



# BRITISH COLUMBIA REGIONAL DIGITIZED HISTORY

Annual Report 2022/23

MAY 16, 2023



## Introduction

British Columbia Regional Digitized History (BCRDH) has just completed its 6<sup>th</sup> full year of operation since students first began site visits to partner repositories to scan local historical resources. We are pleased to provide this brief report covering project activities from May 2022 to April 2023.

In its earlier incarnation as Digitized Okanagan History (DOH) the initiative was a less ambitious project expected only to serve 12 to 15 repositories in the Okanagan Valley but the intervening six years have witnessed a growth in the breadth of coverage and depth of content unimagined in 2017. Generous multi-year financial support from a private British Columbia foundation provided the core funding to allow BCRDH to leverage the expertise and resources available through the UBCO Library for the collective benefit of the regional heritage



*Canadian Pacific work gang, Revelstoke, ca. 1945. Revelstoke Railway Museum P00126B/revelstokeRail:216.*

community. Now partnering with some 50 community archives, museums and historical societies, BCRDH has provided access to digitized copies of a wide range of unique, local resources that would not have been otherwise possible. The provision of digitization services and the creation of shared access portal (<https://bcrdh.ca>) through which digitized content can be searched, discovered and shared has significantly increased the collective capacity of the regional heritage community to enhance access to under-utilized resources for the benefit of the researching public.

While providing obvious benefits for community partners and researchers, pursuit of this initiative has also benefited UBCO. Creating and providing services for the benefit of the collective heritage community allows UBC to realize one of its important strategic goals relating to community engagement. Certainly, there is both some surprise and gratitude from partner repositories that have benefited from their participation in the project. Moreover, the premise on which BCRDH is based – the notion of working collaboratively across many partner repositories to promote greater collective access to historical materials – is quite unique. It's more common, particularly in universities, to see special collections normally operate on an "ownership" or "control" model and focus their efforts on only objects belonging to their own institutions. Working in a more collaborative manner it could be argued results in access to a greater diversity of material than would have been possible drawing on the holdings of any single organization.



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## BCRDH by the numbers

2022/23 was by far the project's most successful year in terms of new partners added, growth of content and increased user visits to the website.

### Partner organizations

There are currently 30 participating organizations from the original catchment area for DOH, a figure that significantly exceeded estimates for the original scope of the project. The initial success of DOH led to interest in repositories in the neighbouring region to the east and the creation of a new Kootenay Columbia regional collection gave rise to the rebranded British Columbia Regional Digitized History project in early 2020. The addition of five more organizations now bring partner participation from that area to 16. In 2022 BCRDH added a third, and final, Thompson Nicola region from which there are four new partners. Collectively some 50 community partners across the three regions in the southern interior of the province have contributed content to the BCRDH platform.

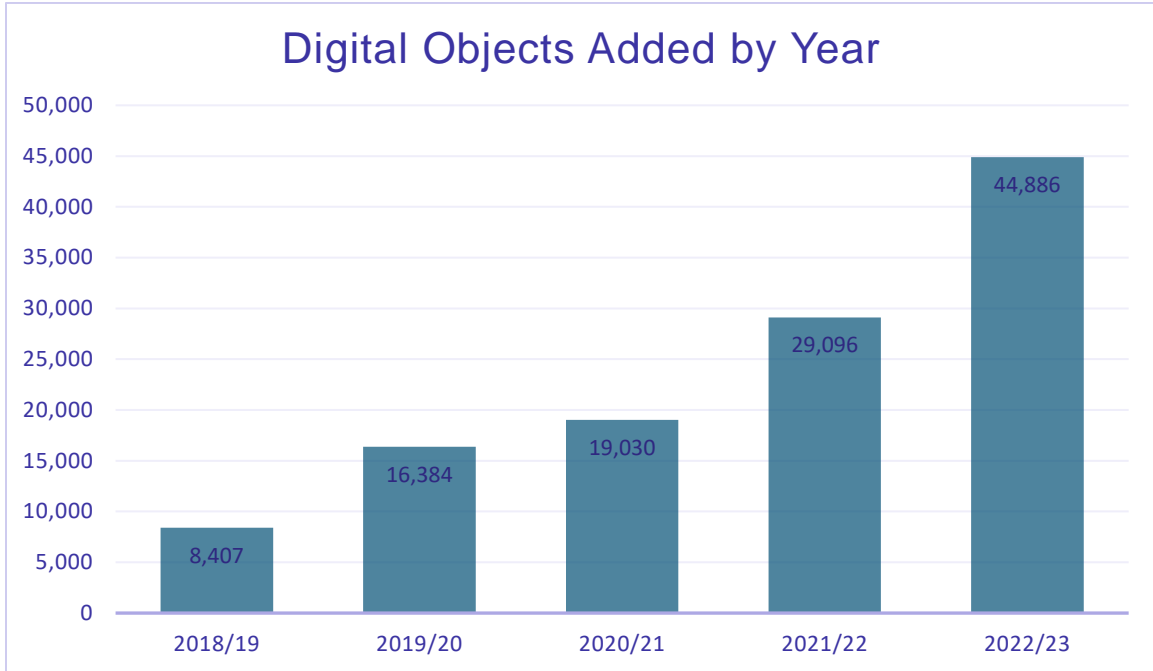
### Growth of collections

During this past year, BCRDH enjoyed by far its most productive year to date with the addition of 44,886 new digital objects bringing the cumulative total to 118,524. Of this total the two largest components are photographs and newspaper issues. The platform currently provides access to 88,760 photographs of which approximately 39,181 were added over the past year. Of the 26,687 issues of community newspapers, 5,107 were added during the reporting period. The site also provides access to hundreds of oral history recordings as well as a broad range of other historical resources including archival documents, maps and plans, audio and video recordings and publications.



*Group of golfers at Hedley Golf Club, 1910. Hedley Museum P1698/hedley:5049.*

For comparative purposes, the following figures show annual digital object growth over the past five years.



### User metrics

BCRDH uses Google Analytics to generate usage statistics to track the number of website hits, number of users, user locations, time spent engaging with digital content, and popular search terms. Some of the important statistics from the past year include:

- **549,039 website visits** in 2022/23 representing a **70% increase** year-over-year;
- **27,894 new users** accessed the BCRDH portal representing a **105% increase** year-over-year;
- Users in Canada accounted for 91% of site visits with the vast majority of those (89%) originating in British Columbia;
- Users spent an average of about 9 minutes in the BCRDH portal, suggesting that they are engaging with the content and using the platform’s built-in hyperlinks to navigate to related objects;
- Most users (55.5%) accessed the site using desktop computers while 40% used mobile devices.

Customized reports specific to each of our partners are generated and distributed three times a year. This data helps partner organizations better understand the online use of their resources and the online statistics can be combined with in-person visits to create a more accurate picture of usage and impact.

## Community newspapers: Chronicling local history

Often available only on microfilm at select locations, newspapers have provided an unparalleled breadth of information about the histories of the communities of which they form a part. Digitizing and making the contents of these publications available and searchable online adds immeasurably to the value of these

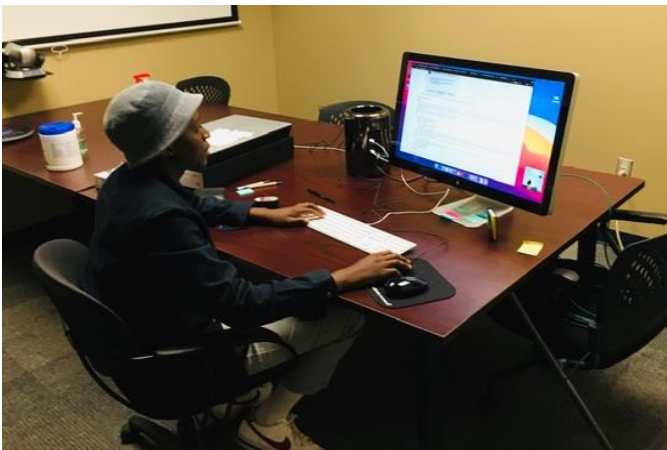


*Slovan City News building, 1897. Slovan Valley Archives. No. 1906/svhs:1891.*

resources. BCRDH currently provides access to ten newspaper titles consisting of over 300,000 pages of searchable text. During the past year over 5,000 newspaper issues including Armstrong Advocate and Armstrong Advertiser (2,886), Kelowna Courier (1,727) and Kootenay Express (463) were added to the platform. To improve the visibility of and access to community newspapers we created a single consolidated collection available at BCRDH's top level <https://bcrdh.ca/islandora/object/news%3Aroot>. To help refine searching a new facet for "newspaper title" has been added which allows users to limit their search results to a single title if necessary. To assist users to navigate the BCRDH newspaper content we have created a short document which will soon be made available on the website as will a video version of instructions <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpsqczY0zf8>.

## Student experiential learning

Since its inception BCRDH has recognized the importance of involving students in this project and providing them with meaningful learning opportunities.



*Allan Nganga, Undergraduate Academic Assistant scanning archival material in digitization lab, 2022*

inspired to follow their UBCO Bachelor's degrees with Master of Library and Information studies with an aim to enter the information professions.

BCRDH graduate assistants pursuing degrees in library and archival practice at the Master's level have been open about the benefits of work-integrated learning in an academic library environment through BCRDH. Some have gone on to pursue PhDs in the digital humanities, or other aligned advanced degrees. Upon completion of their MLIS credential, graduate assistants have applied the skills and knowledge acquired in their experiential learning to informational roles at Burnaby Public Library, the City of North Vancouver, the University of Toronto, and the Library of Congress Junior Fellows Program. Among our undergraduate complement several have been

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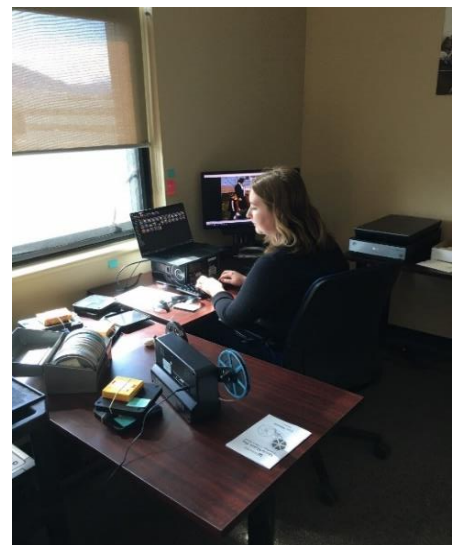
During this reporting period, BCRDH has become more involved in supervising credit-bearing practical learning courses at UBC's iSchool. Leveraging the same ethic of delivering service to heritage organizations in their community context, these students have consulted with and completed projects with positive operational impact to their host repository. This year, we have supervised two graduate students in developing and delivering policy documents for the Trail Museum and Archives and the Arrow Lakes Historical Society (Nakusp). This strengthens the regional network of archival support, and brings Master's students to B.C.'s southern interior in an innovative way.

Students joining the BCRDH team begin with a comprehensive set of training modules to support a full range of their project activities. In addition, they are also provided with access to a very detailed project knowledge base that they can consult as necessary. They are also encouraged to check in with other staff and colleagues on the student team and peer mentoring has happened in the past. The work of undergraduate students is primarily based on scanning material and preparing digital assets for upload to the BCRDH platform. The work of graduate students has largely focused on ingesting packages and interacting with the Islandora digital repository environment, metadata development and cleaning, managing the project's communications and social media presence, compiling and distributing web analytic reports, and working on various other special projects as necessary.

Students participating in BCRDH have the opportunity to develop some important technical skills broadly relating to digitization but they also take away some more general skills. Students are encouraged to be self-directed under guidance, with clear expectations of communication, organization, and time management. This scaffolds the development of supported independence in a working context. Balancing our emphasis on individual accountability at the task level, students are encouraged to take advantage of being part of a team and to help assist one another. As student staff become more comfortable in their roles, we invite them to exercise creative and critical thinking in response to solving emergent technical problems. Often this has followed a pattern of piloting and documenting work flows for digitizing formats new to the project, or editing received digital assets to meet specification for ingest.

Beyond specific skills developed or enhanced through their work with BCRDH, students have also benefited from exposure to materials with which they have interacted. Numerous students over the years have mentioned how interesting it was to have the opportunity to learn about the history of the region in which they have studied.

The considerable success that BCRDH has enjoyed is in no small measure due to the contributions of diverse and talented student teams employed over the years. Over the past year in particular we are grateful to have access to a very effective and dedicated team of students. Despite slightly lower than normal staffing levels (3 full time summer positions and 2 part time positions during term) BCRDH enjoyed its most productive year to date with the addition of over 39,000 new photographs alone.



*Undergraduate Academic Assistant Elizabeth Langton working in digitization lab, 2023*

2022/23 Student team quotes:

*I've always been passionate about the Okanagan's local history and I was excited to work with a program that directly impacted my community....This was my first time ever handling archival material and each time I scanned a photograph, I felt responsible for a part of history....My job has nurtured my passion for archival work and I am looking into the Master of Archival Studies at UBC Vancouver.*  
Elisabeth Langton, Undergraduate Academic Assistant

*I began working with BCRDH during my final year of my undergraduate degree at UBCO. I initially applied for the job as I began considering whether or not I wanted to apply for graduate school in archival studies....I have since begun an archival studies program and my work has changed as I transitioned into a graduate coop position. ... Being able to continue working with BCRDH during my graduate studies has given me the opportunity to integrate and comprehend what I have learned in an academic setting in a practical one.*  
Morgan Ryder, Graduate Academic Assistant

*Working on this project has helped me feel a sense of connection to B.C.'s history. I am grateful for this sense of involvement in B.C.'s communities, especially as an international student living here.*  
Allan Nganga, Undergraduate Academic Assistant

## Communications and sharing the BCRDH experience

From the outset of this initiative creating, maintaining and strengthening relationships with partners has been an important component of its success. To help build trust within the heritage community significant efforts have been invested in ongoing communications with partners and to the extent possible meeting with them at their locations. Site visits wherever possible have been coordinated with trips to retrieve or return materials for digitization.

To help keep partners informed about project activities BCRDH has continued to publish a semi-yearly newsletter and we also maintain an active and stable social media presence through Instagram, Twitter and Facebook. Our Instagram platform has had the most growth in followers this year, with an increase of 69 for a total of 678 followers. We have begun to diversify our social media content to include video, audio, and textual content to represent the diversity of BCRDH's material. Video and audio have been the most successful, resulting in more shares on these posts than standard image posts. Our audience is primarily located in the Okanagan, with smaller concentrations in the Vancouver and Victoria regions.

Last October Paige gave a presentation at the 2022 Canadian Research Knowledge Network (CRKN) conference on digital heritage. The conference was 'Strength in Community,' which is a concept on which BCRDH is founded and certainly exemplifies. The presentation provided an overview of BCRDH's road so far, and offered observations that resolve operational principles and values that position BCRDH for further sustainment. View the presentation slide deck here: ["Radically Regional: GLAM Partnerships through the BC Regional Digitized History Example"](#)

## Additional sources of financial support

During the past year a grant from the Central Okanagan Foundation supported two large content additions to the BCRDH website. The funding allowed for the digitization and upload of over 34,000 pages of the Kelowna Courier (1973-1977) to the newspaper collection. The grant also funded the addition of a collection of 5,200 digitized photographs from Lake Country Museum to the BCRDH platform. The images document the lives of



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early residents and the evolution of Lake Country's original four wards – Winfield, Oyama, Okanagan Centre and Carr's landing. The photographs chronicle the development of the fruit industry and farming and ranching activities in the area as well as the use of local lakes and waterways for transportation and recreation.

In addition, BCRDH was also very grateful to have received an additional \$10,000 from a community donor and these funds were put towards supporting student salaries.

### Digitization grant assistance

To help maximize resources to support efforts to digitize more material for BCRDH we have assisted partners in the preparation of grant application. Last year a successful application to B.C. History Digitization Program submitted by the Armstrong & Spallumcheen Museum funded the digitization of approximately 100 community television *North Okanagan Reports* programs from the mid-1990s. During the current year we assisted the Revelstoke Museum & Archives in the preparation of a successful grant to support the digitization and ingest of 200 large scale maps which will be added to the BCRDH platform in the summer or fall of 2023.

## Looking forward

In something of a break with precedent we anticipate adding only a limited number of new collections over the summer and we have reduced student staffing relative to previous years. Summer work will focus on clearing out the small backlog of existing digitized content, reviewing and revising existing descriptions and modifying the BCRDH website and its linked resources. The summer will also mark the transition of BCRDH operations to a more sustainable model.

Since its inception BCRDH has operated as a unique, community engaged collections-oriented initiative largely supported with external funding. As such it has enjoyed a special position with the UBC Okanagan Library, linked in function and principle to the nascent Okanagan Special Collections which was formally established during this same time. In its start-up phase, BCRDH was staffed at levels that allowed it to be very pro-active in pursuing many digitization projects with various partners simultaneously. The time has come to enact plans to transition BCRDH to a more regularized activity within the broader Special Collections and Archives program. While the community partnerships formed to date will continue to be cultivated, and new ones may yet be formed, digitization work is envisioned to be organized as a set of more discrete projects that can be committed to within the bounds offered by Okanagan Special Collections, or performed on a case-by-case basis in response to future external funding.

The BCRDH project has far exceeded initial expectations in terms of participating partners and the volume of content made available online. The digitization work conducted over the past six years exposed for discovery a significant trove of local historical resources that would have not otherwise been made available. In its coordination of BCRDH the UBC Okanagan Library has lent archival and technical expertise to benefit the regional heritage community by creating a unique collaborative model for providing digitization services and creating a shared portal for access. Community partners often express their appreciation for BCRDH and comment that their participation in the initiative has increased public awareness about the existence of their repositories and provided for the online discovery of their content.



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## Partner Organizations



- Armstrong Spallumcheen Museum & Art Gallery
- Boundary Historical Society (Grand Forks)
- Boundary Museum & Archives
- Enderby & District Museum & Archives
- Falkland Historical Society
- Fintry Estate (Kelowna)
- Greater Vernon Museum & Archives
- Greenwood Museum & Visitors Centre
- Hedley Heritage Museum
- Historic O'Keefe Ranch (Vernon)
- Kelowna & District Genealogical Society
- Kelowna Public Archives
- Kettle River Museum (Midway)
- Lake Country Museum & Archives
- Lumby & District Museum
- Naramata Heritage Museum
- Okanagan College Library
- Okanagan Falls Heritage Museum & Bassett House
- Okanagan Historical Society
- Oliver & District Heritage Society
- Osoyoos Museum Archives
- Peachland Museum
- Penticton Museum & Archives
- Princeton Museum & Archives
- Roman Catholic Diocese of Nelson Archives
- Sicamous & District Museum & Archives
- South Similkameen Museum (Keremeos)
- Summerland Museum & Archives
- UBC Okanagan Library Special Collections
- Westbank Museum



- Arrow Lakes Historical Society (Naksup)
- B.C. Interior Forestry Museum (Revelstoke)
- Creston Museum
- Doukhobor Discovery Centre (Castlegar)
- Fernie Museum
- Golden Museum & Archives
- Kootenay Lake Historical Society (Kaslo)
- Nelson Museum, Archives & Gallery
- Nikkei Internment Memorial Centre (New Denver)
- Revelstoke Museum & Archives
- Revelstoke Railway Museum
- Selkirk College Library (Castlegar)
- Silvery Slocan Valley Historical Society (New Denver)
- Slocan Valley Historical Society
- Trail Museum & Archives
- Windermere Valley Museum



- Ashcroft Museum
- Chase & District Museum & Archives
- Nicola Valley Museum & Archives (Merritt)
- Salmon Arm Museum & Heritage Association

### NEWSPAPER PARTNERS

- Okanagan Valley Newspaper Group
- Black Press

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*Cover image: Frederick Niven and John Murray Gibbon at Lake of the Hanging Glaciers, mid-1920s. Windermere Valley Museum. A0125/windermere:125.*