

## Bringing Local History to Life on the Web: Digital Collections

### Alberta's Cultural Communities: a Diverse History

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#### Speaker Notes:

1. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to talk to you about some of the projects that we are involved with to bring primary source materials to the web.
2. Universities, in particular, but also other organizations are creating digital collections of primary materials to support research. How do we decide on a particular collection?
3. First, we look for authorized sources, like the Peel and Strathearn bibliographies for Alberta or a complete collection curated by a group or organization.
4. We look for completeness, not only of the collection, but also in individual items in the collection – our project digitized all pages of a book, including blank pages and emphasizes the item itself as an artifact, with marginalia, etc. always included.
5. We ensure that proper attribution for the author and publisher is provided, so that users can trace the history and authenticity of material that they see online
6. Our goal is to provide as complete and accurate raw material as possible to bring history to life. I'll give you an example. Looking at the Chinook Country Historical Society site, I read with interest the Kristi's Heritage Corner article on Chinook Country Christmas. It was wonderful to see that she credited both the Peel project and Our Future Our Past as sources for the material she described!
7. As you can imagine, there is a large variety of material that can be used and created. In developing a collection, we look at a variety of material types and explore how they will interact to produce the best depiction of the subject material or era. Some of our collections are simply a faithful rendition of, say, a bibliography, while others are curated by scholars knowledgeable and credible in their fields of interest.
8. When we get an idea for a collection – either from a researcher, an information professional, a partner society, we first look for funding. I should say here that the LHCADL has been generous in providing funding for some of our projects, as has the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, and the Alberta Community Initiatives Programme.
9. Part of developing a funding proposal is selecting and sourcing material. Often, we can get copies of material from large library collections; however, we use Document Delivery actively on all our projects and are very grateful for libraries sharing their holdings, sometimes rare and fragile.
10. Every item included in a digital collection must have copyright clearance. Sometimes it is easy because the material was published over 50 years ago. For those materials that are more recent, we write to the author or publisher and ensure that we have permission before we begin to scan the material (unlike Google!!)

11. Each item has a variety of metadata to allow for searching and to allow us to pull together the images that make up a digital document. In addition to keeping the material online for access, we house archival and high resolution copies of the items for posterity.
12. We not only provide descriptive metadata, but also where it is possible, the full text is scanned to permit keyword access to the material in the book. This is where the nuggets are often found. A current project on Alberta sport history has identified several local histories that contain important information about sport that would not have been found through the general cataloguing.
13. All items are checked for quality assurance, including the display image, correct resolution, typos and other errors in the metadata, etc.
14. The platforms we use must support sophisticated searching across fields and easy moving through the text and images.
15. More and more, funding agencies are requiring that we produce learning modules to help teachers and students make good use of the online material. Thank goodness we have partners like the Galileo Educational Network to create wonderful tools to use with the collections.
16. And finally, we work very hard to ensure that the digital objects are stored safely and preserved even for future format migration.
17. We need to be especially careful to present multicultural materials in their best light. This often involves using language specialists to create our metadata and specialized software to display special characters in non Roman alphabets. You only need to look at the Ukrainian and Chinese collections in Multicultural Canada to understand what is involved.
18. We also want to show cultural sensitivity in presenting these collections in a context that respects their history. An example is our aboriginal collection. Prior to viewing the collection, we provide a short video from Narcisse Blood outline the issues around the material that has been selected. As you can imagine, some of the local histories may not present an unbiased view of time in which the material was created.
19. Finally, partnerships are crucial with Multicultural material. We would not have been able to produce the Alberta Chinese Oral Histories without the partnership of the Calgary Sien Lok Society. They partnered not only with funding, but also with providing subjects for the histories and the videographers, who so effectively captured their stories. Similarly, the Multicultural History Society of Ontario gave us their publications for hosting our German collection. Looking at the Multicultural Canada site, you will see a variety of associations who generously provide time, funding, and expertise to these endeavours.
20. LET'S LOOK AT SOME OF THESE COLLECTIONS NOW.
21. Funded by the Canadian Culture Online Program of Heritage Canada, Our Roots is a flagship national project with many partners including the Universities of Toronto, Laval, and Victoria and Simon Fraser University. Currently, Our Roots has over 8,000 documents, all fully indexed. We have just introduced a new interface and are welcoming comments and suggestions.

22. Our Future Our Past was the first digitization project we worked on – incorporating Alberta’s local histories. It has grown to include a variety of other Alberta projects and is fully integrated with Our Roots.
23. Multicultural Alberta includes three collections to date.
24. The Chinese oral histories was our first experience with streaming video and is a collection that is highly used. A project of this sort is expensive on the production side, but provides excellent an immediate connection with the individuals profiles.
25. It is always a challenge to provide formats that are accessible from the variety of user desktops. In this project, we have experimented with high and low bandwidth applications to meet user needs.
26. This is an example of a collection that is based on a scholarly bibliography.
27. Multicultural Canada has over 31 collections, representing newspapers, photographs, audio and video, as well as some archival collections – a very worthwhile resource!
28. Another excellent collection, Peel’s Prairie Provinces is based on the authoritative bibliography produced by Bruce Peel, former University Librarian at the UofA.
29. Peel also includes Alberta newspapers. As does Our Future Our Past.
30. Just for your information, we do collaborate with one another to avoid duplication where possible and to support each other’s digital initiatives. More on this in context with the Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library project in a minute.
31. Letters from the Trunk is an example of a tutorial produced by the Archives Society of Alberta – it is a very compelling site with information on young immigrants to Alberta. The Alberta In Word and In Site collections show how active the archival community is in producing digital collections of primary resources.
32. Another learning module comes from Galileo – this one looking at diversity in the context of the Land.
33. Finally, Multicultural Canada has produced a template that assists teachers to develop lesson plans and other material to support curriculum using these collections.
34. Searching Tips:
  - Use the help pages and ask questions if they don’t make sense
  - Start with general and move to more specific search terms
  - Begin with the metadata – using Search or Browse
  - Then look at the full text
  - Use citation saving or other services to keep track of your work
35. Cross Collection Searching
  - These services are just coming on line.
  - Using “federated searching” Our Ontario allows you to search across multiple collections
  - LHCADL will also be providing this soon
  - Exposure through search engines
36. I’d like to finish with a quote from a user note – and we get lots of user feedback – that makes all the work worthwhile. Whether you are a genealogist or an academic researcher there is a real thrill in being brought back to another time in history through these digital collections.

