

USING ARCHIVAL PHOTOGRAPHS IN A MULTIMEDIA REPRESENTATION OF THE HUMAN HISTORY OF THE UPPER ATHABASCA VALLEY

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ABSTRACT: The Upper Athabasca valley was the site of Metis habitation during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These people left the area at the time that Jasper National Park was formed, however, their activities have left an enduring imprint on the landscape. Our research involves identifying and scanning archival materials, particularly photographs, related to the homesteads. The multimedia project provides an important representation of this historic human presence with the river valley environment.

KEYWORDS: multimedia, archival, photographs, Jasper National Park, Athabasca River Valley, Metis, landscape change

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INTRODUCTION

Over the summer of 1998, a team of researchers, working under the auspices of the Culture, Ecology and Restoration Project of the University of Alberta, developed a multimedia product to present the history of farmers in the Upper Athabasca Valley. The project focused on the use of archival photographs, mainly those available in the Jasper-Yellowhead Museum and Archives and the Jasper National Park Library. In dealing with the use of archival photographs in a multimedia environment, the team encountered several challenges and found several advantages to this format.

BACKGROUND

Jasper National Park

Jasper National Park is located approximately 350 km to the west of Edmonton, in the front ranges of the Rocky Mountains. It encompasses much of the Upper Athabasca River Valley. The park was created in 1910 by an act of the Parliament of Canada with a mandate to preserve and protect the wilderness aspects of the park. It is now one of the top ten tourist destinations in Canada and is world renowned as an ecotourism

destination. Jasper National Park receives about two million visitors each year. The growth in the number of visitors is increasing exponentially. Most of the visitors do not venture beyond the easily-accessible front country. As a result, some of the most popular sites are suffering heavy user impact. Park Management is in the process of developing a new Management Plan for the Park.

Culture Ecology and Restoration Project

The Culture, Ecology and Restoration (CER) Project (<http://www.ualberta.ca/~cerj/cer.htm>) is a three-year joint research initiative between a consortium of researchers based at the University of Alberta, and Jasper National Park. The Principal Investigator is Dr. Eric Higgs (Department of Anthropology, University of Alberta).

The project is guided by two central questions:

1. What is the extent, character and ecological influence of past human activity in the montane valleys of Jasper National Park?
2. How can such historical knowledge of landscape change influence ecological restoration and management?

This multimedia project is one small part of the larger CER Project and addresses a very short time slice of human history in the Upper Athabasca Valley.

Farmers in the Upper Athabasca Valley

Although the Upper Athabasca Valley has been a peopled landscape for 8,000 to 10,000 years, the valley was largely a transportation route, rather than a settled area. During the late 1800's descendants of the fur traders, both native and non-native, and local native people began to settle in the valley and build farmsteads. In 1910, when Jasper National Park was created, these Metis farmers were removed from the valley and resettled in areas to the east and north of the park. There is little public awareness of the fact that people had lived in the valley prior to the creation of the Park.

MULTIMEDIA PROJECT

What is a multimedia product?

A multimedia product is one which involves the publication of a document which contains several kinds of media. These may include: text, audio, moving pictures, photographs, animation and maps. Our goal was to showcase as many photographs and

related documents as possible within the theme of land use within the Upper Athabasca Valley and to supply as many logical linkages between the text and the photographs.

What are the issues surrounding the use of archival photographs?

1. Locating the Photographs

The first issue which we faced was the location of the photographs. The Jasper-Yellowhead Museum and Archives holds a collection of some 400 images. The Jasper National Park Library also holds a photographic collection. However, we became aware of the fact that not just photographs, but documentation in all forms about the Jasper area is held in archives and libraries across North America.

Much of the documentation related to Jasper National Park was created by visitors. Among these were the Hudsons' Bay Company, the Northwest Mounted Police (later the Royal Canadian Mounted Police), Canadian National Railways, various religious organizations, representatives of the Government of Canada, the Alpine Club of Canada, as well as many early painter, photographers, adventurers and explorers. All of these people visited Jasper and then returned to their homes and headquarters. Consequently, collections of documents and photographs relating to Jasper can be found in Montreal, Ottawa, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Calgary, Victoria, and various locations in the United States. Much documentation also still exists in private collections.

2. Copyright

In Canada, copyright on photographs "exists for the remainder of the calendar year of the making of the initial negative or plate, or, where there was no negative or other plate, the making of the initial photograph, and 50 years thereafter".

Creators also have three moral rights which remain with them, even when copyright is reassigned. Moral rights pass to heirs, even if they do not inherit the copyright. These rights may be described in the following way:

1. No one may distort, mutilate or otherwise modify a work in a way that is prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the creator of the work.
2. The creator's name must be associated with the work, if reasonable in the circumstances.
3. The work may not be used in association with a product, service, cause or institution in a way that is prejudicial to the creator's honour or reputation without the creator's permission.

For published works, copyright extends for the life of the author plus 50 years. If photographs are published, they may not be copied from the published document without permission of the copyright holder, even if the copyright on the original image has expired. However, the original image may be copied. (Canadian Intellectual Property Office, 1994)

Because most of the photographs which we wanted to use were taken in the period from 1880 to 1930, copyright had expired on them, so the right to copy was generally not an issue. However, in many cases we were not able to observe the moral right of identifying the creator of the work. For many of the photographs, neither the photographer nor the donor of the photographs was known.

3. Obtaining permission and cultural sensitivity

Most of the individuals who appeared in the photographs have been dead for many years. However they have many descendants among the Metis communities in Western Alberta. We consulted the Metis Association about the appropriateness of using photographs. We received counsel which told us that as long as the photographs had been deposited with an archives and they were used in a respectful way, there was no need to consult further. The only photographs which raised any concerns were those of graves. For these, some people felt that family members should be consulted, although the concern seemed to focus on recent burials. The grave images which we used included a non-native grave and an image of the grave of an esteemed Metis woman, which we determined had been previously published.

4. Respectful Use

One of the unusual aspects of our project was the fact that we were often more interested in what appeared in the background of a photograph than in the foreground. Often the subject of the photograph was a person, but not the focus of our use of the photograph. While it would have been most respectful to identify the individuals in the photographs, in some cases, we were not able to do that.

In organizing our multimedia product, we also considered the issue of respectful display of photographs on the screen. We decided not to make pages which had to be vertically scrolled to display all of the text so that the images would always be presented intact. In that way, at no time would the bottom half of an individual's body be presented on the screen. Instead, we made sequential pages, which were linked by icons indicating that there was more information available.

5. User fees

As a result of government cuts to funding of archives within the Province of Alberta, many of the archives have instituted user fees for the publication of photographs, whether or not the archives owns the copyright to the photograph.

While I am sure that this has been hotly debated among the members of the archival community, from the perspective of the user, these fees have a chilling effect on the use of the material. If the copyright on a photograph has expired, the fees can be avoided if it is possible to locate a copy of the same photograph in an institution which does not charge fees or in private hands.

One of the determining factors in our project swiftly became whether or not we would be required to pay a use fee.

Use fees for the primary archives from which we might have chosen to use photographs are as follows:

Glenbow Institute	- \$ 10.00
Jasper- Yellowhead Archives and Museum	- \$ 10.00
National Archives of Canada	- \$ 00.00
Provincial Archives of Alberta	- \$ 150.00 (black and white) \$ 300.00 (colour)
University of Alberta	- \$ 00.00 (academic use) \$ 50.00 (black and white - commercial) \$ 300.00 (colour - commercial)

What are the Issues Relating to Scanning and Importing Images?

1. Scanning density

One of the secondary goals of our project was to supply back to the Jasper-Yellowhead Museum and Archives an archival-quality image of any photographs which we used. While the normal density required for print and publication is 300 dots per inch (dpi), files created at this density are quite large. The normal density used for screen display is 72 dpi, with resulting smaller files. To resolve this dilemma, we scanned the photographs at 300dpi, saving them in TIF format and then re-saved each image at 72 dpi in the JPG format.

2. Cropping and altering photographs and historical fidelity

Our goal was to tell the story of this part of human impact on the environment by allowing people to see the impact in the photographs. We wanted people to be able to see the photograph in the same way that they would see it if they went to the Archives to look at the original print. To achieve this, we did very few alterations. Alterations were restricted to edge-cropping and changing contrast, gamma, shadow and sharpness to achieve the best clarity in the photograph. There were no changes made to the content of the photographs, except that sometimes parts of the photo which were not visible in the original became visible in the computer image.

In working with archival photographs, it is not uncommon to find images which are poor quality or in poor physical condition. In some cases we chose to use photographs which were damaged and to show them damaged, so that people would recognize that they were viewing an unaltered image.

What are the Advantages of Using Multimedia for Archival Photographs?

Multimedia formats have several advantages for archival photography. First, it allows for relatively inexpensive storage, preservation and presentation of photographs. Presenting images electronically allows many people to use them without wear and tear on the original.

It also allows for relatively inexpensive distribution of images. Compared with printing a picture book, the cost of delivering electronic image products is relatively low.

The multimedia format also allows us to solve some of the frustrations involved in handling photographs. Printed materials are necessarily linear. In presenting information about a photograph in a print document, it must be placed near the photograph and the user is required to make the connections. In the multimedia format, it is easy to place an invisible link on top of a person or an object in a photograph and have the information automatically appear in a pop-up box when the cursor crosses that link.

Similarly, in print media, indexing is necessarily textual. For example, where a photograph shows a number of people and an extensive accompanying text describes those people, usually indexing would be supplied in the form of a list of names with page numbers. In the multimedia format, the photograph itself can be the index. A link can be made directly from each individual to the text about that individual.

Other kinds of archival documentation can also be easily integrated, including images of documents, such as birth or death certificates, or sound recordings by or about the subject.

While the image quality will never be as good as the original image, multimedia offers some definite advantages for the presentation and distribution of archival images.

Choices for Publication

We considered the Internet as a method of publishing this product and finally resolved to publish it in compact disc format. The advantages of web publishing are that the content is easily updated. However, Internet delivery requires both computer space and ongoing maintenance. Further, there is less opportunity for cost recovery.

Compact disc is a more permanent form of delivery, but has to be updated as a new version or edition. However, compact discs also demand a certain level of technological knowledge by the user. Unlike the purchasers of books, CD users expect publishers to supply ongoing help support for their products.

REFERENCES

Canadian Intellectual Property Office. 1994. *A Guide to Copyrights*. Ministry of Supply and Services, Ottawa.

