

Jessica Hagman and Janet Carleton

Finding friends for our first alumna

Connecting patrons with special collections via social media

Every student has a story, though some are more famous than others. Most institutions have some sort of famous first, such as the first woman or African American student to graduate from the school. And, of course, there are the tales of those who were not famous at the time, but whose post-graduate activities made them so. Your university archives are likely home to physical items that tell these tales. If those documents have been digitized, social media provides the ability to connect your patrons with your local content and share those stories with a wider audience.

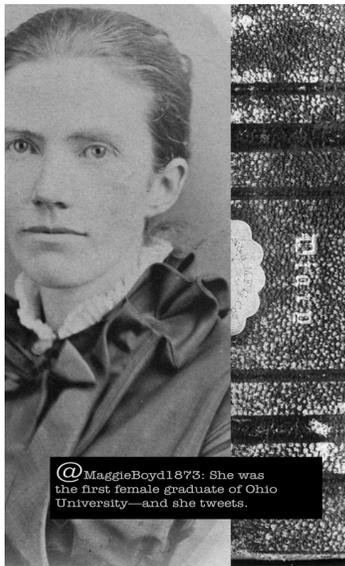
At Ohio University, one of our stories is about Margaret Boyd. She enrolled in the university in 1868 under the pseudonym M. Boyd out of officials' concern about faculty and local citizens' reaction to the admittance of a female student.¹ She became the first female graduate in 1873, though she still had to fight for recognition.

She wrote on June 17 that she told "Scott I do not want a deploma with masculine endings & [sic] he says he will have it fixed."² After graduation, she went on to a teaching career, became the first woman to earn a master's degree from the university, and eventually assumed the assistant principal position at Athens High School.³

Boyd kept a daily diary in 1873, which covers the winter and spring of her senior year. Like all good New Year projects, she began with purpose and dedication, writing on the first of January that she "must try and write every day. In after years it may be nice to look over."⁴

In her entries, she describes her life at the university in ways that are familiar even to students living more than a century later. She laments the difficult courses, expresses frustration at trudging through poor weather to attend a boring lecture, and frets about life after graduation. Her June 1 entry could almost be the tweet of a 21st-century senior approaching post-graduate life with trepidation: "The first day of June. Dear me commencement will soon be here. Then what?"⁵

In the early 2000s, Archives and Special Collections staff scanned and transcribed the diary to be a part of the Ohio Memory Collection.⁶ It has been accessible online since then, but the @MaggieBoyd1873 project throughout 2012 brought a new audience to the document.



Oversize poster depicting Margaret Boyd and her diary that hung in the central library stairwell to promote the @MaggieBoyd1873 project. View this article online for detailed images.

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Students working in Digital Initiatives were fascinated by the diary and wanted to share it with the university community. They heard about other Twitter-based projects at the Massachusetts Historical Society⁷ that shared the words of historical figures, such as U.S. President John Quincy Adams (@JQAdams_MHS), and thought that the short daily entries lent themselves well to the Twitter format. We decided to begin the project as a collaboration between members of the libraries' Digital Initiatives and Reference departments. Students working in Digital Initiatives set up tweets of the daily diary entries, which were scheduled in advance via HootSuite. While the daily diary entries were short, most were too long to be contained in a single tweet, so they went out in several different messages, with one of the tweets linking to that day's diary page in the libraries' content management system.

A student in Reference, whose job was to write social media content, collaborated with a Digital Initiatives student to extend the project by writing regular blog posts about the topics that Boyd discusses in her diary. The blog posts provided context for the diary entries and background on the setting in which Boyd lived.

For example, one post described the types of courses she would have taken, and two others described the university and Athens in 1873. In addition to the Twitter accounts and blog posts, Digital Initiatives students also developed a Pinterest pinboard showcasing the other digital materials about the time period available in the libraries' digital collections.⁸

In recent years we had seen that digital items from the University Archives collections had been some of our most popular content on

the Alden Library Facebook page and Twitter account, so we expected that the diary would pique local interest. Happily, we were not disappointed.

The initial blog post describing the project quickly became one of the most popular posts on the libraries' news blog. Our short link to that post via Bit.ly received more than 400 clicks in 2012. Over the course of the year, the @MaggieBoyd1873 Twitter account gained

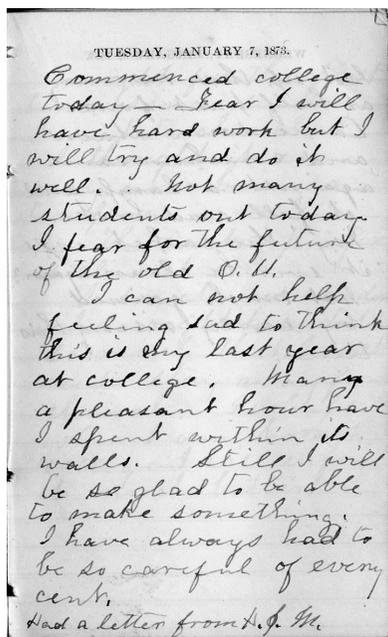
more than 500 followers, many of whom responded directly to the account and recommended that their friends follow it. A Storify board shows that most of those who engaged directly with the Twitter account were female students or alumnae.⁹

The project also led to an invitation for Sherri Saines, subject librarian for Women's and Gender Studies, and Janet Carleton to speak about Boyd at the campus Women's Center as part of the center's regular lunch bag series.

The project also garnered some local press, with the student newspaper, the university's official news publication—*Compass*, and the *Ironton Tribune* all

running stories with headlines like "The Past Meets the Present, Learns Twitter."¹⁰ The Alumni Association mentioned the project in both its newsletter and biannual magazine.¹¹ Anecdotally, we heard from library staff who were out and about on campus that the project generated the type of positive buzz that is relatively rare.

While the project meant greater recognition for the libraries and its digital collections, it was not without its challenges, primarily related to the contextual blog posts. Two students collaborated on this project, with one digging through primary and secondary sources for evidence, and another doing the bulk of the writing.



January 7, 1873, entry of Margaret Boyd's diary in which she writes wistfully about starting her final year of college.

Being student employees, they worked limited hours that didn't overlap. While Google Docs facilitated the collaborative writing, we found that some discussions really needed to occur in person, and that sometimes one or the other needed to be clearer about what they needed from their collaborator. Writing blog posts became a more time-intensive process—for both them and us—than we originally anticipated. This should not have come as a surprise, given that we were asking the students to write mini research reports using primary and secondary research materials. It was also a challenge to let go of our own notions of what it means to write about our historical materials and publish the posts in the students' own voice. But in the end, we believe that the student voices made the blog posts more accessible to the student population.

In addition to the student-authored posts, we had also hoped to bring in more guest authors from around the library and even the university. Perhaps these potential authors were more aware than we were about the time requirements of such a project, as they tended to demur or offer the work to their own students who also did not have the time. Two library staff members did end up writing posts related to their own subject area, however, such as Saines' "Maggie B's World: What Did Maggie Wear to Her Graduation?", a post that was ultimately quite popular. University Archivist Bill Kimok also wrote about the variety of special collections in the library that document the history of student life at the university.

Despite these challenges, we consider the project a successful one in that it allowed our

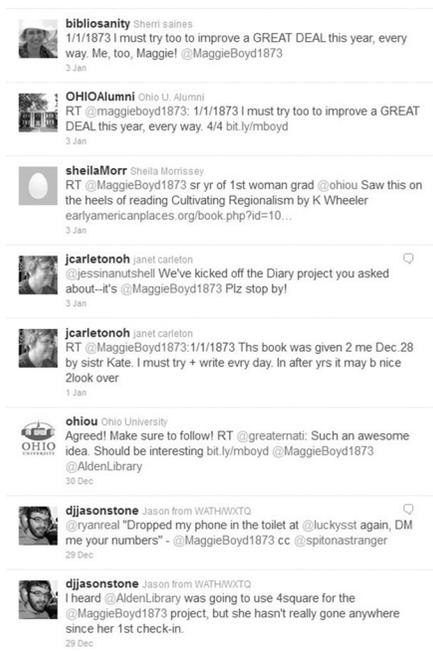
student employees to engage with a piece of university history and work on a project that at least one of them has already used in job interviews. They also had the chance to speak with media outlets about the project and enjoyed a brief bit of campus notoriety for their work.

All of the students involved in the project were employed through the university's Program to Aid Career Exploration, which provides campus employers with the funds for student

employment that provides meaningful work experience. Reflecting on the project, they said that they learned new strategies or improved their skills in research, writing, and using social media. Their work was also in line with the university's focus on the development of a "distinguished competency" for undergraduate students, which emphasizes "writing, analysis, communication, and collaboration" and recognizes that such skills can be learned in the classroom and through co-curricular activities.¹²

For the libraries, the project meant a chance to share a special piece of university history. Using social media meant that we could publicly demonstrate the value of our archival collections in preserving this history and showcase the work of the student employees who gain valuable experience working in the libraries.

Communicating the value of the academic library has become an even more important part of our work than ever, and one that is the responsibility of all members of the organization.¹³ Jonathan Bodnar and Ameet Doshi point out that most library literature about the use of social media for communicating with patrons is aimed at reference librarians who work in the public space of the library, not those who



Screenshot showing some of the campus conversation and comments about the @MaggieBoyd1873 project.

work out of the public eye.¹⁴ The collaborators on this project included students and full-time staff in Reference and Digital Initiatives, with staff in Archives and Reference providing guest posts. This example of effective concerted effort grew out of frequent communication between the two authors about their respective work. This informal discussion became the basis of a project that would have been less successful had either department undertaken it alone.

Boyd's story does not end with her diary. She overcame the early struggles with teaching she describes late in the diary to become a long-time local teacher and eventually had a campus building named for her. Our story doesn't end here either. Students working in Digital Initiatives are building Pinterest pinboards of archival materials on topics like Greek life and commencement, and writing blog posts about their discovery of special collections like the E. W. Scripps papers.¹⁵ This year, Boyd and her diary became the centerpiece of Ohio University's Founder's Day celebrations, growing her profile even more. Recently, we overheard a tour guide telling prospective students and their parents about the diary and Maggie's Twitter page as they toured the library.

It's been 140 years since Boyd received her diploma, and while student life is very different for students graduating in 2013, her diary has shown us that there are some aspects of student life that span the centuries. Modern students can connect to each other through social media, but the Maggie Boyd Twitter projects demonstrates that it can also connect them to the stories that make up the history of the university.

Notes

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3. John Merrill Davis, "Margaret Boyd," *Ohio University Bulletin* (June 1917): 8-11, www.archive.org/stream/ohiouniversbujun1917ohio#page/11/mode/1up (accessed January 07, 2013).

4. Boyd, *Pocket Diary for 1873*, 4.

5. See <http://ohiomemory.org/>.

6. Boyd, *Pocket Diary for 1873*, 155.

7. Massachusetts Historical Society, "John Quincy Adams: About the Diary Entries from the 1809 Trip to Russia," www.masshist.org/adams/jqa (accessed December 17, 2012).

8. "@MaggieBoyd1873's World" at <http://pinterest.com/ohiodigiarchive/maggieboyd1873-s-world/>.

9. Alden Library, "@MaggieBoyd1873", <http://storify.com/aldenlibrary/maggieboyd1873/> (accessed December 17, 2012).

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