LDF Legal Defense Fund

In partnership with

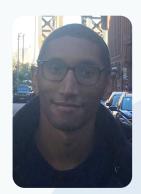**P** **Preservica**   **durable**

Customer story

Safeguarding Civil Rights History: An Initiative of The Legal Defense Fund in Partnership with Durable Digital & Preservica

The **Legal Defense Fund (LDF)** is America's premier legal organization fighting for racial justice. Over the decades, LDF accumulated a vast archive of records documenting its critical role in shaping civil rights history. However, these records were fragmented across physical and digital formats, with no cohesive system to ensure their preservation or public accessibility.

To address these challenges, they embarked on a project to digitize, secure, and present the LDF archives in a way that balances public engagement with security requirements. The collaboration culminated in the creation of the LDF Recollection website.

LDF's project underscores the critical role of storytelling in historical preservation. More than just a searchable database, the LDF Recollection site, powered by Preservica and designed, developed, and supported by Durable Digital, is now a platform for LDF to connect with audiences on an emotional level.

"It's one thing to have a database that people can search. It's another thing to use them to really put a face and a story to what this case is about. I think that's the real upshot of the Recollection site. Not just that it's making all of these records easily accessible. But it's walking people through history, connecting our past with the present."

Ashton Wingate, Manager of Digital Archives
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund

Overcoming Fragmentation: Transforming Scattered Archives into a Scalable, Public-Facing Digital Resource

By 2014, LDF's archival resources were scattered across disparate locations, with most records stacked high in physical boxes and tracked using outdated systems. With limited staff and resources, digitization was sporadic and access to the archives was ad hoc and internal-only.

To tackle this challenge, LDF needed to manage the complexities of organizing and preserving vast collections of digital materials, which encompassed a wide range of formats and historical contexts. These materials often resided in scattered repositories, making it challenging to ensure consistent access and long-term preservation.

Additionally, LDF needed a solution that could balance the competing priorities of public accessibility and rigorous security. To maximize public engagement and education, the online archives needed an intuitive and engaging interface. This interface also had to seamlessly integrate with behind-the-scenes systems that maintain strict preservation and data protection standards.

Finally, LDF grappled with demonstrating the tangible value of their archives to a broader audience. They sought to position their collections as tools for public education and historical discourse while ensuring that the technical infrastructure behind them could support scalability in an evolving digital landscape.

Ashton Wingate, Manager of Digital Archives at the LDF, played a key role in bringing leadership's vision to life by creating a public-facing archive aimed at:

Expanding Public Access
Make civil rights records widely accessible while maintaining security for sensitive information.

Improving Searchability
Provide a user-friendly interface for navigating a complex repository.

Ensuring Digital Preservation
Safeguard historical records with reliable backend solutions.

Educating and Engaging
Use archival materials to educate the public and drive discourse on civil rights history and contemporary issues.

Making this work possible required selecting vendors committed to collaboration, hence the selection of Preservica and Durable Digital.

The Partnership: Seamless Integration Bridging Frontend Accessibility with Backend Preservation

LDF independently selected Preservica as its Digital Preservation system due to its robust capabilities for securing and managing digital records. Simultaneously, they sought a partner to create a dynamic, accessible public-facing archive. Durable Digital was brought on board for its expertise in process optimization, user-centric web design and software development.

While Durable Digital and Preservica were chosen separately, their collaboration became essential. The two companies worked closely, focusing on several key areas:

Step 1: Content Identification and Digitization

Durable Digital supported LDF by building systems that streamline task prioritization and project management workflows for digitization efforts. However, the Archives department, in collaboration with LDF leadership, determines which records are prioritized for reformatting and the sequence of projects sent to the digitization vendor. They also implemented a tracking system using Microsoft Dynamics 365 to manage:

- Items sent to external vendors for digitization.
- Progress monitoring and returns management.

This workflow ensured that millions of pages of physical records were systematically processed and prepared for Digital Preservation.

Step 2: Digitized Content Ingestion into Preservica [Enterprise Edition]

Once digitized, Durable Digital ensured materials were ingested into Preservica. As LDF's Digital Preservation system, Preservica:

- Securely store and preserve digital assets.
- Ensured integrity and long-term accessibility of records.
- Act as the backend repository for all archival content.

Step 3: Website Design and API Integration

Durable Digital designed the [LDF Recollection] website, a public-facing platform for accessing the archives. This phase included:

- Organizing archival content for easy navigation.
- Creating a user-friendly interface to encourage public interaction.
- Integrating LDF's content in Preservica into the public interface via API to enable seamless retrieval of digital assets.

The website contextualizes LDF's historical materials, providing rich metadata and hierarchical organization to guide users through the archives.

Step 4: Public Access and Searching

The LDF Recollection website allows visitors to browse and search the archives effortlessly. Key features include:

- Videos and oral histories from assets hosted in Preservica.
- Advanced search capabilities for exploring digitized materials.
- An intuitive frontend that is integrated with Preservica's powerful backend storage, cataloging and Active Digital Preservation technology.

Metadata's Crucial Role

The Value of Metadata Creation

Metadata was pivotal to LDF's archival success, supporting discovery, access control and preservation. Key benefits included:

- Automation: Integrating Microsoft Dynamics 365 with Preservica automated metadata creation, reducing manual effort and ensuring consistent descriptions.
- Efficiency: Cascading metadata streamlined group-level descriptions, saving time and improving scalability for large collections.
- Access Control: Metadata enabled granular security, protecting sensitive materials while managing public and internal access effectively.
- Discoverability: Comprehensive metadata made the content easy to find, linking historical records to relevant context for public engagement.

"Where I've been most impressed with Preservica is our ability to work with their team to push the system and its functionality and stretch the limits on what it can do and what API integrations we can use," said Ashton. "As an archivist, what I appreciate about our process is that we have **automated metadata creation**. There's still data entry that happens. But I don't have to hard code metadata in a txt file and upload it to a collection or to an item. That stuff is happening automatically through the integration with Preservica so that we're getting a really complete and fully described collection upon the completion of ingestion."

Results: Empowering Public Engagement, Streamlining Access

The outcomes of the project highlight its impact across multiple areas:

- Increased Public Engagement: The LDF Recollection website has generated significant public interest, with high levels of user engagement. Analytics show that people spend considerable time exploring the archives, indicating the effectiveness of the storytelling approach and the discoverability provided by metadata.
- Improved Internal Access: Preservica continues to serve as a valuable internal access tool, providing LDF staff, including legal teams, with secure access to sensitive records.
- Enhanced Archival Practices: LDF has established robust archival workflows and practices, ensuring the long-term preservation of its valuable historical materials.
- Industry Recognition: The project has garnered positive feedback from the archival community, providing a great example for other organizations looking to tackle large backlogs of analog content and make their archives accessible and usable now and for future generations.

"Looking ahead, the focus is on building upon the foundation to address the backlog of physical and digital records. By making more information accessible, the goal is to empower individuals to learn, research, share their stories and unlock new possibilities for creativity. Managing diverse record types, from converting legacy files to preserving emails and archiving web content like websites and social media, is a key part of this vision. Preservica secures the integrity and provides the agility and adaptability needed to meet these challenges, ensuring the archives remain secure, accessible and ready to grow with evolving needs."

naacpldf.org
ldfrecollection.org

preservica.com

durabledigital.com