0.241049 28.241049 [silence]

0.241049 10.241049 Welcome to ArchivingAK, a podcast of the Archives and Special Collections at the UAA APU Consortium Library in Anchorage, Alaska.

10.241049 18.241049 We're here to talk about what we do, what our researchers are up to, and to give you a closer look at the world of archives.

18.241049 25.241049 My name is Becky Butler-Guyegos. I'm one of the archivists here. I'm joined today by Archives Technician Luna de la Rosa.

25.241049 37.241049 Hi Luna, how are you? Wonderful. Luna's joining me today to continue discussing the collections we're working on through the Alaska Federal Lands Project.

28.241049 30.241049 I am doing swell.

30.241049 58.241049 [silence]

37.241049 46.241049 If you've never heard of that before, check our show notes for a link to our blog post about the project, and there was also a previous podcast episode you can listen to.

46.241049 52.241049 Essentially, we're working to increase digital awareness and access to our collections that relate to federal lands.

52.241049 64.241049 Today, we're looking at the records of Commonwealth North. Commonwealth North was co-founded in 1979 by two former governors of Alaska, Walter J. Hickel and William Egan.

58.241049 86.241049 [silence]

64.241049 70.241049 It acts as a non-partisan group funded by individual memberships and private sector funds.

70.241049 81.241049 According to its website, Commonwealth North's purpose is to educate its members and others on significant public policy issues affecting Alaska and its future, and to assist in their resolution.

81.241049 88.241049 Commonwealth North holds monthly forums with speakers from a variety of disciplines to provide insight into Alaskan matters.

86.241049 114.241049 [silence]

88.241049 95.241049 In addition, it forms study groups to research Alaskan issues and publish their findings and recommendations.

95.241049 105.241049 The Archives has the historical administrative records of this organization, as well as many many recordings of Commonwealth North events and Board of Directors meetings.

105.241049 109.241049 You can find the description of the collection on the Archives website.

109.241049 116.241049 So Luna, can you tell us a little bit more about what your work on the collection has looked like so far?

114.241049 126.241049 Right, so I've done two main things with this collection. The first was to pull out all of the VHS tapes and send them out to a third party vendor who digitizes those.

116.241049 145.241049 >> Yes, that's essential.

126.241049 136.241049 And that process really is just identifying which VHS tapes you want to send. Obviously we don't need to do any of the duplicates so those can stay.

136.241049 150.241049 And making sure we leave some sort of note for any other archivists that might be looking for them, letting them know that they have been sent out.

145.241049 173.241049 It gives you a panic attack if you go to look for something and it's just gone.

150.241049 166.241049 The second thing I've done with this collection is digitize the audio cassette tapes which we do do in-house. I have a tape recorder in my office that is connected to my computer which then records on Audacity which is just the program we use for this.

166.241049 178.241049 And then gets moved into the archives digital preservation space for posterity.

173.241049 200.241049 Have there been any issues you've run into as you've digitized?

178.241049 202.241049 There are various issues that can go wrong while you're recording the tapes. The first thing is just making sure that Audacity is in the correct settings to record the tape because if it records and you haven't, if you just haven't chosen the right audio setup, then sometimes you'll record the whole thing only to realize it's not playable.

200.241049 229.241049 Oh, that's rough.

202.241049 214.241049 It is. It's very frustrating when that happens. You also, as you are recording these tapes, you don't actually know how good of a shape they're in.

214.241049 230.241049 And so there are things that happen where you think it's a perfectly good tape and then either you see sound waves only to find out later that those sound waves were really only picking up static gargly noises.

229.241049 251.241049 And...

230.241049 239.241049 Or the tape stops and you think, "Oh, it must be done." There's a little clicky sound that you hear that tells you that the tape is done.

239.241049 251.241049 And sometimes you hear that and you think, "Oh, it must be done recording." But then you take it out and you stop the recording and you realize, "Oh no, it's actually the tape in the cassette got stuck."

251.241049 267.241049 Or like got jammed and so it stopped. But there's more to go and then you have to figure out how many times do you want to try to fix it and try to get it to go over that?

251.241049 279.241049 Oof.

267.241049 279.241049 And keep recording. Or do you just accept that that is as far as you're going to be able to record of this tape so that you don't risk deteriorating it further?

279.241049 308.241049 Now. Right. And so I think the biggest struggle with digitizing the tapes is the not knowing when you're going to get a bad tape.

279.241049 286.241049 Yeah, because there is that balance there, part of the reason we're trying to digitize these is that they can be in a usable format.

286.241049 293.241049 The actual tapes are old now, they are degrading and at a certain point we can't stop that process.

293.241049 307.241049 That's why it's so essential to be digitizing these before they are too far gone for us to actually get content off of them.

307.241049 326.241049 [silence]

308.241049 320.241049 And if you just leave it and you let it run all the way through and then it turns out that you didn't get where you need and then you have to run it again. But every time you run it, it's deteriorating more.

320.241049 333.241049 So it's kind of you have to make the most out of the chance you get. And sometimes you could go through a string of tapes that are perfect condition, have the same amount of time, have the A side and the B side.

326.241049 349.241049 There goes your whole morning.

333.241049 346.241049 And so you're just like going through tapes. You get too comfortable and then that's when a weird tape pops up. Exactly. There goes your whole morning.

346.241049 362.241049 And now you have to like stop what you're doing and figure that out. So yes, the tapes are, I don't know, they're little tricksters.

349.241049 371.241049 Thank you for dealing with them about how many tapes have you done?

362.241049 372.241049 So all together, the collection has 529 tapes. But with duds and duplicates, there's probably more like 400.

371.241049 381.241049 Wow, that's a lot, and we should mention a lot of these cassettes came straight from an administrative assistant who was recording meetings.

372.241049 382.241049 [Music]

381.241049 389.241049 Sometimes there is some human error at the point of creation where you think you hit record and you really didn't.

382.241049 392.241049 [Music]

389.241049 393.241049 So now you have an empty tape that's labeled like it recorded a meeting but it didn't.

392.241049 402.241049 [Music]

393.241049 400.241049 Or there was an issue with the audio cassette or the recording device, you know, it wasn't set up to actually catch the sound.

400.241049 407.241049 So not all of our duds are necessarily just because of degradation. They could just have arrived at the archives here.

402.241049 416.241049 [Music]

407.241049 410.241049 And we don't know until we get that first chance to listen to them.

410.241049 425.241049 Speaking of which, have you found anything interesting to you while you've been digitizing?

416.241049 428.241049 So the fun thing about audio cassette tapes in general is just like being able to hear voices from the past. I think a lot of archiving and researching with archived materials.

425.241049 454.241049 [silence]

428.241049 437.241049 It kind of feels like you're meeting someone backwards. So like instead of meeting a person and then seeing their work, you typically see their work first.

437.241049 447.241049 And then maybe you'll like find a picture or you'll hear a recording of their voice. But those things aren't really guaranteed. Sometimes all you have is the documents.

447.241049 466.241049 And so the cool thing about this collection specifically is that they have so many different people. They had all these events. And so they got so many different like senators and political figures and just like people around Alaska experts on things.

454.241049 483.241049 [silence]

466.241049 474.241049 And so I think that's really, I don't know, it's like a great resource that can help a wide range of different research projects.

474.241049 487.241049 I also just think that currently we feel weirdly secure with how we take photos and like upload it up to the cloud or like take recordings on our phone and save it on Google.

483.241049 512.241049 [silence]

487.241049 502.241049 But I think people don't realize how quickly technology changes. Like as we just stated with these audio cassette tapes, like I bet during that time, they're like, oh, these are going to last us forever. Now this will always be safe.

502.241049 509.241049 But no, actually there's all this work involved to make sure the next generation gets to hear these tapes.

509.241049 527.241049 And technology is changing so quickly that kind of feels like if two generations drop the ball on preserving these things. Then it's just gone. It's just gone. And all we have are maybe documents that prove that these people existed.

512.241049 536.241049 [silence]

527.241049 536.241049 So it is just nice to have this preserved until I get be able to have this like voice reveal for all these leaders in Alaska.

536.241049 546.241049 [BLANK\_AUDIO]

536.241049 548.241049 All right, so jumping back to the Alaska Federal Lands project, the primary focus of it is to make the land-related collections more digitally accessible.

546.241049 556.241049 [BLANK\_AUDIO]

548.241049 554.241049 So getting these tapes into a digital format will make them hugely more usable for researchers.

554.241049 557.241049 So you all have an idea of what these tapes contain.

556.241049 583.241049 [BLANK\_AUDIO]

557.241049 569.241049 We have tapes from briefings and forums on spruce bark beetles, subsistence rights, the seafood industry, and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, among many, many, many, many other topics.

569.241049 579.241049 They feature familiar Alaskan names like Governor Walter Hickel, Senator then Governor Frank Murkowski, Governor Tony Knowles, and Lieutenant Governor Fran Ulmer.

579.241049 589.241049 There are even some national guests like Hillary Clinton and Michael Powell.

583.241049 589.241049 Will these digitized tapes be available for use? Will transcripts be available?

589.241049 599.241049 [BLANK\_AUDIO]

589.241049 591.241049 That is the big question.

591.241049 597.241049 The answer to the first part is yes. These digitized tapes are available for use right now in the research room.

597.241049 602.241049 You can also contact the archives to request remote access online.

599.241049 609.241049 [BLANK\_AUDIO]

602.241049 607.241049 The second question about transcripts is a little trickier to answer.

607.241049 611.241049 Transcription by human takes a long, long time to complete.

609.241049 619.241049 [BLANK\_AUDIO]

611.241049 617.241049 Imagine trying to listen to this podcast and write down everything we say exactly.

617.241049 621.241049 People talk over each other frequently. Sorry, that's usually me, Luna.

619.241049 629.241049 [BLANK\_AUDIO]

621.241049 629.241049 And sometimes words get garbled over a microphone, so it usually takes multiple listens through of a sentence to capture it accurately.

629.241049 639.241049 [BLANK\_AUDIO]

629.241049 635.241049 So here's where it gets exciting. This is where artificial intelligence can help the archives.

635.241049 641.241049 We've recently begun to experiment with 100% local AI transcription services.

639.241049 649.241049 [BLANK\_AUDIO]

641.241049 645.241049 Basically, that means we're not uploading our content to a training model or to a cloud.

645.241049 653.241049 We want to keep control of the intellectual property and copyright of the material while also getting things transcribed in a fraction of the time it usually takes.

649.241049 659.241049 [BLANK\_AUDIO]

653.241049 666.241049 Now, AI isn't perfect, but even only having to listen to a recording once for a quality control check of an AI-generated transcript is much, much faster than relying solely on human ears and typing.

659.241049 683.241049 [BLANK\_AUDIO]

666.241049 673.241049 We're still very much in the testing phase of what this technology could look like in the archives, but I personally find it very exciting.

673.241049 682.241049 Transcripts make recorded materials much easier to search and they make our material more accessible to all, and I'm a big fan of both those things.

682.241049 707.241049 You can also find two versions of the AI transcription of this episode in the episode description.

683.241049 701.241049 You can find the finding aid also known as a collection description for the Commonwealth North Records on the archives website. You can find a link to it in this podcast episode description. Contact the archives if you'd like to listen or view any of the digitized materials or view the paper-based records in the research room.

701.241049 722.241049 [BLANK\_AUDIO]

707.241049 714.241049 One will be simply what the program generates and the other will be edited by me for accuracy and to meet our standards.

714.241049 716.241049 Check them out.

716.241049 721.241049 That brings us to the end of today's episode of Archiving AK.

721.241049 729.241049 Thank you once again, Luna. Stay curious out there!

722.241049 732.241049 [BLANK\_AUDIO]

729.241049 738.241049 Um, why are marsupials the best animals? They have quality checks.

732.241049 739.241049 I don't know. [BLANK\_AUDIO]

738.241049 740.241049 Stupid.

739.241049 741.241049 Noice. (laughs)

740.241049 741.241049 Okay.