



The Canadian Heritage Information Network in the Community: Reflections From Past Employees

By Sheila Carey and Alice Wang

Since its inception in 1972, the Canadian Heritage Information Network (CHIN), formerly the National Inventory Programme, has been helping museums and other cultural institutions document their collection holdings in Canada and abroad. In the late 20th century, the success of its efforts relied on the adaptability of technology and staff. In CHIN's early years, many of its employees spent a lot of time on the road, visiting museums to help them adopt new technologies and find ways to better manage their collections information. To celebrate the Canadian Conservation Institute and CHIN's 50th anniversary, Audience and Program Analyst Sheila Carey invited some retired CHIN employees to reflect on projects that were particularly memorable for them.

Diane Bowden

Diane Bowden joined CHIN in 1974 as a data entry clerk. At that time, data on museum holdings were manually entered into CHIN's central database through terminal computers connected to CHIN's mainframe computer. In her 35-year career at CHIN, Diane's contributions ranged from helping museums create their own cataloguing system to digitizing collections in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Here, she reflects on her work to help museums acquire their own collection management systems and digitize their collections.



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Figure 1. Diane Bowden.

Diane Bowden: In 1996, CHIN was shifting from providing museums with a collections management system to helping them acquire their own system. Therefore, a collections management system review team was formed, comprising CHIN and museum employees. The team reviewed and evaluated [collections management systems](#) to encourage museums to take advantage of the growing availability, cost-effectiveness and user-friendliness of current software. Being part of the review team helped me better understand what museums felt was important in using a collections management system. For museum employees, being part of the team gave them insight into technology and dealing with vendors.

I also travelled across Canada and the United States to provide “Capture Your Collections” training to museums to help employees digitize their collections. These efforts were key in preserving objects for future generations.

Both of these projects were carried out in partnership with the museum community. It was amazing to learn about the differences between smaller and larger museums, in terms of both culture and needs. I also found it meaningful to speak with museum staff about what mattered to them and how they adapted to and accepted the changing technology.

Joan Korzeniowski

Joan Korzeniowski started as a data entry operator at CHIN in 1974 and later became the regional data advisor. In the late 1970s, she travelled to museums across the country to train them on how to input data into cassette drives to be sent for upload to the CHIN mainframe. Here, she reflects on one of her favourite projects in her 35-year career at CHIN: the Community Memories program.

Joan Korzeniowski: I found the Community Memories program particularly interesting. It was a component of the Virtual Museum of Canada program that started in 2001. Member museums were provided with software to create stories from their community. Not only could the software capture data, but it was also able to include images and audio recordings. The communities gathered some very heartwarming stories. What a wonderful way to learn about communities in Canada that you might never get to visit in person!



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Figure 2. Community Memories interface.

Barbara Rottenberg

Barbara Rottenberg joined CHIN in 1980 as a manager of federal grants supporting summer jobs for students. In 1984, she became the Director of Museum Services at CHIN. She led a team that answered public inquiries and provided frontline support for client museums, advising them on data standards and documentation. The team members travelled to meet with Canadian clients once a year, or more often if specific needs arose. Here, she reflects on CHIN's international engagement with heritage communities in the 1980s and 1990s.

Barbara Rottenberg: In the 1980s, CHIN was active internationally as well as nationally. Shortly after the Velvet Revolution in which Czechoslovakia gained its independence from the Soviet Union, CHIN was invited to Prague and Bratislava to discuss the collections management needs of their national museums. A six-week training program was set up in Ottawa for representatives of the two states. The collections management training was very successful and became a model for CHIN's other international training.

CHIN's international efforts spanned other regions as well. For example, CHIN shared its collections management expertise with museum staff from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. Also, in the 1990s, two CHIN employees (Danielle Boily and Denis Simard) travelled to Egypt to teach courses on museum studies at Senghor University in Alexandria.



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Figure 3. Two CHIN employees, Danielle Boily (left) and Denis Simard (right), on horseback in Egypt.

Relive some of CHIN's key projects from the late 1980s in "[A Trip Down Memory Lane: CHIN in 1989.](#)" To hear more personal reflections from former CHIN employees, check out the podcast [CCI and CHIN: In Our Words](#) and listen to the episodes with Peter Homulos and Lyn Elliott Sherwood.

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