

History on the Internet: The Atlantic Canada Portal

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FORUM

History on the Internet: The *Atlantic Canada Portal*

IN A 1996 PIECE FOR the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, historian and self-confessed “neo-Luddite” Gertrude Himmelfarb explained her discomfort with Internet-based history. “The Internet,” she opined, “does not distinguish between the true and the false, the important and the trivial, the enduring and the ephemeral.”¹ Over a decade later, Himmelfarb’s concerns still ring true with many scholars, historians among them.² Daniel Cohen, in a survey of Internet history on the eve of the Web’s second decade, observed that “because of the openness of the medium – and the always tenuous relationship between the professoriate and the large population of lay historians and the general public interested in history – many historians have found the Web to be a mixed blessing: prolific but unmediated, powerful but untamed, open to all but taken seriously by few.”³ Complaints about the powerful and untamed Web have only gained strength as online resources such as *Wikipedia* become more widely used by students and the general public. *Wikipedia*, an open-source, Web-based encyclopaedia that allows any visitor to contribute and to edit any article, represents such an extreme case of peer review and the democratization of knowledge creation that it has served as a flashpoint for criticism of history on the Internet.⁴ While the American historian Carl Becker argued in 1932 that “everyman” might someday be “his own historian,” the fact that *Wikipedia*’s contributors often have no formal training in the field on which they write makes

- 1 Gertrude Himmelfarb, “A Neo-Luddite Reflects on the Internet,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1 November 1996, p. A56.
- 2 The cyber-skeptics are well represented in a debate over the merits of *Wikipedia* that raged on H-Canada in the winter of 2007.
- 3 Daniel Cohen, “History and the Second Decade of the Web,” *Rethinking History*, 8, 2 (June 2004), p. 294.
- 4 For a thoughtful analysis of *Wikipedia* and history see Roy Rosenzweig, “Can History be Open-Source? *Wikipedia* and the Future of the Past,” *Journal of American History*, 93, 1 (1996), pp. 117-46. Rosenzweig finds, at least with regards to biographical entries on prominent Americans, that *Wikipedia*’s accuracy compares favourably with entries from Microsoft *Encarta* and *America National Biography Online*. As Rosenzweig concludes: “*Wikipedia* for the most part gets its facts right” (p. 136). A study in *Nature* found similar results with respect to science articles. In a survey of 42 science articles *Nature* found that *Wikipedia* averaged four errors per article while *Encyclopaedia Britannica* averaged three. See Jim Giles, “Internet Encyclopedias go Head to Head,” *Nature*, 14 December 2005, <http://www.nature.com/news/2005/051212/full/438900a.html>. See also Scot Jaschik, “A Stand Against *Wikipedia*,” *Inside Higher Ed*, 26 January 2007, <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2007/01/26/wiki>. In the interests of full disclosure, the authors must acknowledge that some of these references were found on the *Wikipedia* page “Criticism of *Wikipedia*,” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Criticism_of_Wikipedia. For a Canadian perspective on *Wikipedia* and the larger issues raised by the new communications technologies, see Margaret Conrad’s Canadian Historical Association presidential address: “Public History and its Discontents or History in the Age of *Wikipedia*,” *Canadian Historical Association Journal* 2007 (forthcoming). A preprint version is available on the *Atlantic Canada Portal* at http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca:8000/archive/00000117/01/Conrad_CHA.pdf.

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many academic historians uncomfortable.⁵ Yet, as the historian Roy Rosenzweig has suggested, while “*Wikipedia* can act as a megaphone, amplifying the (sometimes incorrect) conventional wisdom,” academics’ concerns about “Internet sources is overblown. You can find bad history in the library, and while much misinformation circulates on the Internet, it also helps to debunk myths and to correct misinformation.”⁶ When used critically and judiciously – in other words, when we apply the same standards to the Internet that we do to any other source – the Web can be a great boon to the scholarly community.

A number of Web sites testify to the research and pedagogical potential of the Web. For example, the University of Virginia’s pioneering *The Valley of the Shadow* Web site, launched in 1993, shows both sides of the conflict during the American Civil War by examining two communities that straddled the divide between North and South.⁷ Offering online digital images of numerous primary sources, such as diaries, letters, church minutes, newspaper articles, and census and tax records, *The Valley of the Shadow* site has become an essential online tool for students of the Civil War in particular and 19th-century American history more generally. Similarly, the *DoHistory* Web site, based upon Laurel Thatcher Ulrich’s Pulitzer Prize-winning monograph, *A Midwife’s Tale*, is another impressive online resource.⁸ With a focus on instructing users about how historians practice their craft, *DoHistory* provides an “interactive case study” centred on the diary of 18th-century Maine midwife Martha Ballard that demonstrates both the difficulties and the rewards of working with primary historical sources. Learning modules enable students to test their ability to read Ballard’s difficult handwriting and to comprehend what her cryptic comments tell us if we put them in historical context.

More recently historians have begun to use the Internet not only to present primary and secondary sources, but also to collect, preserve, and extend the historical record. The Center for History and New Media, located at George Mason University, has developed several virtual archives projects that enhance the way historians collect their sources. On the first anniversary of the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, for example, the centre solicited first-hand accounts, documents, images, and videos of this historic moment for the *September 11 Digital Archive* Web site. At the end of

5 Carl Becker, “Everyman His Own Historian,” *American Historical Review*, 37 (January 1932), pp. 221-36.

6 Rosenzweig, “Can History be Open-Source?” p. 136.

7 See <http://valley.vcdh.virginia.edu/>. The communities examined are Augusta County, Virginia, and Franklin County, Pennsylvania. For a commentary on this and other sites relating to American history, see Alan B. Howard, “American Studies and the New Technologies: New Paradigms for Teaching and Learning,” *Rethinking History*, 8, 2 (June 2004), pp. 277-91. For a study of Augusta and Franklin counties on the eve of the Civil War based on *The Valley of the Shadow* Web site, see William G. Thomas III and Edward Ayers, “The Differences Slavery Made: A Close Analysis of Two American Communities,” *The American Historical Review* [electronic project] (December 2003), <http://www.vcdh.virginia.edu/AHR/>. Though now somewhat dated, Michael O’Malley and Roy Rosenzweig offer a remarkably prescient and still useful examination of American history on the Internet. See Michael O’Malley and Roy Rosenzweig, “Brave New World or Blind Alley? American History on the World Wide Web,” *The Journal of American History*, 48, 1 (June 1997), pp. 132-55.

8 See Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale: The Life of Martha Ballard Based on her Dairy* (New York: Knopf, 1990) and <http://dohistory.org>.

the day, in which 100,000 people visited the site, more than 1,000,000 digital objects had been viewed.⁹ This project was followed by the *Hurricane Digital Memory Bank*, dedicated to supporting the ongoing effort by historians and archivists to preserve the record of hurricanes Rita and Katrina by collecting images, personal accounts, and podcasts from those who survived these natural disasters.¹⁰ Visitors to either of these Web sites can tell their stories, making both projects excellent examples of how the Internet can be used to preserve the experiences of those whose voices might otherwise be lost as well as the long-term potential of the Internet for documenting collective memory.

Although scholars in the United States are at the forefront of producing Web-based history, Canadian historians are not far behind. The *Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History* Web site is particularly noteworthy. A collaborative effort among the University of Victoria, the Université de Sherbrooke, and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, and funded in part by the Canadian Culture Online Program of the Department of Canadian Heritage, *Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History* encourages visitors to engage with Canadian history by presenting a number of historical “cold cases” and providing the primary material necessary to explore the issue in question. The first mystery in the series, the *Who Killed William Robinson?* site, drew considerable attention when it was launched in 1997.¹¹ In a straightforward format, users were provided with a virtual archive of primary documentation pertaining to the 1868 death of William Robinson, a black man living on British Columbia’s Salt Spring Island, and encouraged to speculate on whether the legal system convicted the right culprit. *Who Killed William Robinson?* appealed to history teachers hoping to capture the attention of the first generation of Canadian students raised on the Internet. Currently, the *Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History* Web site hosts nine mysteries, including two based in the Atlantic region: *Where Was Vinland?* and *Jerome: The Mystery Man of Baie Sainte-Marie*.

The Internet also offers scholars an unprecedented opportunity to extend the impact of their research, both with policy makers and with the general public, and to undertake research in new ways and with new partners. As those who follow policy developments at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) are aware, “knowledge mobilization” has become one its major goals. SSHRC’s formal support of open access to federally funded research, its recent initiative to support online journals, and its enthusiastic embrace of collaborative research signals a new era in the way many historians go about their work. In this transformative process, it is important that the Atlantic Region not fall behind in establishing an online research presence. The *Atlantic Canada Portal* was created to meet this challenge.

9 See <http://911digitalarchive.org/>. See also James J. Sparrow, “On the Web: The September 11 Digital Archive,” in James B. Gardner and Peter S. LaPaglia, eds., *Public History: Essays from the Field*, rev. ed. (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Kreiger Publishing, 2004), pp. 397-415. The Internet is home to an extraordinary array of primary sources, and creating better ways of finding them is one of the challenges facing historians. See Debra DeRuyver and Jennifer Evans, “Digital Junction,” *American Quarterly*, 58, 3 (2006), pp. 943-80.

10 See <http://www.hurricanearchive.org/>.

11 The *Great Unsolved Mysteries in Canadian History* home page is <http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/> and *Who Killed William Robinson?* can be found at <http://www.canadianmysteries.ca/sites/robinson/>.

A bilingual, multi-layered Web site, the *Atlantic Canada Portal* explores the use of communication technology to support research related to the Atlantic Provinces of Canada.¹² Launched in the summer of 2004, the portal is a collaborative effort of the Canada Research Chair in Atlantic Canada Studies and the Electronic Text Centre, both based at the University of New Brunswick (UNB). The Electronic Text Centre, established in 1996 through the initiative of the UNB Libraries Director John Teskey and Associate Director Alan Burk, is a North American pioneer in its support of online research. As a result of a mentoring partnership with the University of Virginia's Electronic Text Centre, the centre at UNB quickly emerged as a leading institution in Canada for research, development, and training in humanities computing and digital publishing and it now has an impressive range of projects to its credit.¹³ In 2002, for example, the centre worked with anglophone scholars from across Canada to produce the first Canadian piece in Chadwyck-Healey's *Literature Online* collection, which features over 19,000 works by 179 Canadian poets. The centre also collaborated with the UNB Mi'kmaq-Maliseet Institute in its efforts to produce an online Maliseet-Passamaquoddy dictionary. Inspired by the achievements of *Érudit*, a Quebec-based initiative mandated to publish all of the province's academic journals online, the Electronic Text Centre now supports over a dozen journals published in the Atlantic region and is the Atlantic Canada node of Synergies, a Canada Foundation for Innovation-funded project designed to create a national network for producing, storing, and accessing Canadian scholarly materials such as journals, theses, and monographs. The centre is also involved in the Text Analysis Portal for Research (TAPoR) – a partnership among six Canadian universities to develop a central gateway for text analysis.

In this rapidly developing digital universe, the *Atlantic Canada Portal* serves as an access point to information on the Atlantic region. It hosts a digital library of primary and secondary sources, including bibliographies, theses, archival documents, reports, and teaching aids. It also supports communication among scholars by hosting virtual research forums, posting e-prints, and maintaining an electronic mailing list. While academic researchers, broadly defined, are the main audience for the portal, the site attracts a wide range of people interested in aspects of the Atlantic region's history and culture. A recent report on portal users indicates that it receives as many as 1,872 unique visitors each month – the portal bibliography and the Edward Winslow pages are the most popular – and that visitors from the Canada domain (.ca) are the most common, followed by non-profit organizations (.org), France, the United Kingdom, Peru, and Japan. Although most people access the portal either directly or through a search engine, more than five per cent of users are directed to the portal by links listed on other Web sites such as the Canadian Encyclopedia, CBC Information Morning, and the "Best of the Web."¹⁴

One of the first portal projects was to develop an online database of bibliographies published in *Acadiensis: The Journal of the History of the Atlantic Region*. The online version of the bibliography is digitized in accordance with a standard encoding

¹² See <http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca/>.

¹³ See <http://www.lib.unb.ca/Texts/>.

¹⁴ Lisa Pasolli, "Atlantic Canada Portal and Atlantic Canada Virtual Archives: Information on Web Tracking" (unpublished report, March 2007).

scheme for text processing that enables complex searches and indexing, accepts missing titles submitted by site users, and permits easy correction of mistakes that invariably creep into any large database.¹⁵ Much easier to use than the printed versions of the bibliography that until 2006 appeared in *Acadiensis*, the online bibliography highlights, as no other portal project does, the efficiency of electronic processes. Clearly, it is much easier to find an article or book in an electronic database of over 20,000 citations than by sorting through decades of printed bibliographies.

The portal also hosts the Atlantic Canada Virtual Archives, which is designed to showcase some of Atlantic Canada's rich archival sources and to explore the potential of Web-based research. In the first phase of the project, undertaken in 2003-04, two frequently consulted archival collections were digitized for online delivery: the Winslow Family Papers, housed in the University of New Brunswick Archives and Special Collections, and the McQueen Family Letters located across four repositories: the Nova Scotia Archives and Records Management, the British Columbia Archives, the Nicola Valley Museum Archives Association, and the Rossland Historical Museum & Archives.

The Winslow Family Papers feature the correspondence of Edward Winslow (1746-1815), a prominent Massachusetts Loyalist who settled in New Brunswick following the American Revolutionary War. A prolific and gifted letter writer, Winslow offers an intimate account of the Loyalist experience of re-establishing family and community life in colonial New Brunswick. The entire Winslow Family Papers (1695-1866), consisting of over 3,600 items and valued at nearly \$1,000,000, have been imaged by the Electronic Text Centre. The portal team transcribed and encoded 222 letters written to and from Edward Winslow between 1783 and 1785, the period covering the founding of New Brunswick as a separate British colony, to display in the Atlantic Canada Virtual Archives as the Edward Winslow Letters. Site visitors can read both an unaltered or diplomatic transcription and a modernized version of the letters, check both against the original, and search them by keywords.¹⁶

The McQueen Family Letters chronicle, often in impressive detail, the activities and relationships of a farming family rooted in Pictou County, Nova Scotia, in the second half of the 19th century. All but one of the six daughters and the only surviving son taught school at some point in their lives, moving around Nova Scotia and, in the case of the two youngest daughters, to British Columbia. A highly mobile family, the McQueens kept in touch by writing letters that speak to us today as remarkable documents of Canadian social history.¹⁷ Letters covering the period from 1866 until 1928 were transcribed by Sandra Barry and encoded to facilitate searches, and the

15 The bibliography is encoded in Extensible Markup Language (XML) in accordance with the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI) Guidelines. For more about TEI, visit the Text Encoding Initiative Web site at <http://www.tei-c.org/>. On the application of XML to historical scholarship, see William G. Thomas III, "Blazing Trails Toward Digital Scholarship," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, XXXIV, 68 (November 2001), pp. 415-26.

16 See <http://unb.ca/winslow/> for the digitized papers of the Winslow family and, for technical details relating to the portal project, see <http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca/acva/en/winslow/about/index.php>.

17 The British Columbia McQueens have inspired both a book and a play: Jean Barman, *Sojourning Sisters: The Lives and Letters of Jessie and Annie McQueen* (Toronto, 2003) and, in 2005, Vancouver's Vital Spark Theatre Company staged Joan Bryans's *Two Years in Nicola*, a play chronicling the time Jessie and Annie McQueen spent teaching in British Columbia's Nicola Valley.

entire collection of over 1,200 documents – including scrapbooks and pictures – has been imaged. In bringing together a collection of documents scattered across four repositories under one electronic roof, the McQueen Family Letters is truly a virtual archive. The value of such an integration of widely dispersed sources is perhaps best illustrated by a few instances where, by circumstances unknown, half of a letter was held at one archive and the other half at another. Digitizing these documents for presentation on the Atlantic Canada Virtual Archives meant that these long-separated fragments of letters could be reunited.

The Atlantic Canada Virtual Archives also includes learning resources for students from kindergarten to high school. Both the Winslow and McQueen Web sites include interactive modules focused on younger learners and lesson plans to allow older students to analyse, synthesize, and evaluate primary historical documents.¹⁸ The McQueen Web site permits students to travel with Jessie McQueen on the recently completed Canadian Pacific Railway across Canada in March 1888, reading the letters and postcards that she wrote en route from Pictou County, Nova Scotia, to Nicola Valley, British Columbia, where she had been hired to teach school. On the Winslow Web site elementary-level students are invited to practice writing with a quill pen and are obliged, as was Edward Winslow, to dip the pen in ink regularly to be able to continue writing. And it is not just students who are enthralled with the learning resources; some senior scholars have become quite taken with this virtual quill pen.

While few scholars dispute the value of such projects, they come at a high cost. At its height, 26 people, including 13 students, were employed to help transcribe, image, and encode the McQueen and Winslow letters. Only a grant from the Canadian Culture Online Program of Canadian Heritage, donations in time and money from a great many people, and the generosity of archival institutions who put their valuable collections at our disposal made this labour-intensive project possible.

In addition to bibliographies and primary sources, the portal hosts a research forum section that facilitates team-based research and knowledge mobilization. It is possible, with the permission of the portal team, for anyone from any location to initiate a forum on the portal platform relating to research on Atlantic Canada. Members of research teams can post papers, messages, videos, and links on the site and work together across any distance to build a bibliography or write a paper. Collaborations can be made publicly accessible or they can be password-protected and restricted solely to research team members. When a project is completed, the team can organize the final results of their research and make them available on the forum site to anyone interested in the topic.

The e-print section of the portal explores the potential of electronic publishing. As the cyber-enthusiast Stevan Harnad is fond of reminding us, a refereed scholarly Web site can reduce dissemination time while also enabling online discussions, automated

18 For a discussion of using new technologies to teach history see John Lutz, "Riding the Horseless Carriage to the Computer Revolution: Teaching History in the Twenty-First Century," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, XXXIV, 68 (November 2001), pp. 427-35. Lutz contends that the best Web sites for historical instruction are those "that put primary resources at our fingertips and at those of our students. We can now, in ways that were more difficult before, teach our students to be historians" (p. 435).

indexing, accessibility to research data, and broad dissemination.¹⁹ The two books currently posted in the portal's e-print archive point to the niche that electronic publishing serves very well: making available out-of-print volumes, such as Margaret Conrad's edited volume on the New England Planters,²⁰ and a limited edition of conference papers on immigration policy in New Brunswick that would not otherwise be widely accessible.²¹ Electronic publishing also facilitates timely dissemination of research by making available pre-prints of articles undergoing peer review and post-prints of articles that for one reason or other undergo revision after publication. To understand the value of what might otherwise be seen as "vanity publishing" consider this example. In 2003, *Atlantis* published an article by Margaret Conrad on the political culture of women in Atlantic Canada following the granting of suffrage.²² The article included appendices that listed the names and dates of female politicians, but the 6000-word limit on *Atlantis* submissions precluded this information from being published. The author secured permission from the editors of *Atlantis* to post the original version of the paper, complete with appendices, in the portal's e-print archive.²³ When the author presented an updated version of this paper, incorporating information from subsequent elections, to the Atlantic Conference of the Canadian Federation of University Women in 2005, this post-print became available on the portal.²⁴ Further, when an error was discovered in one of this post-print's appendices, it was immediately corrected. The forgiving nature of electronic publishing is one of its great strengths; errors can be quickly erased and second thoughts incorporated.

The other side of this coin is the unstable nature of what appears on the portal. As regular portal visitors know, content changes often – sometimes on a daily basis. Moreover, portals, unlike printed books, require ongoing maintenance. If resources are not available to maintain portals and to keep them current in terms of both content and technology, portals become obsolete and disappear. The team involved in the *Atlantic Canada Portal* project is especially attentive to these concerns, working to ensure that the portal receives the institutional support that it needs to outlast its original creators and to develop processes for archiving multiple versions of papers and other research materials.²⁵

19 See <http://www.cogsci.soton.ac.uk/~harnad/>.

20 Margaret Conrad, ed., *They Planted Well: New England Planters in Maritime Canada* (Fredericton, 1988), available online at <http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca:8000/publications/planters/01/>.

21 Hélène Destrempe and Joe Ruggeri, eds., *Rendez-Vous Immigration 2004: Enjeux et défis de l'immigration au Nouveau-Brunswick / Immigration in New Brunswick Issues and Challenges* (Fredericton, 2005), available online at <http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca:8000/publications/rendezvous/>.

22 Margaret Conrad, "Addressing the Democratic Deficit: Women and Political Culture in Atlantic Canada," *Atlantis*, 27, 2 (Spring 2003), pp. 82-9.

23 The original version of the paper, with appendices, can be found in the portal's e-print archive at http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca:8000/archive/00000013/01/Atlantic_Canadian_Women.pdf.

24 Margaret Conrad, "Women and Politics in Atlantic Canada" (keynote address to Canadian Federation of University Women, Atlantic Conference, Fredericton, 21 October 2005). The e-print is available at http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca:8000/archive/00000052/01/Atlantic_Canadian_Women_2005.pdf.

25 Examples of the University of New Brunswick's role in multi-university collaborations include participation in the Text Analysis Portal for Research, a partnership among six Canadian universities to develop a central gateway for text analysis, and Synergies, a joint initiative of five Canadian universities (Montreal, Toronto, Calgary, Simon Fraser, and UNB) to create a national network for the production, storage, and access to digitized knowledge produced in Canada. The Synergies demonstration Web site can be viewed at http://www.synergies.umontreal.ca/index_en.html.

Given their increasing reliance on information on the Internet that has no print equivalent (commonly referred to as “born digital”), scholars are starting to request that Web sites be institutionally supported and that attention be paid to permanence of content, location, versioning, security, and adherence to technical standards. Library and Archives Canada recently announced that electronic publications as well as print materials are to be included in the national deposit system. For some scholars, the university-based repository (commonly referred to as an institutional repository) offers a way of managing and disseminating research in digital form and archiving it for posterity. Many universities in Canada, including the University of New Brunswick, already have such repositories in place; UNB is one of eleven Canadian universities that currently hosts a DSpace repository for theses, dissertations, digital collections, and research papers.²⁶ As part of its commitment to developing research repositories, universities will need to manage technological change in such a way as to ensure the migration of digital content from one set of technologies to another.²⁷

The portal also has two other useful features: it hosts an annotated and searchable World Wide Web directory of sites relating to Atlantic Canada and it posts syllabi for university courses on Atlantic Canada. The Web directory currently contains nearly 350 Web sites individually vetted and annotated by members of the portal team. In a fashion similar to the portal’s bibliography, the Web directory is encoded to allow for great flexibility both in searching the directory and in filtering and manipulating search results. The portal’s teaching resources section includes 19 syllabi for courses on Atlantic Canada taught at Canadian universities. In an age when online resources are increasingly being incorporated into course content, an online syllabus allows for directly embedding a hyperlink to any course material, including articles and videos, available on the Internet.

In addition, the Web directory includes a list of online academic journals and print resources of interest to scholars of Atlantic Canada, such as the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* and the report of Newfoundland and Labrador’s 2003 *Royal Commission on Renewing and Strengthening Our Place in Canada*. Unhappily, *Acadiensis* – the flagship journal of Atlantic Canada studies – has yet to make the full transition to the digital world in the form of online publication, which is a cause for concern especially among students.²⁸ *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, in contrast, has embraced the

26 DSpace is a freely available software package that allows users to store, manage, and distribute scholarly work in electronic form. For more about DSpace see <http://www.dspace.org/>. The other Canadian universities using DSpace are Queen’s University, Simon Fraser University, the University of Calgary, the University of Guelph, the University of Manitoba, the Université de Montréal, the University of Prince Edward Island, the University of Toronto, the University of Waterloo, and York University. See <http://wiki.dspace.org/index.php/DspaceInstances>.

27 Clifford A. Lynch, executive director of the US-based Coalition for Networked Information, states: “At the most basic and fundamental level, an institutional repository is a recognition that the intellectual life and scholarship of our universities will increasingly be represented, documented, and shared in digital form, and that a primary responsibility of our universities is to exercise stewardship over these riches: both to make them available and to preserve them.” See <http://www.arl.org/newsltr/226/ir.html>.

28 Editor’s note: *Acadiensis* is currently in the process of having all of its back issues digitized, although the conditions under which recent digitized issues will be able to be accessed has yet to be decided.

digital revolution with the help of the UNB Electronic Text Centre's electronic journal publishing programme. A full back catalogue of *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* has been digitized, although all issues are available only to those with a subscription to the journal or an affiliation with a subscriber university.²⁹ While protecting online access to back issues is often a means of ensuring the continued operation of a journal through a paid subscriber base, SSHRC, with its commitment to open access, is working with journal editors to develop a new funding model that is less tied to subscriptions so that universal access to journal articles can be achieved. Some alternatives to subscription-based grants include counting the number of downloads from a journal Web site or the number of Web of Science citations logged for a journal's articles. One thing is clear: if a journal is not online it will increasingly not be consulted or counted in these new criteria of excellence and relevance.

The *Atlantic Canada Portal* is an exercise in what is increasingly being called humanities computing. Of necessity a collaborative process – most historians are unlikely to be able to keep up with the rapid advances in computing technology – it takes a great deal of face-to-face communication and e-mail time to work out the details of each portal project. Inevitably, historians and programmers have different vocabularies and different benchmarks for success when they embark on a project together. It took almost five years to produce the current version of the portal, which was launched in May 2007. Long-time users of the site will notice quite a difference in the site's architecture, which represents a number of compromises between historians and programmers. There is, of course, much more to be done. Three new archival sites are under construction – the letters of Prince Edward Island proprietor John MacDonald, the letters of the women in the Winslow family, and the land petitions of black Loyalists – and a proposal currently being workshopped revolves around the construction of a "Going Down the Road" Web site, where Atlantic Canadians who have moved to Alberta to work can submit their experiences. As resources permit, the online bibliography, which dates back only to the early 1980s, will be expanded to incorporate such works as W.G. MacFarlane's *New Brunswick Bibliography: The Books and Writers of the Province* and the bibliographical supplements produced by Eric Swanick.

The biggest problem facing portal managers and all researchers interested in engaging the Internet is funding. To find the time to actually *do* research, scholars need programmers and Web administrators and developers to support them. While funding agencies recognize that scientists need labs, they are less convinced that humanities and social science scholars do. It is therefore difficult to find the funds to make the *Atlantic Canada Portal* more than a passive receptor of information. As a result, we spend a lot of time chasing "soft" money to keep the portal team of professors, students, and technicians together. The challenge is especially great for scholars in the Atlantic region's universities, which are falling behind institutions in the rest of the country in attracting research funding.³⁰ It is, we believe, vitally

29 The Web site for *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* can be found at <http://www.mun.ca/nls/>.

30 In 2004-05, universities in Atlantic Canada attracted only 5.3 per cent of the monies dispersed for researched by the three granting councils: SSHRC (6.4 per cent), NSERC (6.4 per cent) and MRC/CIHR (4.0 per cent). See Table 5.1: Federal Research Funding – Granting Council Awards, 2004-2005, *CAUT Almanac of Post-Secondary Education in Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Association of University Teachers, 2007), p. 44.

important that scholars in Atlantic Canada studies share our knowledge and compete for user attention in cyberspace. Students now expect to find many of their sources on the Internet and scholarly research is greatly facilitated by online resources. When faced with the decision of being at the forefront of digital history or lagging behind, the choice should be obvious both to scholars of Atlantic Canada and to the universities and granting agencies that fund their research. One thing is certain as we ride this new communications technology to its final destination: if we do not have an institutionally supported, user-friendly Internet presence, the Atlantic region's history and culture will "virtually" disappear.

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