



Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

A Collection of Historical Photography

<http://www.sallowsgallery.ca/>

Creating the Framework

for

The Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

© Huron County Library, 2004



Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

A Collection of Historical Photography

<http://www.sallowsgallery.ca/>

Creating the Framework

Introduction

The Huron County Library, in collaboration with The Reuben R. Sallows Gallery, partnered to build The Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library – an online resource featuring the photography of Reuben R. Sallows (1855-1937), a renowned Southwestern Ontario photographer whose work captured the lives of Canadians at the turn of the last century.

Initiated by the need to preserve a historic collection of approximately 200 original photographs, taken during the career of this Canadian photographic pioneer, this project includes creation of a database which can be used for “collections management” purposes as well as serving as the backbone of a database driven website. With this in mind, The Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library Project is committed to making its digitized collection of archival photographs accessible to the widest possible audience.

Staff at The Sallows Gallery and Huron County Library has therefore collaboratively developed guidelines that we hope will:

1. Provide insight into the delivery of our digitized product,
2. Assist other cultural organizations in planning similar projects; and
3. Function as a component or building block upon which future or advanced digital library services can be constructed.

Purpose & Scope

The purpose of this document is to provide a basic introduction to some of the issues encountered in this digitization project, offering guidance and a summary of recommended practices to those organizations directly involved in this project. Specifically it addresses the reasons behind entering this project to create digital content, how this collection of images and its related metadata will be captured, stored and then delivered to the public.

Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

Creating the Framework

Purpose & Scope

Continued

Central to the design of this project and the purpose of this “framework” document is the fact that this venture is based upon partnerships – integrating the photographic collections of multiple cultural institutions, while partnering the “collections management” function of the digital collection with those “value-added” expectations associated with a digital library.

Early on it was recognized that while the project was initiated by the need to preserve, conserve and store original historic photographs, project plans would focus on using this new digital collection, and accompanying descriptions of the images, to create a digital library accessible on the Internet.

This product would include those value-added services expected with a “library” experience, ranging from search and discovery utilities, to browse and interpretive interfaces; and include specialized preservation and dissemination protocols.

In other words, from its conservationist roots, the Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library was more than a “digital collection” but envisioned as a rich, new “digital library” which could:

- Provide centralized access to geographically dispersed collections of Reuben R. Sallows’ work;
- Increase public awareness of the body of photographic art created during the career of “Canada’s photographic genius”; and
- Offer opportunities for students and teachers to view, interact with, and use the collections as an educational tool.

Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

Creating the Framework

Why Digitize?

Base funding support from the Government of Ontario, through the Ministry of Culture: Library Strategic Development Fund, and the Government of Canada, through a Young Canada Works at Building Careers in Heritage Internship Grant, permitted library and gallery staff to create a digital collection which could preserve, organize and provide increased access to a base collection of original photographs donated by the photographer's daughter, Nancy Cooke, to establish The Sallows Gallery housed in the Goderich Branch Library.

It was agreed between the two partnering organizations that digitization provided an opportunity to do more than simply preserve this collection of original materials. We could establish a means of organizing this core collection of photographs while provide a means of increased accessibility using a searchable database structure. Photographs that were too fragile to be handled or exhibited could then be searched and viewed online by anyone from anywhere.

The power of partnerships and visioning continued when we realized that expanding the scope of our online searchable database could create a means of providing access to six other geographically dispersed collections of Sallows' works located across Southwestern Ontario. Creating one centralized location from which researchers could access these works, currently within the public domain, would make it possible to easily access images for comparison or research.

Expanding the number of our contributing partners in our "collection development" process would enable us to bring together the historic photographic collections of multiple partnering institutions – namely:

- The Reuben R. Sallows Gallery;
- Huron County Museum & Historic Gaol;
- Huron County Historical Society;
- University of Guelph Library, Archival and Special Collections;
- The University of Western Ontario Archives; and
- Archives of Ontario.

Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

Creating the Framework

Why Digitize?

Continued

Together we could not only further contribute to the preservation and promotion of this valuable collection, but provide a means of accessing or “visiting” a gallery of photographs that had previously been inaccessible. Additional benefits to this project would obviously include:

- Organizing and cataloguing the images, including recording information on their source and condition;
- Sharing of “best practices” and expertise among the participating partners;
- Establish guidelines which could be adopted by other cultural agencies; and
- Create an aid for collection management which could be used primarily by both Gallery & Library staffs - the contents of which could be imported into the cataloguing system currently used by the Museum and into the system to which the Library was planning to migrate.

Hidden benefits of creating this digital collection would include:

- Enhanced preservation & conservation of historic & often fragile materials;
- Increased outreach with public access;
- Marketing and enhancing awareness of Reuben R. Sallows, the collection(s) and the repositories;
- Provide a means of collecting disparate materials; and
- Create working partnerships with other collections and/or cultural institutions.

Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

Creating the Framework

The Digital Collection

The Original Photographs

Early images from Sallows' photographic career consist primarily of formal studio portraits and carte de visites; however his trade also included a large body of commissioned photographs. Most of these items are fairly uniform in size – the early works being created using standard 5x7 and 8x10 inch size glass plates, and his vast number of commercial works being a standard size. The high quality of materials used by the photographer not only ensured the survival of these historic images, but that the photographic items contributed by each lending institution to this project were in good to excellent condition.

Increasing the number of contributing collections would ensure that the “digital library” contain examples of all the formats created by Sallows – cartes-de-visite, photo cards, photographic prints, postcards, stereoscopic cards, and studio portraits. Each individual collection was also small in number, with no single collection exceeding 350 items.

Access to the individual collections would vary depending upon the partnering institution. The scanning and cataloguing of images from the base collection at The Sallows Gallery would be done onsite; whereas the scanning technician and cataloguer would travel to the Archives of Ontario and Universities working with their collections onsite. In all cases, there was to be limited handling of the originals, with items handled by only two or three staff members wearing curatorial gloves.

Inclusion of the images owned by the Huron County Museum and the Huron County Historical Society would involve removal of the Sallows' materials from the closed stack collections at the Huron County Museum. All materials borrowed being logged out, with between 20-40 individual items borrowed and recorded at a time. Materials would be transported in carrier boxes, by authorized staff, to The Sallows Gallery where scanning and documentation functions took place. When work was completed the items would be checked against the loan list by recorded accession number and returned to the institution. At this time the process was repeated until all available items were scanned & catalogued.

Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

Creating the Framework

The Digital Collection

Continued

The Original Photographs

Continued

All staff working on The Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library is conscious of the security issues surrounding the removal of materials from special and archival collections. Existing policies of accessing collections at the various lending institutions would be acknowledged and followed. At no time would the photographs be left unattended in the work areas, and all materials accounted for daily.

The Digital Images

Background research was conducted prior to commencing our digitization project surrounding the feasibility of out-sourcing the scanning versus conducting it in-house. Outsourcing is only viable if we are able to fully specify our imaging, metadata, and derivative requirements, in addition to locate suitable vendors, evaluate their products and services, plus adopt specific policies and procedures for each function they would perform.

Given the scope of this project, the size of the collections involved, and the uniform size of the original materials, it is more beneficial to create our own image capture to be used to create the digital master files required.

We can then ensure a consistent, high level of image quality across all collections; and decrease the potential need for future rescanning by creating/promoting best practices for the conversion of materials into digital format. Conducting image capture, or scanning, in-house also permits:

- Development of digital imaging experience by cultural staff involved, especially in those areas surrounding project management, database construction, policy development, digital storage, etc.;
- More control of the imaging process, in addition to controlled handling and storage of the original photographs;

Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

Creating the Framework

The Digital Collection

Continued

The Digital Images

Continued

- Ability to adjust the requirements for image quality, access, and scanning during the project, when required, rather than defining them up front; and
- Direct participation in the development of an image collection, and standards reflecting the needs of the lead organizations and their target audience(s).

To create archival or high quality images for long-term access, it is important to scan once to serve as many purposes as possible, with derivative files then being made from the digital master file. Whenever possible the original, or first generation of the source material, will be scanned to achieve the best quality image possible, unless the original was too fragile to be handled.

Converting Sallows' photographic images into electronic format is but one step in the digitization project. An integral part of the Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library is the creation of information, or metadata, about the image, and a database, or repository, to be used for collections management purposes plus computer-facilitated retrieval and display.

The workflow is broken into two parts – scanning and cataloguing – then the actual web site development. The catalogue record, which becomes the finding aid for each item, includes information required in the descriptive, structural or technical, and administrative metadata fields. For quality control purposes, all cataloguing is completed by one team member with all records checked both within the database and again once available on the Internet to ensure that all fields had been completed, checked for spelling errors, and correct form of entry. The scanning process and cataloguing process will be conducted concurrently.

To save time for the cataloguer, a template for each record - complete with selected drop-down menus of standardized naming conventions - is completed at the same time as the scanning technician/web site designer scans the image and records the technical metadata for the corresponding image.

Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

Creating the Framework

The Digital Collection

Continued

The Digital Images

Continued

Most of the partnering institutions have some form of basic records, often in print format only, plus their own unique accessioning systems. While cataloguing, provision to capture and cross-reference previously existing accession number for the lending institutions will be done.

Photographs are described in detail with the images examined to determine area of coverage and applicable subject headings, plus technical and administrative metadata completed.

Note: Procedures for completing the last two sections changed during the scanning/cataloguing process when it was determined that the scanning technician could complete these fields more efficiently, resulting in a times saving.

Managing the Collection

Part of the Reuben Sallows Digital Library Project includes the creation of a database to use for “collections management” purposes. This permits us to structure, store and provide access to the textual metadata created to accompany the images digitized during the project, as well as provide a link between the two.

The database management system keeps the entire collection together and maintains the relationship between the digital images created and their associated text or metadata.

Investigation into the costs, functionality, technical requirements and ease-of-use of existing software options was explored prior to commencement of the project. While a flat-file or table system could accommodate many of our needs, it was determined that a relational database will most easily accommodate our goals of incorporating the contents from multiple collections, and support the “value-added” features of a digital library initiative.

It's been identified that two database applications will be necessary: one for the desktop where the database would be created and the data inputted; and the other on the server, where the data would be accessed by a visitor to the website.

Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

Creating the Framework

The Digital Collection

Continued

Managing the Collection

Continued

Microsoft Access has been selected as the desktop database application to support the database creation. Access easily supports creation of a tailored database, with straightforward data entry, and it is uniformly supported by all project partners.

In order to accommodate online searching, data will be exported from Microsoft Access as a Common Separated Values text file and imported into a MySQL database server, which resides on the County's main server. MySQL was chosen, not only because it is open source and therefore free, but because it will reliably meet the performance demands of a growing database.

The database is not only designed using Dublin Core metadata standards to accommodate any future mapping or relational crosswalks between this resource and others; but it's been designed for its usefulness - the structure being influenced by its accessibility and search functions. Design elements which necessitate consideration include:

- Controlled vocabulary
- Generality
- Simplicity

A controlled vocabulary allows several of the field entries to be input from a pre-defined set of values, using a pull-down menu. This alternative to free-text minimizes operator error and ensures effective information retrieval for searching purposes.

Established naming authorities, such as the Thesaurus for Graphic Materials I (TGM I), Thesaurus for Graphic Materials II (TGM II), and Library of Congress Subject Authority Headings (LC SH) have been used to define a common set of 51 terms for use in the creating a list of standardized subject values. Similar recognized authorities have been used for determining values for other fields, specifically resource type, location, etc.

Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

Creating the Framework

The Digital Collection

Continued

Managing the Collection

Continued

To simplify and ensure consistency in information capture, spelling, use of classification schemes and terminology, experienced cataloguing staff will be used throughout the project to capture technical and descriptive metadata.

The Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library has a small number of staff, so the required skills in this digital conversion project are either already present, or will be learned on the job. For instance, the web-site developer will function also as the scanning technician, quality control technician, database programmer who integrates metadata and images into resource, and systems administrator for the project. The Sallows Gallery Curator will identify and authenticate items in addition to providing background research on the photographer and his work, writing selected copy and developing several of the “virtual gallery” exhibits displayed on the site.

The project manager will resolve some of the functionality problems – creating the standards for cataloguing images, developing the metadata guidelines which influenced the database creation, advising on the development and usability testing of our user-friendly web interface; budget management, data entry, research support, and content editing complete the responsibilities of this position, in addition to serving as liaison with the partnering agencies.

The Digital Library

Designed for and in consultation with audiences, students, teachers, historians, archivists, librarians and others seeking and/or creating digital photographic collections, The Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library will be both versatile and user-friendly.

Using the images and correlated information stored within our database, the end product will include a selection of “value-added” services expected with a “library” experience – search and discovery utilities, the ability to browse the entire collection, interpretive interfaces, learning activities, plus copies of guidelines and protocols developed throughout the project.

The functions, features and content of the “library” will include:

Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

Creating the Framework

The Digital Library

Continued

The Sallows Gallery

Visitors will find information about The Sallows Gallery located in the Goderich Branch Library, including current exhibitions, tours, programs and volunteer opportunities. An annotated listing of web resources pertaining to digital collections and historic photography will be included, plus background information about the creation of this digital resource, including procedural manuals and a listing of partnering institutions.

Life & Times

This section of the site will contain biographical information on Reuben Sallows, plus an extensive listing of additional scholarly resources by and about him. An in-depth journey of the commercial work produced each decade of his sixty-year career will be prepared in addition to a timeline providing comparison of major dates in Sallows' life to historic developments in the field of photography.

Search the Collection

This feature consists of the searchable database providing centralized access to the digitized collections. Searches within the Basic Search feature will be done by selecting from a drop-down menu which provides an alphabetical listing of subject categories, or by typing keyword(s) into the search box. An Advanced Search feature will provide additional search options, including identifying a specific date of creation, resource type, source of collection, or combination of search options. Search results will provide a display of small "thumbnail" pictures matching the search to find a single photograph, or a series of photographs. The entire online collection can be browsed by selecting "All" in the Search by Subject menu and leaving the keyword dialogue box blank.

Virtual Exhibits

Selected past exhibitions at The Sallows Gallery, simulating a gallery visit, will be captured, complete with curatorial comments, for online viewing.

Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

Creating the Framework

The Digital Library

Continued

Pastimes

Themed learning activities, including interactive modules with games and multiple choice challenges will unite Sallows' photographs with information about his career, subjects captured and photographic techniques; offering a variety of opportunities to discover his rich photographic legacy. Plans include jigsaw puzzles, a biographical look at "the Story of" some of people captured in Sallows' portraits, an educational unit on Maple Syrup Making, and more. Concentration will let visitors match pairs of photographs taken by Sallows and discover the story behind a selection of five of his photographs.

Send a Postcard

Visitors will be able to select from twelve of Sallows' images and use this feature to tell others about this energetic historic photographer, inviting them to discover this online resource.

Reproduction Notes

Guidelines for citing images and photographic resources, plus information on contacting the six partnering image providers will be provided in this section, as well as online access to copyright guidelines developed during the project.

Beta testing of all aspects of the digital library will be held two months prior to the official launch of the site, when a select group of users, including grade six students, will be invited to "push the site to the limits." Sessions will be conducted in a variety of settings, several area school labs, small group settings in public libraries, and the computer lab located adjacent to the server on which the digital library is hosted.

Note: Usage during the site's first two weeks of being public available, August 9-23, 2004, has averaged 122 visits per day, with a visit defined as a session of 15 minutes or more. Most of the visitors are Canadian, and many are the result of referrals from the web sites of the University of Guelph and Huron County Libraries.

Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library

Creating the Framework

The Digital Library

Continued

The most recognized outcome of The Reuben R. Sallows Digital Library is an intended one: users of many backgrounds have found a treasury of long-sought or unexpected images. As a great grand nephew of Sallows wrote, "I've spent the past forty minutes on your site and I am totally overwhelmed, by the time, effort and nothing short of love that has been put into this web site...forty minutes wasn't enough time and I will visit the site repeatedly."

Email messages and verbal comments from remote and onsite visitors have been positive. The responses indicate a mix of experienced researchers, novices and students using the site. The most frequent comment has been "well done," followed by questions on obtaining copies of the images and when do we plan to add more.]