

Using Omeka to create the Jane Addams Digital Edition

Cathy Moran Hajo, Editor and Director, Jane Addams Papers Project

Salameno School of Humanities and Global Studies, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Mahwah, NJ, 07430

The Challenge

The Jane Addams Papers Project has been reborn as both a digital and print edition. Our mission is to make Addams' correspondence and writings freely available and accessible to a broad public audience. Choosing a digital platform has been a crucial part of the task.

- We have over 21,000 documents on microfilm.
- We anticipate finding another 2,000 in archives.
- Many of the documents are very hard to read due to Addams' poor handwriting and thus need to be transcribed.
- We wanted to take advantage of digital technology tools like mapping, tagging, creating digital exhibits and more.

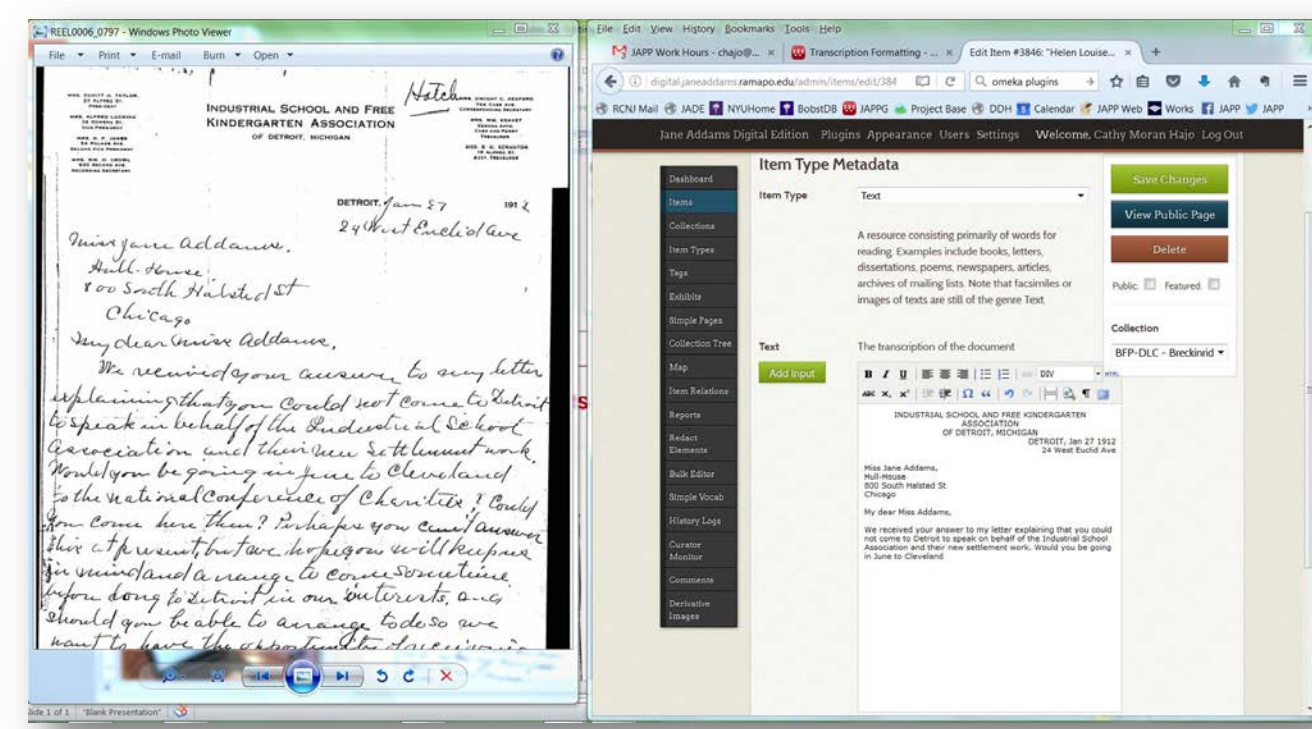


We rely on a wonderful group of student workers who input our metadata, transcribe documents, and research individuals, organizations and events. We also want to encourage members of the general public to participate in the project by helping with the search for documents, transcribing and ranking documents, and creating digital exhibits based on the texts.

We needed a digital platform that was easy to train students and volunteers, but enabled us to build a complex system of metadata around the texts. This metadata has allowed us to control our documents, build our digital edition, and begin to publish documents within the first year of work.

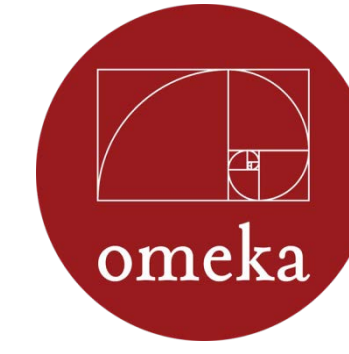
Work flow

- We entered records for 800 archival collections with Addams materials.
- Starting with 1901 correspondence, we entered basic metadata about each letter and attached the digital files to the metadata record.
 - We summarize documents, adding subjects and tags from a list.
 - We link the document to the archival collection.
 - We identify the origin of the document on a map.
 - We create records for the names of people, organizations and important events mentioned in the text and link them to the document.
 - We track the document's status so that we can identify those that need further work to be published.
- Transcribers add transcriptions to the Omeka records.
- Researchers conduct research and write descriptions.
- Editors proofread metadata, transcriptions, and descriptions and then approve the items for publication.

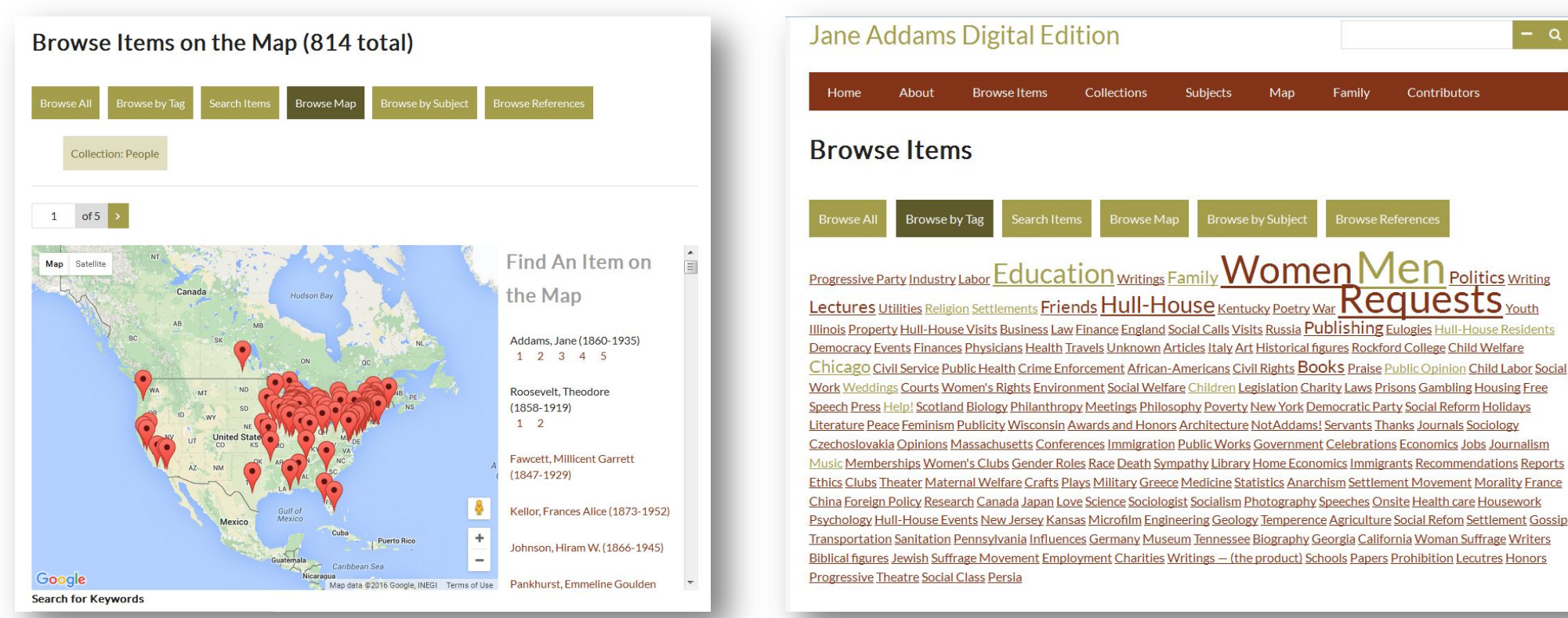


Omeka out of the box

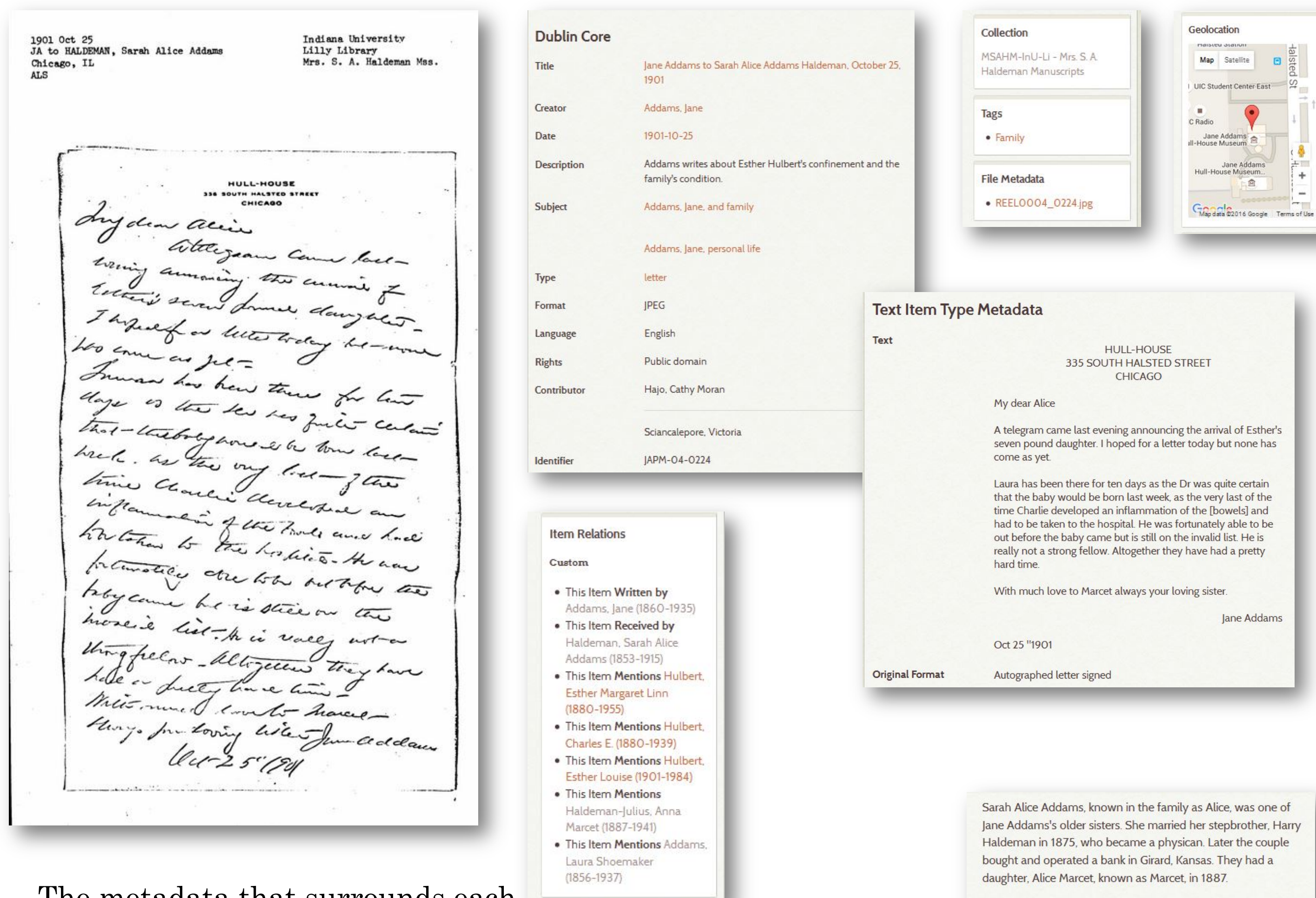
Omeka is a MySQL database-driven cloud-based platform developed for museums and archives to build digital collections. It runs on a server and uses the Dublin Core metadata standard. Omeka organizes your data into collections, items, and exhibits.



Without any customizations, Omeka can instantly publish your digital items to a website, enable searches by words, metadata, or tags, map your items on a Google-based map, and enable you to navigate from item to item using the metadata terms. With customization, it can do a lot more.



Seeing Documents as Metadata



The metadata that surrounds each document image provides powerful search capabilities.

People descriptions Also contain meta-data as well as brief biographies.



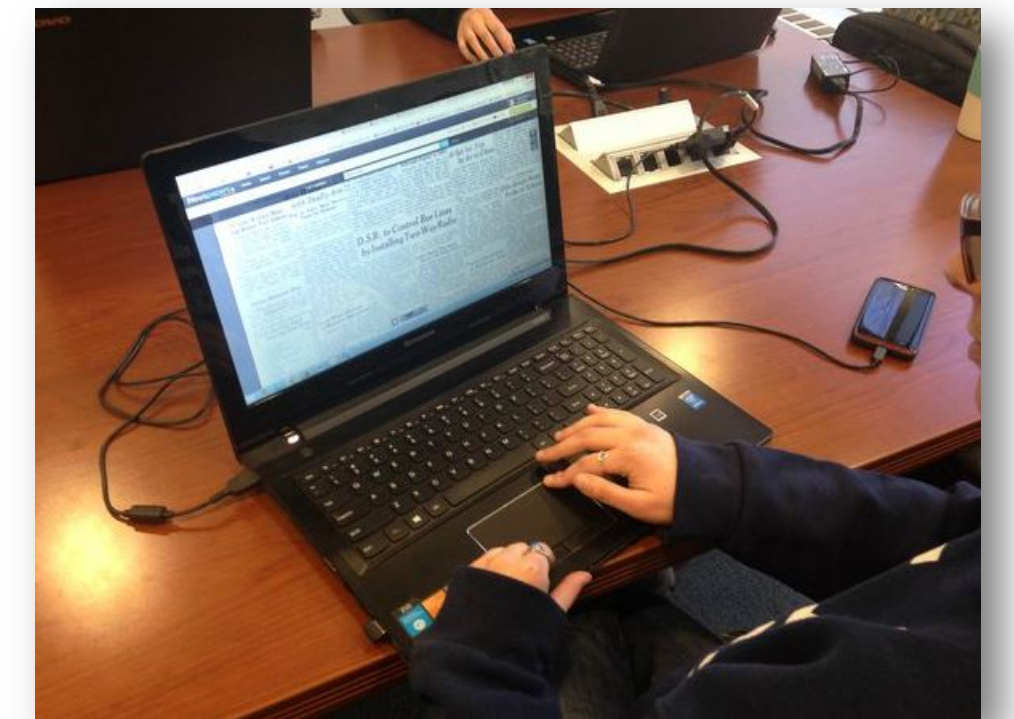
Omeka versus a XML/TEI edition

The decision of whether to use a database-driven system like Omeka or Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) encoding depends largely on your project's goals, technical capabilities, and the kinds of things that you want to do with your texts.

- Much of the encoding that historians undertake—such as identifying the names of people mentioned in a document, dates, occupations, and document types—can be captured easily using metadata.
- Some kinds of encoding—particularly the encoding that enables the reader to see the complexities or variations in the text—cannot be easily replaced by metadata. In such cases, TEI is the better option.
- Using TEI encoding requires familiarity and ease with using and reading coded texts, while Omeka's metadata interface hides all code.
- Omeka's easy to use interface doesn't require advanced technical skills and is cloud-based so that staff can be located anywhere. Its dashboard steps you through metadata options and when creating transcriptions you use familiar icon-based formatting tools.
- In Omeka, publishing your material online using a basic theme is *extremely* simple—literally clicking a button.
- TEI encoding requires an investment in programming before you see the formatted text on the screen. This can require programming, hiring a programmer, or using a development platform like the TAPAS Project.

Customizations

Omeka can be customized using plugins, which add new features to your installation. To adapt Omeka to a scholarly editing project, we developed a few new plugins and updated others.



- We wanted the ability to publish parts of an item at different times. We could publish metadata once it was proofread, but had to wait for repository and copyright permissions before publishing document images and transcriptions.
- We wanted to be able to identify the staff members who worked on items, and to assign research topics to specific students.
- Omeka's Geolocation plugin only allowed one map point per item; our enhancement lets us add multiple points, especially useful for identifications of people who lived in more than one place.
- Omeka's Item Relations plugin was cumbersome to work with, so we developed an enhancement that allowed the user to look up and link names that are already in the system, and to easily add new ones when needed.
- We are in the process of designing an Omeka "theme," which customizes the public-facing side of the site. This will allow us to have our own unique appearance, to place images and metadata in a more pleasing way on the screen, and to build in navigation based on our metadata.

For more information

- Omeka (<http://omeka.org>) was created and is supported by the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at George Mason University.
- Jane Addams Digital Edition (<http://digital.janeaddams.ramapo.edu>) To see the dashboard view, go to <http://digital.janeaddams.ramapo.edu/admin> and login in as "guest" with the password "letmein".
- Contact Cathy Moran Hajo at chajo@ramapo.edu