

■ **NOMINATED:** Cramahe Public Library digitizes history

Archives project shortlisted for provincial prize

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DID NOT WIN THE PRIZE

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COLBORNE — A Cramahe Public Library project to digitize the history formerly scattered in boxes throughout the township has been shortlisted for the 2014 Provincial Innovation Award given out by the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Sport.

They are one of only a half-dozen projects nominated, so they are heading to Toronto at month's end. Even if they don't win, Cramahe Public Library chief executive officer Mary Norton said in a recent interview, they'll at least be on the red carpet.

She will be accompanied by Cramahe Heritage Committee chair Lenna Broatch, with whom she has worked on the Digital Archives Project.

Arriving at the library in 2010, Norton recalled, "one of the things I inherited was lots of boxes. Through Lenna, I understood they were heritage documents, boxes and boxes of them."

"Heritage also had boxes and boxes, stuff in basements, different people's homes, here and there. I didn't really know how much material we had. And if anybody asked you for anything, it was difficult sometimes," Broatch said.

Wishing to unify and organize all this history and make it accessible, Norton applied for a Cultural Strategic Investment Fund grant from the province, enlisting the aid of Councillor Pat Westrope to get through the long and complicated process.

Their efforts were rewarded last year: they were offered a grant of 80% of the project's cost if they could come up with the remainder. The township came to their aid with \$6,000.

The grant kicked off a one-year project that started in April, funding two scanners, two lap-tops with special software, training on the equipment and two part-time workers. Out of 100 applicants and 11 interviews, Broatch said, they found two perfect candidates to get the project rolling — a former museum historian,



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Cramahe Public Library chief executive officer Mary Norton (left) and Cramahe Heritage Committee chair Lenna Broatch hope everyone will drop in at their big Cramahe History event on Jan. 26, to share their own heritage artifacts and stories and to celebrate the library's Digital Archives Project that has been shortlisted for a provincial prize.

EVENT POSTPONED DUE TO WEATHER

and a photographer and digital expert.

"We are extremely fortunate. They do the job because they love it," Norton said.

Months later, the Cramahe Digital Archives offers a well-organized bounty of photographs, records, letters, cards and artifacts. Interviews, photos, information about designated homes, the wonderfully rich Women's Institute histories, among other valuable resources, bring the past to life.

The archives home page spotlights some of their more colourful offerings, including the story of Christie Mill, the 1910 Cramahe Agricultural Society prize list, Cramahe Township in the 1878 Illustrated Historical Atlas, photographs of Cramahe

pets and farm animals, a list of designated buildings in Colborne and Castleton, and an exhibit called Penmanship, Lettering and Signage.

Fans of Downton Abbey can see what Cramahe girls of the time were wearing in a display called In Style. Railroad buffs can look at Colborne Railroad Stations (there have been several, none of which is still standing).

It may surprise many to see what a booming place Colborne once was in the Early Colborne Businesses display, with photographs of a few of the grocery stores, shoe stores, livery stables, blacksmith shops, clothing stores and other businesses that made Colborne a bustling burg as far back as the 1850s.

Perhaps it's the characters

of the past that intrigue Norton most, like Eliza J. Padginton (1862 to 1961). Padginton began her 70-year career as postmistress in January 1883. She sent newspapers to enlisted Cramahe men and women to provide a comforting taste of home during the Boer War, First and Second World Wars and the Korean War. Part of the display on Padginton is the selection of her Second World War Christmas cards.

Soon to be digitized is an account of fundraising that was undertaken to add a marker to her unmarked grave in Lakeport Cemetery in 1970, by which time very few still alive knew where it was located.

Close calls like that make Norton wonder what else might be lost if not for a place to store it

all, like the virtual archives.

Norton pointed out that the site has an interactive feature, where people who happen to know can help identify people in the old pictures. And if you know someone else who might help, there is a feature that lets you send a virtual postcard to that person to ask for assistance.

As a bonus, Broatch said, their part-timers are organizing those boxes into a real collection once they have entered their contents into the database.

A long-range project might be to set up a real archives if they could find the right space. Meanwhile, at least, the virtual archives is open and ready.

"This project has inspired us to think beyond the short term and the intermediate, and hope

we can achieve something bigger and grander for future generations," Norton said.

"As life becomes more fast-paced, this precious history becomes more important. And you have to hope the youngsters will recognize that somewhere down the line."

As a relative newcomer, Norton has found the project has deepened her relationship with Cramahe Township and its heritage. For long-time residents, she has found, it deepens their pride and sense of identity.

Broatch likes the fact that it's easily shared.

Both, however, face the looming one-year mark with trepidation: it will take fundraising to keep it going, and there is so much yet to do.

The first step to successful fundraising is awareness, and they are planning a big Cramahe History day on Jan. 26 at the Keeler Centre.

Everyone is welcome, from the children who will be fascinated at a glimpse of the lives their great-grandparents led to the older people with stories to share.

Wonderful things still remain scattered, Norton expects, and people who would like to share them can bring in their family records, photos or heirlooms to be digitized and added to the database for future generations to share.

"This project has focused us on the fact that we don't know what else is out there. We might find some more gems," she said.

There will be displays and guest speakers (including Dan Buchanan, Roseanne Quinn, Felicity Sidnell Reid and those associated with the project), and organizers are hoping a wider awareness and support will grow out of the event.

The Keeler Centre is located at 80 Division St. in Colborne, and the Jan. 26 event runs from 2 to 4:30 p.m.

Meanwhile, you can access the digital archives from the Cramahe Public Library site at www.cramahelibrary.ca.