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DCN2100 Workshop in Digital Cultures
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28 March 2024

Project Write-Up: Walking Tour Zine

Our project was an excellent fit for our team. Our workplan came together quickly, and we each identified where our strengths would lie. Even as circumstances changed and we realized the different paths the project might take, we were able to make smooth adjustments in our roles and responsibilities. Fundamentally, our approach was to have group discussions on content and strategy, followed by individual work on drafting (Leyla focused on drafting the write-up and web content, while Samar and Aliya focused on drafting both the text and visual content of the zine), and then revisions as a group once again. Regular communication via Microsoft Teams enabled this approach, as did ensuring that all work was done in shared documents so we could all stay consistently up to date. For the written content, we used Microsoft Online, and for the zine itself we used Canva; these are both platforms that every team member was familiar with, which enabled us to be equitable and inclusive in our work.

The first step in creating this project was doing research on the Home Children in Ottawa. It quickly became apparent that there is a distinct lack of location-based information on the Home Children, especially relating to Ottawa; an Omni search of *"home children" AND Ottawa* delivers only eighty-one results, many of which refer to Ottawa in its role as national capital rather than as a locale itself. Even more problematic was searching through newspaper archives for primary sources, as the ProQuest database did not allow search terms with Boolean operators. We were left with many unanswered questions. How did the children arrive in Ottawa? What were the specific living conditions in the home? These were questions that we realized would not be answered through institutional searches due to source scarcity and poor search engines.

We also realized that the bulk of the heavy lifting on documenting the Home Children in Ottawa had been done by amateur historians. While they clearly put hours of work into their research, the communication and organization of the research was chaotic. Turning to sources of public history (e.g., recent news articles, Google Maps, Wikipedia, amateur historical websites, etc.) did not provide significant clarity; even verifying the building's current street address was not a linear task. If nothing else, these conditions revealed the necessity of our project to provide a clear starting point for Ottawa locals to learn about this part of the city's history, and the necessity of following archival best practices in the digital age.

In "Lost in the Infinite Archive: The Promise and Pitfalls of Web Archives," Ian Milligan frames the issue of source scarcity as a problem of the past, whereas the digital historian faces the issue of overabundance (79). What our research revealed was a different reality; the institutional databases suffered from scarcity and the amateur resources suffered from abundance, while both suffered from poor archival practices. Scholars are often tempted to mark moments in time as clear breaks with the past, but one must remember that periods of continuity and transition are far more common. Ignoring this fact does historians a disservice, when instead we could be learning from the best practices developed by our predecessors. For instance, historians have studied and archived physical ephemera like pamphlets and zines for centuries. Whether in physical or digital form, best practices for handling ephemeral documents do not have to be restarted from scratch. Our project, taking the form of both a physical zine and digital webpage, plays into this connection with the past and emphasizes this current period of transition.

In addition to questions of accessibility, the transition to digital ephemera also brings rise to questions of sustainability. In "Negotiating sustainability: Building digital humanities projects that last," Lisa Goddard and Dan Seeman address the "unexamined belief that digital objects are

cheaper and easier to maintain than physical objects" (39). This belief is false both on an institutional level (logistics of preservation) and environmental level (social and environmental politics of extraction to support digital preservation, as discussed in Kate Crawford's *Atlas of AI*). Our project takes this concept of sustainability to the most basic level, as a zine is very easily preserved, duplicated, and distributable. And yet, because our Issuu account will expire, WordPress could go out of business, and there are no links or SEO to our site, our project also will not be preserved. Our project lives in the liminal, transitional space between print and digital humanities.

Projects like our zine are essential not only to educating the public but to sparking their curiosity to learn more. The form itself is engaging, but it also asks of the reader to physically go to the locations. Interactive public histories like this are important stepping stones to understanding broader systems in history. Local history projects like ours have often relied on oral history and other methods traditionally viewed by scholars as unreliable. However, this prejudice has slowly been fading away. It is important to take public history seriously, especially when learning about underrepresented topics that the academy has not cared to look at. Our project both takes from and contributes to the tradition of public history surrounding the Home Children.

Works Cited

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Ian Milligan, "Lost in the Infinite Archive: The Promise and Pitfalls of Web Archives," *International Journal of Humanities and Arts Computing*, Vol. 10, No. 1-2 (2016): 78-94. https://doi.org/10.3366/ijhac.2016.0161