

**The Cleveland Memory Project: an On-line Database for Research and Education**

William C. Barrow  
*Cleveland State University*

*The Cleveland Memory Project*, ([www.ClevelandMemory.org](http://www.ClevelandMemory.org)), is a digital library of texts, images, sound, and video on the history of greater Cleveland and the Western Reserve region of northeastern Ohio. Over 17,000 images, the complete contents of two dozen local area history books, and a growing number of audio and video files are available free of charge for use by patrons world-wide.

Hosted by the Cleveland State University Library, *Cleveland Memory* draws upon the Library's valuable holdings in Special Collections, augmented by materials provided by institutional and individual partners. For example, Special Collections is the home to the Cleveland Press Collection, whose half-million photographs are sampled in *Cleveland Memory*. Another collection, the Cleveland Union Terminal Collection, has contributed nearly 6,000 images of the Terminal Tower complex under construction in the 1920s.

Partnerships with area libraries and historical societies have furnished material for *Cleveland Memory*: over 300 Lakewood Historical Society images for our *Yesterday's Lakewood* site; 100 photographs of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens from the Cleveland Public Library's huge photography collection; 100 photos from the Berea Children's

Home and the Berea Historical Society depicting early life in the children's home; and nearly 2,000 pictures from the Cuyahoga County Engineer's Office. Such partnerships are important to *Cleveland Memory* as they allow broader treatment of subjects than possible through the holdings of Special Collections alone. Other sources of images include Dr. Walter Leedy's splendid collection of Cleveland postcards, of which almost 4,000 are currently available in *Cleveland Memory*.

*Cleveland Memory* is a digital library, in that the digital material is selected and arranged for its potential utility to patrons. Visitors can access the site through the navigation bar by keyword searching in the CONTENTdm image database ("Find Images"); by exploring the list of digital full-text books and articles offered ("Read E-books"); or by seeking out the home pages of individual collections or thematic portals ("Browse Collections"). *Cleveland Memory* does not provide historical narrative or interpretation and the material does not illustrate some particular story. Rather text, images, and A/V files are stocked and made available in a library-like fashion for use by students, teachers, historians, genealogists, authors, reporters, publishers, and the general public.

CONTENTdm is an on-line database program developed at the University of Washington and is supported by OCLC. Searching for a particular name or term across all collections returns pages of thumbnail images, each of which fronts a full sized version of the image, as well as title, description, subject headings, photographer's name, and other relevant information. Each image is presented at a resolution of 72 dots per inch for ease of transmittal and to ameliorate copyright concerns. High resolution versions are available for a fee through the University Library's Digital Production Unit ("Order Prints").

Electronic texts are generally rendered in html format, rather than PDF, to allow full text searches, indexing by search engines, and being read aloud by Americans with Disabilities Act enabled web browsers. *Cleveland Memory's* list of E-book titles include such classics as Charles Whittlesey's *Early History of Cleveland* (1867), autobiographies by Louie Seltzer, long-time editor of the Cleveland Press, and by Cleveland Mayor Carl B. Stokes; and a series of volumes in the Cleveland Ethnic Heritage Program series, such as *Irish Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland*. Also available in *Cleveland Memory* are full-text articles about civil and railroad engineering topics and other articles from historic technical journals.

*The Cleveland Memory Project* also serves as a gateway to everything the Special Collections department of the C.S.U. Library has to offer in local and regional history. *The Cleveland Digital Library*, for example, contains classified lists of links to historical content sites hosted by other institutions. Here links to important products like the *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, hosted by the Case Western Reserve University, or the Cleveland Public Library's *Cleveland Necrology File*, can be found. There is also a list of local history links, providing access to the home pages of local library resources, historical societies, academic history departments, museums and other useful sites.

*Cleveland Memory* also provides access to the C.S.U. Library Special Collections home page and descriptions of its manuscript collections. For example, while *Cleveland Memory* contains some 18,000 images on-line, the Cleveland Press Collection contains 500,000 images and a million clippings from Cleveland's former afternoon daily newspaper. As extensive as *Cleveland Memory* is, it only scratches the surface of what is available in traditional paper format in Special Collections.

One service provided through *Cleveland Memory* is a limited amount of on-line reference. While extensive research cannot be done, staff members are happy to perform quick look-ups or answer questions about local history subjects. This is particularly valuable to patrons living outside the Cleveland area. The “Contact Us” link provides a web form that one can use to send questions to the Special Collections staff.

The collaborative nature of *Cleveland Memory* includes creating relations with donors, community groups and student interns, following Louie Seltzer’s community orientation in trying to be as helpful as possible to patrons and to involve as many people as feasible. Special Collections has an active program with student interns from the library school at Kent State University, who learn digital production techniques while providing *Cleveland Memory* with a source of bright, motivated staffing for new projects.

At the core of *Cleveland Memory’s* inclusive, participatory philosophy is the conviction that historical materials need to be available for access and use. While preservation is of obvious importance to any special collections operation, it is viewed here as a long-term access strategy, and a “fortress mentality” is not permitted to come between patrons and materials. *The Cleveland Memory Project* is both a way of providing access to some of the collections, and more importantly, a symbol of *Cleveland Memory’s* emphasis on accessibility.

This emphasis on access is particularly attractive to potential donors, many of whom despair at the thought that their contributions may languish in some storage area where patrons – and in some cases the donor themselves – are unable to access it. By

employing the web, donors are reassured that access is important and their donations will be widely promoted.

The web is also an effective method of finding potential donors. For example, when Gerald Adams donated the Cleveland Union Terminal Collection, Special Collections obtained a grant to process it and started putting portions of it up on the web as early as 1996. This web presence allowed Robert Linsey, a former Clevelander now living in New York, to discover the existence of the C.U.T collection, resulting in the donation of some 6,000 more images from the original C.U.T. archive that had been in his possession for thirty years. More recently, Peggy Tavales purchased two 16mm films shot by Spenser, White & Prentis, one of the construction firms on the C.U.T project, at a flea market in New York. While browsing the Web she discovered *Cleveland Memory's* C.U.T. web site and promptly donated them. So *The Cleveland Memory Project* is proving to be a good collection development tool, as well as an access tool.

Special Collections and the Cleveland State University Library are continuing to explore new ways in which web-based technology can facilitate the study, teaching, and other uses of local history, but *The Cleveland Memory Project* is at the core of these investigations. We now publish *News from Cleveland Memory*, a monthly electronic newsletter that announces new products and events in *Cleveland Memory* and Special Collections, and reports on local history matters all over the Western Reserve region of northeastern Ohio. The archives and subscription links to *News from Cleveland Memory* are found on the *Cleveland Memory* home page. We welcome anyone interested in local history to visit *Cleveland Memory Project*, use these materials, subscribe to the newsletter, and interact with us in making it more useful for everyone.