

Policy, medicine, and historical sources: Confronting strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and “threats” of digital sources

(One researcher’s view)

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Core “context” documents

- On Canadiana
 - Medical journals (CIHM)
 - Pharmacy journals (CIHM)
 - General magazines (CIHM+)
 - Government records
- Elsewhere
 - Sessional papers (archives.org)
 - Statutes/ordinances/laws
- Newspapers (newspapers.com(\$); ourontario.ca; newspaperarchive.com (\$), Proquest (\$) etc)
- On Heritage
 - PMs records (difficult to use)

Personal digitization

- Pharmacy and medical records
 - Physicians' casebooks
 - Prescriptions
 - Lower level government records (unpublished sessional papers, etc)
 - Society records (pharmacy societies mostly)

SWOT that file

- **Strengths:** easy availability, limited text searching, research from home (good for students on limited budgets, too)
- **Weaknesses:** text searching deeply imperfect, visibility of digitized files (esp microfilm) a challenge, indexing of some files non-existent, *impression that this is everything*
- **Opportunities:** expand holdings, expand listing of holdings, wide availability
- **Threats:** (?) Digitization for profit may undercut access.

Potential research and pedagogical enhancements

- Limited holdings can give a distorted understanding of the historical landscape
- Broader scan of what *was* out there
 - For example: a list of all or major magazines published in Canada, beyond just the holdings
- Broader scan of what *is* out there
 - Potentially identifying where these are available (and the extent of holdings—using for example Word Cat data)

Making broad linkages

A hypothetical case

- A digitized personal journal from a Saskatchewan settler who was also a crafter and wife of a soldier/farmer.
 - Settler journals
 - Women's writing
 - Regional crafting
 - Soldier family life
 - Rural settlers documents
 - [regional] connection with other communities
 - Etc. etc.
- Providing such data would help researchers make connections

Opportunities...

- Could provide a scaffolding on which to build further research (e.g.: magazines)
- Could illustrate for students the broad connections between sources and themes
- Could avoid the problems of perception of limits to records
- Could also link disparate records (both digital and analogue) just as archivescanada.ca does