

Illinois Wesleyan University

From the Selected Works of Meg Miner

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Spring 2016 Sabbatical Summary

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/meg_miner/30/

Spring 2016 Sabbatical Summary

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This sabbatical leave made it possible to create a biblio-biography of IWU's 17th President Minor Myers, jr. My work provides a path towards understanding his effect on others through his passion for book collecting. The summary that follows contains my project proposal, provides links to the work I completed, and describes the work still in progress as of November 2016.

Project as Proposed

President Minor Myers, jr.'s personal book collection contained almost 12,000 items at the time it was purchased by IWU. Records recovered from his home and office files contain lists and descriptions of books acquired during his lifetime. This project will bring together these two types of documentary evidence and will be enhanced by personal recollections of the people who knew his collecting interests. The outcome of this work is a combined narrative of Myers' life as a book collector and a descriptive catalog of the collection at the time of sale. Collectors value post-sale catalogs, referred to as *prices realized catalogs*, for their evidence of changes in book markets as much as for their ability to trace book ownership. Such catalogs also help to document the provenance, a sort of owner lineage, of books and are useful to other researchers and book sellers alike.

My goals for this sabbatical were to

- 1) publish the sale catalog with prices realized in 2005,
- 2) organize the lists President Myers kept of his own acquisitions and to compare them with what the University purchased,
- 3) identify any previously published works on his life as a collector generally, and
- 4) interview people who knew Myers' book collecting habits and to organize their recollections into some meaningful whole.

I achieved all four of my goals. My assessment of his collection is available under the title of *Portrait of a Collector: A View from the Shelves of Minor Myers, jr.* (available at https://works.bepress.com/meg_miner/28/). The sale catalog is 487 pages long, so I made it publicly available as a separate PDF (https://works.bepress.com/meg_miner/27/) along with two other lengthy appendices for the main assessment document.

In terms of my professional responsibilities, I gained the most from talking with people in the broader IWU community. I collected stories about President Myers using the methodology of oral history; by documenting these anecdotes and analyzing how Myers' interests influenced the people around him, a record of both his life as a collector and the intersection of that aspect with his activities on our campus is available for the future.

I conducted a total of 65 interviews in person, by Skype, and by phone. The latter two represent new methods to the way I have conducted oral history interviews to date and with the time allowed by this sabbatical, I was able to experiment with different recording methods in these environments. The knowledge acquired from this experience will benefit my future interview

collection work by expanding the pool of interview subjects beyond the local area. I am still editing the recordings as of this writing, but I have completed thirty-three.

Even though editing work is in progress, I summarized the themes that emerged from these interviews in an essay titled *Portrait of a Collector: Reflections on an Influential Bibliophile* (https://works.bepress.com/meg_miner/29/). Appended to that work are citations for publications in which Myers discusses his book collections, a list of the interview participants, and comments about Myers and his books from people who did not participate in formal interviews.

As part of the editing workflow, I began selecting recording segments for a podcast of the themes that emerged in the interviews. This podcast will complement the *Reflections* essay by using the voices of some interview subjects. There are 16 completed podcast-quality excerpts at this time.

I began exploring a new method for enhancing access to recorded content during this project, too. The [Oral History Metadata Synchronizer](#) (OHMS) is an open source indexing tool that enables viewing of a time-synched list of recording content. I applied for and received an internal grant from IWU's Mellon Center to investigate the feasibility of using this tool for the recordings in my project specifically, but the knowledge I gain through this experience will also inform how I work with IWU's A/V records. Funds became available for this in June 2016, and I expect to complete this analysis in the spring.

In addition to the two informally published analyses, I wrote two articles for scholarly publications: the first, submitted in June, is on the value of storytelling in revealing undocumented aspects of organizational history; the second explores the influences Myers had on IWU libraries and library leadership. In early August, reviewers of my first article requested revisions before committing to accepting the work but they also noted that a different publication might be more suitable. I took their advice and I am incorporating the reviewers' comments into a revised article that I will submit to another journal this fall. A decision is still pending on my second article which I submitted at the end of August.

Writing these two articles afforded me the opportunity to follow my curiosity about many things I have heard during my time as IWU's archivist. During this sabbatical I explored the University Archives' collections in ways that extend beyond the purview of my day-to-day responsibilities. Reading Myers' correspondence files with donors and between other administrators, as well as records of Board of Trustee meetings and news sources gave me a deeper understanding of Myers' complex character.

As a result of this sabbatical, I gained insights into both areas of my responsibility within The Ames Library: 1) I have a better understanding of how some of the donations in Special Collections occurred, and 2) I know more about Myers' life as a collector, as a leader of our community, and about the era in which he served. My research documents activities that had only been rumors before and so my work also fills a gap in IWU's historical record.