

The Crawfordsville District Public Library Image Database

The Crawfordsville District Public Library has long been a repository for local history. The library, founded in 1902 (the first Carnegie library built in Indiana), has collected over the years countless items of real historical significance, both of regional as well as national importance. For example, we have numerous photographs and post cards ranging from the early to the present days of Montgomery County, images of people and places that are invaluable representatives of our heritage. And new photographs arrive via donation or acquisition on a regular basis. We eventually accumulated records on more than 40,000 items, but these photographs were sleeved and stored, sometimes jumbled, in non-secure file cabinets that made locating difficult and preservation problematic. Thanks to a local grant that provided us with seed money, the library began digitizing its substantial local history collection in 1999. At that time we were one of the few small public libraries to undertake such an ambitious program. There were fewer options for small public libraries than there are now, and practically no precedents or models for us to follow. CONTENTdm was not yet a known entity (it was still in the development stage), and the Indiana Memory Project was far in the future.

One of our principle objectives of our digitization effort was to make our photo collection -- our future image database -- searchable and accessible through the web. We decided to invest in our own web server along with DB/TextWorks to create all our databases and DB/Text WebPublisher to give them a web interface. These Inmagic products allowed us complete freedom in our design. Although WebPublisher does not have nearly as many features that the now mature CONTENTdm enjoys as a digital collection management product, it was affordable for us and continues to be so. In addition, it allowed us to publish our many non-image databases as we wished (such as our vital statistics index, our yearbook index, etc.). We have continued with these products up and soon plan to upgrade both our hardware and software -- for the first time in eight years -- in order to remain current even



Unidentified group at Shades in southern Montgomery County from the CDPL Image Database

though the old software still runs fine on our old server.

The real story of the image database is, however, its growth over the years. All began with paper-based listings of holdings that needed to be converted to electronic format so that the metadata could be attached to the scanned photograph. Anyone who has ever tried to match an old inventory list with what one actually owns can easily realize why we are still today trying to reconcile our records. In the early days, too, various hands participated in the creation of the metadata, and we are still cleaning up quite a few non-standard, unsatisfactory, or incomplete descriptions. Yet, we keep these records online, even if the item itself has not yet been digitized, as an indicator of what we may have. Such records can still lead to worthwhile discoveries (see my colleague Emily Griffin's article in this newsletter for an example).

When I took over full management of this database a few years ago, I began to standardize some of our procedures; I also emphasized allowing online access to more than our photograph and postcard collection. We thus began to add the many pieces of realia that we wanted to share with others, including documents, booklets, pamphlets, and

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