

Oxford County Archives: Statement for Reparative and Inclusive Description

The Archives acquires, preserves, and makes accessible inactive public records created by, for, and about Oxford County. These include administrative, legal, fiscal, and historical records of Oxford County (1850 to the present) and its predecessor, the District of Brock (1842-1849). In doing so, the Oxford County Archives seeks to increase public awareness of the rich cultural heritage of the County through the preservation of its archival records, providing public access to these records, and the implementation of a comprehensive outreach program.

Historically, Oxford County has been predominantly white, Christian, and heterosexual, and the attitudes and views of these individuals are inadvertently reflected in a vast number of records managed by the Archives. Unfortunately, in some cases such attitudes and views may be regarded as racist, sexist, homophobic, ableist, stereotypical, or otherwise offensive. We preserve such records not to endorse these views, but to present an accurate and comprehensive record of the County's past. At the same time, we recognize the lack of historical records for many of the County's minority communities and continue to strive to capture the history of local underrepresented and equity-seeking groups including Indigenous Peoples, members of visible minorities, people with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQIA+ community.

Oxford County as a Corporation recognizes Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) as its core value and we work diligently to promote a sense of belonging and inclusion to ensure everyone feels welcomed, valued and respected. This includes acknowledging that the Archives have historical records and items that may contain problematic and outdated language, as well as images, stereotypes, and cultural references that are no longer used or appropriate. Archives staff understand the impact that language and images have on researchers accessing our collections and on the perpetuation of systemic and cultural bias. Although we cannot change the records or items themselves, we can provide context for this material, change the language used to describe them, and name instances of discrimination and questionable language found within our collections.

Although the Archives does not attempt to hide potentially offensive materials in our collections, nor alter their titles or contents, we do have the ability to control how such materials are described, contextualized, and presented within the physical Archives, online to our users, and within our outreach programming and publications. We aim to use neutral and respectful language in the descriptive information that appears alongside records and provide warnings about potentially offensive materials within a collection when it is appropriate to do so. Thoughtful descriptions can alert users to potentially offensive material and empower them to make decisions on how to proceed with their research.

Maintaining updated and accurate descriptions of materials is an ongoing process and we may not always make the right decisions. We welcome and encourage feedback from all members of the public, so that we can learn and adjust our practices. If you encounter language that you find non-inclusive, discriminatory, or inappropriate in our research

guides, catalogue records, digitized collections, exhibitions or elsewhere, or if you have questions about our ongoing inclusive and conscientious work, please email archives@oxfordcounty.ca

For additional information and resources regarding harmful or offensive language in description and bias in cataloging in Archives and Libraries please visit: <https://cataloginglab.org/list-of-statements-on-bias-in-library-and-archives-description/>