

LDI Round 6



**The Poet's Voice - A Digital Poetry Collection**  
George Woodberry Poetry Room/Houghton Library  
Final Report

Submitted by:  
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## **Project Staff**

### **Project Manager:**

(2005-2007) Don Share, Curator of the Woodberry Poetry Room

(2007-2009) Susan Pyzynski, Associate Library of Houghton Library for Technical Services

### **Project Associates:**

David Ackerman, Audio Preservation Engineer, Loeb Music Library

Wendy Gogel, Digital Library Projects Liaison, Office of Information Systems

Stephen Chapman, Preservation Librarian for Digital Initiatives, Weissman Preservation Center

Stephen Abrams, Digital Library Program Manager, Office of Information Systems

### **Project Team:**

Maggie Hale, Digital Projects Librarian, Preservation and Imaging Services, Widener Library

Christina Davis, Curator of the Woodberry Poetry Room

Tom Horrocks, Associate Library of Houghton Library for Collections

Peter Steinberg, Curatorial Assistant, Woodberry Poetry Room

Larissa Glasser, Curatorial Assistant, Woodberry Poetry Room

Wendy Mittelstadt, Curatorial Assistant, Woodberry Poetry Room

Alison Harris, Metadata Assistant, Houghton Library

## **SUMMARY**

*The Poet's Voice* virtual collection is an LDI-funded digital collection of unique and historic poetry recordings made by and for Harvard. The digital collection consists of 249 readings (312 reels) from the 1930s to the present, selected from the Poetry Room's archive of recorded poetry. This archive is widely acknowledged to be the largest in the world, with over 6,000 audio recordings, of which 3,300 of these are magnetic tape reels containing recordings specifically made by or for the Poetry Room at Harvard. The LDI project focused on digitizing a selection of the magnetic tape reels due to their fragile condition and inaccessibility for patrons.

In particular, the digital collection includes unique recordings of major poets, e.g., of Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, W.B. Yeats, Ezra Pound, E.E. Cummings, William Carlos Williams, Dylan Thomas, Marianne Moore, W.H. Auden, Langston Hughes, Wallace Stevens, Sylvia Plath, who are both popular with and useful to our users. At the same time, exceptionally rare recordings, e.g., of Charles Olson, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Osip Mandelstam, Vladimir Nabokov, Laura Riding, Robinson Jeffers; and recordings which are severely deteriorating, e.g., of Louis Zukofsky, Carl Sandburg, Edmund Wilson, Edna St. Vincent Millay, Elizabeth Bishop, needing immediate attention, lest they be lost forever, are also included in the digital collection.

## **REFORMATTING**

The methodology to digitizing the tapes changed over the life of the project. Initially it was proposed that the tape digitization be outsourced to VidiPax, with archival master AIFF files created to serve as preservation replacements for the source audio tape and RealAudio files at the performance level will be generated from the master files for online public delivery. VidiPax was to act as the depositing agent of the digitized file files stored in HUL's Digital Repository Service (DRS).

The first test of files did not go well, with multiple errors found in the files Vidipax deposited. During the several months that unsatisfactory testing of the audio tape digitizing was occurring with VidiPax, the Loeb Music Library Audio Preservation Studio was expanding and adding new staff. These two events caused the project to shift workflow and determine to have the audio tapes digitized at the Loeb audio studio.

To streamline the workflow and reduce the cost, it was determined to produce one audio file per tape, rather than an audio file per track. The play list within the SMIL files allows users to navigate from track to track. This change lessened the number of URNs and links considerably, speeding the process of providing access. Furthermore, due to the revised methodology a much larger number of tapes was digitized; 312

instead of the original estimate of 75. The increase in the number of tapes digitized increased the amount of time needed to be spent on selection and on permissions. Digitization of the poetry tapes is continuing beyond the life of this grant, now that we have established good workflows and processed.

## INTELLECTUAL ACCESS

Multiple forms of access to the collection now exist. All the digitized tapes that have permissions cleared are made accessible via URNs through HOLLIS and through the Online Archival Search Information System (OASIS). Full contents notes have been added to both the existing bibliographic records and to the OASIS finding aid. The OASIS finding aid, which was keyed by outside vendors, underwent an extensive revision, editing and proofing.

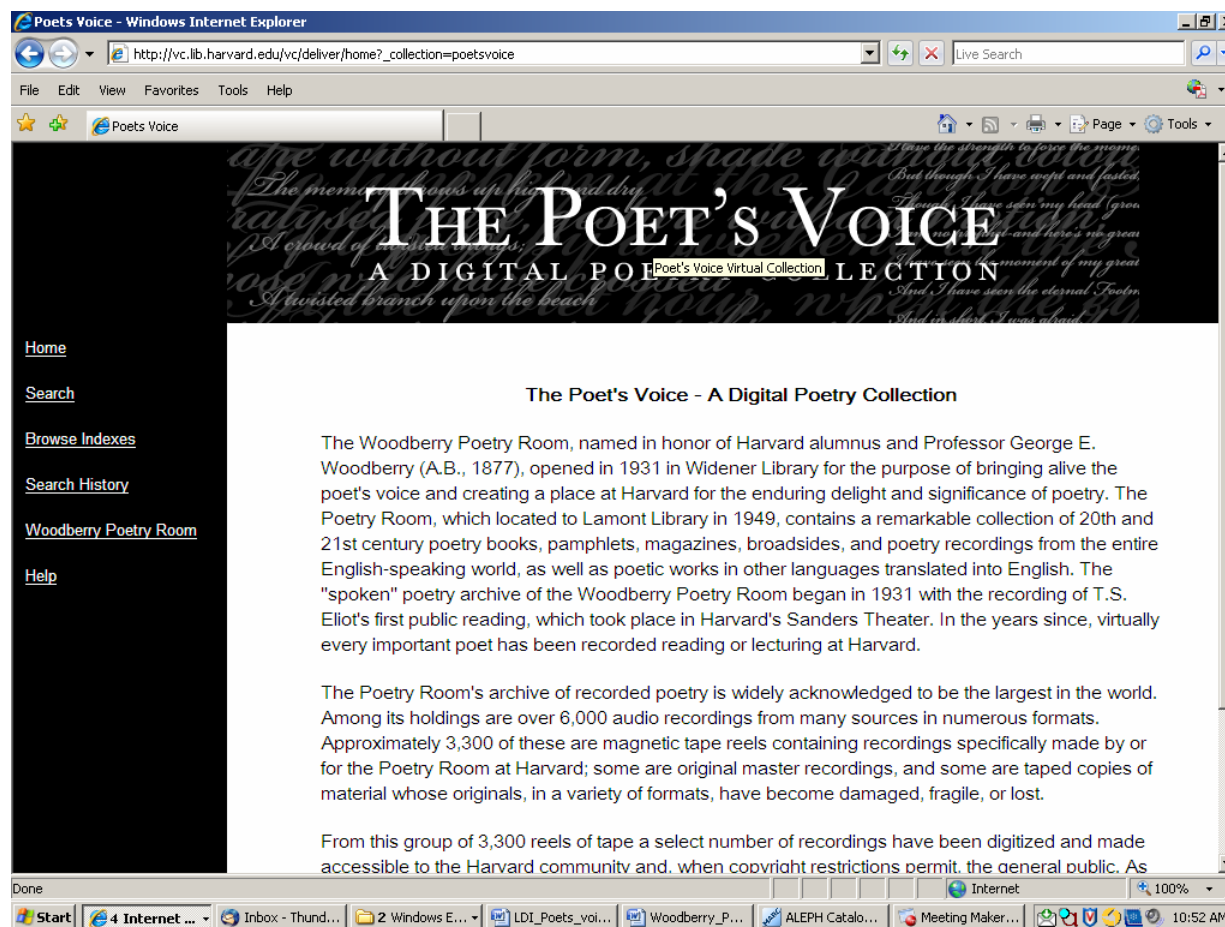
Hollis bibliographic record example:

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a HOLLIS Classic record. The browser title is "FULL CATALOG - Full View of Record - Windows Internet Explorer". The address bar shows a URL from harvard.edu. The page header includes "Harvard University", "HOLLIS CLASSIC", and "HOLLIS". Navigation links include "Search", "Expanded Search", "Command Search", "Results List", "Previous Searches", "Display Options", "My Account/Renew", "Comments/Requests", "Start Over", and "Help". A menu bar contains "Full Catalog", "Find Articles", "Journal Titles", "Digital Resources", and "Reserves". The record title is "Full View of Record : FULL CATALOG". Action buttons include "Print/Save/Send", "Add to List", "View List", "Last Browse", and "Back to Results List". The record format is set to "Full view". The record is identified as "Record 1 out of 1". The author is "Riding, Laura, 1901-1991.". The title is "[Poetry reading sound recording / by Laura Riding]". The publication information is "[Cambridge, Mass. : Woodberry Poetry Room, 1972]". The "INTERNET LINK" section provides two URNs: "http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:2032357" and "http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:FHCL:2034144". The "Locations/Orders" section includes "Availability". The "Location" is "Networked Resource". The "Restrictions" are "No restrictions on access copy.". A second "Location" is "Poetry Room (Lamont) TAPE ARCHIVE PS3519.A363.A6.1972x [Script for reading shelved at: POETRYst PS3519.A363.A6.1972bx]". The "Restrictions" for this location are "On deposit at the Woodberry Poetry Room. ; Room use only. ; Cassette copy available. Room use". The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows several open applications, including Internet Explorer, Thunderbird, Windows Explorer, Microsoft Office, ALEPH Cataloging, and Meeting Maker, with the system clock showing 11:09 AM.

OASIS finding aid:

The screenshot shows a Windows Internet Explorer browser window displaying the OASIS finding aid for the Woodberry Poetry Room at Harvard College Library. The browser's address bar shows the URL: [http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/deepLink?\\_collection=oasis&uniqueId=hou00305](http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/deepLink?_collection=oasis&uniqueId=hou00305). The page header includes the Harvard University Library logo and the text "OASIS: Online Archival Search Information System". Navigation tabs are visible: "Full Finding Aid", "Summary: Context", "Digital Content", "Bring main window to front", "Easy print view", and "Help". The main content area features the title "Woodberry Poetry Room (Harvard College Library). Poetry Readings: Guide." followed by "Houghton Library, Harvard College Library" and the Harvard University crest. Below the crest, the text reads: "Harvard University, Cambridge, MA 02138", "2003 The President and Fellows of Harvard College", and "Last update 2009 June 3". A "Table of Contents" sidebar on the left lists links: "Expand All", "Collapse All", "Descriptive Summary", "Processing Information:", "Use Restrictions", "Access Restrictions", "Historical Note", "Arrangement", "Scope and Content", and "Container List". The "Descriptive Summary" section is partially visible at the bottom, starting with "Repository: Woodberry Poetry Room, Houghton Library, Harvard College Library, Harvard University". The browser's taskbar at the bottom shows several open applications: Start, 7 Internet Expl..., Inbox - Thunderbird, 2 Windows Explor..., 4 Microsoft Offic..., ALEPH Cataloging..., Meeting Maker Cal..., and the system clock showing 11:11 AM.

Furthermore a Virtual Collection, "The Poet's Voice" was created, taking advantage of the VC software to create a stand-alone database to the digitized poetry reading. The building of this database has taken longer than we expected due to the slowness in getting permission granted. But a sizeable number of permissions have now been granted and the database will grow in the near future.



## PERMISSIONS

Permissions proved to be even more laborious and time-consuming than the initial grant proposal expected. As the performances on a tape are not known until the tape is reformatted, the requesting of permissions cannot begin until the batch of tapes has been digitized. Once the performances are identified, the project assistant begins to track down current rights holders (poets or poet's estates and/or their publishers) by researching printed texts and Internet resources. Following the identification of the current rights holders, a formal request for permission to deliver streaming audio of the poems via Harvard catalogs and the project web site is sent by fax or mail. Permission

is requested for unlimited public access to the recordings; however the option is also be given for the rights holders to restrict access to the Harvard Community only. A spreadsheet is maintained to track permissions in the project. Requests are followed up by phone or e-mail, as is often necessary.

We currently have 70 authors who have given access permission to their recordings (57 Harvard and Web, 13 Harvard only). Permissions continue to be worked on past the life of the LDI grant.

## **PROJECT BENEFITS**

The LDI project has already generated much new use of and access to a valuable resource, and has made it more useful than ever before possible. The creation of a digital collection of poetry recordings will prolong the life of master recordings by now providing surrogates to be used for study, teaching, casual listening, and other purposes without incurring deterioration of the originals. Audio from the project is included in Poetry@Harvard:

(<http://poetry.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k40344&pageid=icb.page253625>).

It has also made possible for new and innovative programming such as REEL TIME @ The Woodberry, a weekly listening and chat session that explores the rich archive of poetry readings in the collection.

The project has also given us the opportunity to ensure enduring accessibility to original audio material which is currently completely unusable. Most significantly, the resulting digital files allow the widest possible access to Poetry Room audio holdings, since users are no longer constrained by physical access to the collection or by the disposition of the materials contained in it. While the Poetry Room audio archive already receives worldwide attention and is heavily used, this project has dramatically enhanced and supported its availability and utility.

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

The most crucial lesson learned from this project was the setting of audio digitization standards and workflows. After a very slow and painful start trying to work with an outside vendor, we realized that doing it in-house was cheaper, faster, and better quality. Beyond the actual reformatting of the tapes, the establishment of this audio digitization workflow was the biggest long-term benefit.

Another lesson learned was not to have the project manager leave early in the project, particularly when the grant was really written to be a one-man project. This slowed down the project considerably as a fill-in project manager had to come up to speed, and selection duties had to move temporarily to the Associate Librarian of Houghton Library for Collections until a new Poetry Room Curator started. Three curatorial assistants worked on permissions due to a high volume of staff turnover. Because the

grant was written to take advantage of permanent staff, when these staff left for other jobs it was very difficult to find other staff to fill the breach. In the future dedicating money for temporary staff that can devote themselves to such a project would make better sense.

A third lesson is that technology changes faster than the original grant can predict. The grant was written before the development of widespread audio digitization standards, the Virtual Collection software, and the iPod Touch, all which have been used in this project. There is a need to be able to change and adapt processes and methodologies during the life of the grant, it is the goal that should be the key, and how we get there is adaptable.

### **PROJECT TIMELINE**

October 2004 - Project starts

August 2005 - Vidipax test batch deposited and found unacceptable

November 2006 - Digitization at the Loeb Audio Preservation studio begun

July 2007 - Don Share leaves

November 2007 - First 65 tapes are deposited in the DRS and linked to Hollis

May 2008 - 94 tapes digitized/ linked to Hollis, virtual collection created

November 2008 - 170 tapes digitized/ linked in Hollis, finding aid work in progress

May 2008 - 312 digitized/linked in Hollis, 70 permissions cleared

### **BUDGET SUMMARY**

The budget for the LDI project was \$110,000, \$55,000 from LDI and a matching \$55,000 (\$20,000 from HCL, \$30,000 from a private donor).

The breakdown in expenditure:

\$25,477.41	salaries, staff handling permissions
\$80,180.24	digitization
\$ 575.40	audio equipment for access in Poetry room
\$ 4,235.40	administrative costs
=====	
\$110,468.45	Total