THEN/HiER Graduate Student Project Summary: Make History – a public digital history workshop

In the spring of 2014 I applied for a THEN/HiER Graduate Student Project Grant for a project I was developing called "History Harvest London." This project was based upon the History Harvest model developed by the History Department at the University of Nebraska Lincoln. This model saw historians partnering with local community stakeholders to preserve and document local history and heritage.

Using this model as a template I wished to bring History Harvest to my community of London, Ontario. I am a co-founder of the MakerBus, a project that seeks to expand access to technology and education in London using a retrofitted school bus. At the MakerBus we have access to a number of technologies that have applications for digital history – tools like 3D printers, laptops, podcasting equipment, and digital cameras. I requested funding from THEN/HiER to purchase equipment that would allow us to make 3D scans of historic objects.

With the support of THEN/HiER, I purchased a 3D scanner attachment for the iPad called a Structure Sensor. This scanner had received generally good reviews from technology journalists and had the advantage of being extremely portable.

Working with a local heritage group called the Old East Village Historical Association, we arranged for a trial run of our History Harvest at their annual Heritage Day Festival. As we were developing the program we decided to call the event "Make History." The new name capitalized on the local brand

recognition of the MakerBus and gave us some more freedom to experiment with the History Harvest format. Our goal was to both test Londoners' willingness to participate in a public digital history workshop and to see how the public would respond to the equipment.

During the 4-hour event we interacted with nearly 100 members of the Old East community. We had four stations set up: oral history podcasting, 3D object scanning, 3D printing, and document scanning. We found that while many people had stories to share with us, few felt comfortable giving an oral history podcast. Additionally, while many people were interested in learning more about 3D printing, we had very few people who were interested using the technology to make replicas of the historic artifacts. We did have a number of people bring documents to scan, making the document scanning the most popular station.

People were intrigued by the 3D scanner and we had two people bring personal objects to be scanned. As we discovered while researching heritage applications for consumer 3D scanners, there is no consumer-grade 3D scanner on the market that is capable of scanning metallic objects. All consumer-grade scanners currently on the market use infrared light to scan objects – metallic or glossy objects repel infrared light, making it extremely difficult to make reliable scans. This is a limitation for the technology since many historical objects are metallic or glossy.

We made scans of the two objects and provided information about how consumer-grade 3D scanners can be used to preserve local heritage. Overall we were pleased with the event and consider it a successful first attempt. As we plan how best to develop the History Harvest model in London, we will continue to work with local stakeholders and community groups to insure that future public digital history workshops will meet the needs of our community. Moving forward we are in discussion with local libraries about how best to store and share local digitized history.

The UNL History Harvest works with community groups to hold distinct History Harvest events. We will adopt this model in the future since holding our

workshop at a pre-existing event seemed to cause confusion about what we hoped to achieve. Had we worked with the OEVHA on a distinct event, I believe that we would have had more people bring historical objects to the workshop.

I am extremely thankful to the History Education Network for their support of this project. The scanner and iPad will continue to be used in the development of public local history projects.

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