

12-21-2022

## Digital Bookplates: Cataloging Processes and Workflows

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### Citation of this paper:

Visser, A. (2022). Digital bookplates: Cataloging processes and workflows. *Cataloging & Classification Quarterly*, 60(8), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01639374.2022.2148801>

## Abstract

Historically, bookplates were found in the front of print monographs. Transitioning them to digital allows libraries to expand their visibility to researchers and to fundraising activities within institutions. Digital bookplates offer significant opportunities to honor or memorialize individuals with gifts to libraries at varying donation levels. This article discusses digital bookplates in an academic library and provides examples of the cataloging, metadata, and web processes involved in maintaining and collaborating on this active fundraising program. A previous article on this topic was published in 2012 and this article provides an update to its procedures and workflows a decade later.

## Keywords

Bookplates, donations, gifts, giving, memory, honor, metadata, cataloging

## Introduction

Bookplates, also known as ex-libris,<sup>1</sup> have a long history of inclusion in books; arguably since the infancy of Gutenberg's printing press.<sup>2</sup> Bookplates are still in use by many libraries and booksellers today throughout the world. Traditionally, bookplates were physical entities, "with a label attached to a printed or manuscript book, usually on the paste-side down inside the cover or on one of the front endpapers."<sup>3</sup> Bookplates have made the transition to digital, just as books and journals have, and frequently appear as links or images in library catalogs and discovery layers. Academic libraries often have bookplates in their print collections, and some institutions even have special ex libris research collections. Typically, print bookplates contain "owners' names, initials, and mottos ... again most frequently on the book's initial leaves. The decorative designs of the bookplates comprise heraldic devices, emblemata ... and, in recent centuries, vignettes that allude to libraries, books, and the practice of reading."<sup>4</sup> Bookplates have

been added to monographs for many years as commemorations of donations or as another form of acknowledgment.<sup>5</sup>

This article examines the use of digital bookplates at Western University and its library system, Western Libraries. Western University, also known as the University of Western Ontario, is in London, Ontario, Canada. The author acknowledges the Anishinaabek, Haudenosaunee, Lūnaapéewak, and Chonnonton Nations, whose traditional territories are where this publication was produced.<sup>6</sup> The university has a student population of 31,171 graduate and undergraduate students, 1,325 faculty members, 2,492 staff members, and more than 328,000 alumni worldwide. The library system, Western Libraries, has collections exceeding 5.7 million holdings,<sup>7</sup> and throughout its 104-year history, has inserted physical bookplates into numerous monograph purchases and donations. A previous article published by Foster and Robinson in the *Journal of Library Innovation*<sup>8</sup> on Western Libraries' digital bookplates describes the development of the program since its inception. The purpose of this article is to update and describe the importance of donation statements and bookplates in the digital landscape, particularly the practitioner processes involved for cataloging and metadata departments. It is the author's hope that other institutions can determine paths to create digital bookplates at their institution or upgrade their current print programs to digital, based on the struggles and successes of this program.

### Literature Review

A literature review of publications indexed in the databases *Library Literature & Information Science* and *Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts* reveals

very little discussion on bookplates, physical or electronic, during the past decade. It is far more common to find articles published about donations and policies for gifts-in-kind to libraries, rather on the bookplates themselves.<sup>9,10,11</sup> Typically, articles discussing donations and gifts to academic libraries mention the placement of print bookplates<sup>12,13,14</sup> and their importance for recognition and donor relations.<sup>15,16,17</sup> Only two articles detail the use of donation metadata in cataloged bibliographic records.<sup>18,19</sup> MARC 21 bibliographic fields mentioned in the articles by Massey include the use of local fields – 590 and 980,<sup>20</sup> while Carrico et al. discuss the use of the local 796 field for the donation statement and the 856 - Electronic Location and Access field – to create a link to the bookplate image.<sup>21</sup> Two articles specifically examine virtual or digital bookplates, the publication by Foster and Robinson<sup>22</sup> and the article by Carrico et al. from *College & Research Libraries News*.<sup>23</sup> Carrico et al. explain in detail the benefits of virtual bookplates and their use since 2008 at the University of Florida's Smathers Libraries. The article also discusses a survey the authors distributed to three library email lists (ACQNET, AUTOCAT, and LIBDEV). Their survey findings reveal that in 2010, 95% of the 164 respondents were including print bookplates in their library holdings. Only 16% of respondents used virtual bookplates and of those, 83% included only donation statement text in catalog records. Seventy percent of those using virtual bookplates indexed the donation statement text for searching and 38% included a link to a bookplate image.<sup>24</sup>

### [Digital Bookplates Program at Western Libraries](#)

For decades at Western Libraries, print bookplates were placed in the front matter of monographs, but in the early 2010s this changed. An article by Robinson & Foster in 2012

discussed at length the transition of the bookplates from physical to electronic. Transitioning bookplates to a digital format “revitalize[d] fundraising while at the same time acknowledging the digital future of the library.”<sup>25</sup> The digital bookplates website was launched in conjunction with Western University’s Alumni Relations & Development department in 2010. By 2012, the program had 200 new donors and had significantly reduced work for library staff, which was estimated at .50 FTE or approximately \$25,000.<sup>26</sup> Other universities have also noted the additional staff time required to add physical bookplates to library materials. “Staff at The University of Saskatchewan were spending a significant amount of time on all facets of gift-in-kind work, including bibliographic searching, appraisals, processing, disposing of material, and donor relations ... the cost of these activities outweighed the benefits, and the policy was changed to include only those gifts that were of exceptional value to the library, or which had a minimum value of \$5,000.”<sup>27</sup>

Since the implementation of the digital program at Western Libraries, the bookplates have evolved to honor or memorialize individuals, recognize corporate gifts, or act as celebratory gifts for birthdays, graduations, and other special occasions (Figure 1). Western Libraries currently offers four giving levels with three bookplate types, based on the donation amount.

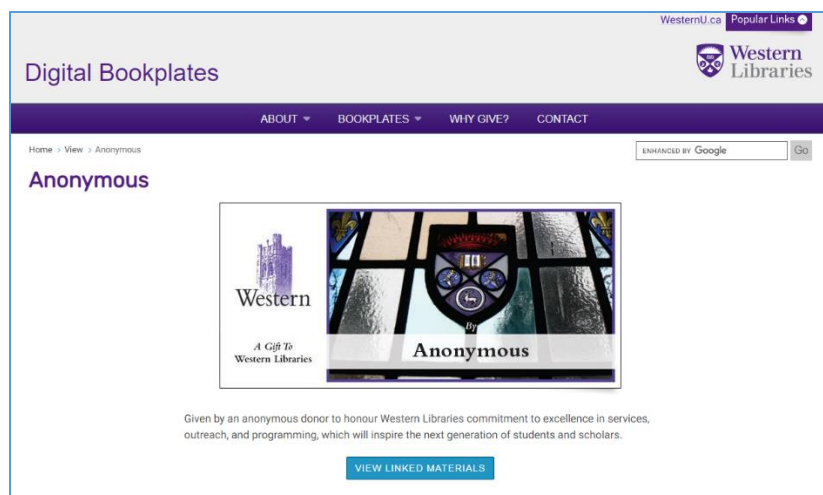


Figure 1: Digital bookplate webpage.

Level 1: \$250-\$999 donation includes one book with a standard bookplate and tribute wording within general collections.

Level 2: \$1000-\$9,999 donation includes five books with a specialized bookplate design and personalized tribute wording within general collections.

Level 3: \$10,000-\$24,999 donation includes ten books or a 'small collection' within Western Libraries, with a library specific or color photo bookplate design and personalized tribute wording.

Level 4: \$25,000+ donation includes twenty-five books or special collections within Western Libraries, with a personalized bookplate design and personalized tribute.<sup>28</sup>

Donors can select from several categories of bookplates including "in honor of", "in memory of", and a separate category for organizations. All giving levels and types are tax-deductible with the Canada Revenue Agency. Western Libraries collaborates with the university's Department of Alumni Relations & Development, which provides the online form that donors complete to make new donations. Western Libraries also receives print

donation forms via fax or mail, should the donors prefer these methods.<sup>29</sup> Lastly, donors can specify on the form to which subject or collections area they would like their bookplate associated.

### Cataloging and Metadata

When the digital bookplate program launched, the integrated library system in use was Innovative Interfaces' Millennium and then Sierra. From 2010-19, Western Libraries' cataloging and metadata department used the MARC 21 – 592 bibliographic Local Notes field for donation statements to search the catalog. The MARC 21 – 856 bibliographic Electronic Location and Access field originally displayed the donation statements and linked to the digital bookplates. In late 2019, Western Libraries migrated to a new collaborative library systems platform, Ex Libris' Alma, with fifteen other Ontario universities. Migrating to Alma included a network zone (NZ), in which all sixteen schools would share bibliographic records. Due to this shared bibliographic records system, it was important to establish local MARC 21 fields that would only display to each home institution in its institution zone (IZ). These fields, in the ranges of 59X, 69X, and 95X to 99X, protect local data that is not relevant for every institution to see or use. Local 59X fields are commonly used by institutions to place this information, "Bookplates, those placed in the piece itself, as well as electronic bookplates, can be used to satisfy a donor's wish of publicly displaying the gift by making a donated collection more discoverable and visible to all library users. Local notes, particularly those placed in the 590 field of the MARC record, allow for staff to add the name of the donor and any other identifying information deemed necessary so that the data is visible to the public and will not be lost should the library migrate its catalog to another system."<sup>30</sup> Indeed, this was the case as

Western Libraries migrated from Sierra to Alma. In Alma, the donation statement stayed in the MARC 21 – 592 field, whereas the bookplate URLs moved to the local 956 MARC 21 field. Using the 956 field ensured that Western Libraries' local bookplates did not display to users in shared bibliographic records at partner universities.

On the user discovery side via Primo VE, bibliographic records display a link to each individually designed digital bookplate using pre-defined text. The text displays to the user as “donated in honor of Jamie Smith” or “donated in memory of Jamie Smith.” An image of the bibliographic display is in Figure 4. With the transition of the bookplate URL metadata to the MARC 21 – 956 field rather than the 856, it was necessary to update the configuration using discovery normalization rules to create the link correctly on the user side. “Normalization rules provide the building blocks for controlling and making changes to the way metadata in bibliographic records is seen by patrons.”<sup>31</sup>

### Procedural Workflows

University fundraisers may contact alumni for donations, or alternatively those from the public may find the library's digital bookplates webpage via the library website. This site has an online and print order form to request a digital bookplate. Donors then can decide upon which giving level to contribute to and if the gift is in honor of, in memory of an individual, or simply a personal gift. Next, the donor can select a specific subject area or collection to have their funds appropriated to for their digital bookplate. Western Libraries' administrative assistant for the Chief Librarian, receives the completed forms and transfers the donor information to an internal staff email. Western Libraries' graphic technician, web developer, and metadata librarians receive this email which includes the



donor's name, honoree or memorial information, digital bookplate category (in honor/memory of), donation level, subject area, and specialized tribute wording. The first step in creating the digital bookplate lies with the graphics technician. A JPG and PDF file of the bookplate is created along with a thumbnail, which is used on the Western Libraries' directory of all donated bookplates webpage. The second step begins with using the web content management system Cascade. To ensure consistency, Western Libraries' web developer designed an automated workflow process to create each bookplate webpage. The Metadata Management Librarian responsible uses the Cascade workflow (Figure 2) to upload the digital bookplate thumbnail, bookplate JPG, and bookplate PDF. The librarian then creates the digital bookplate webpage, which uses the donor's name as the webpage title. Inserted into designated fields is the following information: sort by (alphabetical listing of webpage), search phrase (donation statement searched in discovery layer), donation level, category (in honor of, in memory of), bookplate description (specialized tribute wording), the image thumbnail, JPG, and PDF locations.

The screenshot displays a web application interface for creating a bookplate. The main form includes the following fields and options:

- Title:** Text input containing "Smith, Jamie".
- Bookplate:** Section header.
- Sort By \*:** Text input containing "Smith, Jamie". A tooltip below reads: "How should the bookplate be sorted in alphabetical lists. Typically put it".
- Search Phrase \*:** Text input containing "Jamie Smith donation". A tooltip below reads: "Enter the keyword search phrase used to search for matching materials".
- Donation Level \*:** Dropdown menu set to "3".
- Categories \*:** Dropdown menu set to "In Honour Of". A tooltip below reads: "Select the categories for this bookplate".
- Description \*:** Text area containing "In honour of Jamie Smith." A tooltip below reads: "The description that appears beneath the bookplate".

A modal dialog is open over the form, containing:

- A text input for "Comment on the changes you made." with the text "First version.".
- A "Workflow" section with a checked checkbox "Use a Workflow" and a clock icon next to "New Bookplate Created".
- A prompt: "Submit now or perform guided content checks." followed by two buttons: "Start Workflow" and "Check Content & Submit".

Figure 2: Image of Cascade workflow.

Once the fields are completed, publishing the content to the web begins with the 'Start Workflow' button. This automatically triggers the upload of the bookplate images, PDF, and web page to the public website. The workflow also re-indexes the alphabetical digital bookplate name listing, as well as the in memory of and in honor of webpages. Lastly, in step three, the Metadata Management Librarian selects a specific number of print monographs based on the donation amount. With the monographs chosen, localized MARC 21 fields for the searchable donation statement (592) and the digital bookplate public website URL (956) are added to the individual bibliographic records. When a user selects "View Linked Materials" on a digital bookplate webpage, the system searches Western Libraries' discovery layer Primo VE for the MARC 21 – 592 field's donation statement (Figure 3). Selecting one of the records that appears in the search results displays the full bibliographic record details including the text for the donation statement

and the Local URL hypertext link, which directs back again to the individual digital bookplate webpage (Figure 4).

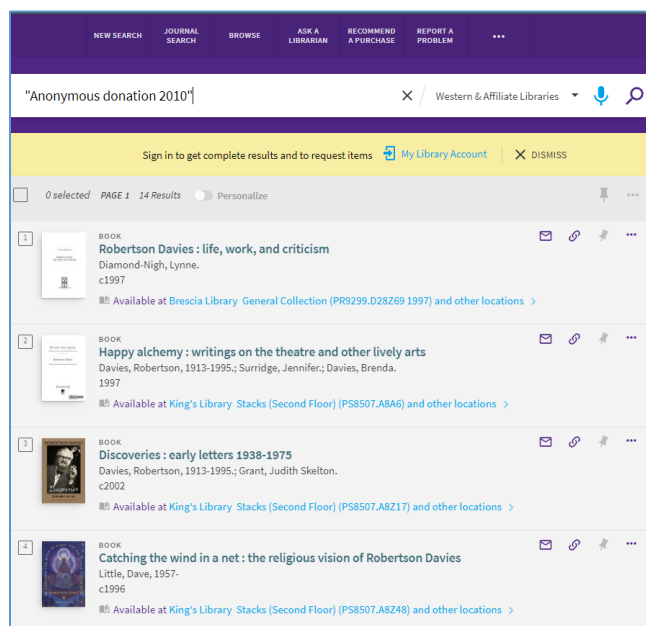


Figure 3: View of a search for the donation statement in Primo VE.

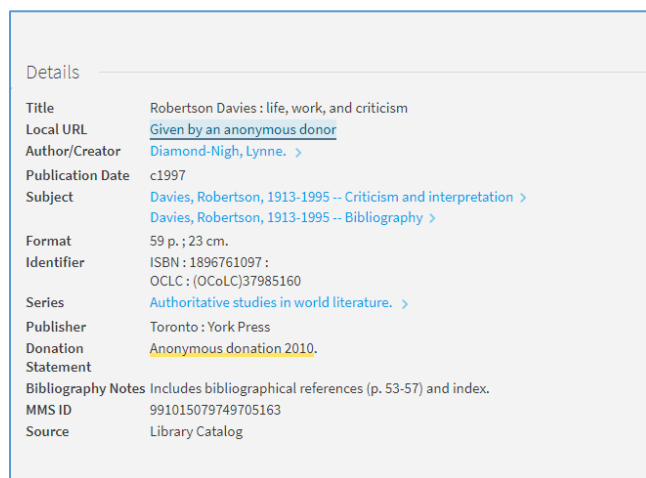


Figure 4: View of the public display of a bibliographic record with a digital bookplate attached. The record displays with the Local URL, “Given by an anonymous donor”, and the Donation Statement, “Anonymous donation 2010”.

The digital bookplate webpage with its attached bibliographic records is shared with the donor when steps 1-3 are complete.

## Program Success & Future Steps

Prior to launching the digital bookplates program in 2009, there were dozens of financial endowments tied to print bookplates. Shifting from physical to digital resulted in benefits for both staff and the environment. Printing physical bookplates was no longer necessary, saving paper and ink, and technical services staff did not have to add them manually to print monographs. Western Libraries was also able to revitalize its relationship with the university department for advancement and development, which was a supplementary bonus. This created a streamlined donation process utilizing their established online giving financial platform, which now incorporates Western Libraries donations with Advancement processes and ensures an ongoing collaboration into the future. The most significant success of the program was the increase in bookplate requests and donations. With the ease of ordering online, donors contributed more to the program. As displayed in Table 1 below, Western Libraries had 200 digital bookplates in 2012; by 2019, this number had increased to 488 and by May 2022, there were 557 (a 144% increase). This was an overall increase of 178.5% from 2012 to May 2022, and a significant investment in the future of Western Libraries.

Table 1. Donation of digital bookplates increase over time			
	<b>2012</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>May 2022</b>
<b>Number of digital bookplates</b>	200	488	557
<b>Percentage increase from 2012</b>		144%	178.5%

Going forward there are improvements to investigate for the processes of the digital bookplates program. The workflow currently is multifaceted and includes several library departments, which can make effective communication difficult. Confusion amongst staff

can occur if a donor requests a digital bookplate in honor or memorial of another individual, or if a donor contributes to the program several times. For multiple donations, the metadata linking to the digital bookplate must have distinct phrasing for each donation year or honoree (e.g., “Jamie Smith 2022 donation” rather than “Jamie Smith donation” for clear donation linking). Another area for improvement is special funds, also known as endowments, made to the libraries. Special funds typically require a digital bookplate, and acquisitions made with these funds require a retroactive addition of donation statements and bookplates. “When one considers the many additional steps necessary in processing gifts, it becomes even more crucial for a library to develop a written gifts policy that takes into account its collection needs, workforce, and available resources.”<sup>32</sup> In this regard, metadata librarians and the acquisitions manager are currently updating legacy cataloging documentation for digital bookplates, special funds, and donations to ensure a thorough understanding within all technical services areas.

A thorough review of backlog items donated to the libraries is another area of focus during the next academic year. Uncataloged donations and gifts are not discoverable by users and this material in the compact shelving of the Content Management, Description, and Access department consists of a multitude of boxes. Western Libraries’ Archivists and Archival Assistants will review this content with a recommendation for improvement in its organization and capacity. Following this, Metadata Management Librarians will collaborate with Collections & Content Strategies Librarians to establish an order for donations processing and cataloging. An examination of donated materials requiring digital bookplates will be an important area of analysis to help determine the processing order. Lastly, the Metadata Management Librarian responsible for digital bookplates will

investigate the possibility of adding bookplate images to the bibliographic records in the discovery layer itself. This will enhance the display for all users, please donors with their contributions, and market the program to users in general going forward.

## Conclusion

Recognition of donors and their contributions is an important area for academic libraries as it helps to enhance engagement and increases fundraising efforts. Bookplates have historically filled this acknowledgement role and their shift to digital only strengthens their accessibility and notice by users and donors alike. There are challenges to any fundraising effort but aligning library goals with those of university advancement departments can help to clarify processes involved for all and market programs to a wider audience. The updates provided in this article on the improvements made to Western Libraries digital bookplates program since 2012 prove that collaboration between departments has increased donations. It is the author's hope that the giving levels, cataloging and metadata processes, and departmental partnerships described throughout are beneficial to academic libraries considering a similar program at their institution.

## Disclosure Statement

The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

## Notes

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