

Born-Digital News in Ohio: What Is (and Isn't) Happening

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Abstract:

The Ohio History Connection (OHC) manages the Ohio Digital Newspaper Program and leads both newspaper preservation and digitization efforts in the state. To date, we have digitized over half a million pages of Ohio newspapers for the Library of Congress' Chronicling America and Ohio Memory, the collaborative digital library of OHC and the State Library of Ohio. OHC also hosts nearly 100,000 pages of additional newspaper content, but only a small percentage of this is borndigital. OHC has not yet developed a program to ingest and preserve born-digital content on a large scale, and other institutions and newspaper publishers around the state are not largely engaged in this type of activity. When they are, it is typically focused on their specific communities (neighborhood, town, university, etc.).

This paper will provide an overview of the current state of OHC and Ohio's efforts to preserve borndigital and other newspaper content: Who is participating in these activities? Why or why not? If they are preserving born-digital content, what systems, staff, workflow and funding supports this work? What is the best way to preserve Ohio's newspapers for future generations? In addition, the paper will include a discussion of current barriers to making this a proactive and collaborative effort between stakeholders across the state, such as OHC, the Ohio Newspaper Association, academic institutions, individual publishers, public libraries and other organizations.

Keywords: born-digital, digitization, newspapers, Ohio, preservation

Introduction

The Ohio History Connection (OHC) and other Ohio libraries, historical societies, archives, and museums have long recognized the value of newspapers for students, educators, genealogists, scholars, casual historians and others. Historian James Ford Rhodes wrote that "newspapers satisfy so many canons of historical evidence" and that he "found facts in them which [he] could have found nowhere else."¹ Most scholars agree that newspapers add a dimension to their research that is unmatched by any other primary resource due to the wide variety of information they contain. In her paper titled "The Many Uses of Newspapers," Alison Jones lists dozens of ways newspapers can be utilized such as: purchasing patterns and economic history through examination of advertisements; changes in social conditions and history of medicine revealed by birth, death, and marriage notices;

history of crime, urbanization, and race relations; historic seismology and natural disasters; and regional language use.² These myriad uses have prompted cultural heritage institutions across the world to preserve these fragile materials and provide access to them through long-term storage of newsprint, preservation microfilming and digitization.

As the state historical society, OHC leads newspaper preservation and digitization efforts across Ohio through the Ohio Digital Newspaper Program. This paper will provide an overview of the current state of OHC and other institutions' work to preserve hardcopy (print), microfilmed and born-digital newspaper content, including who is participating in these activities and how this work is being done. It will also discuss opportunities and challenges arising from these existing projects that can be used to lay the groundwork for a statewide collaborative and comprehensive approach to long-term preservation of Ohio news content of all formats.

History of Newspaper Collection and Preservation at the Ohio History Connection

OHC has collected material documenting the history of Ohio since its establishment in 1885 as the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society. A cornerstone of the collection is newspapers, in hardcopy, microfilm and digital formats. OHC's collection is eclectic, chronologically comprehensive and geographically diverse. With its more than 4,500 titles comprised of over 20,000 volumes of newsprint, 55,000 use-copy microfilm reels and over 550,000 digital images, it is the largest collection of Ohio newspapers in the world, and still growing. It spans from 1793 to present day, and each of Ohio's 88 counties and most of its communities are represented.

Prior to the 1920s, OHC's newspaper holdings were small. An 1850 Ohio law required that county commissioners collect and preserve the leading newspapers of each political party in their respective counties, and the State Library of Ohio actively collected newspapers as well. Under Librarian C.B. Galbreath, however, a more concerted effort for OHC to preserve Ohio's newspapers for future generations was established. In 1920, he proposed that a state law be passed "permitting county commissioners to send their newspapers, under certain conditions, to the Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Society."³ This law was passed in 1923, and in the following years, the collection grew exponentially as county commissioners transferred their collections to OHC. Minutes from the annual meeting in 1927 record that over 1,800 volumes were transferred within a year, filling all the available space devoted to library storage. This was part of OHC's larger effort "to build up a library worth of Ohio on the sources of the state's history."³ 1927 also marked the year that the State Library of Ohio transferred its 6,000 newspaper volumes to OHC.

Preservation of Ohio newspapers through microfilming began in the 1930s through the Works Progress Administration, which provided funding to film seven of the state's major newspapers. This resulted in over 4,000 rolls of microfilm. After World War II, OHC worked with two commercial firms and multiple publishers around the Ohio to produce over 3,000 rolls of microfilm by the mid-1950s. Microfilming efforts were renewed in 1971, and over the course of the next twenty years, OHC produced over 12,000 reels of microfilm, focusing on deteriorating, widely used county seat titles. Most of this work was supported by OHC's operating budget, although some was filmed as part of contracts between publishers or local libraries and OHC.

OHC joined the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH)'s and Library of Congress (LC)'s United States Newspaper Program (USNP) in 1985. With initial efforts focused on the locating and cataloging of Ohio newspapers across the state (see below), it was not until 1991 that OHC began produce preservation microfilm as a part of this project. Titles from OHC and 82 cooperating institutions were filmed, producing about 3,300 reels of film. During this time, OHC continued to produce preservation microfilm outside USNP. Participation in USNP ceased in 1997, and OHC dissolved its in-house microfilming department in 2008. OHC still provides preservation microfilming services to this day, however, through partnerships with local libraries and contracts with external vendors. OHC also provides long-term storage for negative microfilm of Ohio newspapers produced through these partnerships and by other vendors.

In addition to efforts focused on the preservation of newspapers, OHC has also led three statewide efforts to catalog Ohio newspapers across the state. In 1946, the *Union List of Ohio Newspapers Available in Ohio* was published. It recorded the holdings of about 160 libraries and historical societies. Thirty years later, in 1976, OHC published the *Guide to Ohio Newspapers, 1793-1973*, which included 3,146 entries for titles held by more than 240 Ohio repositories. Participation in USNP during the 1980s allowed OHC to catalog its own holdings, as well as those of other repositories and contribute 6,397 bibliographic and 10,861 local data records to the OCLC Online Union Catalog.

History of Newspaper Digitization at the Ohio History Connection

Initial efforts to digitize newspapers at OHC were intermittent. From 2003 to 2008, newspaper digitization was limited to the scanning of individual newspaper articles and content for specific projects, such as *The African American Experience in Ohio*, a project funded by LC/Ameritech National Digital Library Competition in 1996. *Ohio Memory*, the collaborative digital library of OHC and the State Library of Ohio established in 2000, also includes a small number of select articles and content scanned for or by project participants and partners.

A partnership with the Columbus Jewish Historical Society was established in 2008, and *Ohio Memory* became the online repository for about 43,000 pages of the *Ohio Jewish Chronicle*, covering 1922-1994. Content is freely-available and keyword-searchable. Most of it was converted by an external vendor from microfilm, but more recent content was provided as print-ready PDFs directly from the publisher. OHC's primary role in this project was to upload the digital content to *Ohio Memory*. This is the only born-digital newspaper content that OHC currently preserves and provides access to.

It was not until 2008 when OHC joined NEH and LC's National Digital Newspaper Program (NDNP) that OHC was able to engage in large-scale newspaper microfilm digitization. Through participation in NDNP from 2008 to 2015, OHC digitized over 315,000 pages of Ohio's historic newspapers for LC's *Chronicling America* website. This collection covers 1836-1922 and represents 70 titles or title families from 58 of Ohio's 88 counties. Digitization was outsourced to a vendor. Copies of all files produced as part of this project are stored on OHC servers, but are only publicly available through *Chronicling America*.

Necessary limitations imposed by NDNP prompted OHC to use NDNP digitization standards and workflows in order to establish an in-state newspaper digitization program. Through external grants, partnerships with local cultural heritage institutions and operating funds, OHC has digitized an additional 265,000 pages of Ohio microfilmed newspapers for *Ohio Memory*. This collection covers 1832-2015 and includes about 35 titles from 20 counties and grows each year. Content is digitized following current standards and best practices in order to provide a high-quality and sustainable product.

Newspaper Preservation and Digitization Efforts around Ohio

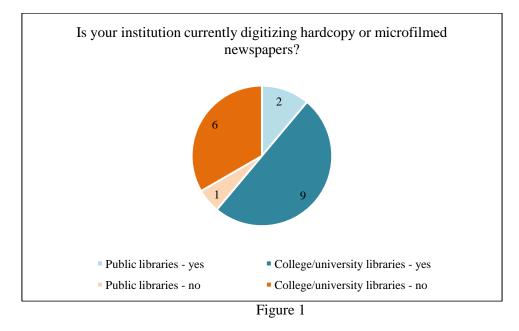
While OHC leads efforts in Ohio to preserve and digitize newspapers, there are many cultural heritage institutions that also preserve and provide access to their local newspapers in hardcopy, microfilm and/or digital formats. Ohio has upwards of 800 public libraries, colleges and universities, historical societies, museums and other institutions that may collect newspapers, and all have varying resources (funding, staff, storage space, etc.) to support preservation and digitization of newspapers. OHC staff regularly communicate with staff from many of these organizations and have general knowledge of which and to what degree institutions are active in this type of project. To date, there has been no formal analysis of how Ohio's cultural heritage institutions are working to preserve digital newspaper content for future generations.

Survey of Cultural Heritage Institutions

From June 8, 2016 through June 17, 2016, OHC staff conducted an online survey via SurveyMonkey to collect information from 25 institutions around the state that are actively digitizing and/or providing digital access to newspapers. Recipients were identified by OHC staff as ones that already

have complete or partial in-house newspaper preservation and digitization programs (versus the at least 15 institutions in Ohio that rely entirely on outside vendors for these services). The survey was divided into four parts asking for information about each institution's digitized hardcopy or microfilmed newspaper collections, born-digital newspaper collections, methods for providing access and institutional capacity. Responses to these questions allowed OHC staff to gain a clearer picture of how each institution is approaching newspaper preservation and digitization, as well as identify strengths and weaknesses in Ohio's efforts in this area overall.

Twenty-five institutions (seven public and 18 college/university libraries) received the survey, and 16 responded (three public and 13 college/university libraries), for a 64% response rate. While the data below therefore does not reflect all newspaper digitization activities across Ohio, it does provide critical information about many of these activities. Significant survey results are summarized below.

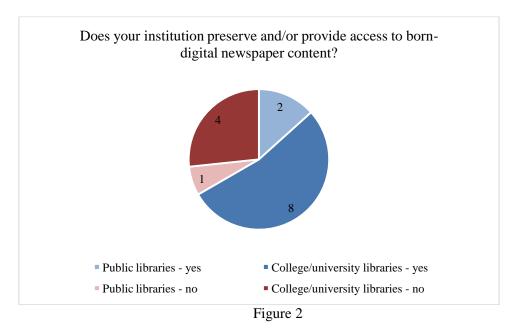


Digitized Hardcopy or Microfilmed Collections

Nine institutions (56%) are currently digitizing hardcopy or microfilmed newspapers (see Figure 1). The remaining seven have either completed their projects or lack resources (staff, funding, equipment, etc.) to digitize collections at this time. Of these nine active projects, all have started within the last ten years with six starting within the last five. No respondent has digitized more than 250,000 pages total, but most (five) have digitized less than 100,000 pages. All but one institution are digitizing content exclusively from their city or county. Both public libraries have digitized one of their community's papers of record, and college/university libraries have focused digitization efforts primarily on student newspapers. A variety of standards have been used to digitize newspapers: of the six institutions that responded to this question, all newspapers collections use Optical Character Recognition (OCR) and five provide access via PDF files.

Information collected in this portion of the survey confirms what OHC staff already knew about individual newspaper projects in Ohio: they are smaller and focused on serving a specific community. There is no single standard applied to these projects, although full-text search capability through the application of OCR is a priority.

Born-Digital Newspaper Collections



Ten institutions (62%) preserve and/or provide access to born-digital newspapers, and five do not (see Figure 2). Of the ten institutions preserving and/or providing access to born-digital newspapers, all but one public library began their born-digital projects in the last six years. (The public library provides access to a local newspaper via a popular subscription service.) Only one respondent, the public library mentioned above, provides access to more than 250,000 pages of born-digital newspaper content, and seven provide access to less than 50,000 pages. Seven institutions (43%) provide access to student newspapers, one provides access to a community's newspaper of record, one to a community/suburban/neighborhood newspaper and one to a special press newspaper. Nine out of ten institutions provide access to born-digital content, with seven out of nine using PDFs and OCR.

As with the results from the previous section of the survey, this confirms previous knowledge on born-digital newspaper projects in Ohio: they are small and primarily limited to work done at college/university libraries with student newspapers.

Methods for Providing Access

All but one institution provides access to all of their digital newspaper content. One college/university library cited "Institutional policy" as the reason why some of their content is not openly accessible. Several digital library platforms are used throughout the state to provide access to digital newspaper content: Digital Commons (bepress), CONTENTdm, DSpace and Olive. Digital Commons and CONTENTdm are the most popular systems with four users each (see Figure 3). Although not reflected in the survey, OHC staff know that at least one institution in Ohio uses Veridian, another popular newspaper content hosting system. Digital Commons is used exclusively by college/university libraries.

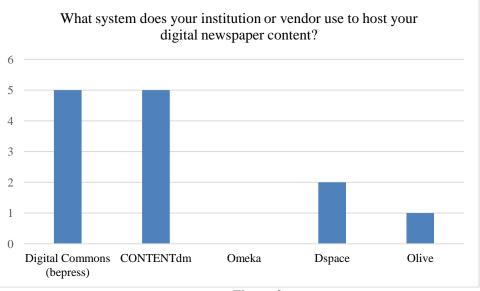
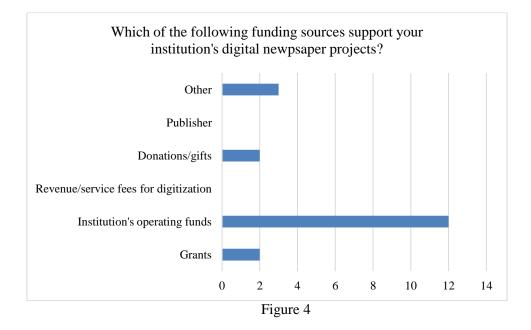


Figure 3

Institutional Capacity

Eight out of 12 respondents (66%) dedicate less than ten hours of staff time to their digital newspaper projects per week; four dedicate anywhere from ten to 40 hours per week. Funding for these projects comes primarily from the institution's operating funds: all 12 respondents (two public, ten college/university) cited this as funding source. Other funding comes from grants (two respondents), donations/gifts (two respondents) and other sources, such as endowments and special funds or collaborating with other institutions (three respondents) (see Figure 4).



Five out of 12 respondents (42%) have a long-term sustainability plan to support and/or build their existing digital newspaper collections, and five out of 12 have some plans in place but they are not fully formed.

Respondents were also asked to share information about the successes and challenges related to their newspaper digitization projects. Six out of the 12 responses noted that the public response has been

positive as these digital collection have brought publicity, increased access and high usage. Challenges range from technical difficulties (imperfect OCR, metadata application, poor imaging due to condition of original newspapers, publication mistakes, etc.) and institutional capacity (funding, staff, storage space, time, etc.). Respondents were asked about their relationships with current newspaper publishers: if one exists, why or why not and how it was established. College/university libraries had mixed success in establishing relationships with student newspapers. One respondent stated that "some [editors] are easier than others," but four have been able to work with the students to have the digital content sent directly to the library for digital preservation and access.

Finally, respondents were asked to reflect on the best way that Ohio cultural heritage institutions could work together to preserve Ohio's newspapers. Three out of five respondents suggested finding a way to build a consortial search interface so users are able to search multiple digital newspaper collections across the state at one time. Four out of five cited a need for information about best practices and standards that can be applied at institutions of all kinds since institutions uses various approaches, methodologies and software to digitize their newspapers.

Survey of Newspaper Publishers

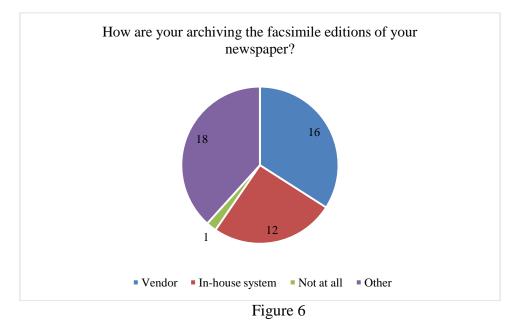
Cultural heritage institutions are just one group of stakeholders interested in newspaper content. In collaboration with the Ohio Newspaper Association (ONA), OHC conducted a second survey of their membership to gather information on newspaper publisher activities as related to newspaper preservation and digitization. From June 23, 2016 through June 29, 2016, OHC staff conducted an online survey via SurveyMonkey, requesting information on if and how publishers are archiving their facsimile editions (digital files emulating the print newspaper), web-only content and hardcopy editions. Publishers were also asked if they have converted any hardcopy or microfilmed content to digital format, and their policies for fee-based access to their archived content online. The survey was sent to 200 daily and weekly newspapers in Ohio

The survey had a response rate of 29%, representing 58 publications from rural, urban and suburban communities (see Figure 5). The variety of publishers that did respond, in terms of type of paper/ownership and physical location, however, provides valuable insight into the broader picture of publisher activities. Significant survey results are summarized below.



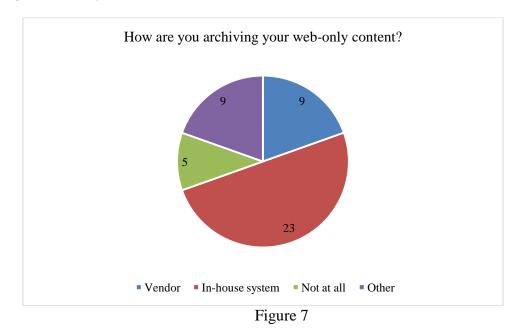
Figure 5 – Location of newspapers responding to survey.

Archiving of Facsimile Editions



79% of survey respondents (46) indicated that they archive the facsimile editions of their newspapers. 34% of these publishers (16) use a vendor, 26% (12) use an in-house system and 39% (18) archive them in a different way (see Figure 6). Of those 18 "other" respondents, 72% (13) archive PDF versions of their newspapers and save them on CD, DVD and/or a server. Respondents use a variety of vendors for archiving the facsimile editions. The most popular was Tecnavia with 14 users. Four work with their local libraries. Other vendors include TownNews and Merlin, with one user each. Respondents also use a variety of content management systems to archive their facsimile editions: TownNews (2), NewsCycle (3), Merlin (1), Adobe (2), Libercus (1), WordPress (1) or custom-built in-house system (5). 59% of survey respondents (34) archive their content as PDF or PDF/As.

Archiving of Web-Only Content



71% of respondents (41) indicated that they archive their web-only content. 22% of these publishers (9) use a vendor, 56% (23) use a custom-built in-house system (see Figure 7). Nine respondents

provided information about the vendor used to archive their web-only content. TownNews was the most popular with four users. TownNews (4), WordPress (2), NewsBank (1), Black Creek Solutions (1) and Our-Hometown.com (1). Respondents use several content management systems: Presto by Gannett (10), TownNews/Blox (4), NewsCycle (3), StoryTracker (1), Atex (1) or custom-built inhouse system (3). 38% of respondents provide access to their archived content online.

Archiving of Printed (Hardcopy) Editions

64% of respondents have their hardcopy newspapers microfilmed. 72% pay for this service themselves and 28% have this service paid for by another institution (such as a local library). 57% of respondents store their hardcopy newspapers, either in their newspapers offices or at another institution (such as a local library). 45% of respondents have digitized a portion of their newspapers that is only available as hardcopy or microfilm.

Respondents were also asked to reflect on what they would like to do with regard to preserving their newspaper content for future generations. Respondents expressed an interested in making the entire run of their newspapers available in digital format, either for free or behind a pay-wall. Some respondents suggested having a central place to ingest current newspaper content statewide for public access and research.

Opportunities and Challenges

Cultural heritage institutions across Ohio have identified preserving and providing access to newspaper content as a priority in serving their stakeholders. There are at least forty cultural heritage institutions actively working on digital newspaper projects, whether that work is done in-house, by an outside vendor or a combination of both. In addition, there are many other institutions that are planning and seeking funding to start their own projects. OHC staff receive, on average, at least one contact weekly from cultural heritage institutions seeking information about newspaper digitization or microfilming.

Often these projects are prompted by public demand: customers increasingly expect instant access and up-to-date technology. Those institutions that have been able to provide digital access to newspaper content have received positive reactions. One survey respondent stated, "The alumni have responded very enthusiastically." When presenting on available digital newspaper resources, OHC staff regularly hear how excited and grateful Ohioans are that these resources are available online, saving them research (and travel) time.

In addition to favorable publicity, successful digital newspaper projects have also led to increased funding. At least one survey respondent reported on receiving funding as a result of their project. At OHC, what was initially only supported by federal grant funding has now received funding from both state and local granting agencies as well as the institution's operating funds. OHC has also built relationships with multiple institutions around Ohio through the Ohio Digital Newspaper Program as well: to date, eight institutions have worked with OHC to digitize historic newspapers, and more partners are added to the program each year. Two of those organizations have sought funds locally to support their projects and have stated that their choice to work with an established newspaper program in the state has helped them obtain these funds from foundations and individual and corporate donors.

Similarly, at least seven libraries in Ohio partner with nearby cultural heritage institutions on digital newspaper projects. Such collaborations allow for increased access through the leveraging of existing resources so that those institutions without ready funds, technology or staff can also participate in newspaper digitization. Ohio institutions can continue to build on these existing relationships and create new ones so that even more communities are served by digital newspaper efforts.

Newspaper publishers have likewise identified digital archiving of their content as important. In particular, most, if not all, large publishers archive the facsimile editions of their newspapers. For smaller, locally-owned newspapers, these efforts may not be as consistent, but very few do not have the ability to at least save and store the facsimile editions as PDFs.⁴ The preservation of web-only

content presents its own challenges, and while a majority of survey respondents indicated that this content is being archived, for smaller papers, these efforts again may be inconsistent. As the traditional journalism industry continues to decline⁵, stretching available resources, publishers must decide which priorities take precedence over others. While digital archiving is certainly not being ignored, developing and implementing a more deliberate, collaborative and sustainable approach to this process has not yet been pursued.

In all, Ohio cultural heritage institutions and publishers have been able to make freely available online at least two million pages of newspaper content documenting communities across Ohio. Despite this success, inadequate resources (equipment, funding, software, staff, storage space, time, etc.) have imposed limitations on the work of both cultural heritage institutions and publishers alike to engage in these efforts to the degree that they might want. One survey respondent noted that "If time and manpower and money were of no concern, I'd like to see us convert our 100+ years of newspapers to a digital format." This echoes the sentiments of organizations around the state with access to the hardcopy and microfilmed newspapers, but no feasible way of launching a digital conversion project. Another respondent mentioned the challenges of "convinc[ing] [...] administration that digitizing newspapers is collection development and not a 'special project.""

Multiple respondents from cultural heritage institutions and publishers, expressed an interest in or need for more collaboration when it comes to newspaper preservation and digitization. With the exception of OHC and perhaps a few other institutions, efforts are localized and focused on newspapers serving the immediate community. While this scattered approach is better than no approach at all, it has led to localized methods and lack of uniformity in how newspapers are digitized and preserved across the state. If current standards are not universally applied, this not only might result in content that is not sustainable over the long-term, but it may also limit future collaborative efforts as organizations seek to find common ground in software and systems that can host or even connect disparate resources. For example, survey results show that there are at least 15 different products used to archive digital newspaper content by cultural heritage institutions and publishers, and this does not even include the eight publishers who use a custom-built in-house system. Future surveys with higher response rates will likely add even more vendor/software solutions. Not only will a statewide collaboration need to account for the idiosyncrasies of each of these systems and the file types they use, but it will need to factor in how this content can be migrated to fit updated standards and delivery platforms as technology changes.

One survey respondent suggested forming a statewide committee that could address the issues of bringing Ohio newspaper content together despite the use of different standards and software. In addition to technology, another potential challenge in bringing together all stakeholders in newspaper preservation and access is reconciling similar yet different priorities and goals between cultural heritage institutions and publishers. For example, while libraries promote free and open access, publishers may want to use access to digital content as a revenue stream. If cultural heritage institutions and publishers desire a successful, mutually beneficial and long-term collaboration, it will be important to find ways to blend these different access models. Another important consideration is that preservation and digitization of hardcopy and microfilmed newspapers looks different than that for born-digital and online-only content. Those working on collaborative projects will need to determine how to bring together standards and systems in a way that works for all types of newspaper content and institutional goals.

Next Steps

Newspaper preservation and digitization efforts in Ohio, while widely recognized as important, are piecemeal, and gaps in the historical record are inevitable. It is a certainty that not every newspaper page ever published in Ohio is available in digital format, nor are they, unfortunately, even available in hardcopy or microfilm. While OHC continues to collect hardcopy and microfilmed newspapers, it is not able to afford subscriptions to all Ohio newspapers, and not all newspapers are able to provide complementary subscriptions. The collecting and preserving of newspapers by local libraries varies

widely as well: some libraries collect, microfilm and digitize their local newspapers; some collect and microfilm; some only collect; and some do not collect at all.

Born-digital content presents another layer of complication. Over the past few years, Dodging the Memory Hole events have emphasized the fragility of born-digital content due to obsolescence and media failure. Years of work can disappear in an instance.⁶ In Ohio, it is largely in the hands of individual publishers to preserve born-digital content as most libraries are not equipped to ingest or provide access to it, and have also focused their digitization projects on hardcopy and microfilmed newspapers, if they are even digitizing newspapers at all. Many publishers are making these efforts, but the resources available as well as strategies and tools used vary. Some methods may not lend themselves to long-term preservation. Redundant backups, for example, are a key part of long-term digital preservation, and it is not clear if Ohio publishers have any redundancy in place.

A more thorough investigation of newspaper preservation and digitization needs to be completed in Ohio. This paper and the surveys that informed them barely scratch the surface of this important topic, and indicate that a more comprehensive picture of what is happening with Ohio's past, present and future newspaper content is needed. It is clear that collaboration is needed and wanted, but what type and to what degree will best serve Ohioans also needs to be investigated. Conversations on digital newspaper preservation at the national-level have not yet prompted any substantive movement to collaboratively tackle this issue at the state-level, although they do echo ongoing concerns librarians, archivists, curators, and others have with other content available in digital format. As more institutions tackle digital newspaper projects, the timing is apt to discuss how born-digital news content can be included with traditional preservation and digitization projects.

In addition to gathering more data on newspaper preservation and digitization in Ohio in order to inform future collaborations, there is a clear need for more education on related standards and best practices for all stakeholders. OHC already provides training and consultation services on newspaper digitization for cultural heritage institutions, but these opportunities can be expanded through collaborations with other existing newspaper digitization projects and working with the Ohio Newspaper Association in order to include even more institutions as well as publishers. While it may not be realistic to establish a single standard for newspaper preservation and digitization across Ohio, increased education may encourage more institutions to look toward standards compliance when making decisions locally. Future large-scale collaborations will be well-served by these efforts as it will be easier to make decisions about how to store, host and provide access to files that are similarly formatted, or easily converted to a similar format.

There is much more work to be done in Ohio to increase access and save these important resources for current and future generations. Ohio has a long history of collaboration between like institutions. These relationships provide firm footing that can be capitalized upon and expanded so that all stakeholders in newspaper preservation and access in Ohio can work together to determine the best methods for saving its newspaper content, regardless of format. Ultimately, more discussion and understanding of what each group of stakeholders needs, wants and can provide in a statewide, collaborative program will allow Ohio to move from irregular newspaper preservation to consistent and sustained newspaper preservation.

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understanding of newspaper preservation and digitization activities in Ohio. Please note that none of these individuals are responsible for the content of this paper.

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