Growing Rosarium: Creating a Repository of Popular and Scientific Writing on Roses using the Text Encoding Initiative

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Looking at the areas in popular culture that the PCA/ACA recognizes, one can find beer culture, dance culture and punk culture. But there are many other cultures out there including a rose culture.

Mankind has an enduring relationship with the rose. It has been cultivated in gardens for thousands of years. The world’s poetry, prose, myths, legends and religions are replete with roses. Art in all its forms is festooned with roses. Language is full of similes, metaphors, adjectives and other modes of meaning involving the rose.

Roses have long been part of the fabric of human culture. Four thousand year old tablets from the Sumerian royal tombs at Ur list rose water and attar of roses along with food, servants, and soldiers as items necessary for the afterlife (Harkness 2005, p. 118). The Romans notoriously used roses in their numerous celebrations and feasts (D’Andrea 1982, p. 72). Roses made the transition from pagan to Christian and had symbolic meaning for the Catholic Church in the Middle Ages (Cucciniello 2008, p. 65). During the Renaissance, roses were grown for their perfume and for medicinal purposes (Gerard 1597, pp. 1077-1089).

By the 19th century, the rose was considered the queen of flowers and was given special attention and a special spot in gardens. David Stuart, in his book *The garden triumphant*, explains, “…the queen of the garden was the rose; indeed, roses are almost the Victorian flower…Every garden that could…had roses, from the humblest cottages to the very grandest mansions (1988, p. 174).”

Frank J. Scott, author of *The art of beautifying suburban home grounds of small extent*, would have agreed, for in 1870, he wrote:

We have not previously mentioned the Rose, among flowers and bedding plants, for the reason that, being the queen of flowers, more than ordinary attention is usually considered due to her. Besides, her royal family are so numerous, so varied and interesting in their characters, and have been the subject of so many compliments from poets, and biographical notices from pens of distinguished horticulturists, that it would be presumptive to attempt to describe, in a few brief paragraphs, the peculiar beauties and characteristics of the family; still less of all its thousand members (p. 261).

In the early 1800s, expeditions by famous plant hunters such as Lewis and Clark in the American West and Robert Fortune in the Far East brought back rose after fascinating rose. These were bred and cross-bred by avid enthusiasts and nurserymen to supply an ever growing desire for new roses. To understand how great this thirst for more roses was consider that
Joséphine de Beauharnais, sometime wife of Napoleon, amassed a world renowned, and at the
time the most complete, collection of nearly 250 different roses at her home, Malmaison, before
she died in 1814 (Hessayon 2008, p. 28). In 1844, Prince’s Nursery of Long Island, New York,
listed 1,253 varieties for sale in its catalog (van Ravenswaay 1977, p. 42). And today, the
American Rose Society has over 70,000 cultivars in its database of roses.

As a result of man’s love of roses, much has been written about them over the years.
Descriptions of roses appeared in classical works such as those by Herodotus and
Theophrastus in Greece, and Pliny in Rome (Bunyard 1978, pp.10-15).

We see the first accounts written in English of roses and their uses in herbals such as that by
John Gerard, which was published in 1597. Articles on roses, like the one on the Moss
Province Rose in The Universal Magazine of Knowledge & Pleasure, appear in the 1700s. The
first book in English solely about roses, Mary Lawrance’s A Collection of Roses Found in
Nature, was published in London in 1796.

Writing on roses in English began to take off in the 19th century. The surge in writing on roses
was not only a reflection of man’s keen interest in roses but also a result of changes in society
and publishing that took place in the 1800s.

With the Industrial Revolution came a burgeoning middle class with time and money to spend
and a new suburbia in which to spend it. The middle class with their suburban plots needed
instruction and advice on gardening and garden design (Scott 1870, p. 14). Key books written
by well-respected gardeners and garden designers had to be reissued time and time again to
keep up with popular demand. The classic A book about roses : how to grow and show them
by the Reverend S. Reynolds Hole, published in both New York and London, went through
twenty seven editions between 1869 and 1918.

Advances in printing, including chromolithography and the decreasing costs of paper and
postage afforded the dramatic increase in the publication of books, magazines and catalogs.
Nurserymen could now reasonably put together huge catalogs of new plants with colored
images and send them and their plants all across America. The 1889 catalog for the Dingee &
Conard Company of West Grove, PA, called The new guide to rose culture, was 110 pages
long.

Nurserymen also took to publishing articles on gardening in their catalogs and then began
issuing gardening magazines, as did the James Vick’s Sons Nursery in Rochester New York
(Mickey 2013, p. 88). Nursery owners in America wrote key rose books such as Robert Buist, a
Scotsman transplanted to Philadelphia, and his Rose Manual of 1844 which was reprinted in
1847, 1851, 1854, and 1859.
In order to study rose culture, one must have free and easy access to the resources such as these wondrously fascinating and plentiful texts that were available to the rosarians of the period. Libraries are all about providing free and easy access to information, and to that end, the Rosarium Project was begun.

The Rosarium Project is a digital humanities project being undertaken at the Phillips Memorial Library + Commons at Providence College with the goal of curating texts and creating an online repository of what has been written in English about the rose. The project arose from the ashes of an earlier bibliographical project on roses and expands on what it aimed to do. A list of citations for what has been written is no longer enough. Providing full access to the primary sources is now the number one target.

It was determined, in consultation with the Library’s Digital Publishing Services Department, that the best way to do this was to create an online fully searchable full-text collection of these resources. It was also decided that the best way to achieve this was by encoding the texts using the Text Encoding Initiative Consortium’s P5 Guidelines or as they are commonly known, the TEI.

The TEI is a common language in the Digital Humanities for scholarly markup of texts that allows for intricate textual analysis. Marked up texts are machine-readable and manipulable, which allows scholars to compare and search large bodies of texts. The TEI is expressed using XML which is easy to learn and use. The TEI is adaptable for different types of materials, such as prose, poetry, plays, manuscripts, and letters. It permits standardization of spelling while still providing access to the original material.

Most importantly, encoding texts with the TEI allows one to add value to the transcripts by pulling in information from other resources, such as a bibliography, a glossary, a gazetteer or a personography. (A personography is to people what a bibliography is to books.) In addition, one can insert images to accompany the text as well as append images of the original work. Plus, you can add links to relevant material on the Web.

The scope of the primary sources to be encoded in this project includes books, pamphlets, catalogs, articles from popular magazines, items in scholarly journals, and columns from newspapers and gazettes. Because it will be a full-text, full-image repository, and due to copyright considerations, the project initially will focus on materials published before 1923. Also, it will be limited to items of non-fiction written in English.

The audience for this project includes researchers in the fields of garden history and horticulture, as well as popular culture scholars interested in leisure activities and suburban life. It is also expected to be of great value to gardeners, particularly rosarians, interested in learning tricks and techniques used before modern fertilizers and pesticides, to those studying gardening designs and styles of bygone eras, and to those wishing to identify hardy old roses that may still be available from specialty rose nurseries.
The end product of this project will be a website where researchers may search or browse the various texts written about roses, rose gardening, and rose gardeners. Users will be able to search the repository by keyword, subject heading, rose variety, and color. There will also be a bibliography and a glossary that can be viewed independently of the texts but which will also be linked to them.

The Rosarium Project began a year ago in early March 2015. After deciding to create an online full-text collection using the TEI, the first step was preliminary research to identify and locate the primary sources to be included in the project. A number of databases and library resources were searched to find items on roses. Some of the online resources consulted include: WorldCat, Hollis+ (Harvard’s online catalog), The Reader’s Guide Retrospective, the American Antiquarian Society Historical Periodicals Collection, and the Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals.

The next step was learning to encode with the TEI. To prepare for learning to encode texts, a basic course in HTML was undertaken via lynda.com. Although the files to be encoded with the TEI would be XML files, this basic course was very helpful for picking up basic tagging techniques and it did make learning the TEI easier.

Learning to encode with the TEI was accomplished by examining examples of the TEI. The TEI Consortium’s website, http://www.tei-c.org/Guidelines/, provides individual webpages for each element that can be used to tag text. (These pages describe the element, how it is used, where it can be used, and also provides examples of its use.) Examples supplied by the Women Writers Project (WWP) at Northeastern University (http://www.wwp.northeastern.edu/outreach/resources.html) were also particularly helpful.

This was enough to get the project jump started. Ultimately, however, a basic course in the TEI was necessary. The course was offered by the people behind the WWP and was held at Northeastern University in Boston, MA, in November of 2015. In addition to reviewing basic tagging elements, the course helped with understanding the theory of TEI encoding and best practices. Plus it was great to ask specific questions that had arisen while encoding the first set of texts and get the answers from TEI professionals.

It was decided to begin the project with really low hanging fruit. To do this, the Reader’s Guide Retrospective database, available through the library, was searched. The Reader’s Guide is a well respected index to journal articles and began publication in the early twentieth century. The materials it indexed were popular journals, widely circulated and routinely held by libraries; this is key as it means that the articles indexed should be easy to acquire.

The Reader’s Guide uses standardized subject headings, and the appropriate heading for the project’s goal was simply “roses.” The search results were limited to materials written before 1923. Then the results of the search were reviewed to remove records for poetry and other literary genres. This resulted in a set of 163 non-fiction articles which were published between 1894 and 1922.
Thirty one percent of the citations collected were from one journal alone. Not surprisingly, it was *The Garden Magazine*, which was published between 1905 and 1924. The magazine had twenty regular departments, and one of them was for roses, which accounts for the large number of articles the search retrieved from it.

Twenty six articles appeared in magazines dealing with country life. The most prominent being *Country Life in America*. Another twenty two articles came from journals on domestic architecture and landscape design. A surprising number appeared in general interest periodicals, literary reviews, and art journals. Sixteen articles were published in women’s magazines. The subject matter of these 163 articles runs the gamut from new rose introductions, to basic gardening techniques, to rose petal recipes.

Bibliographic records for all rose texts discovered are maintained in a RefWorks account. RefWorks is a web-based bibliographic utility that the library provides access to and is similar to free resources such as Zotero. At the present time over 900 citations have been added to the account.

The bibliographic details of the 163 articles indexed in the Reader’s Guide were exported from the database into records in RefWorks. The ability to export records to RefWorks is a handy feature of Ebscohost, which is the platform the Reader’s Guide is available on.

Additional information, such as full publication dates and journal issue numbers, was appended to the records when possible. To do this, the full images of those journals that are available through the Hathi Trust repository and Google Books were consulted.

All 163 articles have been collected through interlibrary loan and other means. Most came quickly and as PDFs. Those articles that came in print form have been digitized. All PDFs of the original texts have been stored on an external drive for safe keeping. Copies of the PDFs are also located in a Dropbox account as these files are consulted from several computers in many locations.

To encode the rose texts, they are first transcribed in a Pages document. Pages for Mac is the preferred word processing software of the principal researcher on the project, but any word processing/text editing software that can handle diacritic and special characters would do.

The transcriptions are then copied and pasted into an XML file created with the software program called <oXygen/>. <oXygen/> is an XML editor that knows the TEI. It has a TEI template and provides tagging suggestions based on where the cursor is in the file. <oXygen/> also verifies the correctness and completeness of the tagging as it is typed which is extremely helpful.

A TEI encoded file consist of two parts, the header and the text. Metadata concerning the electronic version of the text, such as title, contact information for the persons involved in the creation of the file, a description of the project and details of encoding decisions, is inserted into the header part of the file. Bibliographic information on the source of the electronic text
and selected subject terms from a taxonomy which has been created for the Rosarium Project are also added to the header.

The text portion of the file is where the body of the transcription is kept. In addition to the full-text of the work, there can also be front and back matter such as a bibliography, a glossary, indexes and notes. It is also where links to images and relevant material on the Web are inserted.

Tagging the text of the document is actually rather easy, though it requires attention to detail and consistency in application. Of primary concern are names, rose gardens, rose varieties and colors because this is where the added value of the TEI comes in. Colors are tagged so that researchers can find articles on roses of a particular color. The tagged names are linked to the specially encoded personography file. Places of particular rose interest and rose varieties are linked to entries in a separate glossary file.

It is the ability to link elements of the text to the information housed in these special files that makes using the TEI and encoding the files in <oXygen/> worthwhile. A lot of background research is done to provide the biographical information housed in the personography and the details such as breeder, date of release and growth habits of the roses that are kept in the glossary. Also a lot of work goes into including photos or images of each rose in the glossary that are free from copyright restrictions. This ancillary information takes the Rosarium Project beyond a mere set of texts and makes it most useful to scholars and other users.

The final step is to put the file up on the Web. Currently, once the text has been fully encoded, the XML file is uploaded to the Tapas Project where the file is hosted. The Tapas Project is an inexpensive way to make TEI encoded projects available to the public. All that is required is a membership in the Text Encoding Initiative Consortium. Using the Tapas Project to host the files also means that you don’t have to have specialized knowledge of things like CSS and XSLT, or expensive hardware such as servers.

Recently the website for the project went live. For the present, it has only background information on the project and contact details. The database is yet to come. The website can be found at http://library.providence.edu/dps/projects/rosarium/.

The first phase of the project, which consists of encoding the first 163 articles, is ongoing. Over twenty texts have been completed and uploaded to the Tapas Project so far.

Once this phase is complete, work will begin on identifying, capturing and encoding the articles that should have been indexed by the Reader's Guide but weren't either because the materials were out of the scope of the time period covered by the Reader's Guide or were missed by the indexers. The primary researcher has already identified a few such missed articles.

Phase three will focus on earlier articles. These will in part be identified through searching the American Antiquarian Society's digitized collection and Poole's Index to Periodical Literature.
In addition, the names of relevant journals to scan for articles will be discovered by searching WorldCat.

Later phases will focus on books and nursery catalogs. With over four hundred relevant books alone identified via WorldCat, there is plenty to be done over the next fifteen years.
References


Scott, F.J., 1870. *The art of beautifying suburban home grounds of small extent : the advantages of suburban homes over city or country homes; the comfort and economy of neighboring improvements; the choice and treatment of building sites; and the best modes of laying out, planting, and keeping decorated grounds / illustrated by upwards of two hundred plates and engravings... With descriptions of the beautiful and hardy trees and shrubs grown in the United States*, D. Appleton & Co., New York.
