

# **Brome County Historical Society Museum Preservation supports research, validates past**

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The last time inventory was done at the Brome County Historical Society (BCHS) archives was 1993. That is a long time when it comes to accessions since then that need to be prepared and indexed. And though what was done prior to 1993 has had some degree of preservation, with newer materials and technology available, there is a lot of drive to see that the thousands of assets be taken care of so that everyone will truly be aware of what BCHS has.

In a recent tour of the archives housed in the courthouse on the BCHS grounds, Brian Shemilt, member of the board, explained the two key objectives of a monumental project that he has undertaken to steer. He knows that the treasure trove of scrapbooks, maps, scrolls, journals, diaries, ledgers, legal documents, contracts and photos all have immeasurable value in terms of substantiating the lives of our Brome County communities. Without them as reference, there would be no evidence that what was, really was.

With a committee comprised of himself, the museum's newly appointed curator Cari Ensio; Jodi Robinson, director of the Eastern Township Resource Centre; the BCHS' lecturer Jim Manson; and Arlene Royea, the museum's managing director; Shemilt demonstrated the magnitude of the project that they are endeavouring to tackle. They know that it will take years. The committee first had to establish a policy statement and know that they needed to identify where everything is. And they also know that in order to succeed they must prioritize the relevance of everything beforehand.

The ambitious group is set to preserve, conserve and make available information for all to find. And thanks to University of Montreal student Abbey Lacroix, a lot of headway has been made in terms of getting some of the inventory in terms of getting some of the inventory in order as well as entering data into the database (Archi-log) that feeds their website. It is the organization's hope to provide the public with an extensive forum for research purposes.

Shemilt and Ensio made a recent trip to Ottawa to learn about digitization standards and hope to follow them as best they can. When unable to, the process will fall back on the standards that QAHN (Quebec Anglo Heritage Network) uses.

Because photos degrade more rapidly than paper documents, their preservation has become the archive committee's first priority. Shemilt explained that when

last week he thought there were around 8,000 photos, he discovered another batch of almost 2,500 and is certain that more will appear. With the likes of glass negatives, Deguerrotypes, Ambrotypes, tin plates, and many more, he knows that just with these there are mountains of work to be done - work that involves delicately encasing with acid free papers, file folders and boxes and to be filed in metal filing cabinets when possible - work that requires gloved hands to protect the images from the oils in one's skin.

Two major projects revolve around making the inventory of families current and also to categorize the amazing family and village photographs.

Shemilt says that almost 30 per cent of them are still to be identified. And Lacroix has made family files that include a list of 856 families so far. That list represents more than 3,000 groupings of information that might include anything from letters, photos, journals, and legal documents. Every one of the inventories from families' project is retrievable from the BCHS website along with respective biographies.

While the materials alone cost money to preserve, the other concern when archiving is the environment that they are housed in. The optimal humidity ranges from 40-45 per cent and room temperature should be close to a constant 20 degrees C. The building must also be secure and fireproof. The courthouse clearly does not meet these conditions and it will have to be taken care of. All of this takes money that the BCHS is hoping to raise.

Meanwhile it will move forward with preservation, conservation, indexing and data entry and Shemilt invites history buffs, anthropologists and interested individuals to join in on the process. He and Ensio are ready to train willing volunteers.

For more information please call Arlene or Betty at the museum: [450-243-6782](tel:450-243-6782).

Illustration: • Ann Davidson / Brian Shemilt and Abbey Lacroix showing sampling of the thousands of documents needing preservation at the BCHS courthouse in Knowlton.