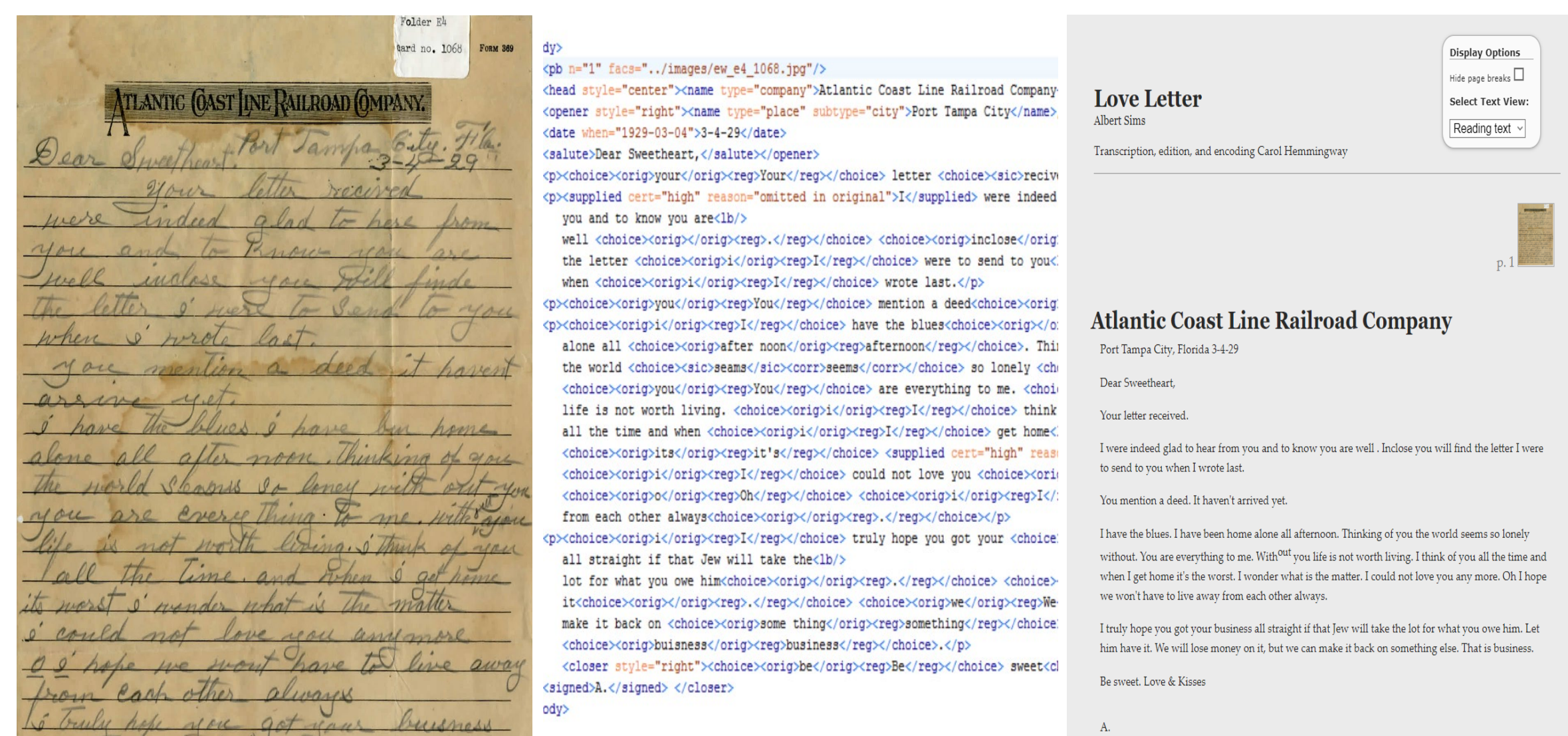# Community Outreach and Crafted Narratives in a Collaborative Textual Editing Project

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Introduction

The *Editing the Eartha M. M. White Collection* project focuses on the personal correspondence and other documents of Eartha M. M. White (1876–1974), the founder of the Clara White Mission and a leader of Jacksonville's African American community. Participants create, encode using TEI-XML, and edit transcriptions of the items from the collection, connecting them with White's personal history and the African American history of Jacksonville. Dr. Clayton McCarl, associate professor of Spanish and faculty leader of this project, and Dr. Aisha Johnson-Jones began the project as an experimental internship-class hybrid in the summer of 2016. The project resumed in Spring 2018 under student leader Susan Williams as a series of three workshops on campus. In Spring 2020, the project has taken the form of weekly open textual editing workshops led by Hemmingway.

Participants of the 2020 Workshop series.

From left to right: Dr. Clayton McCarl, Susan Swiatosz, Carol Hemmingway, Dr. Laura Heffernan, Dr. Felicia Bevel after Carol's presentation on the project and narratives in digital repositories in the Thomas G. Carpenter Library Special Collections Reading Room

An example of a document at each stage of the encoding process

Project Output

We work with the Thomas G. Carpenter Library's Special Collections to obtain a scan of items that we will transcribe. Participants must then read the texts thoroughly and use context to transcribe them as accurately as possible. Next, they encode the transcription using TEI-XML (the international standard for encoding in the humanities), paying attention to details like text placement and elements like names of people and places. We create two versions of the text using TEI-XML: a faithful transcription and a partially regularized version. Finally, the transcription is published on our website.

Participants must follow the following guidelines:

- Preserve integrity of author's intent by not changing syntax.
- Regularize features that do not change how the text is read aloud, such as capitalization and punctuation.
- Avoid regularizing texts written in dialects..
- Identify elements like names, places, and dates.
- Record uncertainty of editorial choices.

Outreach

The target of the 2020 workshop series' outreach has been the campus community. We have established deeper ties with the Digital Humanities Institute by holding the workshops in their suite. Additionally, we have gained the vital support of African American organizations like the UNF Black Student Union and the African American Faculty Staff Association. The former brought a group of volunteers to the workshop for one week. The project has also received contributors from many areas of study, diversifying the contributor base further. For example, Humanities majors participate because they find the experience useful for learning skills and CV building. Non-humanities majors enjoy the experience of working with historical documents, which is not available to them in their field of study.

Omeka Website

The project's new website built through Omeka is a distinctive feature in this iteration of the workshop that has enabled deeper research into the nature of this project.

- Omeka websites are designed for digital repositories, forcing the researcher to consider the project's output as a coherent whole and not a collection of individual items.
- The website's tagging system makes use of identified names of people and places, allowing viewers to search through published documents easily.
- The tagging system shows the researcher the composition of the digital repository being created and, consequently, highlights recurring themes and narratives.
- The metadata collection required for publishing items facilitates the thorough examination of items and the discovery of relationships between published items.

The homepage of the project's new website

Crafting Narratives

When creating a digital repository as is the case in this project, narratives are created, often unintentionally, in the choices of which documents to transcribe and publish. After analyzing the current digital repository of transcriptions, it was determined that the current repository presented a narrative only of misery and poverty in African American life. This was not reflective of both the people whose stories were evidenced in the documents being transcribed and the collection as a whole.

To combat creating problematic narratives and to present a more balanced narrative about African American life in Jacksonville in the early twentieth century, Hemmingway has:
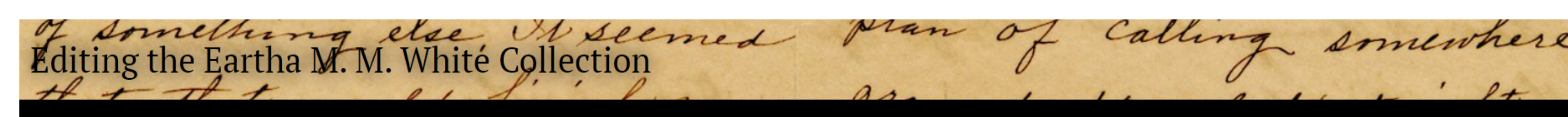
- curated items available to transcribe in order to create a more representative sample of the collection,
- focused on transcribing documents that show black success and happiness, and
- created an exhibit on efforts to write a history of African Americans in Florida, illustrating black pride, dignity, and self-worth.

The Future

The project will continue to address the issue of narratives through creating exhibits on the website. The project will also expand to research responses from participants from Jacksonville more broadly. Before being passed to another student, Hemmingway will continue leading the project in workshops in the community and explore new ways technology can improve the project.