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UNBURYING TREASURES: TEACHING ARCHIVAL METHODS TO MUSIC STUDENTS

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INTRODUCTION

This assignment seeks to train students in archival literacy by including primary sources in the curriculum. The value of interacting with original sources reaches far beyond the intellectual content in the sources themselves, and this assignment exposes more students to archival materials and methods. For this assignment, students create a project in which the archival inquiry itself is the focus: using a single object or small selection, students put forth a research question using related primary and secondary materials. Each student selects a different archival method corresponding to the question asked. This assignment has been used at both undergraduate and graduate levels and can be adapted for use with music specialists or for a general audience.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

- The students will develop a research question after encountering and researching a primary source.
- The students will research the social context of a primary source to inform the development of their research question.
- The students will evaluate and revise their research question as needed during the research process.

The assignment requires students to learn about research and about themselves as researchers. The assignment engages students with many of the core elements of the ACRL Framework ("Searching as Strategic Exploration," "Scholarship as Conversation," and "Research as Inquiry"), while encouraging them to create their own research questions and develop their own research projects. The assignment is focused on exploration, inquiry and research and requires the students to develop their own questions, responsibly find sources, seek help when it is needed, use various methods and develop a critical stance. While much of the emphasis of the assignment is focused on inquiry and research, the students also engage with ideas of authority, intellectual property, and scholarly conversation.

ASSIGNMENT

Meet the class in an appropriate setting for the use of archival materials. After previously consulting with the instructor and selecting a small number of archival materials, introduce them to the students. Direct their attention to one of them (or a closely related set) on which they will base their assignment. The materials selected should be related and help contextualize the era and the physical object. Seek additional expertise on the history and production of the

materials, if necessary. For each object, ask the students to brainstorm about potential research questions and methods of inquiry.

Next, introduce the students to research methods and materials. Collaborate with the instructor to develop materials and methods that the students might use. Have important secondary and tertiary sources at hand and have some examples of sources that can help contextualize the primary sources. The manner and types of materials will differ depending on the level and focus of the course, but attention should be given to secondary and tertiary materials in all cases.

ASSESSMENT

It is important to review student work at completion of the project. Request copies of student work and review them to determine how well students fulfill the objectives of the assignment. Making slight changes during the library sessions based on student needs is also important. Both undergraduate and graduate students may need more guidance and direction to locate secondary and tertiary sources, as well as help distinguishing among the three types of sources. Try to help the students avoid replicating work on the primary resources that is easily obtainable in secondary and tertiary sources. Working with primary sources can be more enjoyable than seeing what existing literature is available for a research question or topic; therefore, gentle reminders for the students to check for secondary and tertiary sources may be necessary.

Additionally, the participation of a specialist with expertise in rare books and manuscripts can add significantly to the contextualization of the materials used for the assignment. When an expert is present, the students are able to engage with the materials on a deeper level; to ask questions about the production, use, and preservation of the materials; and to exhibit knowledge and use of archival vocabulary in their assignments.

Projects like this do not necessarily have to rely on large, expensive, or rare collections. A modest collection of inexpensive temperance songsters was used for an iteration of this assignment. Digital surrogates, such as the Primary Source Sets available from the *Digital Public Library of America*, may be used for the assignments at no cost.[7] Their approach illustrates the value and usefulness of a limited number of materials. Small sets of items (a dozen or fewer) are designed to facilitate inquiry into many topics pertaining to American culture.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Below are some suggestions for implementing this assignment in a variety of contexts.

Locating primary sources in collections:

Items that can inform musical topics of inquiry need not themselves be musical in nature, or contain music, either notated or recorded. They may thus be harder to locate in collections. Some examples include:

- Early hymnals and songbooks that print only the words and refer to well-known tune names

- Performer promotional materials and ephemera
- Descriptions of contact with indigenous peoples that contain chant or dance transcriptions
- Spoken word recordings for sound studies
- Field work materials and personal papers
- Older music textbooks, musical treatises and manuals

Leveraging local resources:

Primary sources outside of library collections may be in easy reach.

- Museums (including house and tribal collections)
- Notable architecture
- Historical societies
- Local music (including archives and live performances)
- Local collectors and cultural societies
- Archives of local businesses or schools

Digital surrogates:

It is important for instructor and student alike to be able to recognize the differences between studying an actual source versus its digital surrogate. However, the advantages offered by digital collections cannot be gainsaid. Besides the DPLA resources mentioned above, other examples of freely available collections containing notable musical sources include:

- Medieval manuscripts from the Digital Scriptorium[8]
- Discography of American Historical Recordings[9]
- 19th-century American sheet music[10]
- Library of Congress digital collections[11]

UNBURYING TREASURES—ASSIGNMENT

Sample **in-class worksheet**

Topic:

Database searched:	Potential search terms:	Number of sources found:	Can I find full text?	Do I need to broaden or narrow my search?	New or additional search terms:
RILM					
JSTOR					
Google Scholar					
Library Catalog					

Discussion questions:
Why do you find different types of sources in different databases?
Are there special tools in the databases that help you?
Would you search for the same terms in all of the databases?
Why might you need to change the way you search?
What types of materials do you find in the bibliographies of the assigned readings?
Where would you search to find similar sources?

Sample **course assignment sheet**:

Primary Source Research Project

This is a research-based assignment. You should work on these assignments with your groups. It will encourage team building and lead to a greater understand of primary source materials. You will work together to do the research for a project, but not in fact write a complete research paper. The project begins with a primary source. Your tasks are below. Please read this entire assignment, as the individual writing assignment is at the very bottom.

Your Task:
Do the following research tasks together. You may divide the work in whatever way you want. You will turn in a document with answers to all of the questions below. It should be

approximately five pages long. You will be graded on fulfilling the tasks. Your answers should be concise and remember this is about research and does not involve an actual paper.

As you search for different types of materials needed for this assignment think about the best places to find them. What types of materials do you find in Google, Google Scholar, *JSTOR*, *RILM*, *Oxford Music Online* and the library catalog? What types of materials do you find in their bibliographies? Where would you find similar sources?

Questions about the source itself: The first task in a primary-source-based project is to understand your source.

> What kind of publication is this?
> What is this source?
> Who was the audience?
> What databases did you use to find this information?
> What database was the most useful?
> Find one other primary source in our library that reminds you of this source.
> Find one primary source online that reminds you of this source.

The historical context for the source:

> What is the larger context for this?
> Find three monographs that might help you work with this source. List the sources. Think broadly.
> Find three to five scholarly articles that do the same thing as above. List them.

Internet challenge:

> Find one primary or secondary source that relates to this project.
> Try to locate this source on three different databases. List the databases.
> Find at least one article about this source that is completely ridiculous. How did you find it and how do you know that it is not a "valid" scholarly article?