



ROOTS & BRANCHES

Alberta Genealogical Society

*BRINGING THE PAST
TO THE PRESENT
FOR THE FUTURE! ©*

Website: www.abgenealogy.ca/wetaskiwin-branch

Email: wetaskiwin@abgenealogy.ca

SEPTEMBER, 2023

VOL. 21 #3

EXECUTIVE

President: Alice Hoyle

Vice President: Lorraine McKay

Secretary: Pam Cooke

Treasurer: Leroy Koop

BRANCH MEETINGS

Third Tuesday of the Month.
Except July, August, December
**In person or Zoom to be
determined monthly**

CONTENTS

President's Ponderings	A. Hoyle	2
Editor's Corner	S. Aney	3
Meeting Programs		3
Branch News		4
Archives Re-Open	- S. Aney	5
Woman of Aspenland		6
V for Victory	- R. Sheehan / S. Aney	8
Legacy of Loss Revisited	- C. Malloch	9
Golf in Wetaskiwin 1923-2023	- S. Aney	12
Archives	- Amy Johnson Crow	13

COPYRIGHT

Articles may not be reprinted without the written consent of the author.

ROOTS & BRANCHES

is published three times a year by and for the members of Wetaskiwin Branch of AGS. It is emailed to members and posted on our website.

COMMITTEES

- **Newsletter**
Sharon Aney
sharonaney@gmail.com
- **Webmaster**
Leroy Koop
- **Volunteer Research**
Alice Hoyle
Leroy Koop
- **Membership**
Leroy Koop
- **Programs**
Claudia Malloch
- **Publicity**
Alice Hoyle
- **Historian**
Rosella Plaquin

BRANCH LIBRARY

Located at City Archives!
For access call 780-352-2156
(Heritage Museum)
If research is required contact
wetaskiwin@abgenealogy.ca

PRESIDENT'S PONDERINGS Alice Hoyle

September: a new month, a new season and for some the beginning of a new year of activities. For me, September has always signaled a change in seasons, in the weather and a renewed energy to 'get on with things' that were left over from summer.

I hope your summer was an enjoyable one and that you had time to visit with friends and family. Perhaps it was a family reunion, or even just a long phone call or video chat with people you haven't seen in a while. These connections are important for our well-being: I have seen several articles recently that point out the importance of connecting with family and friends as well as the importance of making sure our family members are aware of our family history.

Too often we assume that children, grandchildren or great-grandchildren know some of the stories we take for granted. Recently I have found that some stories I thought my adult children knew about or remembered from my telling them (maybe repeatedly?) actually were stories about family history they didn't know about. Perhaps it's better to repeat a family story as opposed to not telling?

Speaking of connections: I'm not sure how many of you are attending the AGS Conference later this month but if you are attending you will be pleased to know that our branch and specifically one of our branch members will be receiving an award /awards. I know the individual recipient of an award is going to be attending so it won't be a surprise to her but perhaps I will let it be a surprise to the rest of you.

Although I have now relocated to Lacombe, I will be attending our branch meeting on the 19th of this month. I will also be at the AGS Conference on the 23rd of this month. Looking forward to seeing everyone again.

I apologize that this first issue of the season is a few weeks late.... Russ and I took a road trip, something we have not done at this time of year in the past. It was a time to reflect upon some family events over the summer.

I wonder if sometimes we family historians get so excited about the lives and accomplishments of our ancestors that we forget to "live in the moment" and appreciate the accomplishments of this generation.

At one of our family gatherings, which was to celebrate our many summertime birthdays, our hosting daughter realized that everyone had had more than one thing to celebrate over the past months: new job, going to camp, new trucks, Stella (1 year old) learned to walk, a first siblings gathering since 2007, great vacations, cataract surgery, a love life, entering apprenticeship, wine from Chateau Aney in France! etc., etc. etc...

She put those little notes into a "Jug of Joy", and we all had a chance to pick out one (actually several), to read aloud someone else's good news, to remember the good moments and to congratulate each other.

It is also worth keeping notes of these types of occasions in a journal, a diary, or just a Word doc for our future writings, ... to jog our memories. ☺

~~~~~



### AGS 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY

and conference

**September 23, 2023**

Our branch was well represented by nine members. See page 4 for an awards report.

~~~~~

MAY 2023

FAMILY HISTORY ON THE CANADIAN PRAIRIES – DAVE OBE A popular presenter, Dave Obee outlined numerous ways we can research our ancestors, using records on various websites. A very detailed 4 page handout was provided.

JUNE, 2023

ARCHIVES TOUR – LEAH JOHNS

We were interested to see the re-opened Wetaskiwin Archives. The newspaper room has papers from 1911, the vault with climate-controlled storage containing Carl Walin photos, family fonds, burial records, etc. The archives also holds obituaries, flat storage for maps, freezer storage for celluloid materials which are combustible, and workrooms.

SEPT, 2023 – SPENDING TIME WITH MY ANCESTORS THIS SUMMER

Rosella – on a road trip to Washington & Oregon with her daughter, she visited libraries and cemeteries that yielded a lot of family information and photos, and made new family connections.

Mavis – completed a cookbook of recipes from herself, her mother and aunts, as a gift to her grandchildren, connecting 4 generations!

Bob – has been researching a website of a WWI battle in which his great-uncle fought, finding many photos and good information.

Sharon – delighted that her daughter is engrossed in the history of French ancestors' emigration from La Rochelle to New France in the 1600s.

Pam – A visit from Lynn Meehan, who works for the Metis Association, resulted in a good exchange of information. She also described her practice of displaying numerous generational wedding pictures at her childrens' weddings. And she brought a book about a family member, Emma Minde.

Claudia – described a 25 year process to find her great great grandfather, using many online resources, culminating in DNA matches through several branches of the family.

BRANCH NOTES and NEWS

Theresa Wildcat, the woman of Aspenland in this issue was the mother-in-law of our member, **Pam Cooke**, who advised us that the Theresa C. Wildcat Early Learning Centre will be opening in Maskwacis in December, 2023. Pam's daughter, Theresa's granddaughter, Devon Wildcat will be a kindergarten teacher there,

CONGRATULATIONS ! Denise Montour has completed her doctorate at UNBQ (University Blue Quills), which focused on generational research.



REMINDER OF COLLECTIBLES MARKET

Further to a decision made at our branch's May, 2023 meeting that we hold a fund-raiser for the Heritage Museum, (which will be the manager of the City of Wetaskiwin Archives for 5 years) .. a date has been tentatively set for late April 2024.

Check your boxes, closets and storage areas for any "collectible" items you will be willing to donate for the sale, and send an email to **Bob Maynard**.

~~~~~

**THANKS!** To **Rosella Plaquin** who has been using her scrapbooking talents to create and maintain our branch history books for many years. The books have been moved to our room at the archives. If you wish to look through them, please phone the Heritage Museum 780-352-0227 to make an appointment.

<https://www.abgenealogy.ca/wetaskiwin-branch>

Have you looked at our Branch website lately? Our webmaster, **Lee Koop**, has done a fine job of keeping it current by recording our Branch's accomplishments and events.



### AGS AWARDS COME TO WETASKIWIN BRANCH

Our branch (all members) was awarded a **50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Outstanding Volunteer Award** for outstanding volunteer services provided to the Society.

The **Best Overall Newsletter Award** came to Sharon Aney as Editor of the January 2022 issue, in which nine branch members wrote about their "Traditions" ... so it is really a Branch award!

Sharon Aney was awarded a **Life Membership**... Thank you, Alice for the nomination!

## CITY OF WETASKIWIN ARCHIVES RE-OPEN

Sharon Aney

June 10, 2023 was an important day for our branch as the City Archives was re-opened.

There are some changes from the time prior to November 2019 when it was closed. Firstly, the archives are in the same building as before the closure. However the building is now the home of Elevation Fitness .... and archives access is through a different door .... on the north-east corner of the building, to the right of the main doors.

Secondly, there will not be a resident archivist on site. The Wetaskiwin & District Heritage Museum is now under contract with the City to manage the archives. So researchers will make an appointment with the Heritage Museum ... 780-352-0227 .... and a staff member will open it to allow users to access and research.

Our branch is delighted to have a room dedicated as our own resource library. Several Branch members were at the Grand Opening and greeted visitors during the day: Alice Hoyle, Mavis Nelson, Lee and Carole Koop, Sharon Aney, Marcella Ball, Claudia Malloch and Don & Judy Brosius. Carole Koop recorded the day in photos. Thank you.



Our library resources



Display board for the day



Ribbon cutting; our members are on the right of the City Archives sign.



President, Alice was finally able to present our "Covid Memories" book to Karen Aberle, WDHM Curator & CEO of the Heritage Museum.



## THE WOMEN OF ASPENLAND

Re-printed with permission from the Wetaskiwin & District Heritage Museum

### THERESA (MINDE) WILDCAT



Theresa, the eldest of three girls, was born on the Ermineskin Reserve on December 9, 1927 to Joe and Emma Minde. She was initially educated at the Ermineskin Residential School and then encouraged by her family to continue her studies at St. Joseph's Convent in Red Deer. Because English was not her first language and her initial education at Hobbema was predominately home economics, Theresa had to persevere until she reached the academic standing which would allow her to graduate from grade 12.

Theresa attended the University of Alberta and got her teaching certificate in 1953. Her path led to Southern Alberta where she taught at the Kainia First Nation School in Cardston and then at the Siksika First Nation School in

Gleichen. After spending years away from home she came back to Hobbema and taught at the Ermineskin Cree Nation School.

Her return led to courtship and the eventual marriage to Sam Wildcat in 1957. Their oldest child was born the next year and for the next several years, Theresa devoted her time and energy to raising their family of five children, Brian, Carol, Darrel, Clara and Daniel. During this busy time, she was not a stranger to the school in Ermineskin and substituted if needed.



However, her talent and belief that you can do anything you set out to, soon led to many varied opportunities for Theresa. Much to her surprise she was nominated by her brother-in-law and then elected as the first woman Councillor of the Ermineskin Band in 1965. She chaired the Four Band School Committee monthly meetings (consisting of the Louis Bull, Samson Ermineskin, and Montana bands) which presented a challenge and opportunity to learn this role. About the time her term was up, she became a member of the Ermineskin School committee on which she remained for ten years. In the late 1960's, Theresa helped establish and edit the Bear Hills Native Voice newspaper, which existed for the next two decades.

In the 1970's, Theresa continued to serve both at the community level and beyond. She was asked to sit on a Provincial Manpower Committee. Theresa was asked by the University of Calgary for her advice and recommendations in establishing a Native Student Center. This became a focal point for many native students attending the university.

At the end of the decade, Theresa sat on the Senate at the University of Alberta for many years. She was a founding member of the Alberta Native Teacher's Society, the first of its kind in Alberta.

No doubt the most important and far-reaching event of the decade for Theresa was her involvement in the founding of Maskwachees Cultural College in Hobbema in 1976. For Theresa, the college was more than an institution. It signified a beginning, where culture would be high priority and language could follow, because as Theresa believes, if the Cree language is lost, then the identity and all that goes with it is lost.

To this end, one of the first activities begun by the college was the "Living History Project". Theresa's role was to interview all the elders over a period of several years. From the elders she collected their stories and family histories. The knowledge and background gained from the interviews led to another significant project, the Creeway Program.

Creeway was a program that was used both in Hobbema and outside of the community to promote language, identity and culture to native and non-native peoples alike. When Theresa was invited by a local teacher to come to his classroom and discuss the community, she was able to use what she had learned from the interviews with elders. Since that beginning it has expanded, been adapted for various audiences and is still in use today. The program has also been used in Red Deer and Camrose. Finally, in 1978 Theresa co-founded the Ermineskin Education Trust Fund, which encourages achievement in academics and sports.

In 1981, Theresa assisted with the development and writing of the Ermineskin constitution. It was the first constitution created by a First Nation Band. Now she is involved in educating the Hobbema community in the awareness of diabetes and is a member of the Hobbema Indian Health board. She co-authored a segment for a handbook used by Alberta women's shelters on native protocol and respect of the Cree culture and tradition.

Theresa is presently sitting with a committee of students at the University of Alberta who are working to protect and promote the Cree language and culture. She is still involved in the Creeway Program, which she teaches at the Ermineskin Alternate School.



Theresa Wildcat was inducted into the Women of Aspenland in 2005. She passed away on Dec. 28, 2011.

Theresa, receiving the Queens Medal Award from MP Dale Johnston in 2002.

~~~~~

Addendum: Theresa Wildcat Memorial Card, 2011

Theresa devoted her entire life to the education, culture and history of the Plains Cree People.

As a **historian**, she believed that you need to understand your past and your roots.

As an **educator**, she believed that education was a way to

improve your life and to contribute to your community. Education is the key to the survival of the Indian people.

As a **leader**, she taught us "Be proud of who you are. We all belong to a society of people called the First Nations of Canada. Like other societies we have a language, Cree; we have a culture; we have roots. Success comes when we realize our identity and where we come from."

As a **loving mother and kokum** she taught us to believe in ourselves. She always encouraged us in our personal pursuits.

~~~~~

## V FOR VICTORY!

Robin Sheehan & Sharon Aney

The British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill is one of the first people to have used the "V" sign. It is often interpreted as indicating the word "Victory" which was widely used when the Allies won World War II.

Per: Wikipedia



Our member, Robin Sheehan, found this item in a box of auction sale merchandise. It struck a chord as a military memento, but she was intrigued by the name of the manufacturer. She found that he had homesteaded in Alberta for a few years before learning that Saskatoon lacked a foundry during a building boom. By 1910 he established the John East Foundry, making the claim that "If it's made of cast iron, we make it" and "If it's made in a machine shop, we do it". That seemed to be justified in the wide range of buildings, bridges, light standards, etc. that contained his product in Saskatoon.

His product expanded. When his brother joined the firm he introduced a fire hydrant line that he had modified to operate in sub-zero temperatures; this product would prove to be very popular in Western Canadian cities, and was used as far north as Alaska.



This story is an illustration of the innovative entrepreneurship that enabled the development of western Canada, and of the patriotism that gripped so many of its citizens during the WWII years.

117-121 Avenue C, Saskatoon Sask. 1946  
Local History Room, S.P.L.

~~~~~


LEGACY OF LOSS REVISITED

by Claudia Malloch

Elmira A. Taylor: an enigma shrouded in a mystery of many names and husbands, surprising census records and unexpected locations.

This lady has kept me extremely busy for a very long time; she led me to write my first article, "Legacy of Loss" for the April 2023 issue of Roots and Branches. This is my attempt to wrap up her story to the best of my ability with the additional records I've found.

When I shared that last article with my research angel, Patty, she jumped quickly into the finding fray. I returned home from church one day to a large number of emails which caused me to tackle a follow-up article in an attempt to wrap up Elmira's life story.

It is a challenge knowing whether to tell this story in chronological order, or in the order in which it was located; the two definitely do not match! One of the greatest difficulties was knowing which name to use in a search!

Actually, the final record I located was Almira Sheck in the 1920 US Census for Old Town, Maine. She is shown as aged 41, head of the household, a trained nurse working in a private hospital. She is married (no husband showing) and the mother of a 4 month old daughter, Corrine. Her nephew, 18 year old James Petterson, is also living with her and attending school. This would be the son of her sister, Janie, who had eventually moved with her husband back to Nova Scotia.

The daughter came as a total surprise to me; there was no indication of a father. Following the trail for baby Corinne Sheck was a short one. Her death record showed that she had died at Old Town, Maine on February 16, 1920, 5 months of age of bronchial pneumonia which she had for 14 days. Her father is shown as a labourer but his name is unknown. . Both of Corinne's parents were born in Maine. Corinne is shown as adopted by Alice Sheck. Note that Alvira (as shown on the 1920 census) gave her name as Alice on Corinne's death record. Corinne A. Sheck was buried in Lawndale Cemetery at Old Town, Maine.

My original goal was to locate Elmira's death record and any extra marriages which might have taken place during her life. At this point, her name should be Elmira Drake as the last marriage located was to 22 year old Frank Mansell Drake in 1922. He died 3 months later of typhoid fever. A search on that name was fruitless but many thanks to my cousin who discovered a photo of Frank with his father and several brothers which gives a bit of reality to the information.



Frank Mansell Drake:
Birth: 27 Aug 1901. Old Town,
Penobscot, Maine, USA
Death: 1922. Old Town,
Penobscot, Maine, USA

Left to right: Abner, Archie, Fred, Frank
and Warren Drake

Another marriage surfaced under her maiden name of Almira A. Taylor on November 1, 1935 in Old Town, Maine. Her spouse is Philip DION (His Petition for Naturalization to the US shows him as Philippe Thomas Dionne). He was born April 23, 1904 in St. Cyprien, P.Q. Canada. This same petition states that his wife's name is Almira Alice. "She became a citizen by her prior marriage on 8/12/22 at Old Town, ME. to Frank Drake who was born at Alton, Maine 8/27/01. Marriage to said Drake (my 2nd wife's 2nd husband)."

Philip has one son, Philip, born April 28, 1926, Old Town, Maine, Res. Lewiston, Me. (This child is by his prior marriage). Philip had applied for Naturalization on Aug. 31, 1912. He was finally given the Oath of Allegiance on 4th, April, 1944.

The 1940 US Census shows Philip, age 35, and "Alice" Dionne, age 61, living in Old Town, Maine where they have resided since 1935. He has a grade 3 education and she has a grade 8. No occupation is shown for either Philip or Alice.

Philip Dionne, age 44, and Alice A, his 70 year old wife, are living in Old Town in the 1950 census. Philip is a Clean up man and Alice has no occupation listed.

Finally, with this marriage information, Elmira's death record could be located in newspapers.com under "Mrs. Philip Dionne". Somehow, in spite of everything, she had survived from 1878 to September 18, 1951 to 73 years of age. Her burial was in the Lawndale Cemetery in Old Town, Maine.

MRS. PHILIP DIONNE
OLD TOWN, Sept. 18—Mrs. Alice Dionne, 70, died at her Pea Cove home tonight after a period of ill health.
She was born in Nova Scotia, but had been a resident of Old Town for the past 40 years.
She is survived by her husband, Philip Dionne; a daughter, Mrs. Cristy Fillette, Steuben; a step-son, Philip Dionne of Gardiner; two sisters, Mrs. Susan McDonald, Boston, and Mrs. Lillian Butcher of Nova Scotia; and four grandchildren.
Funeral services will be held at the Craig funeral chapel, 24 High street, Old Town, Friday at 2 p. m.

Alice B. Dionne	
BIRTH	1878
DEATH	18 Sep 1951 (aged 72–73) Pea Cove, Penobscot County, Maine, USA
BURIAL	Lawndale Cemetery Old Town, Penobscot County, Maine, USA
MEMORIAL ID	122288284 · View Source

One mystery is solved; there is a death date and place for "Alice" Dionne, nee Taylor. The obituary, however, left another mystery. Who is her daughter, Christy Fillette of Steuben and her 4 grandchildren mentioned in the newspaper clipping?

A record search located a marriage record for Henry Follett and Christy Drake. Unfortunately there was no record of their parents.

Nova Scotia vital records provided Christy's birth record as 19 December, 1912. There were attachments to the record showing a Statutory Declaration stating that the registration of birth

showing her as Christiana Taylor was incorrect and that her name was actually Christy E. Taylor. One of the records backing this declaration is a school record which was signed by her guardian, Mrs. Alice Sheck, a nurse and is dated May of 1922. The birth record indicates that Christy was born in Southvale, Colchester County, Nova Scotia to James Taylor and Mabel Dean.

James was Elmira Taylor's (Mrs. Alice Sheck) brother and had married Mabel Dean in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1906. Christy is the youngest of their 5 children.

Her mother, Mabel, had died of cancer in Jerome, Yavapai, Arizona in November, 1922 where she, James and their family were living. Christy would have been just short of her 10th birthday at that time.

It appears that at approximately this time Elmira became Christy's guardian. However, since Elmira married Frank Drake in August of 1922 and was signing Christy's school record as her guardian "Alice Sheck" in 1922, it's probable Christy was living with her before that marriage.

Christy's father, James Taylor later moved to Brooklyn, New York and remarried but it is apparent that Christy stayed with Elmira. James died in Brooklyn on 12 June, 1936.

By the time of her father's death, Christy was already married to Henry K. Follett, as of 25 July, 1935, and living in Steuben, Maine where they spent the rest of their lives. Christy died March 31st, 1989 at the age of 76 leaving her husband, Henry, their 4 children, Patricia, James, Judy and Alice, who were undoubtedly the 4 children referred to as Elmira's grandchildren in her obituary. Christy also left 9 grandchildren and 4 great grandchildren. She is buried in the West-Follett Cemetery in Steuben, Washington County, Maine with Henry, her husband of 53 years.

Christy appears to have had the stable, fulfilling life that had eluded her parents and her aunt (and guardian/mother) throughout their lives.

After learning all of this and preparing to write this article, I realized I hadn't checked the 1930 US Census with all of the name changes. Since Elmira's last marriage previous to Philip was to Frank Drake who died in 1922, I did the search for that name. Imagine my surprise when I found Elmira, age 50, married to Frank Drake, also 50, with daughter, Christie Drake, age 17 a student...They are living in Boston, Mass and managing a restaurant! Frank shows his birthplace as Nova Scotia, that his first marriage was when he was 19 and that he is widowed.

I am totally unable, at this point, to locate records showing their marriage or Christy's adoption. There is a record of Frank Drake living in Halifax, Nova Scotia in 1901 and shown as 21 years old and widowed. He is living with Alfred and Lavinia Craig as a lodger. Patty followed this trail and learned that Lavinia is the daughter of a Frank M Drake and his wife, Lavinia. I have not, however, been able to find a census nor any other record confirming that he is part of that family.

As we began, so we end. Although we have learned much about Elmira Alice Taylor and the life she has lived, there is still one marriage which is totally unexplained. That the name of this husband is the same as the husband who died in 1922 only complicates the issue.

Philip Dionne, Alice's final husband, died in Old Town, Maine on November 13, 1967 at the age of 62. As he was a member of the Catholic Church, he was buried at St. Joseph's Cemetery, Old Town. So, even in death, Elmira was not with her husband as she is buried in the Lawndale Cemetery in Old Town.

It is a comforting thought, however, that she shares her final earthly resting place with two of her children: son, Reuben, born when she was 15 years old, her adopted infant daughter, Corrina, as well as with her husband of only 3 months, Frank M. Drake.

It was a challenging life for all of them; but their legacy can live on in the minds of those who read this article.

~~~~~

### **GOLF IN WETASKIWIN CELEBRATES 100 YEARS, 1923 – 2023**

Sharon Aney

Not many non-government organizations can celebrate a Centennial in western Canada. When John, the local golf course pro, decided that the Wetaskiwin Golf Club (now Montgomery Glen) should celebrate its history, I was honored that he asked me to research and write it.

It was fortunate that the City Archives were re-opened just a few days earlier, on June 10, 2023. On our first visit to the archives we were given a file that included a "history" of golf in Wetaskiwin by Ethel Switzer. It appears to have been written about 1986, and added some color to early stories from the online Wetaskiwin Times.

I had gleaned information about the origins of the golf club from the Times on the U of A Peel Library website. Prior to 1923, eager golfers had rented a pasture and hired someone to "cut the weeds and fill the gopher holes", so that they could golf. In 1923 the group formed the Wetaskiwin Golf Club and purchased land to develop a course.

Ethel's more personal account was that.... prior to building their own course, golfers played on a rented pasture which is the present Centennial subdivision. After the golfers moved to the new site, when the Weiler family cultivated the land, they turned up golf balls that had been lost in the gopher holes!

Information for years from 1930 to 2007 was a challenge because there were very few original club records available, and there was not time to look through every newspaper in the Archives. Minute books from 1960 – 1973 were the only ones we were able to find. My husband, Russ, called on his fellow golfers and they recalled some of the main events and dates.

We were then able to find stories at the Archives, in the Wetaskiwin Times, of the building of the clubhouse in 1975, the expansion to 18 holes in 1982, and the sale of the golf club to Country Club Tour group in 2007, who renamed it "Montgomery Glen Golf Course".

History of one entity does not exist in a vacuum. The new course was playable in about 1926, but the clubhouse had to be moved to a more central location in 1930 because of the construction of the north-south highway, now 2A. This changed the layout of the course, and



the story of Wetaskiwin, leading to the future development of 56 Street / Hwy 2A as the "Automile".

Another treasure that we found in the archives was a map drafted by Jim Montgomery of the lands eventually owned by the golf course: the original quarter section being triangular in shape (1923), the purchase of the ¼ section for the back 9 holes (1962), and 10 acres purchased to connect the two parcels in (1974).

Some long-time members were delighted to share their memories, mementos and photos, which confirmed or directed our research. But some of the situations that came up were controversial at the time, needing careful handling, even now, in writing about them.

In the end, it was a very collaborative project! The booklet was a gift to all participants in the celebratory tournament on August 25, 2023.

~~~~~

WHY AREN'T MORE GENEALOGY RECORDS ONLINE?

BY [AMY JOHNSON CROW](#)

Where did Noah keep
the bees on the Ark?



In the Ark hives.

With scanning technology being easier and cheaper than ever before, why aren't more genealogy materials online? The answer isn't, "Just scan it." Here's a look at everything involved in making genealogy records available online.

Recently, FamilySearch announced that they have completed digitizing their collection of 2.4 million rolls of microfilm. But... they aren't all online yet. And when you think about the archives, libraries, government agencies, and other organizations that have records—why aren't more of them online?

Let's walk through a hypothetical (yet realistic) scenario. Let's pretend you're an archivist and there's this really cool collection of thousands of letters that you just know would be useful to researchers. Wouldn't it be great to digitize it and get it online? Let's see what it would take.

Getting Permission

For an archive or library to make their materials available online, **they first need to make sure they have permission** to do so. Sometimes that's straightforward, like when it's

something in the public domain. But if it isn't in the public domain and it's something that was donated to them—such as original materials or manuscripts—they need to make sure they have the permission of the donor. Donor agreements sometimes restrict what that library or archive can do with the material. Also, if it isn't spelled out that the repository does have rights to digitize and distribute, they might need to re-negotiate an agreement allowing them to do so.

If it's a government agency, **sometimes the records are restricted by law**. The records might be from a time period that is still in "embargo" (such as states that restrict death records for 50 years). The record type itself might be restricted; this is often seen with state hospital and state asylum records.

In your (hypothetical) archive, you first need to find the donor agreement. When you find that it doesn't have the necessary permission, you have to try reaching out to the donor, which isn't always an easy or fast thing to do. But for this example, we'll say that it only took a month to reach the donor and get his permission.

Getting Funding

As you'll see, there's a fair amount of money involved in digitizing. Most archives have razor-thin budgets, and extra projects simply don't make the cut. You opt to go for grant funding for the necessary equipment and additional staffing. Fast-forward several months, and you're notified you got the grant. (You aren't always so fortunate. It isn't unusual to go through several rounds of applications to various foundations before securing funding.)

Setting Some Ground Rules

Are you going to scan the front and back of all pages, or just the ones with writing? Are you going to scan the envelope? (I hope the answer to that one is, "Yes.") How are you going to handle oversize pages that either won't fit on the scanner or in the field of the camera without being really tiny?

What format will they be scanned into? What resolution? How will you keep together the files of the letters that are multiple pages? File naming conventions?

Arranging and Preparing the Material

Before you set up your scanner or digital camera, there is work to do. Those letters need to be opened and the papers unfolded, unstapled, and un-paperclipped. This takes time. (So. Much. Time.) And there needs to be a way to keep things in order so papers don't get mixed up in the process.

Getting the Necessary Equipment

There needs to be a scanner or digital camera with the necessary accessories, such as batteries, lighting, camera stand, etc. And people. You can't digitize without the people do it.

Digitizing

Honestly, this is usually the easiest part of the whole process, but it still takes time. Scanning a book can be fairly fast, but if you're working with unbound material (like your hypothetical letter collection), you're going to go a lot slower. Even if you can do a new image every 5 seconds — which would be lightning speed for some unbound materials, it adds up. Let's say it's 5 second per page. Multiply that by a letter that's 6 pages long plus an envelope... and there are 2000 letters to do. That's 1167 minutes or almost 20 hours. That's presuming nothing slows you down. (Head's up: There's *always* something that will slow you down.)

Describing/Cataloging

Those images don't do anyone good if nobody knows what they are. That requires someone to set up **metadata—information about something that makes it more usable**. At a minimum, you need some kind of title for this group of images, but there usually needs to be a more robust description.

There's also something called "structural metadata," which shows how the images relate to one another. This includes things like the sequence of the images, so that page 5 comes after page 4 but before page 6. It can also be assigning "waypoints." Essentially, this allows users to see where sections of the work are, much like a book's table of contents does. This also takes time and someone to do it. (See a pattern here?)

Hosting

If these images are going to be online, they need to be hosted somewhere. (This isn't the same thing as the archive's hard drive where they are stored. By the way, that's more equipment that's needed.) There also needs to be some sort of website. There are frameworks called "content management systems" that help libraries and archives manage this, but they're often too expensive for small organizations to use. Even the organizations that do have a CMS still need to pay for the service and have people to work on the technical aspect. (I hope you figured that into your grant proposal.)

Storage and Backups

If you've ever had a hard drive fail, you'll understand the need for a good system of backups. With computers, it isn't a matter of *if* they will fail; it's a matter of *when*. You're going to need a good backup system (which includes a clear way to recover data), as well as a plan to migrate data to new media and/or formats when necessary.

Staffing

You *might* be able to get some of the work done with the staff you already have at your (hypothetical) archive, but this is a big project. You were smart to include in your grant proposal some funding for a part-time employee or intern to work with the project. Even if you had opted to use all volunteers for this, volunteer labor is not free. It still requires time to train, supervise, and manage.

These Issues Affect Everyone

Whether it's your (hypothetical) small archive or one of the major players in the genealogy space, these issues affect everyone who is trying to get things digitized and bring them online. True, the big players don't need to apply for grant funding, but they still have issues of time constraints, staffing, and technology. Even for them, there are limits of people, time, and money. It's tougher for smaller organizations, because they don't have the economy of scale that the larger ones do.

So when you get frustrated (like I do sometimes) when that record you need isn't online, remember that there's more to bringing records online than just scanning.