

Digital Readiness Case Study in Brief: Chippewa Valley Museum



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About the organization

The Chippewa Valley Museum in Eau Claire, Wisconsin connects people to the community and inspires curiosity by collecting, preserving and sharing the region's historical and cultural resources. Significant collections document the history of farming and farm life, Gillette Safety Tire Factory, business and industry in Eau Claire including logging history, folk art, education, and the Hmong community in Eau Claire.

Digital Readiness Challenges and Opportunities

- **Western Wisconsin COVID-19 Archive Project:** A collaboration between UW Eau Claire and CVM, the rapid response collecting initiative documents the stories of how COVID-19 has impacted the region and its residents. They designed a submission form to collect community-driven metadata in standardized formats so that each artifact would be easy to upload into Omeka-S.
- **Oral Histories at Chippewa Valley Museum:** To meet patron needs, archivist Jodi Kiffmeyer digitizes oral histories on demand from the original audio cassettes. Using a simple cassette player, she converts the audio and sends recordings to the researchers. While it's not a perfect solution, for now it works, especially given the increased risk of cassette tape deterioration.
- **Workflows and documentation:** Solid, detailed documentation has been quite useful to CVM, and is among the goals for Kiffmeyer's future work. For example, their photo scanning workflow effectively guides volunteers, step-by-step, through a digitization and uploading process.
- **Digitization initiatives and progress:** The Chippewa Valley Museum has approximately 20,000 digitized photos, several dozen digitized oral histories, and just a few digitized documents. Portions of the photo collections are available through the L.E. Phillips Public Library and Recollection Wisconsin. CVM has contributed 75 oral histories to Listening to War: Wisconsin's Wartime Oral Histories.

Lessons Learned

- **Collaboration is key:** The three entities involved in the Western Wisconsin COVID-19 Archive Project came together to quickly launch a truly collaborative rapid-response archive.
- **Organization and project planning? Equally important:** Addressing a common challenge in cultural heritage organizations, Kiffmeyer reports "it wasn't until I digitized a few oral histories that I realized I had a project on my hands!" Although it wasn't possible to write a detailed project plan at the time, this experience provided a valuable lesson for future project work.
- **Training and hands-on experience:** The opportunity to "learn by doing" in a supportive and collaborative environment generates informal, invaluable networks of peer practitioners; it's these experiences and wider networks that the Digital Readiness Community of Practice is helping to create throughout Wisconsin.
- **Volunteers are a force of nature!:** We're not saying anything new here but it's worth repeating... volunteer staff contributions are essential to sustaining and growing digital collections. Check out our Digital Projects Toolkit post on engaging volunteers for more tips and info.

For more information about our Digital Readiness Community of Practice, visit <https://recollectionwisconsin.org/cop>.

