

Building and Sustaining a Statewide Digital Resource: Seeking Michigan

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Looking at Seeking Michigan (seekingmichigan.org) as an example, this program will explore how to construct, develop, and maintain a digital archive, as well as collection prioritization, evaluation of researchers' expectations, and collaboration. The online portal for the Archives of Michigan, Seeking Michigan offers free access to a wide array of rich statewide content, including death certificates, land surveyors' notes, historical maps, Civil War records, main street images, and much more.

Originally launched back in 2009 as a collaborative effort between the Archives of Michigan and the Library of Michigan, Seeking Michigan (seekingmichigan.org) is now administered and maintained entirely by the Archives of Michigan.

Designed to be THE destination for Michigan genealogical and historical research, Seeking Michigan continues to evolve and grow, all the while maintaining free access to millions of digital images, index entries, content-driven articles, and an educational forum. Current collections include:

- Michigan death certificates, 1897-1920
- Michigan death certificates, 1921-1952 (index-only data, 1941-1952)
- Civil War service records
- Michigan state census records
- Michigan land surveyors' original field notebooks
- Card index to *The Detroit News*
- Naturalization indexes for more than 30 Michigan counties
- "Main Street" images of Michigan cities and villages from across the state

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- Archives of Michigan onsite collections guides

Future projects include the Archives' collection of Michigan naturalization records – the records themselves! – from all across the state. Partnering with FamilySearch, the Michigan Genealogical Council, and the genealogical community at-large, this exciting project will be Seeking Michigan's most popular (and complex) project to-date.

Collection priorities continue to be driven by the delicate balance between digital preservation of original records, online access to popular and frequently-used resources, and the cohesive vision of a purely Michigan online research destination.

Other factors to consider include:

- Does the collection fit the overall, larger vision of your web site?
- Does the condition of the original necessitate digitization?
- Does the onsite use of the material support online access?
- Does online access offer future collection development opportunities?
- Will online access enhance your institution's community profile?
- Does the material fit well with your existing software? Will it make for a positive user experience?

Yet a strong digital footprint and robust collections mean little if users are unable to find the material and/or have poor online experiences. Educating the community on web site functionality, how to best maximize search results, and yes, to explain software limitations are all critical components of guiding your researchers to a positive outcome in finding the information they seek.

The state of Michigan has a fantastic story to tell. At Seeking Michigan, researchers can find their own unique and powerful stories, together with the support of original source documents from the Archives of Michigan.

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