Acadiensis

ACADIENSIS

History on the Internet 2.0:
The Rise of Social Media

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Volume 41, Number 2, Summer/Autumn 2012

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/acad41_2for03

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Publisher(s)

The Department of History at the University of New Brunswick

ISSN

0044-5851 (print)
1712-7432 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this document

Slumkoski, C. (2012). History on the Internet 2.0:: The Rise of Social Media. *Acadiensis*, *41*(2), 153–162.

History on the Internet 2.0: The Rise of Social Media

WHEN ASKED TO WRITE A BRIEF ESSAY about Atlantic Canada Studies, the digital humanities, and social media, I returned to a previous *Acadiensis* forum piece, co-written by myself, Margaret Conrad, and Lisa Charlong and published in 2008.[1] That article was intended to provide an overview of the digital humanities as they stood at the time and to introduce readers to the Atlantic Canada Portal, an academic website developed to serve scholars of this region. In rereading that article I was struck by three things. First, there was the optimism of the article; written shortly after the Atlantic Canada Portal had been redesigned and relaunched, we heralded that site as an essential part of Atlantic Canada Studies' transition into the digital age. The second was the prescience of our sombre conclusion and warning that without adequate institutional support and funding scholars of Atlantic Canada would find it difficult to incorporate the history of this region into the burgeoning number of digital history projects then under development. Thirdly, I was shocked by our complete lack of discussion of social media and their impact on the practice of history.[2] This forum piece is my attempt to bring that earlier article up-to-date by assessing the state of humanities computing in Atlantic Canada along with the impact that social media and the proliferation of mobile computing have had on scholarly practice.

In the four years since that article was published, many changes have taken place in the digital humanities. One of the greatest transformations concerns the general acceptance of digital humanities among members of the academy. In 2008, for example, we could approvingly cite Daniel Cohen's observation that "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] Today one would be hard pressed to find an academic who does not take seriously the potential that the Web has to alter the way we practice and present our discipline.[4] Even Wikipedia – that bane of so many instructors and the obvious flashpoint for criticism of history on the Web[5] – has

1 Corey Slumkoski, Margaret Conrad, and Lisa Charlong, "History on the Internet: The Atlantic Canada Portal," *Acadiensis* XXXVII, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2008): 100-9.

2 In our defence, the forum piece was largely written in 2007, which would be during the initial stages of the rise of social media. Although blogging software had been available since the mid-1990s, such currently ubiquitous social media platforms as Facebook and Twitter had by 2007 only recently launched or been opened to the general public. For example, Twitter was unveiled in July 2006, while Facebook was opened to anyone age 13 or older with an email account that same September. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Facebook and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twitter for more details. I will not be discussing the use of Twitter here, as that has been well covered in this issue by Katherine O'Flaherty and Robert Gee. Moreover, I will not assess the use of Pinterest (http://www.pinterest.com) in this piece, as that website has only recently become popular and its impact on scholarly practice is yet unknown.

3 Daniel Cohen, "History and the Second Decade of the Web," *Rethinking History* 8, no. 2 (June 2004): 294.

4 Moreover, I suspect that the concerns of those who are not keen on the changes the Internet has wrought on historical practice stem from the very fact that the Internet is something to be taken seriously.

5 Studies have shown that Wikipedia's accuracy compares favourably to more traditional published sources. See Roy Rosenzweig, "Can History be Open-Source? *Wikipedia* and the Future of the

Corey Slumkoski, "History on the Internet 2.0: The Rise of Social Media," *Acadiensis* XLI, no. 2 (Summer/Autumn 2012): 153-162.

found a high-profile defender in William Cronon, president of the American Historical Association. While recognizing that Wikipedia entries are no substitute for "the much deeper, richer, more integrated knowledge that has always been the goal of good scholarship," Cronon suggests that for "quick consultation for information one can check in other ways, or a brief orientation to an unfamiliar topic, it's hard to imagine a more serviceable tool than Wikipedia."[6] Clearly the academy has come to terms with the potential of the digital humanities.

In part, this scholarly embrace of the Web's potential may stem from another welcome change that has occurred during the past few years: the increased presence of online journals. Now, virtually all major Canadian and Atlantic Canadian history journals have some sort of online presence.[7] Even *Acadiensis,* once criticized for not being available online, deserves praise for having digitized its entire catalogue and for maintaining a commitment to online publication while simultaneously producing a print version of the journal. By confining the non-subscriber blackout period to only the two most recent years through a moving subscription wall – meaning that anyone with an Internet connection can access all but the four most recent issues of the journal – *Acadiensis* is at the forefront of mediating the somewhat contradictory goals of freely disseminating information while protecting its paid-subscription model. Moreover, online journal software, such as the Open Journal System (OJS) software that is used by *Acadiensis*, has allowed for the development of new journals that forego the print model entirely to adopt an online-only approach.[8] In

Past," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 1 (June 2006): 117-46, and Jim Giles, "Internet Encyclopedias go Head to Head," *Nature* (14 December 2005), http://www.nature.com/news/2005/051212/full/438900a.html.

6 William Cronon, "Scholarly Authority in a Wikified World," *Perspectives on History* (February 2012), http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2012/1202/Scholarly-Authority-in-a-Wikified- World.cfm. Cronon is relatively late to the party of academics endorsing the promise Wikipedia holds. For example, Roy Rosenzweig embraced the potential of Wikipedia as early as 2006, while Margaret Conrad discussed the online encyclopedia's beneficial impact in her 2007 Canadian Historical Association presidential address. See Roy Rosenzweig, "Can History be Open Source?" 117-46, and Margaret Conrad, "Public History and its Discontents or History in the Age of Wikipedia," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association* 18, no. 1 (2007): 1-26. Moreover, Wikipedia seems to be soliciting the advice of the scholarly community in improving its articles. The Wikimedia Foundation, the organization that maintains Wikipedia, has set up the Wikipedia Education Program to encourage professors to engage their students in ensuring the accuracy of Wikipedia articles. Tina Loo has written a brief blog post detailing her experience with this program. See Tina Loo, "Wikipedia in the Classroom," http://niche-canada.org/node/10397.

7 A brief survey of *BC Studies*, the *Canadian Historical Review*, the *Journal of Canadian Studies*, and *Ontario History* found that all but *Ontario History* had full text articles available online (*Ontario History*, much like the 2008 version of *Acadiensis*, has confined its online content to a journal index). Atlantic Canadian-specific journals *Acadiensis*, *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies*, and *The Island Magazine* all now have full text articles available online, while the *Journal of New Brunswick Studies* is only available in an online format. Unfortunately, the *Newfoundland Quarterly* has yet to digitize its back catalogue. What is more, advances in library search engines – and notably the use of Journal Resolver software – have enabled scholars to more quickly and easily find full text online articles such as those in the aforementioned journals.

8 The Open Journal System is developed and maintained by Simon Fraser University's Public Knowledge Project. This freely available open source journal platform allows anyone with server

2010, for example, scholars at St. Thomas University took advantage of the potential of OJS when they launched the *Journal of New Brunswick Studies*. As a result of their ambitious efforts, all four of the Atlantic Provinces now have a journal specifically dedicated to their histories (with *Acadiensis*, of course, covering the broader region).[9] Never has the history of this region been as well covered or as accessible as it is at present, and much of that is the direct result of the embrace of and commitment to new communicative technologies and possibilities offered by the Web to journal editors, editorial boards, and academics generally.

And the *Journal of New Brunswick Studies* certainly seems to be embracing the Web's potential to revitalise the way we disseminate information in the digital world. Although the new journal's first issue simply mimicked the print paradigm, the second issue took advantage of the wider possibilities the online format presents by including a downloadable podcast featuring Nicole Lang, Elizabeth Mancke, and Ruth Sandwell discussing Béatrice Craig's Sir John A. Macdonald Prize-winning *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of Market Culture in Eastern Canada*.[10] Podcasts – downloadable audio files that can be played on a portable MP3 player or on a computer – allow for a more interactive means of scholarly communication, as they can reveal the spontaneity of scholarly discussion by, in this case, presenting multiple viewpoints debating a text's merits in a more engaging (and more personal) format than the written word.

Unfortunately, not all changes that have occurred in Atlantic Canadian digital humanities since 2008 have been as positive. In particular, the optimism we displayed at the launch of the Atlantic Canada Portal now seems somewhat misplaced as the ensuing years have failed to see it reach what we felt then to have been its true potential. Although the Atlantic Canada Virtual Archives has expanded its holdings – collections relating to Aboriginal land petitions in New Brunswick, the Black Loyalists, Loyalist women, and Prince Edward Island's MacDonald Family have since joined the original McQueen Family Papers and Winslow Papers[11] – the Atlantic Canada Portal as a whole is not as functional today as it was in 2008. Where the portal once housed an impressive array of course syllabi on Atlantic Canada, a collection of e-prints and pre-prints written by regional scholars, and a searchable and up-to-date bibliography, it now is limited to the aforementioned expanded virtual archives, a newsfeed on Atlantic Canadian studies, a directory of websites that has not been updated since July 2011, and a filterable – but not searchable –

access to develop their own online journal. For more information about the Public Knowledge Project and the Open Journal System, visit http://pkp.sfu.ca/. It seems likely that even the rolling subscription wall may eventually be taken down by humanities and social sciences journals, as the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) has a public position of favouring open access for all scholarly information funded by the council (e.g., the taxpayers have paid for it).

9 Nova Scotia has the *Journal of the Royal Nova Scotia Historical Society*; Prince Edward Island has *The Island Magazine*; Newfoundland and Labrador has *Newfoundland and Labrador Studies* and the *Newfoundland Quarterly*; and New Brunswick has the *Journal of New Brunswick Studies*.

10 "Podcast: Nicole Lang, Elizabeth Mancke, and Ruth Sandwell Discuss Béatrice Craig's *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada*," *Journal of New Brunswick Studies* 2 (2011), http://journals.hil.unb.ca/index.php/JNBS/article/view/18732.

11 These collections can be accessed at http://atlanticportal.hil.unb.ca/virtual-archives.

bibliography that has not been updated in the past few years.[12] Whereas the portal was once an essential online resource on Atlantic Canada for scholars and students alike, it has now become more or less a simple repository of news items of interest to scholars of Atlantic Canada and, as a result, has grown outdated.

The decline of the Atlantic Canada Portal's currency and usability is directly related to the lack of funding about which we warned in 2008. Granting agencies have proven to be much more willing to fund the creation of digital projects than to provide the monies required to maintain existing ones. As a result, much of the support for the ongoing operation of the Atlantic Canada Portal came from funds granted through Margaret Conrad's Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Atlantic Canada Studies. With Conrad's 2009 retirement this source of support dried up, and the funds required to employ the graduate students that maintained the site disappeared. Given these financial limitations, it is understandable that the UNB Electronic Text Centre – the group that helped develop and currently maintains and hosts the portal – revamped the site to require less time and maintenance. Unfortunately, these changes came at the expense of much of the utility the site once held. I sincerely hope that these alterations are just a temporary response to the financial difficulties occasioned by Conrad's departure, and that new initiatives in Atlantic Canada Studies at UNB associated with the inauguration of a new Tier I Canada Research Chair will lead to reinvigoration of the portal. Such reinvigoration would not only provide graduate students with important training in the digital humanities, but a redesigned and relaunched site would also once again justify the optimism we displayed in 2008 by allowing the portal to again move toward reaching its potential as an online scholarly resource. If a revamp of the Atlantic Canada Portal is in the cards, two excellent models for what it could become are provided by the Network in Canadian History and Environment (NiCHE) and Active History websites; tellingly, both of these websites use various social media to promote the dissemination of history and, as a result, both reveal the potential of how the Internet and social media can positively impact our discipline.[13]

Originally launched in 2005 by the University of Western Ontario's Alan MacEachern and William Turkel, the NiCHE website was redesigned in 2007 using funds from a SSHRC Strategic Knowledge Clusters grant to incorporate an impressive array of resources of use to practitioners of Canadian environmental history. In addition to a directory of over 475 students and academics engaged with environmental history, the website has a "Resources" section featuring teaching resources, student resources, general research resources, and resources to help in hosting an environmentally sustainable conference – all of which demonstrate the capacity of academic websites to reach out beyond the academy. Moreover, the

12 The distinction between a searchable bibliography and a filterable bibliography is important. Whereas in 2008 one could search by keyword – an option that would pull up any source that contained the searched-for term – today one can only filter the bibliography based on author, title, type (thesis, article, or book), and date of publication. This means that unless one knows the precise author or title for which one is looking, searching the bibliography will be a time-consuming and frustrating experience.

13 The NiCHE site is available at http://niche-canada.org and the Active History site can be found at http://activehistory.ca.

"Blogs" section of the website encompasses various social media being used to promote environmental history.[14] Here one will not only find "The Otter," a blog featuring brief posts – both contributed and solicited – on topics related to environmental history and historical practice from a wide selection of scholars, including such well-known academics as Tina Loo, Stéphane Castonguay, and Bill Waiser, but also a "Scholars Profile" blog, which provides updates from academics about their work, interviews with emerging environmental historians, and profiles of others already working in this field. In addition, multimedia platforms are used to present Sean Kheraj's "Nature's Past" podcast on issues relating to the environment – along with EHTV (a semi-regular series of short video documentaries that follow environmental historians in the field). NiCHE even provides a primarily French-language blog – « Qu'est-ce qui se passe » – that covers issues of environmental history in Quebec.[15]

The Active History website is of slightly more recent provenance. Initially developed as a means of disseminating the proceedings from a 2008 symposium held at York University, the Active History site was launched in April 2009 by a group of the school's history graduate students. Supported by York University's Avie Bennett Historica-Dominion Chair in Canadian History and York's Department of History, it has grown into an excellent academic website that receives over 11,000 monthly visitors.[16] These visitors are greeted with a wide array of features, with the most noticeable aspect of Active History being the impressive number of blog posts the site contains.[17] These posts, on a wide variety of historical topics, are written by graduate students, junior scholars, and senior academics; for example, of the seven blog articles posted in May 2012 one was co-written by Queen's University senior academics Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, one was by York University assistant professor Sean Kheraj, and five were posted by a quartet of post-doctoral fellows.[18] In addition to the ongoing blog pieces, Active History also hosts a dozen longer articles along with a number of book reviews and podcasts.

What is truly impressive about the NiCHE and Active History websites, beyond their scope and utility, is the way that they have incorporated freely available

14 This title is a bit of a misnomer, as the section features more than just blogs.

15 The Active History website also features a French language sister site: http://HistoireEngagee.ca.

16 The NiCHE website has similar numbers, and receives almost 10,000 unique visitors each month during the school year. In comparison, the numbers for the Atlantic Canada Portal are much less impressive, with May 2012 seeing only 1,744 page views. Owing to differences in tracking rubrics – the portal tracks page views while NiCHE and Active History track unique visitors – a comprehensive statistical comparison is impossible. That said, the number of unique visitors to the portal cannot exceed the number of page views. Moreover, the portal's number of page views has declined dramatically since 2008; February 2008 saw 23,073 page views. I would like to thank Jen Whitney (Atlantic Canada Portal), Alan MacEachern (NiCHE), and Ian Milligan (Active History) for this information. For more on the development of Active History, see Jim Clifford, "Celebrating Three Years," Active History, http://activehistory.ca/2012/05/celebrating-three-years/.

17 A blog post is a brief (generally under 500 words) opinion piece, similar to a newspaper editorial.

18 The post-doctoral fellows who contributed to Active History in May 2012 are Daniel MacFarlane of Carleton University, Ian Milligan of the University of Western Ontario, Tom Peace of Dartmouth College, and Jessica Van Horssen of McGill University/Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières.

software and social media platforms in their construction and the dissemination of their content. Both use content management systems that allow contributors and website managers easily to post new content – no prior knowledge of HTML encoding is required – and quickly and consistently to make changes across multiple pages on each site. NiCHE uses the Drupal content management system, which tends to create a more traditional website featuring numerous cross-referenced, thematically organized pages. Active History, on the other hand, uses the Word Press content management system as the backbone of its site.[19] This system creates a more blog-like website; pages tend to be organized chronologically – the most recent blog posts are displayed more prominently – although it still offers the flexibility of having dedicated pages for hosting the articles, reviews, and podcasts that are also found on the site.[20] Moreover, Word Press automatically archives all posts by year and month, allowing site visitors to quickly and easily comb through past posts.

In addition, these websites point to the increasing interconnectedness of academic and social networking websites. Much of NiCHE's online content is actually hosted off site, with links provided; for example, the EHTV videos are hosted by YouTube and embedded into NiCHE's site. This allows NiCHE to use this popular online video site to store its content, thereby saving storage space and development time while also allowing for a more dynamic website. And other types of content can also be hosted externally on various social media platforms. For example, digital images can be posted on the photo-sharing website Flickr or on the photoblog Tumblr. The use of these external social media sites to host content makes sense in this age of increasingly stretched budgets for online projects; why spend the time and effort developing your own means of video delivery – or take up valuable storage space – when there is a freely available and easily used social media site that can do it for you?

Both NiCHE and Active History also succeed in using social media as a means of bringing attention to their new content. In 2008 social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter were in their infancy, and the most common form of social media used for academic purposes was likely online bulletin board or forum websites. These sites used freely available software to set up websites organized around specific topics or interests, and allowed registered users to post queries or respond to questions of other site members. In fact, the Atlantic Canada Portal

19 For more on Drupal, visit http://drupal.org/. For more on Word Press, visit http://wordpress.org.

20 According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (3rd ed., March 2003), a blog is "a frequently updated web site consisting of personal observations, excerpts from other sources, etc., typically run by a single person, and usually with hyperlinks to other sites; an online journal or diary"; online version March 2012, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/256743>. Blog-hosting sites and software can be easily found online. In addition to its content management system, Word Press also hosts a free blog service at http://wordpress.com. Other popular blog services include Blogger, available at http://blogger.com, and Tumblr, which is found at http://www.tumblr.com. I do not have the time or space in this brief forum piece to cover the presence of individual historians' personal blogs; although a 2010 report by PEW Internet suggests that blogging has steadily been in decline, I suspect you could not toss an iPad through the dance floor at Cliopalooza without hitting a blogger! This is because many historians have set up blogs using the above websites to serve as an online CV. See the Pew Internet, "Generations 2010" report, http://pewinternet.org/Reports/2010/Generations-2010/Overview/Findings.aspx.

briefly experimented with such a system, before dropping it due to lack of interest. Simply put, the number of visitors to this section of the portal did not warrant the time and effort necessary to maintain it. This lack of interest in academic forums has been recently confirmed by a recent study jointly published by the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) and the British Library, which revealed that while 23 per cent of Generation Y doctoral candidates – defined as those born between 1982 and 1994 – had visited academic forum sites, only 13 per cent had actively participated in the discussions, suggesting that young scholars believed that "actively using . . . social media and online forums in research lacks legitimacy."[21] Despite the JISC/British Library report's pessimism regarding the use of social media for academic purposes, I suspect we are on the cusp of an attitudinal sea change – a sea change that can partially be revealed by the way that NiCHE and Active History use social media websites such as Facebook.

Facebook, as most readers will know, is a broadly-based social networking site that combines such features as email, instant messaging, blogging, photo and video sharing, and gaming under one roof.[22] As of this writing, the number of Facebook users is approaching one billion. Users can set up profiles to connect with, or "Friend," other Facebook users. In addition, users can create groups around shared interests, or choose to "Like" certain people, places, and things.[23] This information is then automatically shared with people in the user's Friends list as well as allowing the user to connect with others who like that interest regardless of whether or not they are already "Friends."[24] Both NiCHE and Active History have tapped into the potential of Facebook by setting up "Group" pages, which Facebook users can "Like" in order to share the groups with their "Friends" and get updates when new content is uploaded to the two websites. Moreover, both the NiCHE and Active History groups provide direct links into the new content – one simply has to click on the Facebook link to be taken to the content hosted on its website. This is illustrative of the way that many historians are using Facebook. The ubiquitous social media platform is not being used to host content, but it is being effectively utilized as a way of pointing users to content hosted elsewhere. Moreover, Facebook has become an increasingly useful tool for mobilizing historians in the digital age –

21 JISC and the British Library, "Researchers of Tomorrow: The Research Behaviour of Generation Y Doctoral Students," http://www.jisc.ac.uk/publications/reports/2012/researchers-of-tomorrow#menu. JISC is a British conglomerate that investigates the use of digital technologies in academic research and teaching.

22 Facebook can be accessed at http://www.facebook.com. For those unfamiliar with Facebook, an excellent guide to the social networking site can be found at http://mashable.com/guidebook/facebook/. For a brief history of Facebook, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Facebook. For a critical take on Facebook in academia, see Alex Golub, "The Flaws of Facebook," *Inside Higher Ed* (2009), http://www.insidehighered.com/views/2009/02/03/golub. Although it is used by academics, Facebook was not developed to be a scholarly social networking site. For a social networking site designed specifically for an academic audience, see http://www.academia.edu, which allows users to create profiles tied to their institutions, to upload papers and their CV, and to connect with, or "follow," other academics.

23 Peter Twohig of Saint Mary's University has, for example, created an Atlantic Canada Studies group on Facebook. To find it, simply enter Atlantic Canada Studies in the Facebook search box.

24 This is Facebook's default setting. Users can modify their Facebook account's privacy settings to limit who has access to their actions and information.

an important consideration during this time of myopic government cuts to important cultural and heritage institutions. The Canadian Historical Association and the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), for example, have both used Facebook to voice their dissatisfaction over cuts to Library and Archives Canada, with the CAUT even developing the aptly named "Save Library and Archives Canada – Sauvons Bibliothèque et Archives Canada" Facebook group for this purpose.[25] And this can prove to be a very effective strategy, for the interconnected nature of Facebook – it allows us to see our friends' activities – means that one does not have to be a member of any of these groups in order to find out about their efforts; for example, I did not find any of these historical groups on my own but rather was informed of them through my network of Facebook friends.[26] In this manner Facebook is not transforming how we do history, but is instead simplifying and improving how we communicate about and mobilize around issues of importance to historians. It seems clear to me that any revision of the portal should follow the model put forth by NiCHE and Active History by incorporating social media platforms such as YouTube and Facebook.

Finally, it is impossible to discuss the use of social media in scholarly practice without a brief discussion of the impact of advances in computing hardware – specifically handheld computing devices such as smartphones.[27] Although smartphones had existed earlier, the introduction of the Apple iPhone in June of 2007 and the subsequent development of "apps" – small computer programs designed to run on smartphones – have altered the ways that many people communicate. Smartphones, which really are small personal computers with telephony capability, allow for computing mobility and thus can present new ways of accessing and interpreting the past. Not only do such apps as Facebook's allow subscribers to get updates on recent posts from NiCHE and Active History, but the ability of the smartphones to process text, images, and video present the opportunity for much more robust history-themed apps. For example, the Historypin app uses the GPS and camera capabilities of smartphones to superimpose historical photographs over images of the present, thereby allowing users to visualize their environment as it once was. NiCHE has developed its own app, which compiles information from a number of sources – the NiCHE website, the NiCHE twitter feed, and the H-Environment site – into a sort of "one-stop shopping" for information on environmental history. Moreover, the explosion of apps points to new directions in pedagogy. For example, Carleton University's Shawn Graham recently had his

25 I hope that historians of all political stripes can agree that cuts to Library and Archives Canada are not good for our discipline.

26 In a similar fashion, I found out about Jerry Bannister's article on Churchill Falls in the last issue of *Acadiensis* from the Sir Robert Bond Papers blog – which covers Newfoundland politics and public policy – roughly one week before I received my copy of the journal. See http://bondpapers.blogspot.ca/2012/05/river-runs-through-it-nlpoli.html, and Jerry Bannister, "A River Runs Through It: Churchill Falls and the End of Newfoundland History," *Acadiensis* XLI, no. 1 (Winter/Spring 2012): 211-25.

27 Although they are not telephones, I also include in this category such portable web-browsing hardware as the Apple iPod Touch and tablets.

graduate class in the digital humanities develop a portable app for smartphones that historicizes a walking tour of downtown Ottawa.[28]

These recent changes in the digital humanities – the expansion of online journals, the rise of social media, the growth of mobile computing platforms – have certainly had an impact on historical practice. However, this impact can best be described as primarily complementary and not transformative. What I mean by this is that such developments have tended to accelerate the traditional historical paradigm; although online journals facilitate access, social media increases both the speed at which we make connections and disseminate information, and smartphones and portable web browsers allow us to be constantly connected, none of these changes really transform the way we conduct our business. In their absence we would still have access to journals, we would still connect with our colleagues, we would still publish our research, and we would still use the Internet at home or work. Yet perhaps this is where the impact is most strongly felt, for the speed at which social media allow us to access journals, to communicate and collaborate with colleagues, and disseminate our finding have all altered our expectations. This, combined with the development of portable computing, means that many scholars (and, even more so, students) now expect to be connected on a near-constant basis, for better or for worse. On a personal level, I try to find articles that are freely available online when developing course syllabi, I use social media platforms running on my iPod to communicate with other historians, and I enjoy the speed with which online journals can take an article from submission to publication. And maybe this reveals only the tip of the iceberg. Transformations of scholarly disciplines, after all, are not effected overnight, and the speed at which social media allows us to connect and collaborate, combined with the potential of history apps and portable computing, suggest that the transformative potential of the digital world may be realized in the coming years.

Realizing the potential held by the integration of historical practice with social media, however, requires two things: an increased acceptance of the utility of the digital turn as well as funding to continue to develop and maintain digital projects. Indeed, these two are largely interconnected; if we can secure more funding to develop useful, innovative online projects, I believe that even the most conservative of academics will come to see the utility of digital history. Moreover, the funding problem has in part been addressed by the ease with which scholarly online projects incorporate freely available social media platforms such as YouTube, Flickr and Facebook. These sites are all free to use, which offers some relief to cash-strapped digital humanists. At the same time, the increasing integration of these sites into academic websites also illustrates some of the difficulties inherent in creating and

28 Historypin is a joint initiative of Google, the "We Are What We Do" organization, and such partner institutions as the Museum of the City of New York. See "Picture the Past: Historypin Mashes Up Archived Photos with the Present," http://www.good.is/post/historypin-app-uses-augmented-reality-to-visualize-the-past/. The Zeitag TO app does something similar for the city of Toronto. For more about the NiCHE app, see Sean Kheraj, "Environmental History? There's an App For That," http://niche-canada.org/node/10345. For more about Shawn Graham's class and the development of their historical app, see http://dhcworks.carleton.ca/history5702/. For a good overview of history apps, see Jay Young, "Like History? There's an app for that," Active History, http://activehistory.ca/2011/07/like-history-theres-an-app-for-that/. These apps are all designed for Apple products and can be easily found by searching Apple's App Store.

maintaining meaningful digital projects and websites. That is because despite their utility, social media only provide an empty platform for online history – you still need to populate the platform with content and that requires an ongoing commitment to pay not just the administrators who maintain the websites and the developers who can create historically themed apps, but also the researchers who will populate the sites and apps with ongoing and current content.

Although social media allow for the development of these elements outside the institutional structure, I am reluctant to endorse this sort of free-labour model. Indeed, the ease with which freely available web platforms and social media can be used to effect online historical projects necessitates a warning. Although academia is beginning to appreciate the benefits that digital history can offer – increased access to journals, better communication and mobilization, and increased portability – it seems reluctant to recognize the effort needed to create such online projects. Simply put, decisions around hiring and promotion – with the notable exception of those hired specifically as digital humanists – generally fail to recognize digital projects as meaningful contributions. Young scholars who may see the development of a broad online research project or collaborative as their stepping stone into academia are still better served by continuing in the more traditional vein of publishing peer-reviewed books and articles. I hope that if another update on the digital humanities is required in a few years that this will have changed.

Despite this concern, I believe that with proper institutional support, combined with the integration of social media, humanities computing in this region can still have a bright future. It is my sincere wish that the work that went into developing the Atlantic Canada Portal will not have been for naught, and that funding will be procured to transform it from a static and increasingly outdated website into one that features frequent content updates and podcasts as well as incorporating, at the very least, some social media presence to inform regional scholars of site updates and other information relevant to Atlantic Canada Studies. Otherwise, even with the advances that social media promises for the digital humanities, the pessimistic conclusion that we reached in 2008 regarding humanities computing in Atlantic Canada – that "if we do not have an institutionally supported, user-friendly Internet presence, the Atlantic region's history and culture will 'virtually' disappear" – will remain valid.[29]

COREY SLUMKOSKI

29 Slumkoski, Conrad, and Charlong, "History on the Internet," 109.

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