

The Shingwauk Project – Creating digital archives to preserve the history of Residential Schools for generations of student learning

Opportunity

Shingwauk Hall, now a central part of the campus of Algoma University in Sault Ste Marie, was established in 1873 as a residential school for First Nations children and operated as such until 1970. In 2008, Algoma University College received its University Charter with the special mission of cross-cultural education and research, in keeping with the history of the site. The Shingwauk Project, a vast collection of documents and photographs chronicling the experiences at residential schools, is housed in the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre at Algoma University. The collection is being digitized to ensure its survival and to extend access to these crucial historical records.

Innovation

The Shingwauk Project is a cross-cultural research and educational development project of Algoma University and the Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association (CSAA), which includes former students of the residential school, staff, descendants, family, and friends. They work together with the National Residential Schools Survivors' Society, the Anglican Church, the Shingwauk Education Trust and others to research, collect, preserve, and display the history of the residential and day schools across Canada; develop and deliver projects of sharing, healing, learning, and individual and community cultural restoration in relation to the impact of the schools; and accomplish the realization of Chief Shingwauk's vision of cross-cultural understanding and synthesis of traditional Anishnabek and European knowledge and learning systems.

Since 1979, the Shingwauk Project and the CSAA have undertaken many activities including reunions, healing circles, publications, videos, photo displays, curriculum development, historical tours, as well as the establishment of archive, library, and heritage collections and a web site. The Arthur A. Wishart Library coordinates, catalogues, stores, and displays the residential school artefacts, photographs, documents, and resources.

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**Chief Shingwauk
(1773-1854)**



**Shingwauk Project
Residential School Centre**



The latest development is the Shingwauk Project Digital Archive and Library which comprises over 24,000 images, hundreds of thousands of pages of primary documents, and hundreds of audio and video recordings with Elders and survivors. This enormous collection includes:

- Thousands of photographs of students at residential schools across Canada, most not identified. Through the Remember the Children Project, the photographs were taken and sent to communities so that survivors and community residents could identify children in the photos;
- Materials from all schools in Ontario that have been recognized as residential schools, as well as some in Quebec and the western provinces;
- The records of the Anglican Diocese of Algoma (est. 1873) which ran the Shingwauk and Wawanosh Residential Schools and many First Nations parishes;
- The records of the Anglican Ecclesiastical Province of Ontario, going back to 1860;
- The journals of E. M. Wilson, the first principal of the school. Text from his journal and images from the Centre have been put online to illustrate his journeys;
- The Reverend William Maurice, S.J. collection with negatives, photographs, documents and films about the Indian Residential Schools near Spanish, Ontario, many of the photographs taken by the students. There are many other collections from individuals, especially staff of the schools;
- Transcripts and some original recordings of interviews with former students from the 30s, 40s, and 50s;
- A complete set of the annual reports and other records of the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs;
- Photos of beadwork, woodwork, and other artefacts created by the students and staff with detailed conservation reports.

The digitized collection is searchable by person, date, location, school name, and key words.

The Centre has developed culturally-sensitive exhibit policies, structured around the inclusion of First Nation voices. Students can use the online materials to develop their own exhibits, research and illustrate papers, and learn about their past. The Centre offers tours of the site at Algoma and brings the collection to communities across Ontario.

The Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre staff have used the Drupal Content Management System, which is open source software, to allow for wider, easier access to the digital collection. As well, as it is open source, a much wider user community can contribute to the support and development of the system. The archives follow de facto standards for the customizing and showcasing of collection. McMaster University in Hamilton supplied some funding and experience and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum served as a model.

Outcomes and Benefits

The digitization of the collection makes an important part of Canadian history available across the country, and beyond, for both student and public learning. It documents a central experience in the development of Canada and the collection can support learning in many disciplines, including, history, education, Aboriginal Knowledge and history, sociology, political science, and human geography.

The Shingwauk Project is not a traditional archive as there is a social justice aspect to the collections; the information has benefited people making claims under the Common Experience and Independent Assessment Processes as part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement.

Algoma University is introducing Anishinaabe content into as many courses as possible and the diversity of the collections in the Shingwauk Project make it an essential resource for student learning and research. Currently, the collection is linked to the curriculum through tours, support for student projects and through the efforts of individual professors.

The Centre and the Project are linked to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee in Winnipeg and could serve as a model for the archives of the committee's documents and resources.

Challenges and Enhancements

The challenges are linked to the maintenance and expansion of the collection, with a small, dedicated staff and limited physical space. Discussions are underway that would provide more space and additional staff for the Centre.

Potential

Algoma University plans to develop an archives course, integrating the Shingwauk Project collections, with special attention to attracting Anishinaabe students. There is also consideration of a four-year Anishinaabe degree, with the Centre as a core source of learning and research.

Work is being done on identifying day schools that were run on reserves and collecting materials associated with them.

Kiosks with links to the collection could be set up so that people could self-document their experiences in residential schools.

The Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre has recently been chosen as the permanent home for the extensive collection of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF)'s Gail Guthrie Valaskakis Memorial Resource Centre. Since 1998, the AHF has been funded by the federal government to provide resources to promote reconciliation and encourage and support Aboriginal people and their communities in building sustainable healing processes that address the legacy of abuses in the residential school system. AHF online resources include thousands of legal documents, research series on the enduring consequences of the residential schools, residential school resources from across Canada, speeches, and the archives for the hundreds of healing projects funded by the AHF since 1998. The diversity of this collection will enhance the richness of the Shingwauk Project resources, creating unique digital and tangible resources for student learning.

The digital collection of the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre is available to all postsecondary institutions in Ontario at <http://archives.algomau.ca/>, with unique resources that can be used for teaching, learning, and research.

For Further Information

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Children of Shingwauk Alumni Association
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