How the Data Rescue and Archives Weather (DRAW) Crowdsourcing Project Became an Online Participatory Archive

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This multidisciplinary project was established in 2015 with the direct involvement of archivists. DRAW was designed to rescue weather data buried in the analogue records of the McGill Observatory and move these into computer readable form. The transcribed data will be used by researchers interested in historical weather data to further climate change research. This was done through a user-friendly transcription web site designed to encourage members of the public or citizen scientists to participate in this process.

Since 2017 the DRAW project has been evolving into an online participatory archive with an emphasis to engage multiple audiences (researchers, students, public, citizen scientists) through outreach, including social media, to create a personal research experience with weather data they have created online. The data entry element in the project is now secondary. For DRAW to be a participatory archive, archivists have pushed the idea that the project could not be just about crowdsourcing to supply data for scientific use but to promote the concept that this data could be used by a broader research community for their own research projects. The engagement of wider communities is the goal for the participatory archives' elements in this project.

The project has created an active learning classroom curriculum in conjunction with educators to help CEGEP and University students link their weather data on extreme weather events to contextual historical sources such as newspapers. We have built an Educator's Corner section on our website to provide links to weather-related digital resources to help support lesson plans in Universities, CEGEPS and High Schools. We have also built lesson plans for the McGill Lifelong Learning Community to move beyond the student community to engage the public. The goal has been to increase community engagement to encourage the use of archives to create a research experience for themselves. As an online archive we are particularly well suited to support this endeavor.

About the author:

Gordon Burr is a double graduate of McGill University in history and Information Studies. Retired as an archivist in 2017, he now teaches in McGill's School of Information Studies as an adjunct professor and currently serves as the Chair of the Professional Development Committee of the Canadian National Archival Appraisal Board (NAAB). He has been active since 2015 in the DRAW (Data Research and Archives Weather) project to enable the capture of historical weather data to assist in climate change research.