

UBC opens digital library

PUBLIC ACCESS: Aim is to make rare material available

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Call it open-source scholarship. The University of B.C.'s information collection and archiving methods are undergoing a radical shift — from dusty shelves to downloadable files.

At the forefront of the switch are the UBC Library Digital Collections, which host hundreds of tests, images and audio files. Here, students can browse a virtual library, peruse digital books, scan e-journals and submit electronic thesis papers without leaving their dorms.

Most recently, the library — which is open to the public — scanned a collection of 159 letters by Florence Nightingale in honour of National Nursing Week May 7-13.

"We're particularly eyeballing rare books and special collections in terms of having our more important and valuable material available to a wider audience," said Chris Hives, the UBC archivist behind this growing paperless library.

"What we have focused on most recently are smaller but important collections, like the [Charles] Darwin letters and Florence Nightingale letters."

Among the digital holdings at <http://angel.library.ubc.ca> are



The University of B.C. library's new digital collection includes 159 letters written by Florence Nightingale. The letters were recently scanned into the library's digital archives in honour of National Nursing Week.

4,000 historical B.C. fishing industry photos, 3,000 archival forestry photographs, 1,000 First World War photographs, 660 photographs from Japanese-Canadian history, 450 rare bookplates and 50 letters from Darwin.

The university has also archived 53,000 pages of its own periodicals and newspapers, 20,000 photos from its past, 1,730 UBC yearbook images, 100 audio-visual files and reports dating to 1915.

The university's paper holdings still dwarf its e-holdings: UBC libraries house about 5.4 million volumes, 5.2 million microforms, 808,000 maps, audio, video and images and 56,000 subscriptions,

compared with 254,961 e-books and 311,815 electronic resources. The balance may shift in future.

"At some point, the library has got to think seriously about how it wants to proceed in the future in terms of looking at a larger-scale digitization program. They may want to get into digitization of library books," Hives said.

Already, libraries are finding innovative new uses for digital archiving: A project Hives ran with the Faculty of Graduate Studies allowed students to file thesis papers digitally.

But for now, they still get a paper degree.

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