

THE CONNEXIONS ARCHIVE & LIBRARY

PRESERVING AND SHARING GRASSROOTS HISTORIES

OVERVIEW

CONNEXIONS INFORMATION SHARING SERVICES is a non-profit project founded in Toronto in 1975 to compile and share information about and for grassroots citizen groups and social movements. The CONNEXIONS website receives about 75,000 visitors a month.

The project has grown to encompass a substantial physical archive of materials, leading to the incorporation of a separate but closely related entity, the CONNEXIONS ARCHIVE & LIBRARY. CONNEXIONS is an active working archive focused on making materials available to the public by cataloguing, digitizing, describing and indexing them. The work is done by volunteers and by interns who have come to Toronto from more than 25 countries to work on the project.

CONNEXIONS recently launched an initiative to identify other archives of Toronto-based grassroots citizen groups. Two well-attended meetings, publicized with the teaser '*Is that an archive in your basement... or are you just hoarding?*' stimulated discussion about how to preserve and share this kind of 'people's history,' and collected information about a number of uncatalogued collections.

CONNEXIONS is searching for a secure space to house the collection *and* those who work on it. We are exploring creative win-win partnerships to accomplish this.

PURPOSE

CONNEXIONS' paramount goals are:

- **Preservation:** Preserving histories of grassroots movements for social justice.
- **Sharing:** Making the documents, histories, experiences, and visions of these movements accessible online, as well as physically.
- **Social Justice:** Our strong commitment to archiving and access is accompanied by an equally strong commitment to supporting movements for social justice from one generation to the next.

RATIONALE

The histories of citizen groups and grassroots movements are important but frequently neglected. Social progress often has its roots in the activities of local or issue-based citizen groups setting out to remedy injustices and change what to that point has been accepted as normal. Knowing our past helps us to understand our present, and make better-informed choices about the future we want.

Because citizen groups tend to be loosely structured, have few or no paid staff, and are often relatively short-lived, they typically have a small institutional footprint. Their histories are particularly fragile and prone to disappear.

CONNEXIONS has been working to identify these kinds of non-institutional archives and to seek solutions for preserving them, digitizing them, and providing access to them. There is some urgency to this: many of them came out of groups which no longer exist, and are being held by people who are getting older and wanting to find a way of transferring their collections to some organization that is willing to preserve them and provide access to their contents. CONNEXIONS has been working to help to identify and find solutions for these at-risk social justice materials, but also needs to find a secure space of its own to work from.

CURRENT OBJECTIVES

- 1) Secure a physical location for CONNEXIONS, ideally in partnership with an institution able to provide space, which will have room for:
 - (a) The archive itself, i.e. the materials in the collection;
 - (b) Space for the work of the archive (cataloguing, scanning, subject indexing, creation of web pages)
 - (c) Some space for people to come and consult the materials, i.e. a resource centre function.
- 2) Develop relationships with institutional archives (governmental, university) to make it possible to transfer materials which have been digitized to the larger archive, where appropriate.
- 3) Help to develop a network of people and organizations engaged in archiving and publishing grassroots social justice materials. To support this, help to develop computer resources and software to allow sharing of resources, e.g. combined catalogues and indexing and search technologies, with resulting benefits of higher visibility, more people using the materials online, etc.

CORPORATE INFORMATION

The CONNEXIONS ARCHIVE & LIBRARY is incorporated in Ontario as a not-for-profit corporation.

Incorporation number: 1845394

Business number: 82695 5718

Objects for which the corporation is incorporated:

- a) To collect, preserve, organize, index, publish and provide access to information and materials related to grassroots movements for social justice;
- b) To educate and increase the public's understanding and appreciation of grassroots movements for social justice;
- c) To provide information to the public through educational forums, literature, and other means; and such other complementary purposes not inconsistent with these objects.

CONNEXIONS ARCHIVE & LIBRARY
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