

PAST TO PRESENT: USING ONLINE HISTORICAL RESOURCES TO PROMOTE TODAY'S LIBRARIES



WHITE PAPER

Introduction.

With the arrival of digitization, gone are the days when only a lucky few have access to the priceless treasures that document the histories of people, places, and events. Historical newspapers, antique maps, census records, personal papers, government documents, and many other types of resources are being captured electronically and preserved for future generations.

These rare, primary source materials are easy to explore with today's user-friendly search technologies. And often, they can be accessed both in the library and from remote locations such as home and the local coffee shop, anytime day or night.

Whether yours is an academic library, a public library, or a special collections library, you likely have a core group of researchers who already know about and find great value in your institution's unique materials. This white paper outlines how you can use your online historical collections to collaborate with community organizations, faculty members, and media to raise the profile and expand the use of your library and its resources beyond this core group. Even if some of these ideas aren't practical within your library's setting or your time constraints, you may be able to use them as a starting point for further brainstorming.

Host a meeting. Serve informational hors d'oeuvres.

Look around your community or campus. Study the events calendar, the campus newspaper, bulletin boards, and Web sites. What organizations do you see? When and how often do they meet? If your library has the space, why not offer to host a future meeting, and ask the group to give you time on the agenda to introduce their members to relevant online resources?

For example, invite the local chamber of commerce and/or historical society to meet at your facility. Offer to demonstrate how their members can access online historical maps and city directories that they will find interesting and useful.

Encourage the advertising club (student or professional—or both!) or even the local classic car club to meet at your library. Use your historical newspapers database to create a presentation that illustrates how automobiles (or other products and services) have been advertised over the decades (see figure 1). Show your guests how to find, print, and email historical display ads.

Figure 1: Match your historical online collections to the needs and interests of civic, academic, and professional groups to gain more visibility for your library and the resources you offer.

**"The EDSEL acts the way it looks,
but it doesn't cost that much"**

Shows Here is the Edsel Citation Convertible

**Its 18 models are
powered by new V-8
Edsel Engines—and
priced through the range
where most people buy**

From a block away, you can see why the 1208 Edsel stands apart from all other cars. Its elegant lines, classic vertical grille and low, wide eight-spoke wheels prove quickly that this car was built fresh, from the ground up. And the originality of the Edsel really comes to life the moment you drive it. You can shift with both hands at the wheel. Just reach a hand on the steering wheel knob. The Edsel's exclusive Tele-Road Drive starts you off—smoothly, electrically. As you accelerate, you become aware that the Edsel has the rarest V-8 engine in the world. The Edsel 400 and the Edsel 475 are high-torque

Engines capable of developing more usable power than you've ever handled before. On the road, you enjoy other advances worthy of America's only completely new car. Advances such as Edsel's self-adjusting brakes which do not need periodic tightening, and Edsel's cushion seats—the most comfortable car seats you've ever experienced. Learn all about the Edsel—and have the fun of road-checking it—at your Edsel Dealer. Edsel prices range from just above the lowest to just below the highest. You can afford an Edsel. And you can choose from 4 series, 18 models. EDSEL DIVISION - FORD MOTOR COMPANY

**1958
EDSEL**
New member of the
Ford family of fine cars

Source: "Display Ad 75 -- No Title." *New York Times* (1857-Current file), October 23, 1957, <http://www.proquest.com/>.

Don't forget to welcome the genealogical society to your library. Demonstrate how to access online obituaries, birth notices, society pages, shipping news, and more. Show how resources such as historical newspapers help genealogists not only locate ancestors, but also develop a deeper sense of family history by uncovering more about the world at the time they were living.¹

You might also consider hosting local battle reenactment groups. Perhaps they would like to make copies of era-specific maps to share with spectators, or access soldiers' letters home to read as part of their performances.

At the meeting, hand out a reference sheet that explains how to access online historical resources in the library or remotely, if you offer that capability. Because visitors may not be used to searching databases, you also might want to provide a "how to" instruction sheet that outlines the basic steps to help them get started, such as the one included as part of ProQuest's Historical Newspapers Marketing Toolkit.

Because historical newspapers, maps, and other documents are so rich in content, it's easy to match the interests of various groups with the resources you offer. Use these materials to raise the profile of your library.

¹To download and read one researcher's story, go to http://www.proquest.com/assets/literature/products/databases/casestudy_hnp_schultz.pdf.

Collaborate with faculty. Engage students.

Which do you think gives students a richer understanding of the Battle of Gettysburg?

More than 51,000 men died, or

...With half a sheet and some soft straw, Mrs. _____ made a poor dying boy as easy as his sufferings would permit. Poor young fellow, he was so grateful to her for washing, and feeding, and comforting him. He was too ill to bear the journey, and went from our tent to the church hospital, and from the church to his grave, which would have been coffinless but for the care of _____, for the Quarter Master's Department was overtaxed, and for many days our dead were simply wrapped in their blankets and put into earth. It is a soldierly way after all, of lying wrapped in the old war-worn blanket, the little dust returned to dust.²

Not only can your historical collections provide facts only available in primary source material, they also can give researchers a startling sense of time and place through the first-hand reports of people who were there. Libraries of all types can collaborate with faculty to create lesson plans and assignments that bring history to life and scholars young and old into the library.

The East Carolina University Department of English and the institution's library, for example, jointly developed a program that requires second-year English students to choose an artifact from the Verona Joyner Langford North Carolina Collection—which contains both physical and digital assets—and put the artifact into historical context. Through this assignment, students learn how to more effectively use the library and primary resources for research, enhance their ability to think more critically, improve their research skills, and develop a more personal understanding of North Carolina's history.³

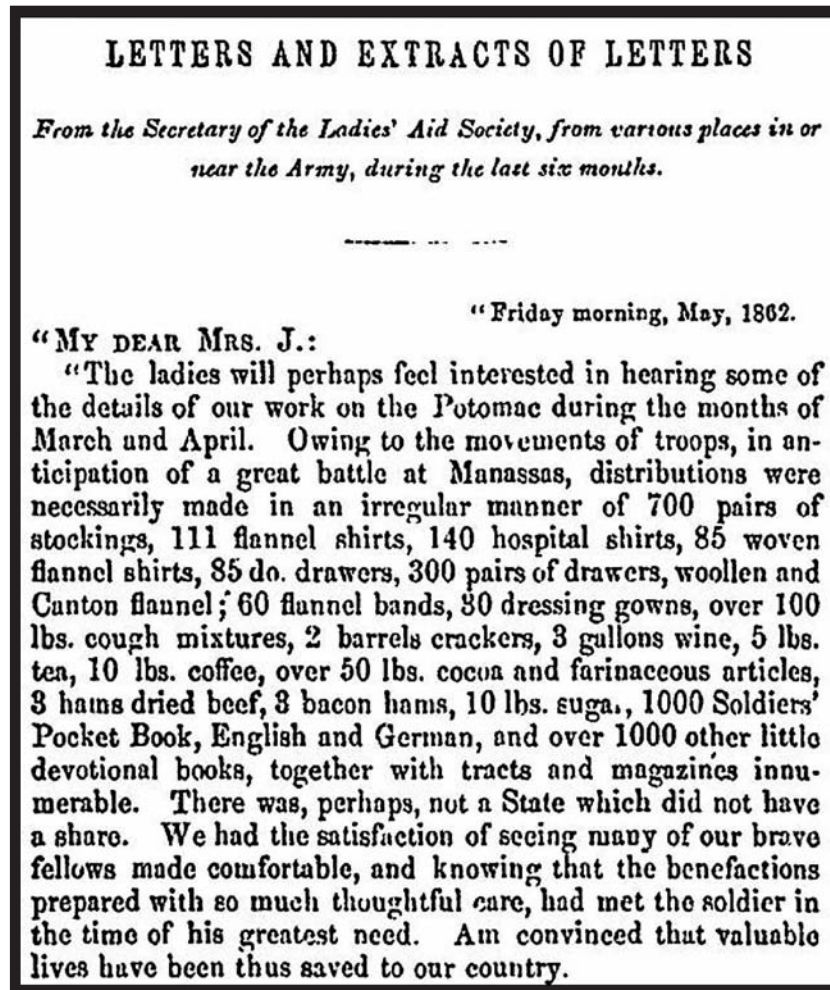
Considering the historical online resources available through your library (e.g., Civil War documents, the historical *New York Times*, city maps, etc.), which instructors and students would be best served by your library's unique online collections? Reach out to those instructors and gauge their interest. This may be as simple as making phone calls if you already work with faculty members, or it may require more formal communications that include appetite-whetting examples of the materials awaiting students. These samples may be sent in hard copy form or as PDFs, if your online collections support this functionality.

If an instructor is interested, work together to outline the assignment's goals and scope, determine the available/required resources, and plan for any special training that will be necessary, such as how to access and search various collections.

²Bacon, *Three weeks at Gettysburg* ... New York: Anson D.F. Randolph, 1863. <http://www.proquest.com/>.

³Matthew Reynolds and Dale Sauter, "Engaging undergraduates in special collections through English composition: Collaborating for student success," *C&RL News*, June 2008, pp. 318-321.

Figure 2: Work with educators to incorporate primary source materials into research assignments.



Source: *Third semi-annual report of the Ladies' Aid Society of Philadelphia ...* (Philadelphia): (C. Sherman), 1862. <http://www.proquest.com/>.

By working with educators to reintroduce the library and primary source materials to the research process for "the Google generation," you not only help students improve their research skills, you also help faculty bring lessons to life.

Feed the Media. Be the Media.

Pretend for a moment that you're a journalist. Your editor wants a "fresh" story about Abraham Lincoln to publish (or air) on the anniversary of his death. How about a "new spin" on World War II to run on the anniversary of Pearl Harbor? Or, something "intriguing" to say about the world-famous entertainer who just passed away?

Luckily, you're not a journalist: You're a librarian with a lot of ideas and the historical resources to back them up! You know, for example, that your online Civil War pamphlets collection includes a document containing jokes and funny stories told by Abraham Lincoln (*Who knew that this serious-looking man was funny!*). You know that your online historical newspapers don't just contain details of World War II battles and troop movements. They also feature recipes for housewives struggling with the sugar ration, stories about the development and mass production of penicillin for the troops, and job listings for those who remained at home.

In other words, your library's resources can yield the unique historical perspectives and little-known facts. They can help reporters elevate stories from "more of the same" to "tell me more!"

So, get to know local reporters (and respected bloggers!) and their approach to stories. Then, send information "care packages" that summarize resources that may be useful to them in their work. Be sure to include Web addresses, access instructions, and any passwords they might need. Follow up by phone to see if they have questions or further needs. If possible, schedule a no-strings-attached lunch with media representatives. Tell them that you would value coverage of the library and ask how you can make that happen. Be prepared to tell the story of your library's online historical resources.

Figure 3. Use online historical resources to help journalists inject life into stories that have been told before. Rather than the battlefield, a World War II story could feature the home front, for example.



Source: Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES. "OPA GIVES RECIPES FOR SAVING SUGAR : Home Economics Bureau Tells in Pamphlet How to Handle Natural Content in Food USE OF SUBSTITUTES CITED Meanwhile, Thousands of New Jersey Housewives Plan to Join in Canning Program." *New York Times* (1857-Current file), March 26, 1942, <http://www.proquest.com/>.

Of course, you can go after the story yourself with a press release. When writing a release, always remember to include the five Ws up front (who, what, when, where, and why). And, make that first paragraph compelling. Rather than opening with "The library has a new historical newspaper database," for example, you could offer something like the following:

Teen idol. Entertainment dynamite. Superstar. The accused. Wacko Jacko. Examining how the press treated the late King of Pop, Michael Jackson, throughout his life is simple with the library's historical newspapers archive. Your library card gets you 24/7 online access.

A release like this connects your announcement with current events, demonstrates the unique value of your resources, and illustrates how your library visitors can benefit from using them. You also can make the reporter's job even easier by including testimonials from people who have used the resource; quotes let the reporter write a story that sounds like interviews were conducted, yet doesn't require him or her to pick up the phone.

Besides newspapers, radio, and TV, think about other ways people get information today. For instance, did you know that more than half of U.S. college students who use the Internet report that they visit social networking sites daily? How about that there are more than 12 million adult Twitter users in the U.S.?⁴ Even as far back as 2007, nearly a quarter of all Canadians were on Facebook already⁵ and today, more than 250 million people around the world use it to share information.

With social networks and Internet tools, you become your own media outlet. Does your library have a Facebook page? How about a blog or an electronic newsletter? Have you created videos that could be uploaded to YouTube? Do you "tweet" on Twitter? Once you know what sites and tools your library visitors (and potential visitors) use, be there if you can.

Keep in mind that the strength of these sites is that, unlike traditional media, they enable you to start two-way conversations. Instead of simply announcing the acquisition of a new resource on your Facebook page, why not encourage your "friends" to access the collection for themselves and write a mini-review that gets posted on your page? Post a historical editorial cartoon and invite students and faculty to debate how views have or haven't changed over the decades. If you write a blog, why not write one that features the big headlines or the surprising little stories that appear in historical newspapers on the date of your birth, and encourage others to share the same.

Social media allows you to engage your library's users and learn more about them. Use your online historical collections to get the conversation started.

⁴EContent, July/August 2009, p. 8.

⁵Chris Sorensen, "1 in 4 Canadians on Facebook," *TheStar.com*, December 10, 2007. <http://www.thestar.com/Business/article/284017>

Summary

Digitization is making unique historical materials available to the general public, historians, genealogists, and scholars. By marketing these online resources to their fullest—whether through hosting meetings, collaborating with educators, or harnessing the power of traditional and non-traditional media—you not only encourage more use of your assets, you also can create more awareness, support, and usage of your library as a whole.

About ProQuest

ProQuest creates indispensable research solutions that connect people and information. We support librarianship through tools and services that help librarians connect with their communities, free database access and scholarship support for library students, and sponsorship of a range of awards that recognize outstanding library school educators and honor local efforts to protect intellectual freedom.

For more information about ProQuest or our products, call 800-521-0600, email pqsales@proquest.com; or visit www.proquest.com.