

Canadiana.org: One of Canada's oldest and newest digitization initiatives

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Abstract

Canadiana.org is a new independent, non-profit, alliance of partners, including Library and Archives Canada, from all parts of Canada's cultural, heritage, research, broadcasting and publishing communities, chartered to raise funds, receive donations and grants and to act as the overall coordinator and facilitator for digitization initiatives and related enduring access services and preservation infrastructures. Working with Library and Archives Canada under the framework of the **Canadian Digital Information Strategy**, **Canadiana.org** has a 'master plan' to facilitate a coherent national digital information strategy. The community has developed a bilingual metadata toolkit to suit most types of material as an option for those who need it. The community also supports a powerful bilingual public access Indexing and Discovery Portal system (right now branded AlouetteCanada) to enhance the searching and discovery of local digital collections of all types across the country.

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OK – quick, what's the name of Canada's newest collaborative partnership? Canadiana.org, of course! But what IS Canadiana.org you ask? If you thought you knew before, you might just find that, as of April of this year, the answer has changed.

A **new** Canadiana.org formed through the merger of the former CIHM (Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions), and the former CIDL (Canadian Initiative on Digital Libraries) and the former AlouetteCanada.

Canadiana.org in its new form is now a permanent alliance that will help to synchronize the efforts of partners in Canadian libraries, archives, museums and historical societies, as well as Canadian content creators themselves. It is mandated to facilitate long term digitization of Canadian collections and the gathering of metadata for new, born digital content, to coordinate the long term preservation of the digital content, and to enable permanent, open access to that content which is in the public domain or being made available with permission.

Initiated in 2005 by Library and Archives Canada (LAC), the **Canadian Digital Information Strategy** (CDIS) was drafted on behalf of over 200 stakeholder

organizations from a variety of sectors: publishing and media producers, creators, rights bodies, academics, provincial and federal officials, and memory institutions. Canadiana.org is mandated to work with LAC and to be the facilitator of the CDIS.

It is important to note that Canadiana.org is not in control of or taking over the mandate of any of these partner organizations but rather it is a forum where plans can be shared, synchronized and harmonized. It is invested, by its members and allies, with whatever strength this coalition wishes it to have in order to help them to carry out the shared vision.

Canadiana.org can be likened to the way a Laser behaves. In the case of a normal light bulb, the waves of light fly out in all directions equally but have very little power to do work. In a Laser, all the light waves are synchronized in order to work together to get a job done. And the amazing thing is that very little energy is required to achieve that efficiency and focus!

For some time now, many of us have spoken of our shared vision as being akin to building the original trans-Canada railroad that shaped and united this country. The builders began with a vision - but they also had to begin with what existed: the natural resources, the topology, the geographic obstacles and realities – just as we are beginning with the existing political realities, the existing infrastructure and options and the wide variety of standards and choices. But it was the shared vision that allowed the various partners to eventually overcome the barriers and to build the infrastructure that benefited all, just as we are working hard using a centralized approach to build a de-centralized solution.

For 30 years the CIHM, which began as a 5 year project, has worked to keep microfilming and now digitizing year after year with no stable, long term funding. CIDL and AlouetteCanada operated only through the financial assistance of their supporting partners – mainly members of CARL (Canadian Association of Research Libraries), including LAC.

Now, with these mergers completed, we're ready to get on with helping each other do the jobs we know need doing. We have the vision and the alliance – but we are missing the funding. The University and Public Library communities, LAC and Canadian Heritage have invested increasing millions of dollars in cash and in-kind contributions over the past 30 years. Now we're starting out together on a national fund raising effort and mass digitization project with the working title The Canada Project.

An independent working group consisting of LAC, University of Waterloo, BanQ (Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec) and the Open Text Corporation of Waterloo had been developing a vision of a national digitization project for almost 18 months. Now, with the merger complete, the Canada Project initiative also has a home within the broader alliance of partners that is Canadiana.org.

The goal of the Canada Project is to raise millions of dollars for a synchronized, distributed series of digitization projects from coast to coast, for all sectors.

The good news is that Canadiana.org isn't starting from scratch. We have a strong governance model that takes in all related sectors plus a national vision and growing goodwill from many sectors, including strong partnerships and strong alliances in various forms from coast to coast. We have the resources of over 30 years of research and collecting of Canadian content in both microfilm and digital formats resulting from the work of CIHM.

With a grant from the Canadian Heritage CCOP (Canadian Culture Online Program) the community has developed a bilingual metadata toolkit to suit most types of material as an option for those who need it. Watch for an announcement about this in June. The community also supports a powerful bilingual public access Indexing and Discovery Portal system (right now branded AlouetteCanada) to enhance the searching and discovery of local digital collections of all types across the country. There are already over 400 contributors of metadata to the portal and over 3,000,000 objects searchable through several portals. To check these out, go to either <http://alouette.ourontario.ca/rechercher> or <http://alouette.ourontario.ca/search> to try out the portal (note that these URLs are prototypes and will change later this year).

To thrive, Canadiana.org needs to keep growing, so if your organization has collections that you're digitizing and you want to contribute their metadata to be included in the portal – or if you're just getting started and have questions or you want to volunteer to help with this amazing national project – contact me. I'd be happy to hear from you!

Brief biographical information

Since the merger of AlouetteCanada with the former Canadiana Institute for Historical Microreproductions to form Canadiana.org, Brian Bell has become its Co-Executive Director. Brian is on a multi-year secondment from the Oakville Public Library where he has been Director of E-Services since 1987.

He has served as:

- Chair of the Canadian Initiative on Digital Libraries
- Chair of the Canadian Community Information Online Consortium
- President of the Ontario Library and Information Technology Association
- President of the Ontario Library Association
- Member of the planning committee for the Canadian Digital Information Strategy
- Member of the board, Canadian Institute for Historical Microreproductions

Brian was presented the W.J. Robertson Medallion for Ontario Public Librarian of the Year in 2007.

In his other life Brian tries to spend as much time as possible with his wife and 2 daughters and enjoys music, history, travel and outdoor activities like canoeing, hiking and gardening.

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