



Making Connections: Bringing Archives to Undergraduates

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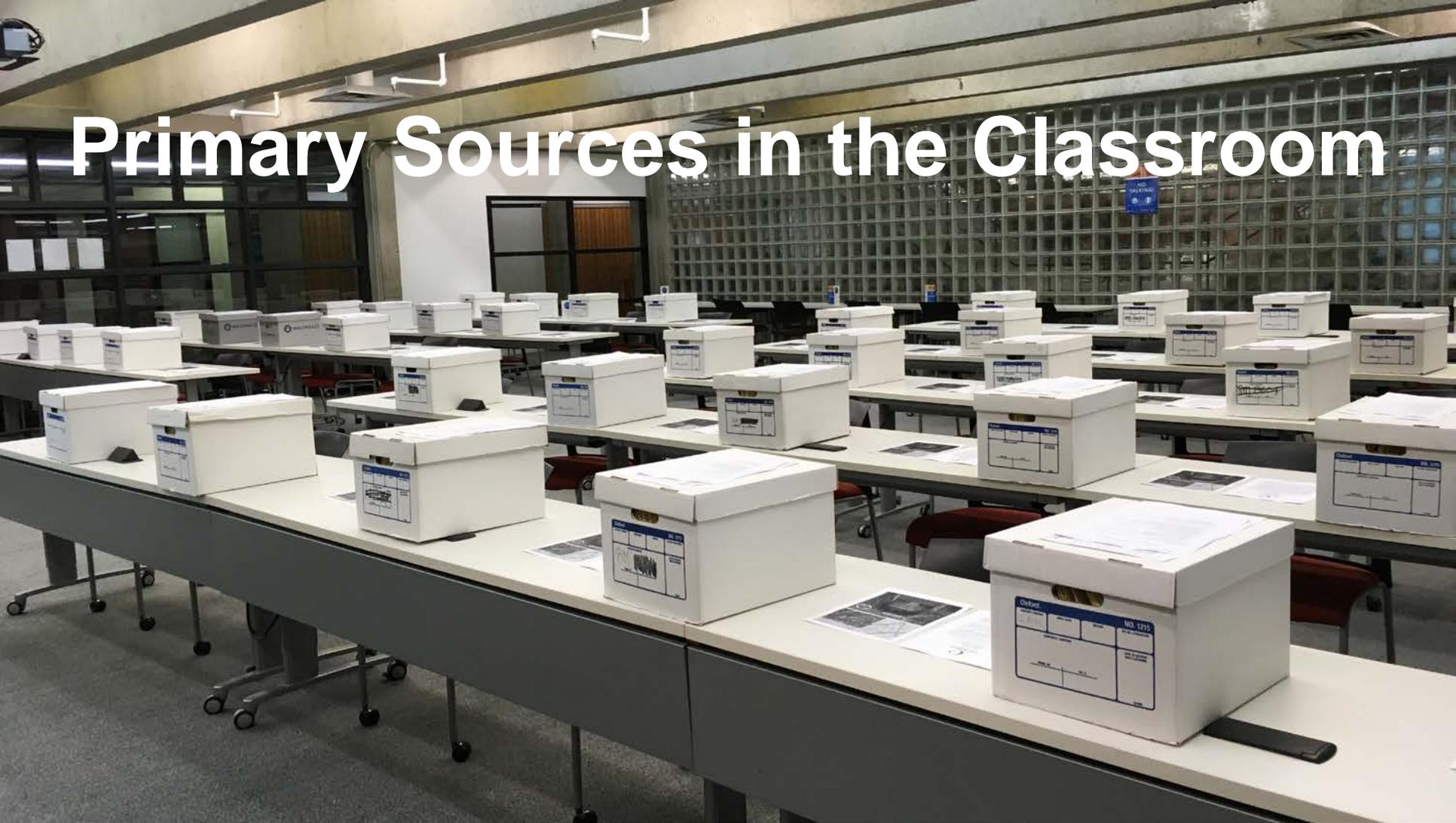
Special Collections Archivist, Concordia University Library

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Overview

- Teaching with primary sources at the undergraduate level
- Case study: *Telling Stories*
 - Collaborating with faculty and integrating with the curriculum
 - Impact of primary source literacy
 - Project outcomes

Primary Sources in the Classroom



One-time Instruction Sessions

- One-time instruction sessions
 - Proven less effective than multi-part sessions or full courses at teaching and reinforcing primary source literacy skills
 - Rarely provide students the opportunity to practice or reinforce literacy training
- Primary source and archival literacy are **built over time**

Yakel, E. & Malkmus, D. (2016). Contextualizing archival literacy. In C.J. Prom & L.J. Hinchliffe (Eds.), *Teaching with Primary Sources* (pp. 8-67). Chicago: Society of American Archivists.

Hands-on, active, and inquiry-based learning with “unmediated primary sources” is “one of the best ways to increase student engagement and teach higher-level critical thinking skills” (p. 298)

Rockenbach, B. (2011). Archives, undergraduates, and inquiry-based learning: case studies from Yale University. *The American Archivist* 74(1): 297-311.

Teaching with Primary Sources

- Teaching with primary sources:
 - Encourages the development of critical thinking skills
 - Exposes students to multiple points of view
 - Provides students with the opportunity to learn from first person accounts
 - Allows students to establish personal connections to the past
 - Fosters active learning

Negro Community Centre

- Negro Community Centre/Charles H. Este Cultural Centre
 - In operation from 1927 to 1995
 - Founded under the leadership of Charles H. Este, pastor at Union United Church
 - Located in Little Burgundy
 - Served Montreal's English-speaking Black community
- The Negro Community Centre/Charles H. Este Cultural Centre fonds
 - Contains over 25 linear meters of textual records, over a thousand photographs and negatives, architectural drawings, objects, and audio-visual items

Telling Stories

- 300-level undergraduate history course
- Part of the “Right to the City” pedagogical initiative
- Course grounded in historical research
- Students charged with learning from and activating the archive
- Students asked to return the stories they found in the archive to the community

Telling Stories

- 35 students, mostly in their second year
- Students were each assigned a box and tasked with becoming an expert in its contents



Archival Anxiety

- Primary source research is sometimes considered the domain of scholars, researchers, and graduate students
- Undergraduates are infrequent users of archives
 - Primary research is not often part of the curriculum
 - Search process can be daunting, outside their comfort zones
 - Research process outside expectations (closed stacks, reading room)
 - Lack of archival and primary source literacy training

Primary Source Literacy

- “The combination of knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to effectively find, interpret, evaluate, and ethically use primary sources within specific disciplinary contexts, in order to create new knowledge or revise existing understandings” (p.1)

Association of College and Research Libraries & Society of American Archivists (2017). Guidelines for primary source literacy

Archival Literacy

- Specific skills required to interact with archive
 - Basic understanding of archival theory and practice
 - Knowledge of how archival materials are organized
 - Ability to develop research strategies despite the uncertainty inherent in searching for archival materials

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Telling Stories

- First four classes were held at the Vanier Library
- Lectures, group exercises, and research time was incorporated into each class



Telling Stories

- Training in primary source literacy, archival literacy, visual literacy, and handling was provided
- Training was reinforced by in-class activities
 - Document analysis, photographic analysis
 - Knowledge sharing, peer-based tagging exercises
- Discussion and sharing between students was encouraged

Primary Source Literacy

- Group exercises reinforced primary source literacy training, including ability to:
 - Critically evaluate primary sources
 - Put resources into context
 - Understand, analyse, and communicate information found in primary documentation
 - Use materials in ways that respect cultural contexts, privacy rights, and copyright law
 - Consider reasons for silences and gaps in the documentary record

Association of College and Research Libraries & Society of American Archivists (2017). Guidelines for primary source literacy

Primary Source Literacy

- Students were also able to:
 - Distinguish primary from secondary sources
 - Understanding when they may want to use primary sources, in addition to secondary sources in their research
 - Determine what primary sources may be used for a particular project

Association of College and Research Libraries & Society of American Archivists (2017). Guidelines for primary source literacy

Public Outcome



APRIL 11TH
7:00-9:00
SHOWCASING MONTREAL'S
NEGRO COMMUNITY CENTRE
ARCHIVES

UNIVERSAL NEGRO IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION
(UNIA) LIBERTY HALL, 2741 NOTRE DAME
WEST/OUEST (NEAR ATWATER)
LIONEL-GROULX METRO

Public Outcome

- Student projects and the archive showcased in Little Burgundy
- Community invited to attend and participate
- Exhibition of reproductions from the archive
- Memory booth and photo identification activity

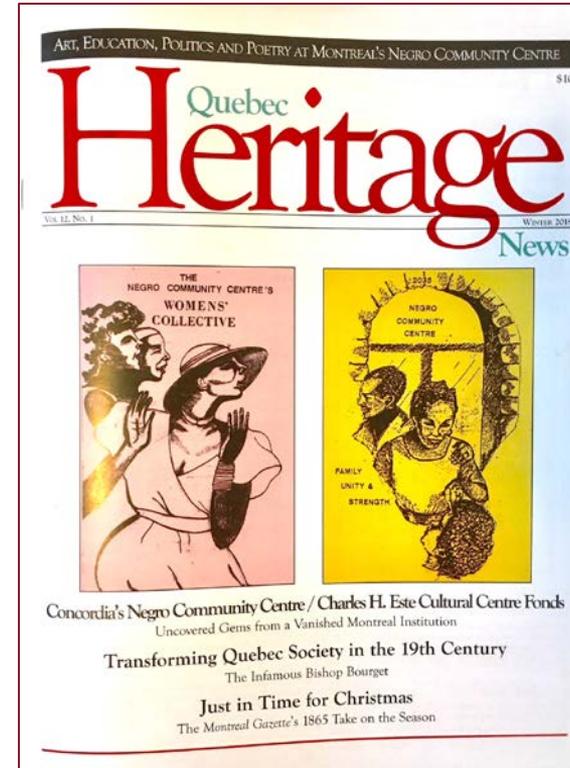


Public Outcome



Public Outcome – Quebec Heritage

- Special Issue containing 7 articles and 1 graphic novel by students in *Telling Stories*
- Another way the students went public that showcased the contents of the archive and the history of the NCC



Students became
active participants in
their education



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