Executive Summary  
Cunningham Children’s Home Working Group  

Paolo P. Gujilde, Logan Moore, and Rebecca Crist  
490CE Fall 2008  

In the summer of 2008 Rosalie C.F. Rippey, Director of Communications and Marketing, and Stephanie Brunner Lynge, Associate Director of Church and Community Relations, contacted members of the UIUC Graduate School of Library and Information Science about aiding in the process of arranging and storing the extensive Cunningham Children’s Home archives. The collection included photographs, business papers, audio material, video material, and other media dating back as much as 100 years. The collections of photographs, mainly of past residents and staff at CCH, held particular importance both for promotional considerations and for the memories and emotional legacies of former alumni and their families. At the time GSLIS became involved, the entirety of the collection was spread over three locations, the core collection being located on the CCH campus. The photography collection had been only loosely organized by the identity of the cottage, the event, chronology, or some combination thereof. In addition, photographs were stored in simple plastic binders, not suitable for preservation. Directors Rippey and Lynge inquired as to whether or not the archival program or the community informatics program might be able to aid in the creation of a system for more consistent arrangement and access of materials, recommendations for storage, and a procedure for the intake and outtake of materials within the collection.  

Collaboration between CCH and LIS490:  
As the goal of the Community Engagement course at GSLIS, as well as the larger Community Informatics discipline, is to apply information science skills to social service, community advocacy, service learning, and other similar efforts, the archives at CCH presented a unique opportunity to aid in the creation, dissemination, and preservation of an important part of the community’s memory and legacy. CCH has stood as a central figure in the Champaign-Urbana area for over a century. The organization has moved from serving orphans to at-risk youth, both groups of individuals whose memories of childhood are intimately tied to the materials contained in the archives. The project of organizing and developing recommendations for
maintenance was offered as one of several projects available to students in the LIS 490 Community Engagement. Paolo P. Gujilde, a graduate student within the LIS program specializing in community archives, had already served as a contact with CCH. Graduate students Rebecca Crist and Logan Moore additionally chose to partner with CCH for their semester project in the class.

Inquiry

We began the project with the Cunningham Children’s home with the working question, “How can we organize materials and informative resources to give staff the access to their materials, and what recommendations can we offer to enable them to better organize their current and forthcoming materials?”

Investigation

We relied on a number of resources to advance our work. Many are listed in the “Resources” section of the final recommendations report given to CCH staff. However, the principle investigative action took place in the clinical setting, through the assessment of the collection and dialogue with the CCH staff. In an initial meeting with Rosalie Rippey and Stephanie Lynge, we discussed their expectations and desired outcomes and assessed their needs. We then conducted an initial evaluation of the scope of the collection. We examined the portion of the collection located on the CCH campus, and performed an inventory. Those materials consisted largely of photographs, photograph albums, negatives, and slides as well as a small number of newspaper clippings and other miscellaneous materials. (Through discussion with Stephanie and Rosalie, it was discovered that portions of the CCH archives are also housed at the Urbana Free Library and at the UIUC Archives.) Due to the massive amount of materials and the relative time constraints of a three-month semester, we decided through further discussion that an adjustment of the project goals was necessary for successful completion. Previously, potentials for the project had extended from the finalized creation of an arranged archive, to a system in which individual photos were to be cataloged and arranged according to categories as minute as individuals in pictured in the photo—a nearly impossible task to complete within a three-month time span.

The student group decided the best feasible direction for the project would be to focus solely on the photographs, as these constituted the bulk of the collection and held the most relevance for former alumni. The group would perform a thorough
inventory of that portion of the collection and based on the
inventory would provide a series of recommendations for the
collection regarding arrangement, access, materials needed for
preservation, and a system for intake and outtake of materials
for CCH staff.

The inventory proceeded by arranging the photo albums by
year. The group examined each photo album and created notes for
the year, context, and other important details of the contained
photographs, as well as assigning each photo album a unique
number for the purposes of arrangement and identification. All
this information was then placed into an Excel spreadsheet for
use by CCH staff and any student group continuing the project in
future semesters.

**Deliverables Created**

We provided Rosalie and Stephanie with a tentative plan and
timeline, which they approved. We created an inventory, first
arranging the photo albums by year. The group examined each
photo album and created notes for the year, context, and other
important details of the contained photographs, and assigned
each photo album a unique number for arrangement and
identification. All this information was then entered into an
Excel spreadsheet for use by CCH staff and any student group
continuing the project in future semesters. The group concluded
the semester’s work on the project by providing a comprehensive
summary of work completed and recommendations for future efforts
(attached). These were presented to the Cunningham staff
December 5, 2008.

**Discussion**

The inventory procedures and resultant recommendations were
the result of collaboration among the students and between the
students and the staff. As noted above, specific issues we
negotiated were how best to handle such a large collection
(separate materials by type and concentrate on one type only);
how best to organize materials (by maintaining the current
binder system); and how to establish procedures that enable the
staff to continue the work without the student group’s
involvement (noted in the recommendations). Throughout the
process, we tried to make decisions that would best organize and
preserve the valuable collection, but without adding stress to
the CCH staff’s busy schedules.

**Reflection**

The community partners we worked with were extremely
helpful; they were always kind and generous with the student
group, and are highly dedicated to the mission of the Cunningham Children’s Home. We appreciate the time they spent with us and the encouragement and praise they provided. However, their time is consumed executing the primary function of the Cunningham Children’s home—to foster, protect, and advocate for children in difficult situations. They are not archivists, and while they might easily learn the skills, their time will always be needed in other ways. It was important to acknowledge that we were not attempting to document best practices for archiving photos, but to create the best possible system given the time and priority constraints the staff will inevitably be subject to.

Moreover, as a non-profit organization, the CCH must regulate its budget carefully. We recommended that they purchase archival-quality materials, but understand that doing so may only be possible with a generous budget. We hope that the recommendations we provided can be of use in planning and requesting grant funds. Regardless, the recommendations will be serviceable in the future if funds are not immediately available for purchasing supplies.

We were all genuinely touched by the staff’s commitment to the residents and the mission of the home. We are honored to have played a part of preserving this history. The organization and preservation of this collection is, however, far from finished, and the project offers many possibilities for continuing engagement. Rosalie and Stephanie have offered some preliminary suggestions for steps that may be taken in coming semesters, keeping the partnership between the CCH and GSLIS alive. Their suggestions include the following:

1) Create a database in keeping with your recommendations.
   CCH--identify preferred software & reserve workspace
   GSLIS--help set up the system

2) Triage materials most in need of help
   GSLIS--begin working with materials in order to trouble-shoot that the database is working to meet the needs

3) Develop recommendations for electronic files that don't have print copies
   CCH--address storage issues (possibly purchase space online where digital files could be backed up)
   GSLIS--recommend system for handling digital files that is well integrated with physical materials system
4) Write a Protocol for PRDM staff to maintain archives  
   CCH--Formalize a deed of gift  
   CCH--Draft easy-to-follow instructions & identify tools needed to be close at hand (proper kind of paper, pencils, blank deeds of gift)  
   CCH--Develop a volunteer job description to help work on collection and database going forward  
   GSLIS--Review these documents to make sure they follow your recommendations

FUTURE WORK:  
Beyond this semester, we think the following might be considered:  
   Develop protocol for collecting information about each resident before they leave to make sure we have it on hand if they return to visit  
   Design & outfit the heritage room to better serve its original purpose  
   Catalogue materials held in other locations and integrate with on-site materials

The CCH staff will further discuss their needs after reviewing our recommendations with their full staff. Students in future semesters should be able to step easily into the project and continue this rewarding project.