

December 2017

Update on the Twitter Archive at the Library of Congress

In April, 2010, the Library of Congress and Twitter signed an agreement providing the Library the public tweet text from the company's inception through the date of the agreement, an archive of tweets from 2006 through April 2010.* Additionally, Twitter agreed to provide tweets on an ongoing basis under the same terms. The Library saw an opportunity to document the emergence of online social media for future generations. Its first objectives were to acquire and preserve the 2006-10 archive; to establish a secure, sustainable process for receiving and preserving a daily, ongoing stream of tweets through the present day; and to create a structure for organizing the entire archive by date.

As the twelfth year of Twitter draws to a close, the Library has decided to change its collection strategy for receipt of tweets on December 31, 2017. After this time, the Library will continue to acquire tweets but will do so on a very selective basis under the overall guidance provided in the Library's Collections Policy Statements and associated documents (loc.gov/acq/devpol/). Generally, the tweets collected and archived will be thematic and event-based, including events such as elections, or themes of ongoing national interest, e.g. public policy.

The Library will also engage with Twitter to resolve issues associated with managing transactions that generate deletions of tweets, and user access issues. The Twitter collection will remain embargoed until access issues can be resolved in a cost-effective and sustainable manner.

Collection Decision

The Library continuously reviews its ongoing acquisitions, whether subscriptions to newspapers or the receipt of tweets via a gift. As a result of the review, the Library has determined that its initial Twitter collection will consist of a twelve-year snapshot of the beginning of one of social media's most important and transformative communication tools. Subsequent selective tweet collecting may continue in addition to the twelve-year snapshot. Some factors contributing to this decision include:

- (a) The nature of Twitter has changed over time.
 - i. The volume of tweets and related transactions has evolved and increased dramatically since the initial agreement was signed.

- ii. The Library only receives text. It does not receive images, videos or linked content. Tweets now are often more visual than textual, limiting the value of text-only collecting.
 - iii. Twitter is expanding the size of tweets beyond what was originally described at the beginning of effort.
- (b) The Library now has the first 12 years of public tweets. This period documents the rise of an important social media platform.
- (c) The Library generally does not collect comprehensively. Given the unknown direction of social media when the gift was first planned, the Library made an exception for public tweets. With social media now established, the Library is bringing its collecting practice more in line with its collection policies.

Collection Access

The Twitter collection will remain embargoed until access issues can be resolved. Three priorities have guided the Library's work to provide access to the Twitter collection: respect the intent of the producers of the content; honor donor (Twitter) access requirements; and manage taxpayer-provided resources wisely. There is no projected timetable for providing public access at this time.

The Library will focus its efforts on preserving the Twitter collection for future generations. Throughout its history, the Library has seized opportunities to collect snapshots of unique moments in human history and preserve them for future generations. These snapshots of particular moments in history often give voice to history's silent masses: ordinary people. Without the efforts of past generations, the nation might not have a collection of oral histories in the hours after the attack on Pearl Harbor (memory.loc.gov/ammem/afcphtml/afcphtml.html) or film footage depicting San Francisco before and after the great quake of 1906 (loc.gov/collections/san-francisco-earthquake-and-fire-1897-to-1916/about-this-collection/). The Twitter Archive may prove to be one of this generation's most significant legacies to future generations. Future generations will learn much about this rich period in our history, the information flows, and social and political forces that help define the current generation.

* For additional background on the Library's agreement with Twitter, and the ongoing collection of tweets, please see the January, 2013 Update on the Twitter Archive at the Library of Congress here: blogs.loc.gov/loc/2013/01/update-on-the-twitter-archive-at-the-library-of-congress/

View the original gift agreement here: blogs.loc.gov/loc/files/2010/04/LOC-Twitter.pdf