

Integrating equity and reconciliation work into archival descriptive practice



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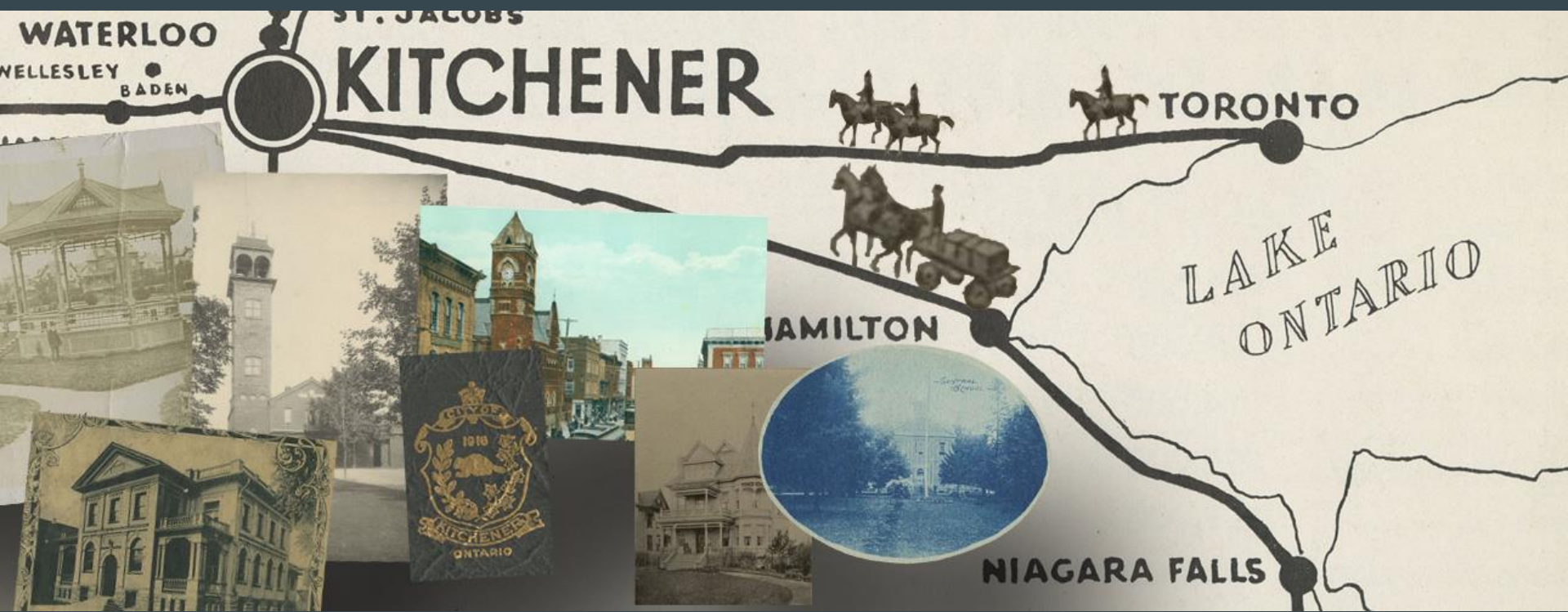
I live and work on the Haldimand Tract, the land promised to the Six Nations in 1784 for allying with the British during the American Revolution. It includes six miles on each side of the Grand River. These lands continue to be deeply connected to Indigenous peoples who have historically lived, and continue to live, here. They include the Neutral, Anishinaabeg, and Haudenosaunee peoples.

Map: [Living on Stolen Land](#) by Adam Lewis



Outline

- Department overview
- Equity and reconciliation within the Waterloo landscape
- Purpose of archival description according to the Rules for Archival Description (RAD)
- Reason for language in archival description changes
- Stated commitments in action
- Challenges and work ahead



Local History banner by Waterloo co-op student Katie Turriff

Equity and reconciliation within Waterloo landscape

- Complete staff turnover as of mid-2010s.
- Launch of Waterloo Digital Library (Islandora) and migration to the Archives Database (AtoM)
- UW vice-president of equity steps down
- White regional settlement of land along Grand River within boundaries of the Haldimand Tract.

Purposes of archival description

1. To provide access to archival material through retrievable descriptions;
2. To promote understanding of archival material by documenting its content, context and structure; and
3. To establish grounds for presuming the authenticity of archival material by documenting its chain of custody, arrangement, and circumstances of creation and use.

Reason for statement expansion

“While the language of the record creators has been maintained, Special Collections & Archives staff understand the impact language and images have both on researchers accessing our collections and on the perpetuation of systemic and cultural bias. As a result, staff are actively working to:

- replace inappropriate language introduced during legacy descriptive practices
- identify and name instances of racism, sexism, ableism and other forms of discrimination
- use current language that respects the people and events reflected in our collections during the (re)description of records”

Stated commitments in action

Waterloo High School Knitting Bee (65-1330)



Title and statement of responsibility area

Title proper	Waterloo Highschool Knitting Bee
General material designation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Graphic material
Level of description	File
Repository	University of Waterloo. Special Collections & Archives
Reference code	SCA98-GA68-1965-65-1330

Notes area

Availability of other formats	Envelope scanned as TIF files 2019.
General note	Boys' Slave Day poster with racist depiction of a Black person visible on wall behind knitting bee participants.

“The views expressed in PIB publications reflect the era in which they were produced. They include family planning thinking rooted in eugenics, the belief that the genetic makeup of the human population can be improved by limiting the ability of people deemed inferior from reproducing. Demeaning language about lower class and disabled people appear throughout.”

Parents' Information Bureau fonds

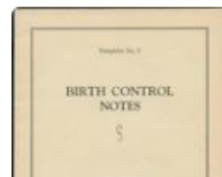
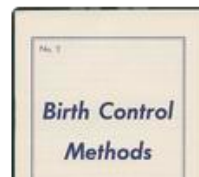


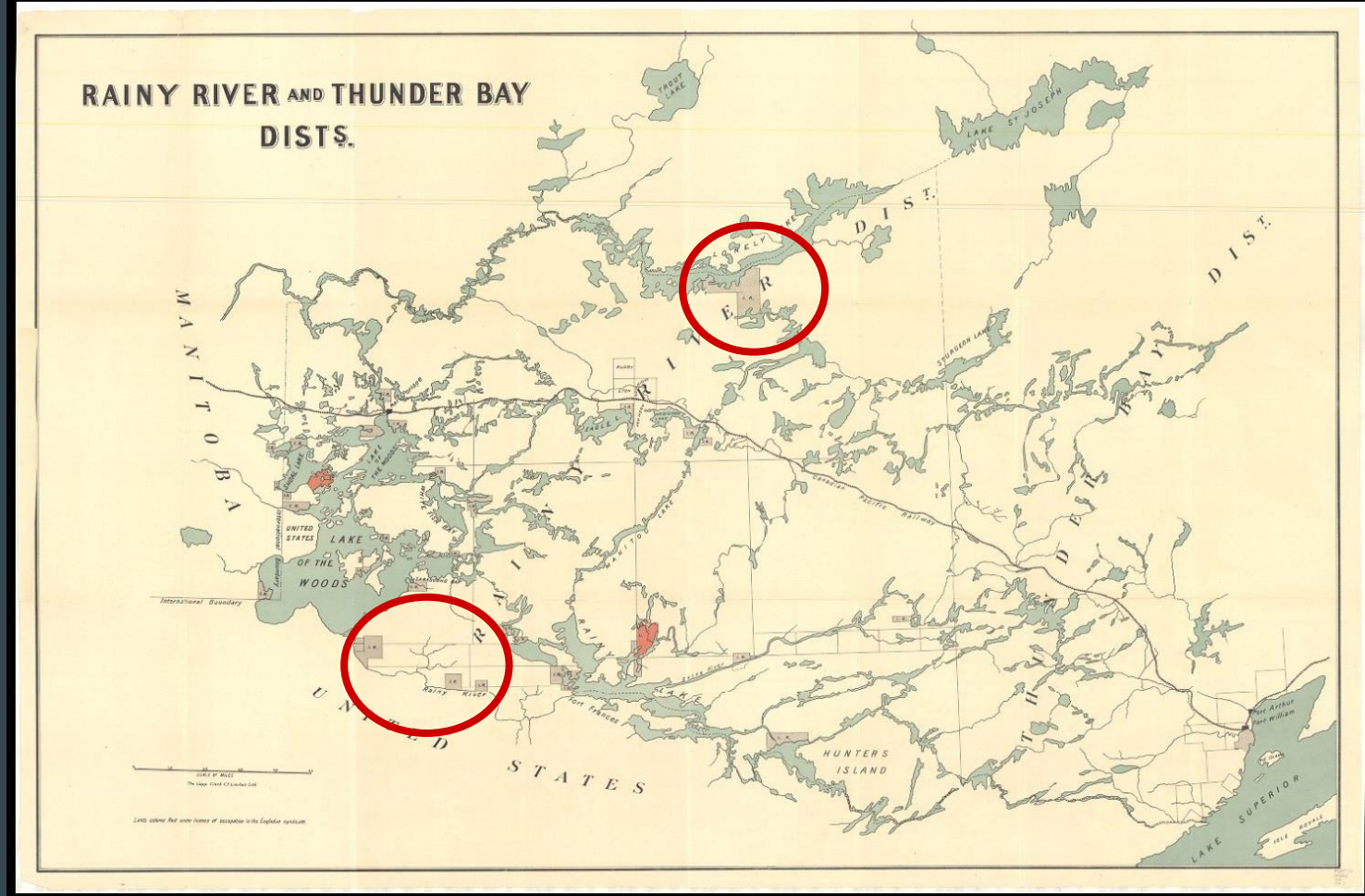
The Parents' Information Bureau (PIB) fonds consists of records from the clinic for family planning and birth control set up by A.R. (Alvin Ratz) Kaufman of the Kaufman Rubber Company in the 1930s. The main branch of the PIB was located at 410 King Street West in Kitchener, Ontario. Between the mid-1930s and the mid-1970s the PIB published a series of numbered reports, forms, and informational pamphlets regarding birth control and sterilization. The publication numbers were reused by the PIB for revised editions and for documents containing information about related topics that were likely circulated as part of an information packet.

Content note: The views expressed in PIB publications reflect the era in which they were produced. They include family planning thinking rooted in eugenics, the belief that the genetic makeup of the human population can be improved by limiting the ability of people deemed inferior from reproducing. Demeaning language about lower class and disabled people appear throughout. Information about the handling of this type of **language in archival descriptions** can be found on the Special Collections & Archives website.

Grid view List view

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 next › last »





Indigenous peoples - land tenure (G24493)

Other examples

- Prioritize use of family-inclusive language
- Eliminate “never married” and “had no children” from bios
- Avoid unnecessary assumptions about gender or sex
- Identify instances of Blackface, Brownface, Redface and Yellowface

Family-Inclusive LANGUAGE

avoid	why?	instead
“parents” “mom” “dad” “mom and dad”	Not everyone accompanying a child is a parent. Grandparents, step-parents, and nannies may not identify as parents. Not all children have a mom and dad.	“grownup” “adult” “caregiver”
“son” “daughter”	The children in someone’s care could be grandchildren, nieces, nephews, godchildren, etc. You may also not want to assume the gender of a child.	“children”
“extended family”	This term is usually meant to include grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins but for folks of many cultures this isn’t “extended” family- it’s just family.	“family”
“family resemblance”	We’re conditioned to look for similar features in family members so you may see resemblance where there is none. Many families include step-parents, adoptive parents, or parents who conceived with donated eggs or sperm. Inversely, don’t assume that a child who doesn’t look like their caregiver is adopted- many multi-racial children resemble one parent more than the other.	keep it to yourself
“members of a household”	Families don’t always live together. For example, families with divorced parents or incarcerated parents.	“family members”

Challenges and work ahead

- Not knowing what we don't know
- Lack of suitable RAD fields
- Talking (more) openly about the inherent whiteness of our holdings



Woolen Mill employees (GA227-3-17)

Further reading

- [Anti-Racist Description Resources](#) (Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia 2019)
- [Archiving Hate: Racist Materials in Archives](#) (Nelson 2020)
- [Identifying & Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives](#) (Caswell & UCLA Archives, Records, and Memory students 2016)
- ["Language Matters: Writing Inclusive Finding Aids"](#) (Suárez 2020)
- [SCRC Statement on Potentially Harmful Language in Archival Description and Cataloging](#) (Temple University Libraries 2018)

Identifying & Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives

An Incomplete List of White Privileges in Archives and Action Items for Dismantling Them*

Content produced in Michelle Caswell's *Archives, Records, and Memory* class, Fall 2016, UCLA
Poster design by Grace Enlihu

*All of the following call for nuance, context, and an awareness that oppression is structural.

Identifying & Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives

DESCRIPTION

PRIVILEGE

When I look for materials from my community in archives, they will be described in the finding aid and catalog records using language we use to describe ourselves.

ACTION

- Train all archivists to have cultural humility and describe materials using anti-oppressive language.
- Educate yourself continually and consistently.
- Hire more archivists of color to describe materials.
- Engage communities to ask how they wish to describe themselves. Compensate them for their labor.

PRIVILEGE

When I look at descriptions of archival materials, I am not always bombarded by/remembered of my otherness.

ACTION

- Hire more archivists of color to describe materials.
- Update finding aids that use outdated white supremacist language. Keep a note of your changes so that users can examine the history of the finding aid as an artifact.
- Engage communities to ask how they wish to describe themselves. Compensate them for their labor.

PRIVILEGE

Materials are described using my native language.

ACTION

- Hire multilingual people as archivists and translators and translate finding aids into appropriate languages.
- Encourage, value, and give credit for language expertise in MLIS programs and as continuing education.

Identifying & Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives

PROFESSIONAL LIFE

PRIVILEGE

People assume I'm unbiased because of my race.

ACTION

- Do become whiteness in archival practice. Name it. Uncover it. Discuss it. Address it.
- Intervene when you see whiteness perpetuated as a neutral default or assumption.
- Make your anti-racist values known and hold institutions accountable for the white supremacist values they perpetuate.
- Stop perpetuating the myth of archival neutrality.

PRIVILEGE

People assume I behave "professionally" because of my race.

ACTION

- Question assumptions about professionalism. Think critically about when those assumptions mask white supremacist values.
- Interrupt colleagues and users when they say racist things.
- Practice a phrase to have in your back pocket (such as "that's racist" or "would you say that about a white person?") to disrupt racist comments.

PRIVILEGE

I can be sure funders will see the value of my collections rather than designate them as "niche."

ACTION

- Communicate to funding agencies and allocators that their funding priorities often favor whiteness at the expense of people of color.
- Disrupt white supremacist thinking when you serve on review panels and making budgetary decisions.
- Uncover the whiteness of supposedly "universal" projects that do get funding. Name it. Discuss it. Address it.

Identifying & Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives

APPRAISAL

PRIVILEGE

I can be sure I can find materials representing people of my race/created by people of my race.

ACTION

- Implement policies to collect materials representing and created by people of color. Note that it will take time to build trust and change racist trajectories.
- Contact archivists at your local repository and tell them you want to use collections created by people of color.
- Institute participatory appraisal models that share appraisal decision-making power with communities of color.

PRIVILEGE

The objects I feel are valuable for my culture are also deemed valuable in archives.

ACTION

- Expand our cultural values to include materials created by communities of color.
- Educate yourself (continually, constantly) about what specific communities of color value. Don't expect communities of color to do the work for your appraisal decisions.
- Work collaboratively with communities of color as equal partners in appraisal decisions. Compensate them for their labor.

PRIVILEGE

I can assume archives will be committed to the preservation of materials from my community.

ACTION

- Educate yourself about what specific communities of color value.
- Demonstrate commitment to those communities through relationship-building and power sharing over time.
- Learn and honor culturally specific protocols for what should be preserved or destroyed.
- Train and hire archivists of color so they are making appraisal decisions.

Identifying & Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives

ACCESS/USE

PRIVILEGE

I can use an archives without eliciting surveillance.

ACTION

- Fight like hell to maintain the privacy of users.
- Do not collect data that identifies users.
- Do not require users to show an ID to access collections.
- Do not treat users as thieves.

PRIVILEGE

When I go to the archives, I can be relatively sure that I will see someone of my race behind the reference desk.

ACTION

- Hire more archivists of color.
- Recruit more undergraduate students of color into MLIS programs to train to be archivists.
- Provide financial and moral support for MLIS students of color so that they complete their programs.

PRIVILEGE

When I go into an archive, no one questions why I am there.

ACTION

- Train staff at all levels to identify and disrupt white supremacist assumptions.
- Foster a nurturing environment for people of color in the reading room.
- Create displays and outreach materials that show your archives values communities of color.

Identifying & Dismantling White Supremacy in Archives

EDUCATION

PRIVILEGE

I can be sure that archival practices and concepts from my culture will be represented in my education.

ACTION

- Prioritize and decenter archival education.
- Create syllabi that reflect authors and communities of color.
- Read and assign and cite scholars of color. Amplify their voices.
- Hold your professors accountable for disrupting white supremacy in the classroom.

PRIVILEGE

I can assume that when I attend an archival outreach or classroom instruction session, materials created by my community will be represented.

ACTION

- Use materials created by communities of color in archival outreach activities.
- Disrupt whiteness as a default or "neutral" category.
- Don't assume users are not capable of understanding nuance and complexity about race. Address white supremacy in your instruction sessions.

PRIVILEGE

I can be sure there will be other students of my race in my classes. I can be sure there will be instructors of my race.

ACTION

- Recruit more undergraduate students of color into MLIS programs to train to be archivists.
- Encourage students of color to pursue PhDs and become archival studies faculty.
- Provide financial and moral support for MLIS & PhD students of color so that they complete their programs.
- Hire archival studies faculty of color.