

Fact Sheet:

Digital Dissemination of Spiritual Invention of a Nation: Media and Missionaries on Indian Land

Pamela Klassen

Innovation Funding Project, 2013-2014

Project Description and Goals:

This book project, “Spiritual Invention of a Nation”, analyzed one aspect of early twentieth-century attempts to negotiate religious diversity in Canada by focusing on missionary-First Nations interactions. The main focus was placed on the religiously diverse traditions of storytelling that shaped the colonizing processes that created Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The book argued that stories, and their specific forms of mediation (via paper, totem poles, photographs, etc.), were at the heart of missionary-Indigenous interaction. Overall, it was argued that at a time when these missionary histories were taking on new significance through government-sponsored processes of apology, truth and reconciliation, greater awareness of the past significance of diverse story-telling traditions was of great importance. The support of the *Religion and Diversity Project* for research assistance with digital dissemination had enabled me develop innovative, creative methods for bringing this historical reflection on one of the earliest forms of “religious diversity” in Canada to wider audiences.

The goal of this project was to develop the tools and content to disseminate the results of my SSHRC-funded research project in a digital format in order to reach a broader audience than conventional scholarly modes of publication.

Methodology:

- This project works with methods of the digital humanities, in which digital preservation and coding of archival records through the open-source platform of Islandora allows for high-quality and accountable digital cataloguing of sources that can then be turned into easily accessible digital maps and digital storytelling.
- A website is being developed that will supplement the book by providing access to some of the archival texts, photographs, and maps that were used in this research.

Student Involvement:

- Judith Brunton, University of Toronto
- Hannah Wilkinson, University of Toronto
- Kaleigh McLelland, University of Toronto

Results:

Funding was also requested for two aspects of the dissemination: 1) an audio documentary providing a 30-minute version of the book’s argument; 2) a digitally interactive map of Du Vernet’s journey incorporating images, recorded stories, and other markers of the places and people he visited in northern Ontario and northwestern British Columbia. These forms of digital storytelling have allowed the primary investigator to disseminate her research in an accessible manner that could have classroom applications.

Dissemination:

Digital storytelling and digital mapping are increasingly important as both methods and dissemination tools for historical and religious studies research. Telling stories about indigenous-missionary relations in this format has prompted the primary investigator to use sources differently, and to think more intentionally about the effectiveness of her scholarly analyses and framing when trying to communicate with audiences in the classroom and outside of the academy. Digital dissemination is also very time-consuming, both in terms of the labour involved and of the education and training that it requires. But the time and effort are worth it, as this process challenges scholarly conventions for how we organize and think with our sources, and enables us to turn our research into more accessible, yet still intellectually complex, arguments.