

## **West Beyond the West: BC Digitization Symposium**

### ***User Panel***

**Brenda L. Smith**, BC Historical Federation

The BC Historical Federation <<http://www.bchistory.ca/>> is interested in telling stories from history, and creating the environment where the stories can be told more easily. In addition to her work for the BC Historical Federation, Brenda is a researcher of community and generational issues, educator of family historians (who are often very motivated users of digitized resources), and works with community literacy groups.

Once materials are digitized, it is essential to support the user communities. Private genealogical researchers, for example, often use archival materials. These family historians have a wide range of technological skill; many need support to make use of digitized materials, and these individual researchers can benefit from networking with others pursuing similar types of research. There is value in mobilizing these researchers, as they can be powerful advocates for digitization. Tools are needed to help researchers, teachers and students make use of digitized materials.

Access and usage rights can be difficult to understand, and should be clearly communicated. People need to know whether an item is public domain or has copyright restrictions. It is important to let people know what to expect, as initially people expect to be able to see anything, anytime.

Brenda offered the following recommendations from the perspective of local and family historians:

- Users should have a voice in the conversation about how materials are digitized.
- Avoid duplication.
- Carefully consider our partnerships.
- Create an inventory of other digitization programs (existing and projected).
- Link to other projects.
- Indexing and efficient search tools are essential.
- Complete and promote one project before moving on to the next.
- Resist the temptation to ignore the recent past in favour of the far distant past. There are very few records available for the last 100 years, so consider starting close to the present and working back; this is how many researchers work.
- Establish criteria that work across the province, for example don't just select chronologically, as this would leave out the northern part of the province.
- Putting the BC Archives holdings online was the primary request from family historians, but newspapers were also rated as important materials to digitize.
- Much of the historic record lies outside our memory institutions in vast, private, largely unorganized or catalogued, personal and organizational collections. Projects should include ways for these materials to be added to the digitized pool.
- Don't fear the flood of users rushing to use resources once they are put up; good public relations can control the flood.
- Mobilize family and community historians to lobby for funding.

There are many others who use digitized materials; their needs also need to be factored into development of a long range plan for digitization.