

# Curating Digital Exhibits in Community Archives: A Comparative Study of the Park County Local History Archives and the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California

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## Abstract

Digital exhibits can be used to promote digital collections and enhance user engagement. They also offer opportunities to address archival silences and tell the stories of underrepresented groups. While the role and structure of digital exhibits have been explored in the context of academic institutions and public libraries, there is no research examining the methods and challenges of creating digital exhibits in local community archives, especially for exhibits that center marginalized communities.

This presentation discusses approaches to curating digital exhibits in community archives by examining and comparing exhibit-building activities by two organizations that highlight Chinese histories: Park County Local History Archives (PCLHA) and the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California (CHSSC). PCLHA is a community archive located in rural Colorado and has built the [Chinese Immigrants in Park County](#) exhibit. CHSSC preserves the histories of Chinese and Chinese Americans in southern California and has created several exhibits (e.g., [Grandview Gardens Restaurant](#)). We conducted a qualitative analysis of two data sources: the content of available digital exhibits and semi-structured interviews with four folks involved in building the exhibits. By selecting two community archives that have distinct local Chinese populations and histories and vary in scale and resources, we identified a range of approaches to curating digital exhibits. Our findings explore strategies for selecting topics and materials, choosing tools, building partnerships, and addressing absences in records. The presentation aims to enhance the understanding of the process of creating digital exhibits in local community archives, especially in terms of how to uplift the histories of marginalized communities.

## About the authors:

**Dr. Ruohua Han** is an assistant professor in the Library and Information Science (LIS) program at the University of Denver (DU). She obtained her Ph.D. in Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Her research interests are in personal archiving, community archives, and enhancing the representation and discoverability of the stories of marginalized communities in archival collections. Her work has been published in *Archival Science*, *Library Trends*, *Preservation*, *Digital Technology & Culture*, and *Records Management Journal* and presented at the Annual Meetings of the Association for Information Science and Technology, the iConference, and the SAA Research Forum. Her most recent article [Inconsistencies, inaccuracies, and inappropriateness: examining the representation of Chinese students in university archives with radical empathy](#) co-authored with Dr. Yingying Han examined the problems with how University of Illinois Chinese international students enrolled from 1904 to 1920 are represented in the university's archives. After joining DU, she started working with Dr. Krystyna Matusiak on collaborating with the Park County Local History Archives, which is located in a rural area of western Colorado. Together with DU LIS students, she assisted the Park County community with digitizing archival materials and building a

recently completed exhibit titled [\*Where Community and Learning Met: Rural Education in Park County\*](#).

**Dr. Krystyna Matusiak** is a professor in the Library and Information Science (LIS) program at the University of Denver (DU). She received her MLIS and Ph.D. from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. Dr. Matusiak's areas of research include digital libraries, digitization of cultural heritage materials, visual information, digital curation, community archives, and user studies in the digital environment. She is the author of over 50 peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and conference papers. Her book, *Digital Libraries: Research and Practice*, co-authored with Dr. Iris Xie, was published in 2016. Her most recent book, *Bridging Research and Library Practice: Global Perspectives on Education and Training*, co-edited with Drs Kawanna Bright and Debbie Schachter was published in 2023. Prior to joining the Library and Information Science program, Dr. Matusiak worked as an academic librarian for 12 years in public services and digitization. She has practical experience in digitization, metadata creation, and building digital collections. Since 2019, she has been collaborating with the community archive in Park County, located in a rural area of western Colorado. Together with DU LIS students, she assisted the Park County community with processing archival collections, digitizing materials, and building the [\*Park County Local History Digital Archive\*](#).