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The "Northern Cities Shift" A Digital Preservation Story

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"NORTHERN CITIES SHIFT"
A DIGITAL PRESERVATION STORY

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WHAT IS THE "NORTHERN CITIES SHIFT?"

Anybody heard of it?

The Northern Cities Vowel Shift is a significant change in vowel pronunciation that is currently developing in some northern inland US cities.

It's a dialect that is spoken in cities like Grand Rapids today, although it is most consistently present in **Syracuse**, **Rochester**, **Buffalo**, **Detroit** and **Chicago.**

> **"block"** sounds like *black*
>
> **"buses"** sounds like *bosses*

People who use this dialect say the word

       Block the way other people say black; and

       Busses the way other people say bosses.

Sound like anybody you know?

Spoken by famous contemporaries such as…

Drew Carey (Cleveland, Ohio)
Ashton Kutcher (Cedar Rapids, Iowa)
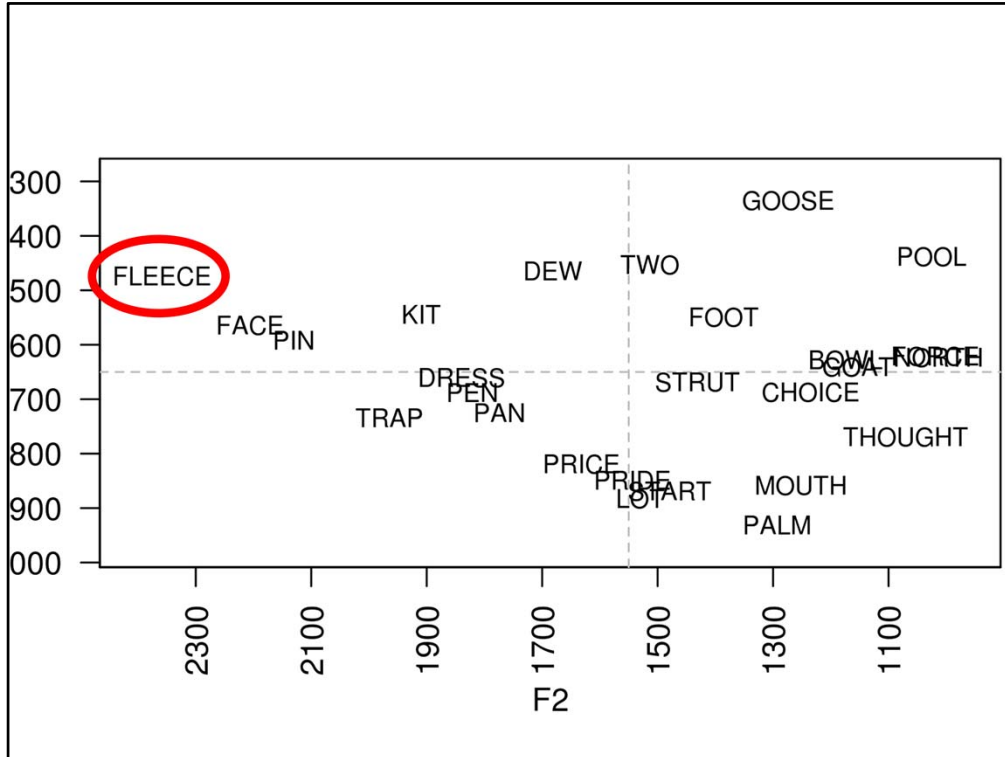John Goodman (St. Louis, Missouri)

And by...
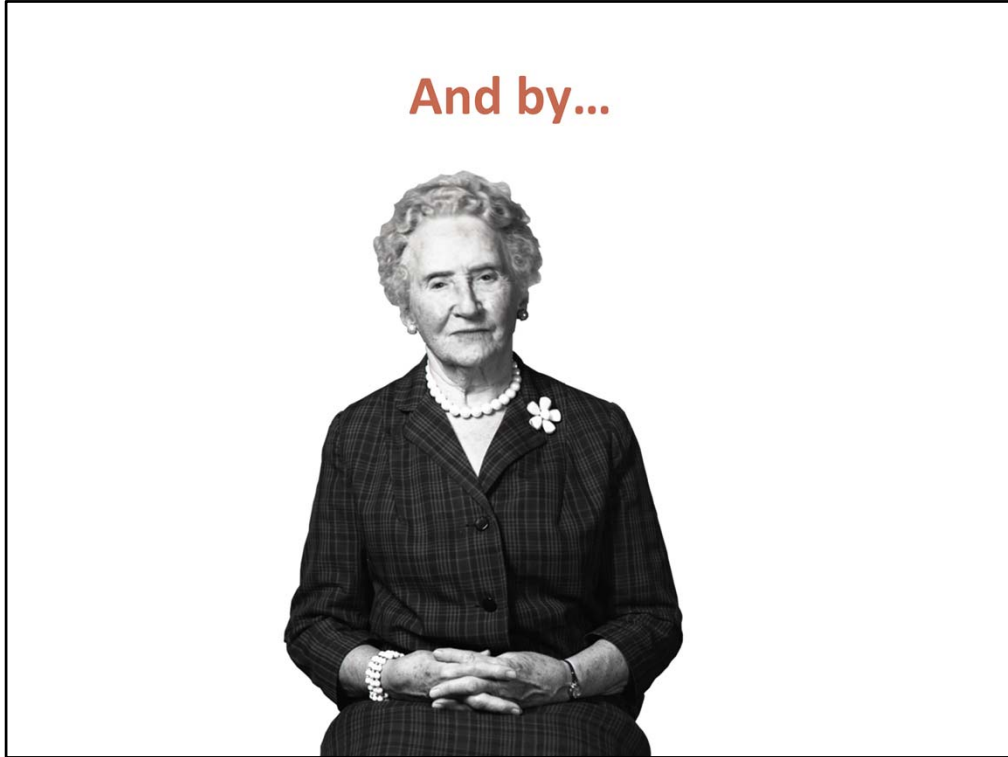
And by this famous person… wait you don't know her?

This is Mildred Shulz, a single working girl from Grand Rapids, MI. She worked in the Voigt flour mill as a secretary. She was born around St. Joseph on the lake in 1890 and lived here all of her life.

So that's Mildren Shulz…

…and this is her mouth.

Anybody know what this is? I certainly didn't before this project.

This a vowel chart.

Specifically, it's the vowel chart for Mildred Shulz.
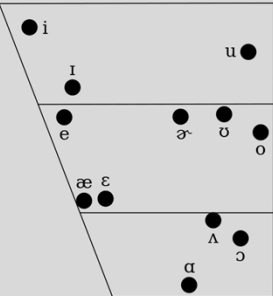
The chart shows where, on average, her tongue touches the roof of her mouth when she pronounces vowels in words like "fleece." The left side of the chart represents the front of her mouth and the top of the chart represents the roof of her mouth.

Pretty cool, right?

STORY TIME
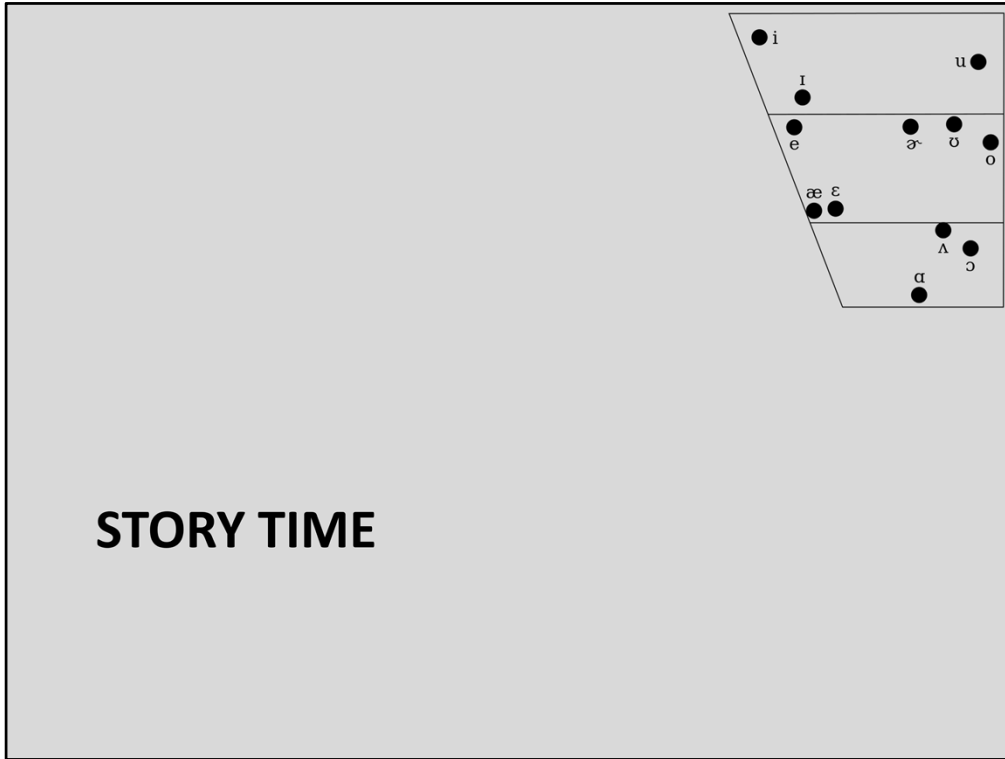
But what does this have to do with digital preservation? Well, let me tell you a quick story.

Some of them, at least

LESSONS LEARNED

So what's the moral of that story? What lessons did we learn?

Well, they have to do with digital curation and preservation. I think they cover just about every part of the digital object lifecycle.

Digitization ≠ Digital Preservation
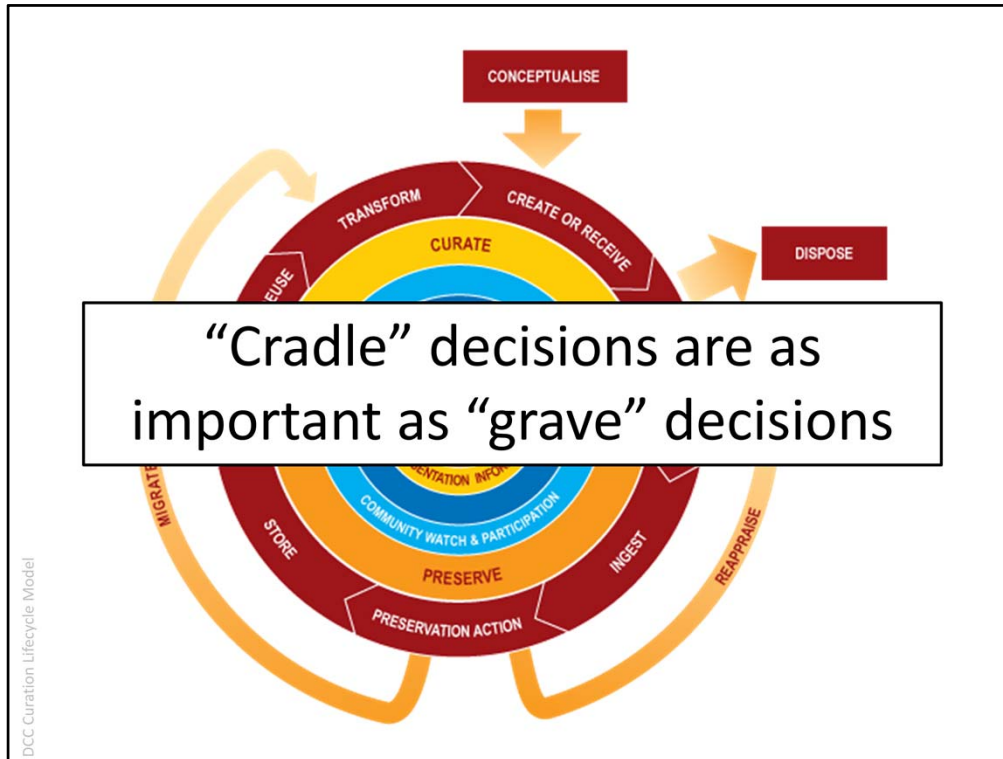
First, digitization is not digital preservation.

       You can digitize all you want, but you have to think about preservation, too.

       Digitization is a time-limited process. Digital Preservation is an active, long-term commitment.

       I think we conflated the two.

DCC Curation Lifecycle Model

Related to that is the fact that "cradle" decisions are as important as "grave" decisions.

This is kind of an interesting quote from this English professor:

"The issue with MP3s vs. WAVs for us is that it's usually impossible to know what information has been lost during compression (to MP3)." This guy sounds like one of us.

Many times we don't have control over how a digital object gets created. But sometimes we do, especially in digitization projects.

So it's worth it to create them right, and consistently. You'll be happy you did later.

Optical disks no longer count as Archival Storage

Optical disks, even "archival" quality optical disks, no longer count as Archival Storage. They definitely can't be the only place you keep preservation masters.

When this storage media started going obsolete, there was some administration/management that should have happened but didn't.

We should have gotten AIPs off of those CDs into our current Archival Storage system.

Maybe then we would have discovered this problem earlier.

SEO improves visibility and usage
of your collections

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Digital repositories are notorious for being bad at search engine optimization. But this is how people find our stuff. This is how the English professor, and, in fact, the majority of our users, find our stuff.

So do what you can to improve SEO.

Scholars do re-use our digital collections

Just like people have found ways to re-use old Mac computers, scholars (and others) really do reuse digital materials.

And you don't necessarily know how.

The easier objects are to repurpose, remix and reuse, and, in general, the more open your materials are, the better.

THE END!