

The Evolution and Digitization of the World War II Poster Collection at Northwestern University Libraries

Daniel Zellner and Charmaine Henriques

The Posters

Between 1940 and 1947, several federal agencies of the United States government produced a variety of posters to support the ongoing war effort. The posters were meant to be placed in factories, schools, libraries, and other public areas and covered a range of topics such as but not limited to rationing, nutrition, investment in war bonds, and women in the workforce.

Original Digitization Project

From 1995-98, Northwestern University Information Technology Division, the then Government Publications & Maps Department, and several other Departments within Northwestern University Libraries (Preservation, Cataloging, and the Marjorie I. Mitchell Multimedia Center) collaborated to digitize and construct a World Wide Web accessible database comprising of over 300 World War II era posters. At some stage in 2002/2003, an additional 23 World War II posters were discovered, digitized and added; thus making a total of 338 items contained in the database.

New Demands / Challenges

The images in the World War II Poster Database were in the public domain and did not carry any copyright restrictions since they were published by the U.S. Government Publishing Office (GPO), yet a number of issues arose for patrons; the images available from the database were not of high enough resolution to fulfill the need of normal use that the majority of people and organizations wished to achieve and there were no set procedures for delivering high resolution images or for fulfilling request for paper reproductions of the posters.

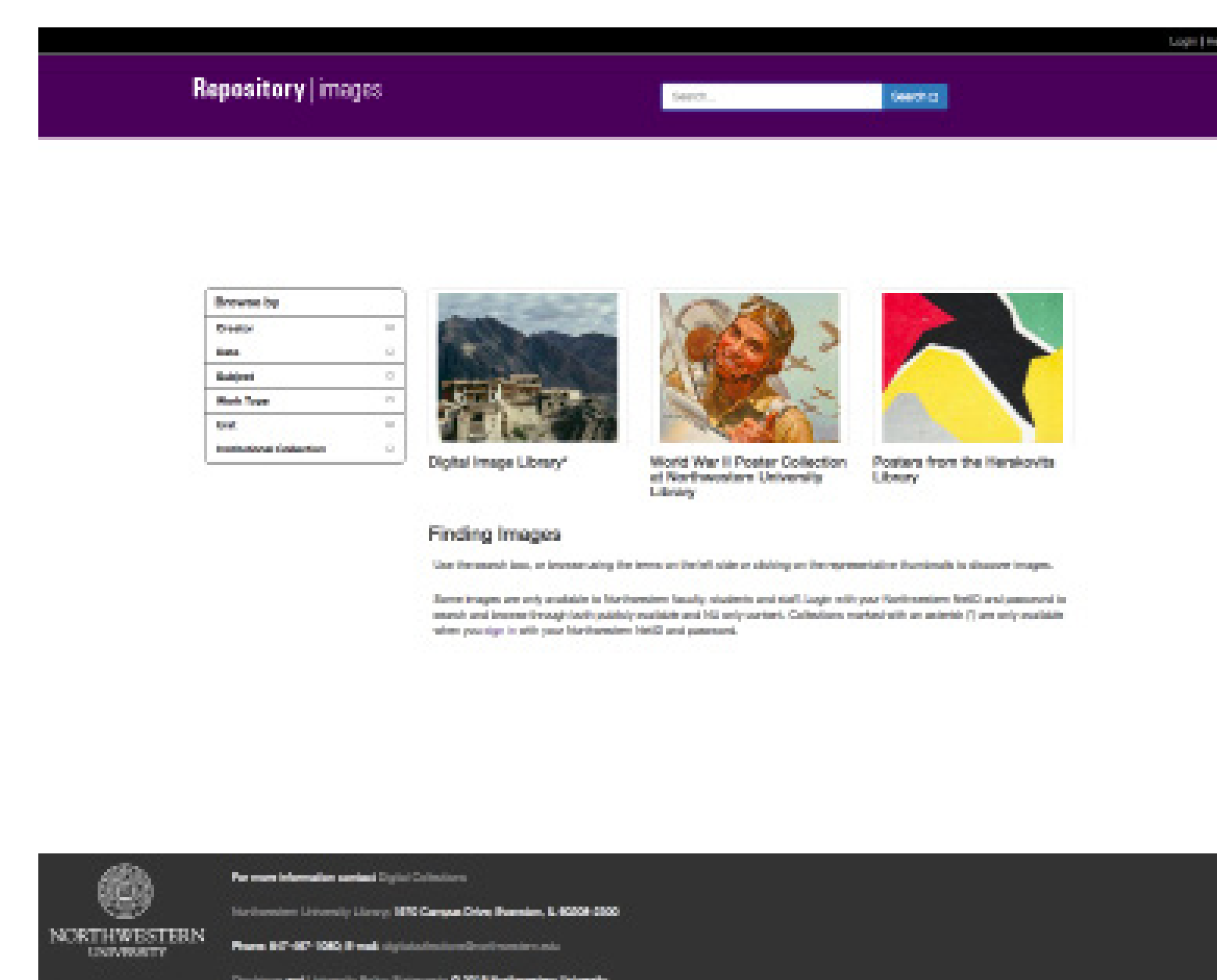
After the tragic events of September 11th, interest in the database increased and images were being requested by high profile parties such as publishers and military/governmental entities. The Preservation Department created a cost recovery fee structure and began filling requests for reimbursement however in 2010, it was determined that the Preservation Department could no longer perform this task, so staff from the then Government and Geographic Information and Data Services Department started providing upgraded images at no cost via file sharing software called Depot.

Repository Images

In 2013, the University Library's Digital Collections Department started to work on making publicly accessible collections available in the new Repository Images application. The World War II Poster Database was located on a server that was scheduled for termination and need to be migrated, hence it was identified as the top use case for making publicly available collections in Repository Images.

Repository Ingest

Ingest of the poster collection into the Library's Fedora repository involved a crosswalk of the metadata, creation of Fedora objects for each poster and the manual creation of the public collection in Repository Images (a Hydra application that sits on top of the repository and serves as a presentation and content management layer). As part of the stakeholders' feature request, the World War II Poster Collection images are available for hi-resolution tif download without mediation.



Uses of the Images

Since its inception, the images in the World War II Poster Collection have been a popular resource. Pictures have been utilized in exhibits and exhibit announcements (IDEAS AT WAR: American Propaganda Posters of WWII), printed in books (Posters for Peace: Visual Rhetoric and Civic Action), published in articles (World War II Poster Campaigns: Preaching Frugality to American Consumers) and have been placed in museums (National Museum of the U.S. Army). The upgrading of the images and their addition to Repository Images increases access by facilitating self-service download of the posters which in turn promotes, encourages, and reinforces the importance of U.S. government information especially those materials that are unique and in a visual format.

Plans for National Museum of the United States Army

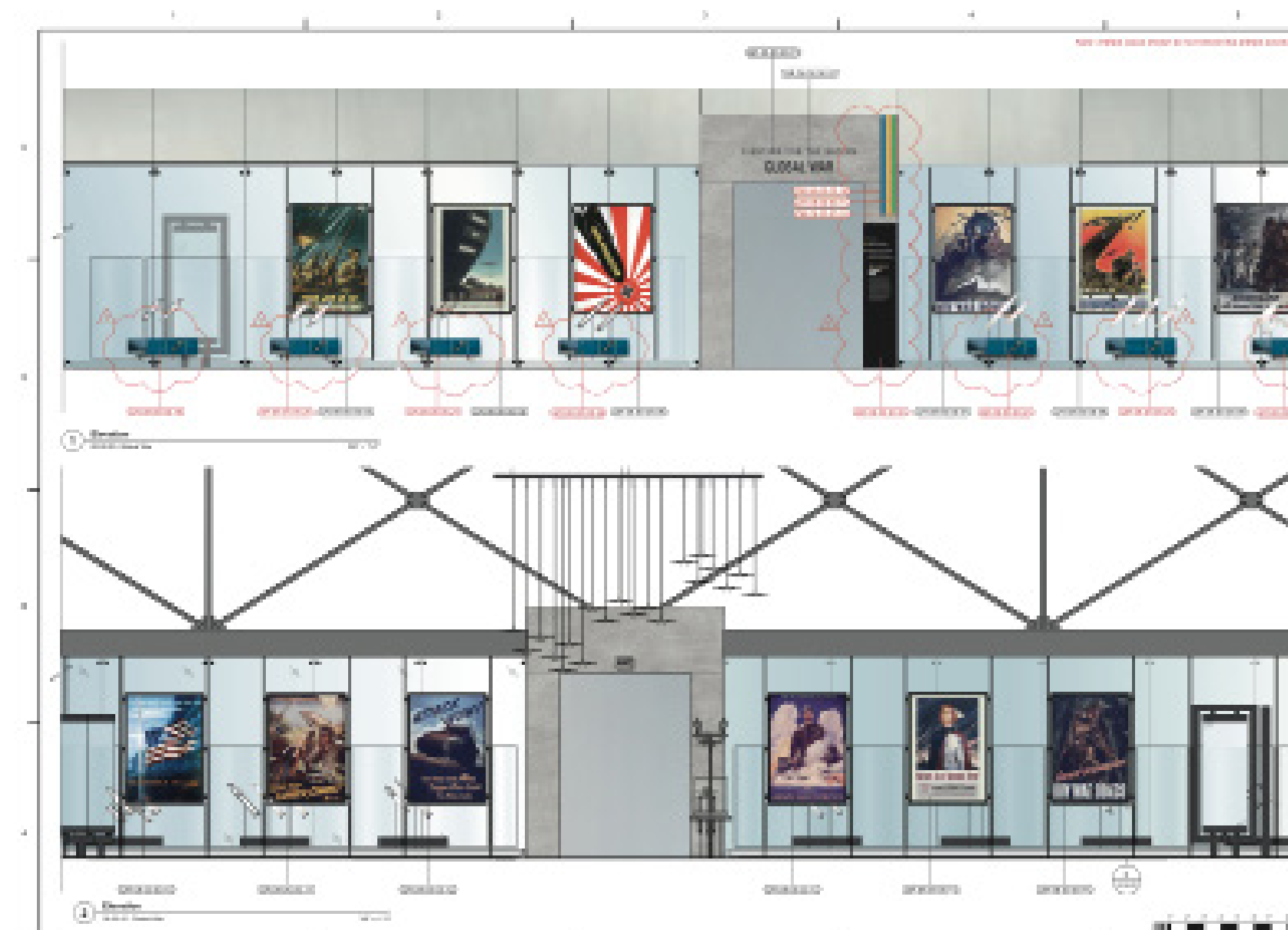


Exhibit at Drake University's Anderson Gallery



Article in Journal of Advertising

