



Oxford County Archives

Community Impact Report

Prepared by
Liz Dommasch
Coordinator of Legislative
Information/Archivist

2024

Mandate

The Oxford County Archives acquires, preserves, and makes accessible inactive public records created by, for, and about Oxford County. This includes administrative records, legal records, fiscal records, and historical records of Oxford County (1850 to the present) and its predecessor, the District of Brock (1842-1849).

Mission

The Oxford County Archives endeavours to increase public awareness of the rich cultural heritage of Oxford County through the preservation of its archival records, providing public access to these records, and the implementation of a comprehensive outreach program.

Regulatory Framework

- Section 254 (1) Municipal Act, 2001 requires the municipality to “retain and preserve the records of the municipality and its local boards in a secure and accessible manner.”
- County Resolution dated 27 October 1999, created the Oxford County Archives.
- County corporate policies, including the Archives Management Policy (revised 2022).
- The Canadian Copyright Act.
- Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.
- Canadian Rules for Archival Description, collections management standards, reference practices, and community outreach principles.



Message from the Archivist

-Liz Dommasch

In 2024, the Oxford County Archives continued to thrive with a focus on expanding outreach and preserving the County's history. With an expanded role of Coordinator of Legislative Information/Archivist, which additionally involves the day-to-day management of the County's records management program and overseeing access and privacy administration across all County departments. The Archives team remained dedicated to providing exceptional service and maintaining a strong presence in the community. Tysha Rieger, our new Legislative Information/Archives Technician joined us from Elgin County Archives and has quickly become an essential member of our team, contributing greatly to our ongoing success.

Over the year, Archives staff concentrated on completing reference services to internal and external patrons; arranged and described countless archival transfers and donations; and partook in a variety of outreach initiatives. We also began preparing for the number of County anniversaries we are celebrating in 2025, including the Archives 25th anniversary since its establishment in January 2000. As you will see over the next few pages, this past year was, once again, no exception to the quality and level of work we were able to accomplish to ensure that Oxford County's past is not only preserved but celebrated.

I wish to thank County Council, and staff as well as our numerous students, volunteers, donors, and community partners that have helped shape the Archives into what it is today. Without their continuous support, we would be unable to accomplish all that we do.

Archivist's Responsibilities

- Establish and administer policies and procedures for the County Archives Management program;
- Aid Area Municipalities by assisting or facilitating their Archives Management programs through the transfer of archival records to the Archives;
- Identify, collect and preserve records of archival value to the County and the community as a whole, and to make such arrival records available to County officials and staff, as well as the general public;
- Classify, index, and catalogue all items deposited in the archives following proper archival standards;
- Stimulate public interest in the history of Oxford County by the dissemination of information through exhibitions, displays, publications, Oxford County website, prevalent County social media platforms, and public programming and outreach initiatives;
- Ensure equity, diversity, and inclusivity in the collection of County, Area Municipalities, and community stakeholders' archival records and promote transparency in the access and use of those records to ensure that the entire history of the County is represented and interpreted appropriately.

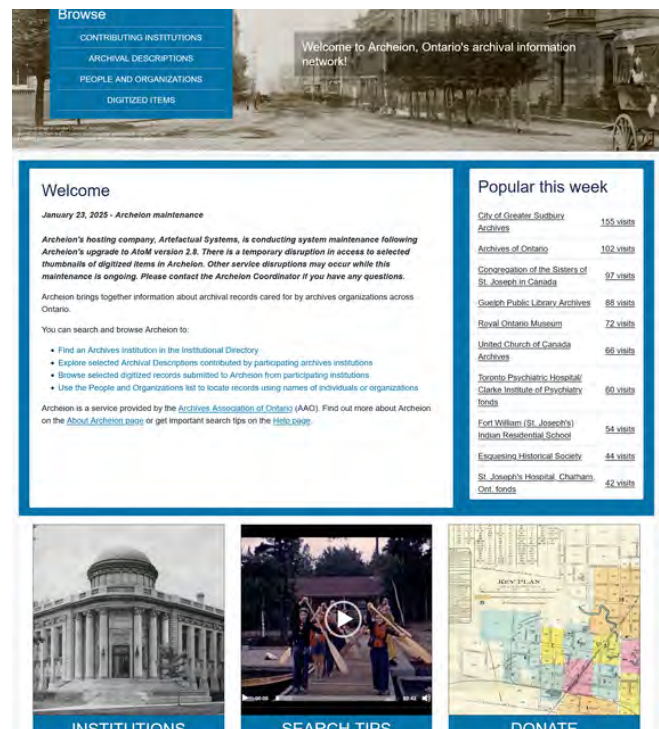
2024 HIGHLIGHTS

JANUARY

Archives staff began the year by focusing on arranging and describing the backlog of records that have come in over the past few years. Completed finding aids were uploaded to Archeion, the Archives Association of Ontario's shared database of archival descriptions:

<https://www.archeion.ca/county-of-oxford-archives>

In preparation for Black History Month, Oxford County Archives, in partnership with Oxford County Library set up a display in the lobby at Oxford County Administration Building at the end of the month.

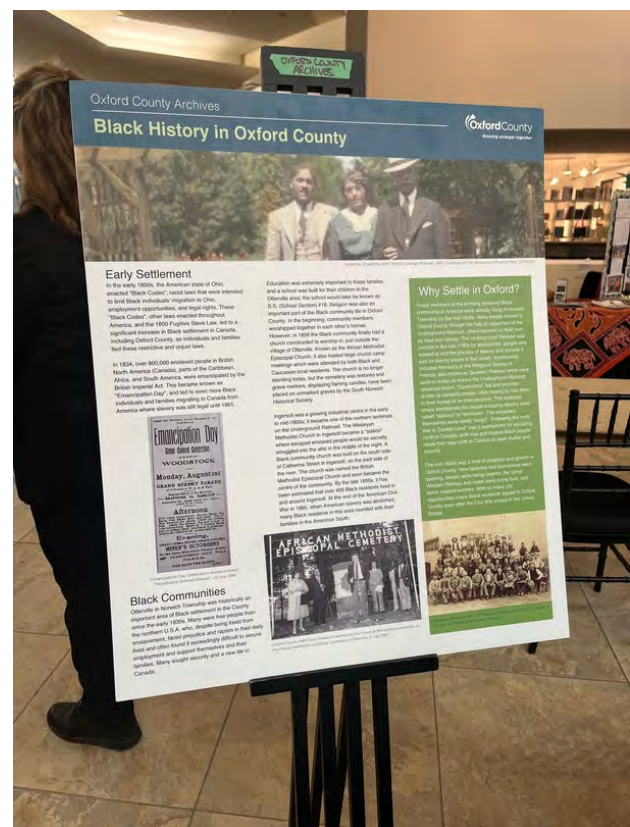


FEBRUARY

This is the second year in a row that Archives staff were invited to take part as an exhibitor at Museum London's Black History Month Opening Celebration. Joining staff from Norwich Museum and local historian, Heather Rennalls, our exhibit highlighted the life stories and history of historically significant Black individuals, communities, and buildings in Oxford County. In addition, staff also once again took part in Tillsonburg's Black History Month Celebration as an exhibitor celebrating Oxford County's rich Black cultural heritage.

Likewise, staff were exhibitors at the St. Mary's Heritage Fair, in celebration of Ontario Heritage Week where the theme was "Rebuilding and Restoring," inspiring connections and bringing our community together.

Archives staff also began web archiving the Future Oxford Facebook page and website, and the Safe & Well Oxford website on the Archives' Archive-It account. In doing so, these pages will be preserved and made publicly accessible online.



MARCH

Archives staff began discussions with members of the Salford Heritage Museum about transferring records to the Archives, following the closure of the community museum.

In conjunction with Tourism Staff, the Archives created an exhibit at the Oxford County Administration Building highlighting the history of the County's cheese industry. The opening of this display aligned with Archives Awareness Week, which is celebrated the 1st week of April.

APRIL

As part of Archives Awareness Week, the Archives took part in the Archives of Ontario's Social Media campaign "Archives A to Z."

Archives staff took part in the 4th annual Oxford Local History Day at Ingersoll Public Library with an exhibit highlighting the types of records maintained by Oxford County Archives, as well as our programs, services, and past publications.

Archives staff accepted a transfer of records from Blandford-Blenheim Township and assisted Zorra Township with the transfer of a large volume of archival records prior to the move to their new municipal building in Thamesford.

MAY

Archives Technician, Megan Lockhart was interviewed on CBC's "Afternoon Drive" regarding the history of Thamesford's Calithumpian, which interestingly led into some historical information on hangings which have taken place in Oxford County:

<https://www.cbc.ca/listen/live-radio/1-80-afternoon-drive/clip/16068383-acalithumpian-street-party-coming-thamesford-weekend>



JUNE

Archives staff completed the arrangement and description of the Oxford Pride fonds, including newspaper articles related to the Oxford Pride Committee, and their annual "Pride Guides." Marked the beginning of a concerted effort to preserve the history and archival records of Oxford's LGBTQ+ community.

JULY

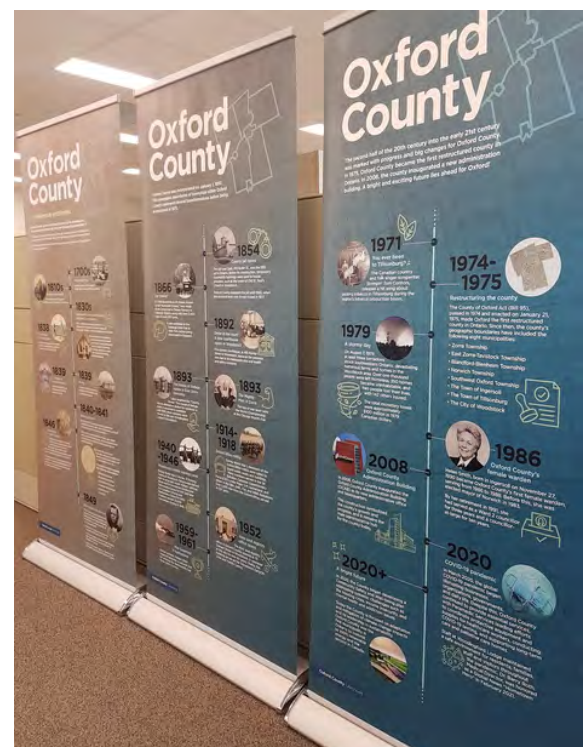
Throughout the year, Archives staff assisted the Zorra Caledonian Society in preparations for a historical display to commemorate the 85th Embro Highland Games, on July 1, 2024. Staff provided images and research related to the games 85+ years of history.

AUGUST

The Archives Instagram page jumped on a few fun social media trends over the summer, including "Brat Girl Summer," which encouraged women to enjoy life as much as possible despite difficult obstacles. In doing so, the Archives highlighted the stories of Brownsville hotel owner Mary Sackrider, Woodstock Mayor Bernadette Smith, and Dr. Emily Stowe of Norwich, Ontario.

SEPTEMBER

The Archives saw the completion of their new historical display banners, prepared for the 2025 Anniversary year. The tri-panels provide a historical timeline of the development from precolonial times to the present day and will be used to promote the County's history moving forward.



2024, saw the Archivist begin to take part in the Association of Canadian Archivists' (ACA) Mentorship Program for new archivists and archival studies students. The goal of the ACA Membership Program is to facilitate the integration of new archivists into the Canadian archival community by matching them with a mentor who may advise and guide them on career and professional development. Throughout the year, Liz and her mentee corresponded over email, phone, and Zoom, and in September they met for the first time at the Archives.



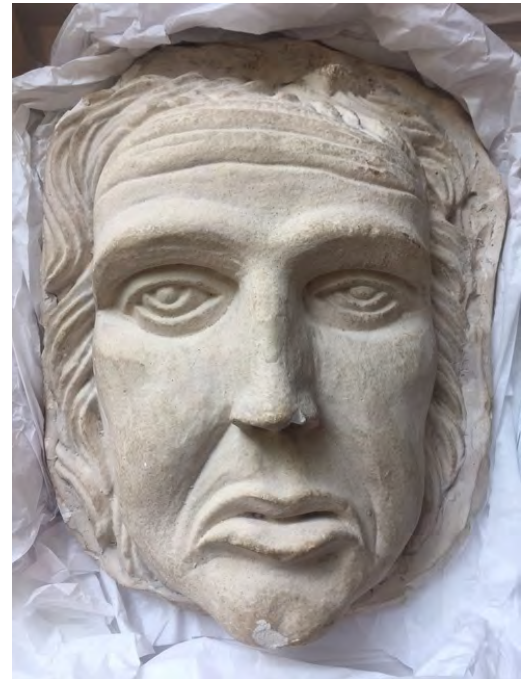
OCTOBER

Throughout the year, the Archivist met with members of the Woodstock Police Services Board to discuss the transfer of the Oxford Police Services Board (1998-2009) records to the Archives. These records were officially donated to the Archives in October 2024 and have since been arranged and described by Archives staff.

NOVEMBER

Archives staff hosted an Oxford Grows session for County staff entitled "Researching the History of your Home" where participants learned about archival materials and online resources that can assist with property histories.

The Archivist was also interviewed by Fanshawe College film students for their production *The Haunting of Woodstock*, a historical documentary exploring the life, execution, and alleged ghostly hauntings associated with Thomas Cook in Woodstock.



DECEMBER

Archives staff picked up archival transfers from SWOX and East Zorra-Tavistock.

Staff started to shift their focus to 2025 and the County's anniversary celebrations. Planning began in earnest related to social media, an exhibit at OCAB, and a report to Council. Staff also continued to pull together content for the upcoming publication "Growing Stronger Together: A Celebration of Oxford's Past."



2024 STATISTICS

ACQUISITIONS AND TRANSFERS

29 total record and collection donations/transfers from the following notable sources (including but not limited to):

- Blandford-Blenheim, East Zorra-Tavistock, South-West Oxford, and Zorra Townships
- Archives of Ontario (Town of Ingersoll records)
- Dresden Historical Society
- Embro and West Zorra Women's Institute
- Salford Heritage Museum
- Woodstock Police Services Board
- Beachville District Museum

COLLECTION DATABASES

- 36 fonds and collection descriptions submitted to Archeion, for a total of 259 total authority records available as of the beginning of 2025.
- 258 postcards and photographs to "Archived Oxford" via Vita Collections, <https://vitacollections.ca/archivedOxford/search>.
- 1,280 Instagram followers (@Oxfordcountyarchives)

REFERENCE INQUIRIES AND VISITS

- Internal County and Area Municipality reference: 264 inquiries
- Phone requests: 177
- Email requests: 460
- Social Media requests: 13
- In-person research appointments: 109
- Visits to the Archives (tours, students, donations, conservation work, etc.): 322

OUTREACH AND PUBLIC PROGRAMS

- Over 21 total outreach initiatives, public programs, and events including:
- Archive tours
- Oxford Grows workshop for County staff
- Black History Month events and Heritage Fairs
- Displays, Exhibitions, and Social Media campaigns
- Speaker Series in partnership with Oxford County Library
- Promotional bookmarks
- Digitization projects

STUDENTS AND VOLUNTEERS

- Number of Co-op/placement students: 4
Huron Park Secondary School
College Avenue Secondary School
Ingersoll District Collegiate Institute (virtual placement)
Mohawk College, Library and Information Technician Program
- Number of volunteers: 5

MESSAGES OF THANKS AND SUPPORT

*LISA TEEPLE
RECORDS MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR/
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT
ZORRA TOWNSHIP*

"Several years ago, Staff from Zorra went to the County Archives for a tour of the facility. Right away we knew we wanted to get involved. We got to work right away transferring some of our old records to the Archives for permanent, safe storage in their state-of-the-art facility. It is a relief for staff to know that our records are being cared for in a way that we cannot duplicate at the municipal office. Over the years we have transferred many carloads of documents, photos, and other records to the Archives for storage. We continue to review our records annually and move paper records as needed. We took extra advantage of this service when we relocated offices in 2024 and came across many more historical documents that were destined for the Archives. Staff and Council at Zorra are thankful for the amazing service provided by the Oxford County Archives, particularly the wonderful staff we have dealt with over the years."



*KRISTIN BARNIM
EXECUTIVE ASSISTANT
WOODSTOCK POLICE SERVICE BOARD*

"The Woodstock Police Service Board recently reviewed its accumulated files and historical records and acknowledged that the records of the former Oxford Community Police Service could be valuable for public access and future research. To preserve and share this history, the Board contacted Liz at the Oxford County Archives. Together, we reached an agreement to make these documents publicly accessible. This collaboration will help preserve our community's policing history, ensuring it remains available for educational and research purposes. We extend our sincere thanks to Liz for her invaluable assistance and expertise throughout this process."

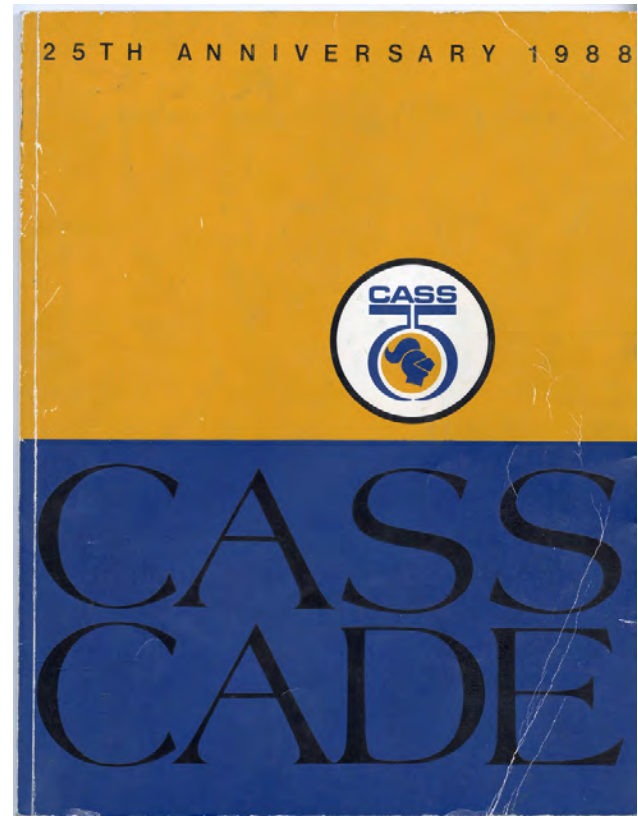


BRADY RIVARD
COOPERATIVE EDUCATION, ENRICHMENT
COLLEGE AVENUE SECONDARY SCHOOL

"The Oxford Archives provided our student with a rewarding cooperative education placement this semester. My student explored her interests in writing non-fiction, researching local history and examining a career as an Archivist. Each time I went to the Archives to conference with my student, I looked forward to her latest project, the positive interactions with her supervisors, and meeting the many local people who were accessing the organization's remarkable repository of information and historical artifacts. I was impressed by the modern technology used to both store and preserve history as well as to help the public access information and data. My student particularly enjoyed the process of researching her house's history including all of the previous owners and their individual stories. Her supervisors, and even some of the local genealogists, helped her develop these historical detective skills and fostered and supported her interests. I feel fortunate to have discovered this valuable and important resource that supports such an array of local interests."

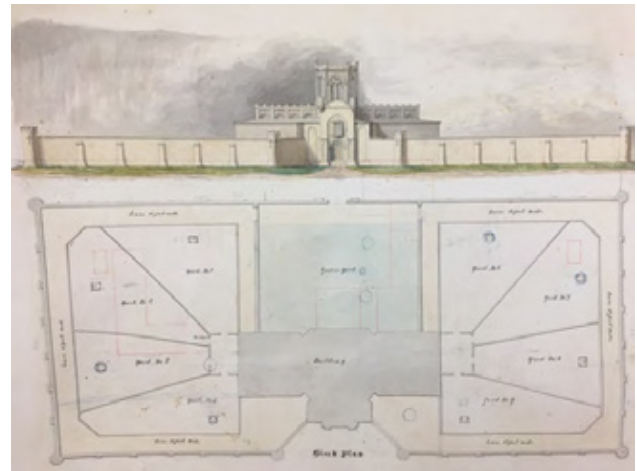
ISABELLE FINCH
CO-OP STUDENT
COLLEGE AVENUE SECONDARY SCHOOL

"My experience at the Oxford County Archives was very positive. I got to work on digitizing photos, describing County By-laws, arranging diaries and yearbooks, and using Vita Toolkit. I had lots of support when doing research on my house project and was provided with help finding websites and other materials to do research with. I met some really great people who I will miss not seeing everyday, but I am very grateful for the opportunity to attend the Archives as a co-op student."



*AUDEN KUCHARIC & COREY SLAGER
STUDENTS OF THE ADVANCED
FILMMAKING PROGRAM
FANSHAWE COLLEGE*

"The Oxford County Archives played a crucial role in the production of our student film *The Haunting of Woodstock*, a historical documentary exploring the life, execution, and alleged ghostly hauntings associated with Thomas Cook in Woodstock. Liz Dommasch, the Archivist, demonstrated exceptional expertise, providing us with valuable historical information that allowed us to reconstruct the story of Thomas Cook for our documentary. Additionally, Liz graciously permitted us to visit the archives and film an interview with her, during which she shared insights into the life and legacy of Woodstock's most notorious resident, Thomas Cook. Liz's assistance was essential to the success of our project, and we are deeply grateful to both her and the Oxford County Archives for affording us the opportunity to learn and grow through the information we gathered while working on this film."



*JANICE DICKIN
PROFESSOR EMERITA
UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY*

"I have been investigating the famous evangelist Aimee Semple McPherson for going on four decades. [In doing so], Aimee has been the subject - often disguised - of both fiction and nonfiction books and films. While the new work is generally more sympathetic than that of the past, the Aimee that every author starts out working with supposedly grew up in desperate circumstances in the poorest and most ignorant part of some imaginary Ontario. This is far from true, and I have undertaken to portray her comfortable childhood in some detail. Two important incidents - heretofore virtually absent from accounts - are the murder trial of her next-door neighbour and a newspaper "popularity contest," information on which is unavailable elsewhere than a small archive. I am very grateful for the help I got from Oxford County Archives and could not have done this work without it."



KELLI BABCOCK
ARCHEION COORDINATOR
ARCHIVES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO

"Archeion is the Archives Association of Ontario's shared database of archival descriptions and selected digitized records contributed from archival institutions across Ontario. The database receives an average of 9,017 unique users each month. Oxford County Archives is an important and active member institution within Archeion. To date, Oxford County Archives has contributed over 250 people and organization records to Archeion, giving an online presence to the names of important individuals in Oxford County's history. In 2024, the Archives made 252 description updates, adding 36 new descriptions to the Archeion database for researchers across Ontario to locate and access records cared for by Oxford County Archives staff."



JEFF INNES, PRESIDENT
HELEN DOWD, SECRETARY
ZORRA CALEDONIAN SOCIETY

"In preparations for a historical display to commemorate the 85th Embro Highland Games on July 1, 2024, the volunteers of the Zorra Caledonian Society reached out to the Oxford County Archives to see if we could get some help! WOW, were we ever impressed with the quick turn-around times, excellence in customer service and the quality of the photos and information provided to us. Compiling 85+ years of history is no easy feat but by reaching out to Megan Lockhart, she made it happen! We attract over 3,500 visitors to the Embro Highland Games and so having an exhibit of this caliber is important and impactful for it will be enjoyed by so many of our loyal supporters! We give thanks to the team at the Oxford County Archives for all you do to preserve the history of Oxford County for current and future generations to enjoy!"



*CAROL COOMBS, TREASURER
THE PLATTSVILLE & DISTRICT
HERITAGE SOCIETY
AND LIFETIME RESEARCHER*

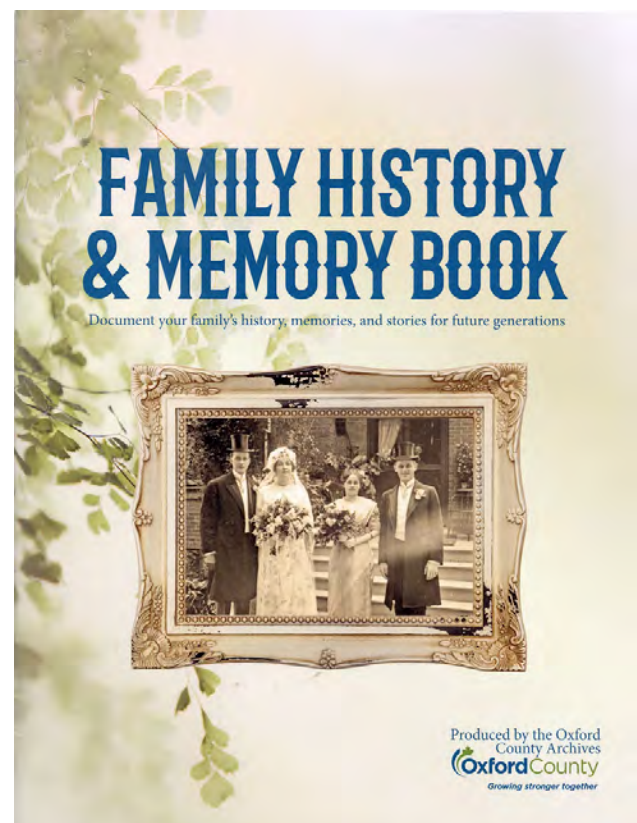
"Visits to the Oxford County Archives are moments of bringing the past forward to the future--looking for a place long forgotten or looking for a person now marked in a cemetery as a forever home or looking for a document now hidden in a long lost book on the shelf or help in preserving a newspaper or document. Liz and Megan are always eager to help me succeed in my quest with a delightful smile sharing their knowledge and expertise. This community is fortunate to have these ladies and the archives for a source to a history long gone."



*JANICE FERGUSON,
ZORRA TOWNSHIP PRESIDENT*

Oxford archives and its staff have proved to be a valuable asset to myself, supporting the Zorra Heritage Committee, and preserving local history that could have ended up being lost forever. Over the years, the Archives, restored piece by piece an original map of the Town of Ingersoll [and] encapsulated an original copy of an 1918 Embro Courier. By chance, through a Beachville District Speaker Series participant, I obtained the original documents of the Zorra Holiday Public School records from its inception in the late 1800's. The Archives digitized these fragile records and returned them to the owner, with instructions on how to preserve the original materials.

I personally recorded, in the Archives' Family History & Memory Book, the life history of a 102 yr. old resident that would have been lost because she had no living relatives. That history is now digitized for preservation. This is just my personal record of how Oxford Archives has helped me. Imagine that help multiplied by many citizens of Oxford. Oxford Archives is a necessary part of recording our past for preservation for the future.



THANK YOU TO OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERS

We are deeply appreciative of the individuals, community groups, and organizations that collaborated with us on projects, events, outreach, and educational programming in 2024, in order to preserve and spread awareness of our community's cultural and archival heritage.

- ACA MENTORSHIP PROGRAM
- ANNANDALE MUSEUM
- ARCHEION
- ARCHIVE-IT
- BEACHVILLE DISTRICT MUSEUM
- DRUMBO & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
- GEORGE EMERY (PROFESSOR AND AUTHOR)
- HEATHER RENNALLS (AUTHOR/LOCAL BLACK HISTORY HISTORIAN)
- INGERSOLL CHEESE AND AGRICULTURAL MUSEUM
- INGERSOLL RURAL CEMETERY
- MUSEUM LONDON
- NORWICH AND DISTRICT MUSEUM
- OURDIGITALWORLD
- OXFORD BRANCH OF ONTARIO ANCESTORS
- OXFORD COUNTY LIBRARY
- OXFORD COUNTY PRIDE
- OXFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY
- PLATTSVILLE & DISTRICT HISTORICAL SOCIETY
- SAFE & WELL OXFORD
- STEPHEN SMITH (MILITARY HISTORIAN)
- ST. MARYS MUSEUM & ARCHIVES
- TOURISM OXFORD
- WOODSTOCK ART GALLERY
- WOODSTOCK MUSEUM NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE
- WOODSTOCK PUBLIC LIBRARY
- ZORRA CALEDONIAN SOCIETY
- ZORRA HERITAGE COMMITTEE



Oxford County Archives

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@OxfordCountyArchives



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