

Appendix F: *AU Press walks confident path.* An article about digitization.

The centrepiece will be the extraordinary documentation over three decades of the environmental movement in Alberta, donated by its leading activist, the late Martha Kostuch. Her work joins the Friends of the Athabasca collection. Another gem is 20 boxes' worth of Metis genealogical research. Langley wants people to donate their records to archives where they will be secure, temperature and humidity-controlled, and available to researchers. "A lot of people don't realize the things they have are useful for archives. It's the records – how they live their lives – that document what they're doing, for example, three generations of farming records."

While the new space will allow for secure storage of much more extensive archives, the flip side is that digitizing everything makes it accessible to everyone. That surely has to be the hallmark of an open university.

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AU Press walks confident path

"For historians, one of the great promises of digital technology is its potential to democratize history – to incorporate multiple voices, reach diverse audiences, and encourage popular participation in presenting and preserving the past (2006)."

– Roy Rosenzweig, Founder and Director of the Center on History & New Media, George Mason University

Historian and poet Walter Hildebrandt, director of AU Press, is proud that with the official launch of AU's scholarly press in June, the university took a bold stance in the controversy surrounding access to academic works. "We are one of the first overtly open access presses in North America. Anything we publish goes up on a website for access for free. People think it will put scholarly publishing out of business, but some important leaders in the publishing world – who work at Athabasca – are making it accessible. It's the most central thing we're doing."

The geographical focus of AU Press is on Canada, the North American West, and the Circumpolar North. It is publishing innovative and experimental works and reviving neglected forms such as diary, memoir and oral history. Its works emphasize labour studies, Métis and aboriginal studies from perspectives sensitive to aboriginal peoples, gender studies and the environment. All bear the scholarly imprint of peer review and all are in open access technologies. In addition to original works, AU Press is publishing prestigious journals and creating websites carrying credible resource material.

"In the age of the Internet when people are uncertain what information they can rely on, we are providing material that has been assessed. We indicate the scholarly process," Hildebrandt says. "We're living in a time when some people are saying the scholarly monograph is in danger of disappearing, pricing itself out of the market when only 300 may sell. Open access is one way of making more material available to more people." While others see AU as the canary in the mine, "we have no fear," Hildebrandt says. "Our books are selling quite well."

Intrigued by podcasts and interviews with authors, readers sample the books online, then buy them with a click of the

mouse. AU Library is using LULU, an e-publishing service that handles all the technical aspects of production, book ordering and shipping, totally hassle-free. AU doesn't even need to keep any inventory.

Hand-in-hand with the philosophical position that knowledge must not be hoarded is the technological means to make AU's materials fully available. "(We're) increasing accessibility and usability; we're not interested in just collecting the documents," says electronic resources librarian Tony Tin. "Accessibility to Canadian culture and history is really important."

The springboard is the Lois Hole Campus Alberta Digital Library, a \$30-million investment in digital materials the province announced for educational institutions in 2005. AU Library is in the midst of creating a breathtaking digital presence with AU Press and Thomas A. Edge Archives & Special Collections materials. In keeping with AU's chosen niches, there'll be an emphasis on local history, women's studies, natural history, the environment, and resources for AU courses.

Materials such as the Riel Resistance memoir *Four Months Under Arms* will be digitized within a rich context, what Tin calls "a one-stop experience. We'll put supporting information, links to video files, audio files, additional information about the rebellion, so you don't stop at reading one document." The digitization team is even developing its own search engine.

The practicalities of the project include satisfying questions of copyright and – ironically, in this bid to preserve history – selecting digital formats that can migrate into technologies not yet devised. Coming down the technological pipe is something called *Second Life*, which Tin describes as a virtual world that will allow people to set up an identity in a house or a museum, or even a deli, where they will experience the original items in a collection and be able to manipulate them in cyberspace. "The digitization initiative is to enhance the value of the collection," he says. "We're not trying to replace the original (item), but to reduce the wear and tear."