The University of Regina's Use of Digitization as an Access Tool

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Paper presented to the Archives Association of Ontario Conference
Ottawa, 30 May 2013

Introduction

Good afternoon. It is a pleasure to speak to you today. My talk will focus on a series of digitization projects that the University of Regina has undertaken in the last few years. These projects are each different and distinct. Each has a unique purpose and each has had an impact on how our users interact with our archives and archival information.

But before I dive into the projects and their access impacts, I'd like to begin with a brief introduction to Archives and Special Collections at the University of Regina. The University of Regina is located in Saskatchewan's capital. It was established in 1974 and today serves a student body of about 12,000 offering undergraduate and graduate degrees in the Humanities, Fine Arts, Sciences, Engineering, Business Administration, Social Work, Nursing, and Kinesiology. Its predecessor institution, Regina College, was established as a residential high school in 1911. Archives and Special Collections contains records going back to the founding of the College, it contains the continuing administrative record of the university, the private papers of key administrators and academics, and it contains materials relating to three established collecting areas: the visual arts, journalism and Saskatchewan literature.

In addition to establishing a digitization program, Archives and Special Collections is also responsible for the University's institutional repository and for developing a records and information management program.

Early Digital Projects at the University of Regina

The first efforts at digitization in Saskatchewan were led by our provincial archival association, the Saskatchewan Council for Archives and Archivists. This was in connection with the CAIN granting stream offered through the Canadian Council of Archives in the early 2000s. The University of Regina participated in a number of these early initiatives by providing material for digitization. Our first real effort at digitization, however, occurred as part of the Saskatchewan Digital Alliance, an initiative led by the provincial library and including various archives, libraries, and museums across the province.

This collective project digitized materials documenting Saskatchewan's experiences in wartime. The University of Regina opted to digitize the correspondence of Florence Kirk. For 18 years Florence Kirk taught English in China. Raised on a homestead in Saskatchewan, Kirk left Canada in 1932 to join the staff of a small Christian university in Nanjing. There she was witness to the Japanese invasion and occupation, the Chinese civil war, and the establishment of the People's Republic. Kirk documented these seminal events with letters home to family and friends. The letters provide a compelling, captivating, and profoundly moving record of upheaval. Approximately 2700 pages of hand-written and typed correspondence were digitized, catalogued, and presented along with a detailed biography of Kirk, a timeline of historical events, and a bibliography of books on Chinese history covering this time.

The project built a range of new skills for Archives and Special Collections. It was our first hands-on experience with digitization. Working in collaboration with others offered us exposure to an established set of best practices, metadata standards, and project management techniques. This was put to good use in our second major project, scanning materials and establishing a web presentation to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Regina College in 2011.

Here we scanned a series of photographs, documents, student newspapers, and memorabilia that was then uploaded to our CONTENTdm database and linked to a web-page time-line covering the history of the College from 1911 to 1959. Metadata elements described each item, as in the Florence Kirk project, but the time-line was the primary access point. This proved to be a highly effective approach to presenting the digital materials. In addition we developed various social media tools to promote the project and made sure that it was known by those developing and organizing celebrations for the centennial.

The web-page became the access point to the collection and it was exhaustively used by our centennial organizers. Of course, we would have expected the organizers to use the archives in any case, what we did find was that both student and local media made use and reference to the web-page expanding the reach of the archives at least for the time the centennial was front and centre. During the centennial year we invited a history faculty member to lecture on the history of the fine arts at Regina College. That lecture was standing room only and a MP3 of the lecture was added to the web-page project. In addition to the time-line, the scanned materials, and the history lecture, a short bibliography of books and articles on the history of the college was provided. We also created an interactive map of the college at two points in its history. This map was created using two historical areal photographs.

To date the Regina College history digitization project remains one of our most successful. The link of the project to a highly public event, like the College founding centennial, provided a built audience for our digital initiative. The University's student newspaper published a full two-page spread on the College's history utilizing many of the photographs we had digitized. They discovered the web-page through our Facebook page, which highlighted the Colleges history throughout most of 2011. Items from both the web-page and facebook page were also picked up by the University's External Relations department and utilized in both their print, web, and social media.

Context and Metadata as an Access Tool: Saskatchewan's Visual Arts

While successful, the Regina College history project was not our largest or most complex. That distinction falls to our next, and current project, *Saskatchewan's Visual Arts*. This project intends to build a digital archive of artists' materials. It began with the archival slide collection of artist Joe Fafard and has expanded to digital excerpts from the archives of a number of different artists in our collections. Fafard is one of Canada's leading professional visual artists. He has exhibited his work in galleries and museums across the country and around the world. Much of his early sculpture used clay, then in 1985, he shifted to bronze as his chief sculptural medium. Fafard portrays his neighbours, farm animals, and famous artists that he came to respect as he learned his craft.

Over 3,700 slides were digitized and organized chronologically by project. Fafard's staff maintained a series of log books that documented project details such as medium of the work, size, number of castings, and purchase information. While these log books are not yet part of the Fafard archives, the information in them was recorded by archives staff. This formed the basis of the archival finding aid. The information was also attached to each scanned slide in our digital management system. For this project Archives and Special Collections developed an internal metadata element set for scanned art materials. This set, based on the elements already used in earlier projects, was supplemented and modified using *Dublin Core*, *PREMIS* (a standard for preservation metadata in digital archiving systems), and *Categories for the Description of Works of Art* from the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Our element set combines descriptive elements for the original art object (the sculpture) with descriptive elements for the archival object (the slide) and technical elements about the scanning process and resulting digital files. Specific elements are designed to record contextual information. In addition to obvious elements, such as artwork medium, edition, date and measurement, others provide a short biography of the artist, a brief

custodial history, and lists of further readings and related materials. All metadata elements are linked to the digitized image of the slide they describe in our CONTENTdm database. We are working to embed some elements directly into the JPEG file of the slide to ensure that it may be contextualized should it be separated from the CONTENTdm application. Thus, even if a researcher downloads a single slide and over time forgets its origins, certain contextual information will be available simply by viewing the file's properties or clicking on a link located there.

This is description, but I see context and metadata as an access tool as well. Context allows the user to ask more detailed questions of the material, to explore that item in greater depth, or to discover other materials in the collection that relate to their research topic. All of this enhances and supports access.

The Fafard slide project eventually became the nucleus of a broader effort to digitize art archives in Saskatchewan. Funding was provided to Archives and Special Collections by the province and the project expanded to include archival materials from several significant artists that have been active in Saskatchewan since 1950. The theme looks at artists who have raised the profile of visual arts within Saskatchewan, following the creation of the Saskatchewan Arts Board in 1948. The Arts Board's mandate to provide financial support to artists encouraged a new level of artistic growth within Saskatchewan and made way for some of the province's most noteworthy and memorable artists.

A masters-level art student undertook the selection of documents from various University of Regina archival collections. To the 3,700 digital images of the artwork of Joe Fafard, another 150 documents have to date been scanned or photographed. This included unique archival materials like plans and sketches as well as original artwork such as paintings and prints. Also included are photographs, slides and audio interviews with several artists. The project currently includes the contributions of eight Saskatchewan artists: Ken Lochhead,

Art McKay, Ron Bloore, Ted Godwin, Doug Morton, Jack Sures, Vic Cicansky and Joe Fafard. These artists are noted for their energy and determination in bringing the art world to Saskatchewan. Under their participation and guidance, organizations such as the Mackenzie Art Gallery, the Department of Art at Regina College (and later the University of Regina), and the Emma Lake Artist Workshops flourished.

Further to the context recorded in our metadata element set, our aim is to create a web presentation that will provide further background information on Fafard and the other artists selected for the project. It is our hope that creating a fully contextualized collection will allow our research clients to use this digital archive as a research collection.

As the project website continues to develop, it will contain a series of essays introducing researchers to Saskatchewan art and to the work of the various artists. Ultimately, essays could be available on societal contexts, governmental policy regarding the arts, art technique and processes, and a whole host of other relevant access points. These essays would help researchers go beyond the materials at hand, to the less visible, yet complex ideas and trends behind them. A researcher could always go directly to the materials and avoid the essays at will, or choose to read some and ignore others. We are currently also considering audio and video essays where artists speak about there work and processes and even react to how their materials have been archived, digitized, and presented. As with our Regina College history project we offered and recorded a lecture -- this time by a noted art curator. This lecture will be available on the website as well.

These contextual links, both the enhanced metadata at the item level, and the essays, lectures, and other tools at the collection level, greatly increase understanding of the materials and treat access as something more than simply providing an item. Archives aim to provide understanding and the tools we are

developing will hopefully replicate some of what we do as archivists for our researchers who visit us in person. That is a critical part of the access question -- How do we build the archival research experience online?

Conclusions

I hope that what I have presented today shows, in some part, the digitizing work that is underway at the University of Regina. And I hope that I have also shown ways that these projects have effected our thinking on access to our archives and its resources. What we are building, we hope, will provide our research clients not only with access to archival collections and information, but will also provide the background, or the necessary information to discover the background, of the materials we present. Only in this way will researchers be able to critically think about and engage with what they see on their computer screens and that critical engagement should be a central goal of any project that claims to serve research access to archives. Thank you.