Administrative Aspects

Overview

“The Boston Public Library recognizes the importance of digital collections for access to, and preservation of, the collection.” (Boston Public Library Collection Development Policy)
The Boston Public Library (BPL) has a vast online digital library that houses several general and “specific” collections relating to the Boston, Massachusetts area. The library hosts some digital collections that are commonly held by libraries across the country such as Overdrive, Hoopla, Zinio, and research databases. Specialized collections include anti-slavery documents specific to Boston, John Adam’s personal library, and many others.

**General Collections**
- Boston Public Library at Digital Commonwealth
- Collections of images on Flickr
- Archival and Manuscript Finding Aid Database
- Boston Public Library at the Internet Archive
- Overdrive and Downloadable Media
- Digital Magazines
- Historical Government Information
- Sound Archives
- Newspaper Directories

**Specific Collections**
- American Revolutionary War Manuscript collection
- Anti-Slavery Manuscript collection
- Boston at the Movies (short historical films of Boston)
- Children’s books from the Jordan Collection, available online via the International Children’s Digital Library
- John Adams Library
- Norman B. Leventhal Map Center
- On the Edge: The Hidden Art of Fore-edge Painting
- Sports Temples of Boston

The Boston Public Library’s digital collection has been widely available since 2012 with digitizing efforts started several years before then. The collections are maintained by digital experts that work directly for the BPL in “two state-of-the-art digitization labs in [the] Central branch in Copley Square.” (Blake 2012) The project is funded through a federal grant provided by Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners. Though one particular collection, On the Edge: The Hidden Art of Fore-edge Painting, was made possible through a private gift but still produced and maintained by the library itself.

**Affiliates**
- Digital Commonwealth
- Open Content Alliance
- International Children's Digital Library
- Internet Archive (archive.org)

Many other Massachusetts libraries, schools, and organizations have partnered with the library to contribute resources that benefit the city, the state, and users outside of this area. A mapped listing of contributors is available at the following link:

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1r4oo__mrpGdWx2Pn3MM10AOdHk8&usp=sharing
Mission & Users

The mission of the digital library is best expressed by its affiliate, Digital Commonwealth, which is to “provide resources and services” that circulate cultural and historical materials held by the library. Items in the collection are made available to benefit the students, researchers, historians, and the public in general.

Furthermore, the BPL has a goal of creating “a consolidated statewide digital library system” through the Digital Commonwealth. (Blake 2012)

Collection Content

Collection Development Policy

The content of the Boston Public Library’s digital collections is covered by the library’s Collection Development Policy. All materials for acquisition are considered with the same evaluation criteria such as public demand, relevance to the community, wide representation, etc. Further criteria are considered for digitization efforts:

- Subject areas in demand, and anticipated to be in demand, by the public
- Materials that support exhibitions
- Preservation
- Scan-on-demand and interlibrary loan requests
- Format and physical characteristics
Content

The online collections of the Boston Public Library cover various subjects and resource types. The general collections contain popular eBooks, magazines, audio/video materials, etc. These collections such as Overdrive are quite common for library digital collections and maintained by other parties. However, individual libraries can select materials that are made available to their patrons through these services. The BPL also subscribes to research databases that are either available to card-holding patrons remotely or strictly within the premises of the library system. Research databases in their collection cover topics such as art, genealogy, business, sports, statistics etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Search databases listed by subject:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architecture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audio Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eBooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The library generated collections mainly house materials that are specific to the Boston/Massachusetts community. However, some collections are cultivated more for their historical value than local. The intent of these collections is to provide information and resources that are culturally relevant to the area. The Boston Public Library’s page at Digital Commons reveals a wide-range of topics and object from a two-year photographic history of the elevated train system to audio interviews of longtime residents of the state to vintage local and national advertising posters.
Information Organization:

Boston Public Library at Digital Commonwealth

The main digital library of the Boston Public Library is located in Digital Commonwealth, which is a Massachusetts statewide site for digital libraries. The BPL’s digital library is divided into several digital collections as seen in the image below.
Metadata Standards

The Digital Commonwealth subscribes to the Metadata Object Description Schema (MODS,) which was created by the Library of Congress. “The MODS schema provides for robust description of items, and supports the use of a wide variety of controlled vocabularies and content standards.” (“Digital Commonwealth - Metadata Requirements & Guidelines”)

Controlled vocabulary recommendations are shown below:

**Controlled Vocabularies**

Use of controlled values facilitates browsing, enhances searching, ensures data consistency, and facilitates sharing of records with other institutions. Digital Commonwealth strongly recommends the use of controlled vocabularies for subject headings, personal and corporate names, creator roles, format/genre terms, geographic entities, and languages. Recommended controlled vocabularies include:

**Subject/Format Headings**
- Library of Congress Thesaurus for Graphic Materials
- Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH)
- Getty Art & Architecture Thesaurus
- FAST (Faceted Application of Subject Terminology)

**Authorized Name Headings/Creator Roles**
- Library of Congress Name Authority File (NAF)
- Getty Union List of Artist Names
- MARC Code List for Relators

**Geographic Headings**
- Getty Thesaurus of Geographic Names
- MARC List for Countries
- MARC List for Geographic Areas
- GeoNames

**Languages**
- ISO 639-2: Codes for the Representation of Names of Languages

Furthermore, the Digital Commonwealth uses Open Archives Initiative (OAI) for harvesting metadata along with the Dublin Core international standards.

Collection Storage & Preservation

In 2013, the Boston Public Library was nearly completing the City of Boston Archival Center, “a secure climate controlled state-of-the-art facility.” ("BPL - Strategic Planning – Center of Knowledge") The facility is based off the “Harvard Model.” These types of facilities are designed
uniquely for storage, preservation, and retrieval of resources. Books and other materials are sorted by size and stored in rows. These resources are kept in trays and barcoded. Retrieval is then done similar to most warehouse order pickers. (Weeks 2002)

Collection Access

The Digital Commonwealth uses an open-source software that was developed by BPL engineers, which further develops the library’s commitment to enhancing the collection of digital information for the community and other libraries. ("Rare Chronique Anonyme Universelle Now Viewable Online", 2015) The efforts made for the Digital Commonwealth are done in-house and offer digitization services to other organizations.

The Boston Public Library also have collections on external sites. They have an extensive image collection on the photo sharing website, Flickr.

https://www.flickr.com/photos/boston_public_library/collections/
The Internet Archive (https://archive.org/) houses some of the BPL’s special collections such as the Anti-Slavery Manuscript collection.

Searching & Browsing

The opening page for the Boston Public Library’s digital collections page at the Digital Commonwealth site offers many options for viewing the resources. The top of the page offers three
separate ways to search the collection: a search bar, a “view all” button, and a “browse by” widget. The “browse by” widget allows for users to discover items by topic, place, date, or format. Individual collections are located the library’s description and denoted with images specific to that collection. Clicking one of these images takes the user to a landing page for that collection.

Search Results

The Digital Commonwealth offers an advanced search page for customizing search results. This page suggests Boolean operator terms and has boxes for searching multiple fields such as subject and title. Date fields and format and institution buttons are present to further narrow down any search endeavors.
There are no apparent links to help assistance or privacy policies. Although each page features multiple ways to contact the organization.

Technical & Service Aspects

The Boston Public Library and the Digital Commonwealth’s mission is to bring access to education, information, and resources to all. The collections cultivated by the digitization project is open to any user seeking access. However, the BPL’s other collections such as Overdrive are limited to library cardholders only.

Users are able to create an account within the Digital Commonwealth website. The benefits of creating an account allow an user to save searches, customize their own collections using items they find, and to track past searches.

Resources are able to be saved and printed by the end user. Each resource also houses a toolbox that allows for sharing on various social media websites, saving to a folder, and citing the resource.
Copyright

The Digital Commonwealth requires contributing organizations to clear any copyright materials before submitting. Users have the responsibility to follow all copyright restrictions for any resource used outside of fair use. Otherwise the Digital Commonwealth does not charge any permission fees.
References


