

KEEPING OUR PAST ALIVE BY DIGITIZING OUR ARCHIVES

A presentation to Bruce County Council
by Sheila Latham, Southampton

3 December 2020

Introduction to Sheila Latham



After working as a professional librarian for 33 years, I retired to Southampton in 2008. My research, for degrees in Library Science and a PhD in English, my 40+ published books and articles, as well as my responsibility for the University of Lethbridge Archives and Special Collections , have informed my knowledge and interest in archives collections and research. As a regular user of the Bruce County Archives, I greatly appreciate the work Deb Sturdevant and the Archives staff. However, I believe the Archives needs more staff and more funding support.

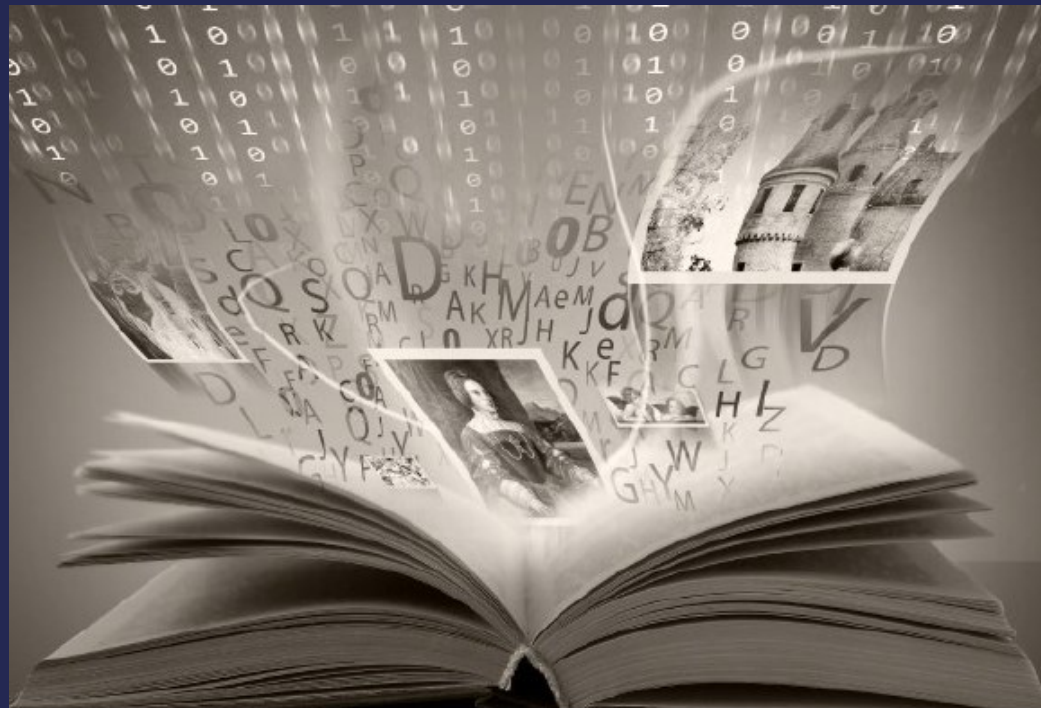
The Case for Digitizing Archives

Digitization is now the preferred method for preserving and storing our collective memory and heritage.

For over 25 years, digital storage and retrieval of archival collections has been recommended by archivists and research experts in Canada and around the world.



Opportunities Outlined by the Canadian Expert Panel on Memory Institutions



**LEADING IN THE DIGITAL WORLD: OPPORTUNITIES
FOR CANADA'S MEMORY INSTITUTIONS**

The Expert Panel on Memory Institutions
and the Digital Revolution



2 The Digital Imperative

Key Findings

Digital technology is ubiquitous and enmeshed in the daily existence of Canadians and operations of governments. Its use has fundamentally altered the way in which we communicate and network, and the type of records we create.

Together with social media, digital technology has transformed how we produce and consume documentary heritage. Production has been democratized, resulting in very significant increases in both the amount produced and the number of producers. As for consumption, it is increasingly carried out online with Canadians ranking among the most significant consumers of digital online content in the world.

With content now often digitally born and residing in a myriad of formats and platforms, it is increasingly beyond the reach of many of the traditional tools that memory institutions have used to fulfill their mandate of preserving documentary heritage.



Digital Archives Are:

- Preferred by a Computer-Literate Public
- Easy to Search (instantly with keywords)
- Available Anytime, Anywhere (24/7)
- Safe for Users (during a pandemic)
- Good for Preservation (preventing damage)
- An Excellent Storage Alternative (saving space)
- Portable and User-Friendly
- An Empowering Equalizer for Citizens
- A Route to a Stronger Identity



Digital Archives are Preferred by our Computer-Literate Canadian Public

Our Young People are Growing Up in a Digital World



If we want to make our written cultural heritage accessible to our children, digital format is key.



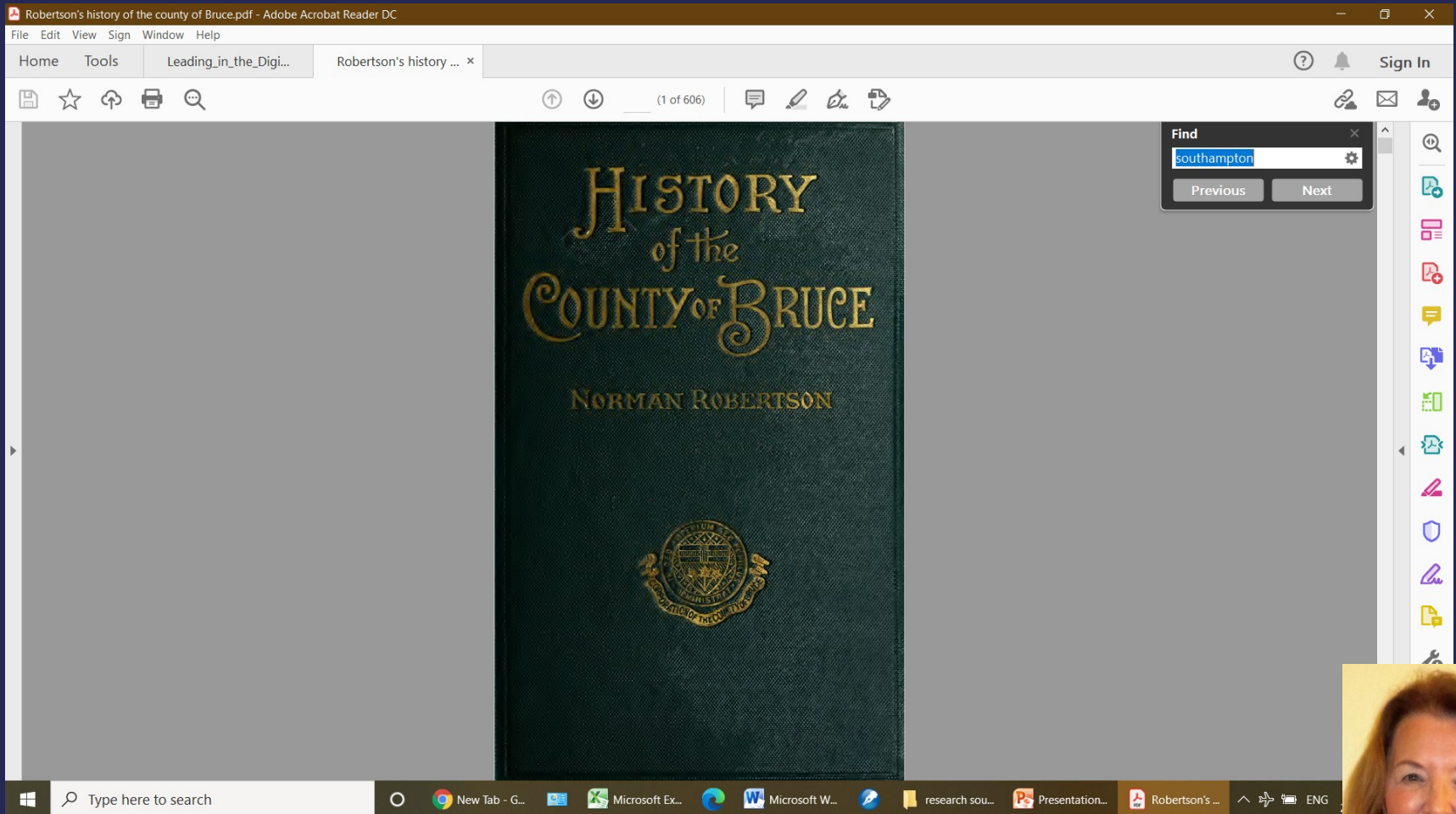
Digitized Books and Archives Are Easy to Find and Use

The screenshot shows the Internet Archive website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with categories: WEB, BOOKS, VIDEO, AUDIO, SOFTWARE, and IMAGES. Below this is a search bar for the WayBack Machine. The main content area features the Internet Archive logo and a search bar containing the text "History of the County of Bruce Robertson". A red oval highlights this search bar and the "GO" button. Below the search bar are several radio button options for search criteria: "Search metadata" (selected), "Search text contents", "Search TV news captions", "Search radio transcripts", and "Search archived web sites". To the right of the search bar is an "Advanced Search" link. Below the search bar is a section titled "Top Collections at the Archive" with five cards: "Community Audio" (2,236,368 items), "Community Video" (1,017,133 items), "Community Texts" (1,056,691 items), "American Libraries" (3,416,564 items), and "Community Data" (264,500 items). The bottom of the page includes a "Terms of Service" link.

Millions of books and documents can be searched free on the Internet Archive website: archive.org.
In the red oval, you will see I searched for the History of the County of Bruce, by Robertson.



Digital Archives Are Easy to Search



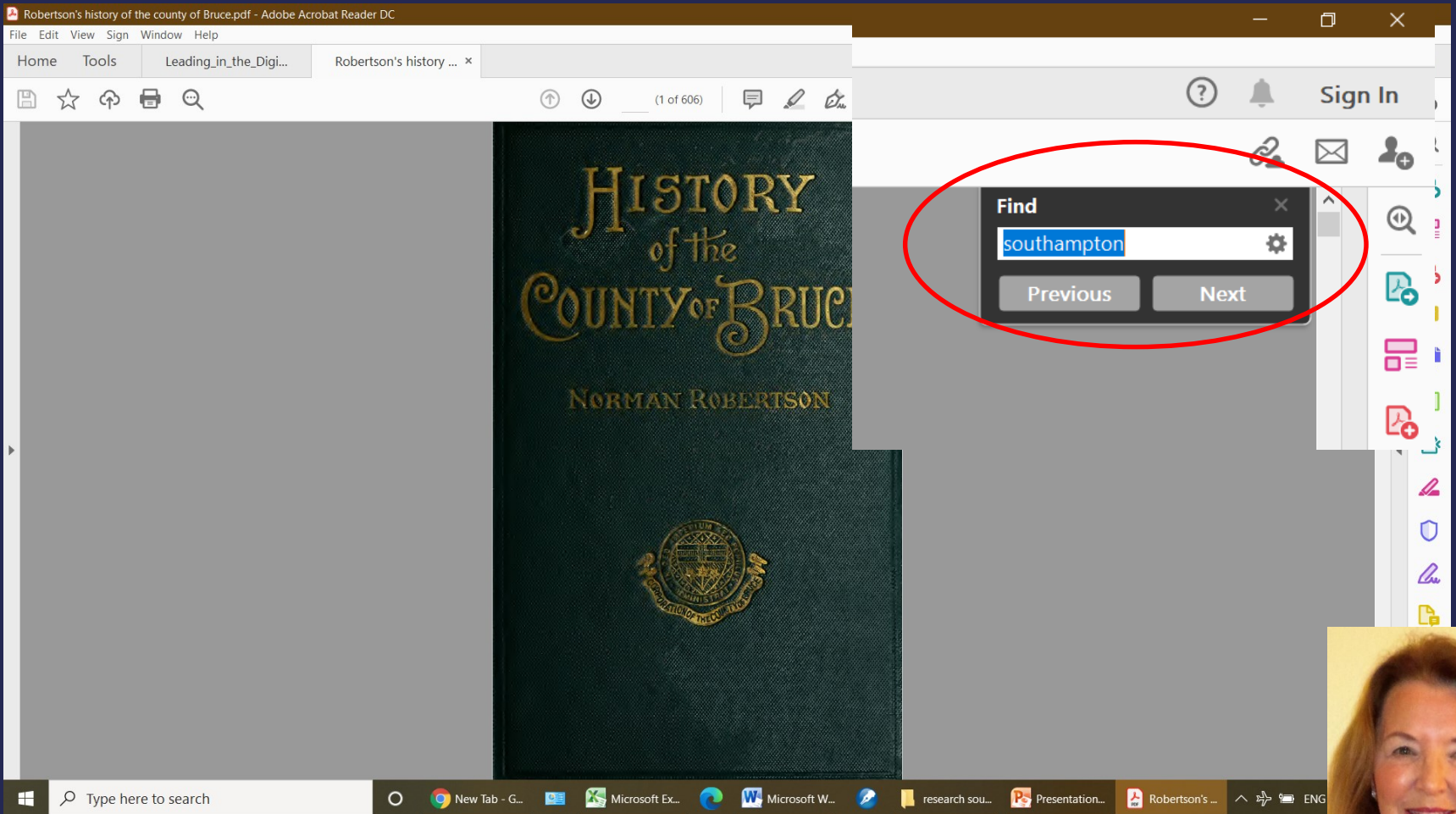
I found 4 copies of Robertson's *History of the County of Bruce* in the Internet Archive.

Digital Archives are Easy to Search

-- Digitized books are a great convenience, and easy to search instantly, simply by using Control + F on the computer keyboard.



Digital Archives Are Easy to Search



In the search box, brought up with Ctl + F, I typed Southampton to search inside.



Digital Archives Are Easy to Search

The screenshot displays a digital archive viewer interface. The main window shows a PDF document titled "Robertson's history of the county of Bruce.pdf" in Adobe Acrobat Reader DC. The document is split into two pages, 50 and 51. Page 50 is titled "OTHER TOWNSHIPS SURVEYED" and page 51 is titled "CROWN LANDS AGENT A. McNABB". The text on page 50 discusses the survey of Bruce county in 1851, mentioning townships like Southampton and Owen Sound. The text on page 51 discusses the survey of Crown lands, mentioning the role of Alexander McNabb. The interface includes a search bar at the top right with the text "southampton" entered. A "Find" panel is open on the right side, showing the search results and navigation buttons "Previous" and "Next". A note is attached to the text on page 51, stating "I can highlight and make my own notes on this digital version." The note is titled "Sheila 11:11 PM" and has a "Reply" button. The bottom of the screenshot shows the Windows taskbar with various application icons and the search bar.

Every instance of a word can be found (see Southampton in blue); you can also highlight, and make notes for yourself (great for students).



Digital Archives Are Available 24/7 from Any Location, Anytime

Consider that:

The County Archives has limited daytime open hours.

Many working people are not free to visit when it is open.

Not everyone has a car to drive to Southampton.

Most school children and some seniors do not drive.

However, digital archives are accessible anytime via personal computers and phones.

Citizens without computers can use computers in public libraries to access digital archives online.



Digital Archives Are Safe for the Public



Gathering to do research now poses a health risk during the pandemic.



Masks, as shown on the right, are not enough at the Bruce County Archives. For public safety, plastic barriers have been added, hours reduced, and only two people can visit the Archives at the same time. Advance appointments are required.



Digitization Protects Archival Materials from Damage



Books and documents are easily damaged by handling and exposure to light, as well as by fluctuations in temperature and humidity.

White gloves are not enough.



By digitizing fragile materials, the information can be made available to the public while the originals can be preserved in a climate-controlled storage area.



Digitized Documents Can Be Stored in Off-Site Compact Storage

Compact shelving saves space



Open to alternative sites /locations

Digitized documents would be stored in a climate controlled storage facility and would need to be retrieved only in very rare or unusual circumstances. Since most people would prefer the digital version, the paper originals wouldn't be needed.

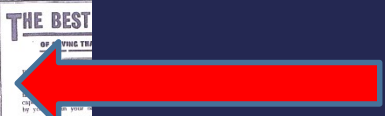


Digital Archives Are User Friendly



Page from 1898 Toronto Globe with story on Captain Dan MacLeod.

Found in seconds, on my laptop.



Digital Archives Are User Friendly

Prominent Men ...of the Great Lakes.

BY JOHN A. COPLAND.

...ment of ... on the steamer ...

Captain D. Macleod.

Captain D. MacLeod is called one of the fish kings of the north, from his extensive business in the piscatorial H. e.



CAPT. D. MACLEOD.

He was born in Rothshire, Scotland, and came to Canada in 1862. Having settled in Southampton he went into the

1898.

fish business and has been in it ever since. In 1891 he became one of the firm of MacKay, Clark & Co. Captain MacLeod is a Scotchman if he is anything, and is one of the best performers of Scottish dances in Canada.

Digital archives can be cut and pasted and shared in various ways, for visual presentations, for teaching purposes, for personal scrapbooks, for school projects, etc.



Digitization of Archives is an Equalizer for Citizens

Southampton residents have an unfair advantage over citizens in other Bruce County communities because we can easily walk to the County's Archives.

Digitization would level the playing field for all citizens in Bruce County.

Citizens will thank you for it.



What Are Other Counties Doing?



The Elgin County Archives has completed the digitization of early Elgin County newspapers!



In partnership with the Elgin County branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society, the Elgin County Archives has scanned and digitized microfilm newspaper issues. These newspapers represent a key resource for information on the unique documentary history of Elgin County.

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<https://www.elgincounty.ca/2020/01/elgin-county-archives-has-completed-the-digitization-of-early-elgin-county-newspapers/>

Elgin County Newspapers Online



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These historical newspapers are:

- Aylmer Enterprise (1869-1870)
- Aylmer Express (1881-1948)
- Aylmer Saturday Night (1914)
- Aylmer Sun (1890-1914)
- East Elgin Tribune (1915-1916)
- Dutton Enterprise (1881-1889)
- Dutton Advance (1889-1949)
- Rodney Chronicle (1885)
- Rodney Mercury (1887-1918)
- Weekly Dispatch (1853-1876)
- The Home Journal/Canadian Home Journal (1859-1877)
- West Lorne Sun (1902-1918)

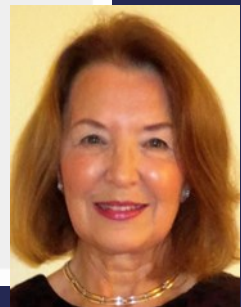
Anyone can search these 12 digitized newspapers online, by keyword, phrase, title, or date.

These newspapers are focused on specific areas within Elgin County and contain information about popular events, advertisements, obituaries and much more, dating as far back as 1853.

Individual newspapers can be searched by entering the name of the newspaper and the year you are looking for or you can use the advanced search option, entering the name of the newspaper and then sorting by electronic records. You can also visit our database to see the entire collection: <https://inmagic.elgin.ca/ask/>. Newspapers are available in yearly segments or in individual issues.

Examples of specific search types are outlined here: [Search Examples](#)

Archiv
Collect
October



Elgin County Journal Digitization Project



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Make A Donat

ElginCounty
Progressive by Nature

St. Thomas Times-Journal Digitization Project

Two students, hired under the Government of Canada's Young Canada Works in Heritage Institutions and Canada Summer Jobs programs, spent three months this summer continuing the ongoing work of digitizing and publishing online photographs and captions originally published in the *St. Thomas Times-Journal*, ca. 1950-1985. Since work on this project began in 2009, more than 30,000 photos and captions have been processed.

The Bruce County Archives has a total of only 6719 digitized photos (according to the website).



localnews

■ **HERITAGE:** The Women's Institute Tweedsmuir books are invaluable to researchers

Rural history books to be digitized

PATRICK BRENNAN
Times-Journal

If you ever lived in rural Elgin county, a snapshot of who you were, where you lived and what your community was like will live on at the Elgin County Archives.

A donation Friday of \$6,000 from the Elgin branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society will permit digitization of Elgin County Women's Institute Tweedsmuir history

books to continue.

"We ran a similar but much larger project in 2006-2007," said Stephen Francom manager/archivist of the Elgin County Archives. "We digitized all of the Tweedsmuir history books in our collection, at that time more than 50 volumes (covering more than 7,500 pages)."

The books are compiled by members of the Women's Institutes.

"They represent the farm

women contributions to their communities," said Jean Bircham, treasurer of the Elgin branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society.

"They were compiled in sections where these women lived. They are pictures and stories of the families and farms and people that lived in the area and they are invaluable for people who are doing family research and local history on various (subjects) such as the cheese factories."

The volumes are converted to PDF form and made available online at the Elgin County Archives website.

A manual process using acid-free papers and archival bindings is still the preferred technique for Women's Institutes. Typically a Tweedsmuir history book contains unique original photographs and documents.

Each branch has a Tweedsmuir convener whose job it is to co-ordinate building the volumes and having them digitized.

Older physical content in volumes may be very fragile as it gets older, Francom said.

"By digitizing them, we allow people to access that content without physically touching the material," he said.

"It also makes it available to a wider audience," Bircham said.

"We can let one researcher at a time come in and look at this book physically, but if it's available online to anyone with a computer and an Internet connection, an infinite number of people can be looking at the material at the same time," Francom said.



ROBERT CHAULK Times-Journal

Stephen Francom, standing, manager/archivist for the Elgin County Archives, points out an original photograph in a Tweedsmuir history book to Elgin Warden Dave Mennill, left; Helen Van Brenk, Tweedsmuir curator for the Elgin County District Women's Institute; and Jean Bircham, treasurer of the Elgin County branch of the Ontario Genealogical Society. Bircham presented a \$6,000 cheque Friday to the archives to support digitization of all the recent history books.



Elgin County Local History Books Are Now Online

In 2011 Elgin County
launched a project to
digitize rural history
books.

PRACTICAL QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. HOW MIGHT WE PLAN FOR AN EXPANDED DIGITIZATION PROGRAM?
2. HOW DO WE ASSIGN PRIORITIES TO ARCHIVAL COLLECTIONS TO BE DIGITIZED?
3. WHO ARE OUR POTENTIAL COLLABORATORS?
(Bruce County Historical and Genealogical associations?)



Practical Questions

5. HOW CAN WE OBTAIN THE FUNDS FOR STAFF AND EQUIPMENT?

I asked the Curator at the Elgin County Museum and Archives how they did it:

--Annually, they have hired students through the Canada Works employment program every summer, dedicated to digitizing the collection.

--Recently, a donor has funded a full-time digitizer for a year.

--They have just spent \$12,000 on a full-page newspaper scanner.



CONCLUSION:

Improving access to archives is essential to our lives because it transfers our social history from the realm of the academic scholar to the easy reach of each of our neighbours, whose personal identity develops through the stories we share within our local community.

Funding and grants for staff and equipment is needed to assist the Bruce County Archives to expand upon its current digitization program.

THANK YOU