

CONNEXIONS

PRESERVING AND SHARING PEOPLE'S HISTORY

OVERVIEW

CONNEXIONS is a non-profit project founded in 1975 to compile and share information about movements for social justice and grassroots activism. The CONNEXIONS website www.connexions.org receives about 75,000 visitors a month.

The project has grown to also encompass a substantial physical archive of materials located in Toronto. The CONNEXIONS ARCHIVE is an active working archive focused on making alternative voices and people's histories available to people around the world. The work of cataloguing, digitizing, describing, indexing and translating materials in the CONNEXIONS ARCHIVE is done by volunteers and interns who have come to Toronto from more than 25 countries to work on the project, as well as by volunteers who work remotely.

CONNEXIONS is currently searching for a secure space in Toronto to house the collection *and* those who work on it.

CONNEXIONS recently launched an initiative to identify other archives collected by 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.'

ARCHIVE LOCALLY, SHARE GLOBALLY

CONNEXIONS is looking to develop relationships with other projects, organizations, and individuals engaged in archiving and publishing grassroots social justice materials.

One way in which we could co-operate is co-ordinating and sharing the work of digitizing, cataloguing, and indexing. If our archives and resource centres share information about their collections and priorities, it could help us avoid duplication of effort while making more resources available to more users.

We would also like to explore co-operative archiving of each other's websites and digital materials. While digital media, including the Internet, are valuable for sharing materials with large numbers of people, they are also fragile and transitory. Digital media and software become obsolete or deteriorate quickly. Websites disappear. One project could be to set up a *mutual archiving network* whereby radical archives and websites mirror each others' websites and digital records in a systematic way so that there are multiple copies.

CONNEXIONS would like to hear from others projects interested in developing such initiatives.

SUPPORTING CONNEXIONS

CONNEXIONS receives no funding from governments or corporations. We rely on contributions from supporters to sustain the project. Donations may be made online at www.connexions.org/Donate.htm or by mail to the address below. For information about making a bequest or in-memoriam donation call 416-964-1511.

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The Case for Grassroots Archives

- 1) The social transformation we are working for is a *long revolution* – a process that requires the efforts of *generations of activists*.
- 2) Remembering and knowing about previous struggles strengthens us. We learn from past victories and defeats, from mistakes as well as from positive experiences. It is always good to know that we are linked to those who stood up for justice and freedom before us, and to those who will continue the work in the future.
- 3) Written materials and other physical records are tangible records of the history of social change movements. These materials are *people's history*, and they play a valuable role in the “battle of memory.” It is important to preserve as much of this grassroots heritage as we can – and to make it available as widely as possible.
- 4) Official institutions, for the most part, are not much interested in preserving radical history. Those few which are interested face budget constraints that severely curtail their ability to make acquisitions or provide access to their collections.
- 5) Preserving the documentary history of grassroots movements has largely fallen to individuals and small projects who see the importance of preventing history from disappearing “down the memory hole.” Many of these collections are in danger of disappearing over the next few years.
- 6) We owe it to the future to take steps to secure these grassroots archives, and to make it possible for them to continue as *living archives* able to continue their work of preserving people's history and making it available.

Connexions Statement of Values

We believe

1. In the value of preserving the history of grassroots movements for social justice and making it accessible to new generations.
2. In the importance of keeping alive the memories, experiences, strategies, successes, failures, and visions of those who have worked for social justice over the years so future generations can learn from them and be inspired by them.
3. In the tradition of ‘history from below’ – people's history – working to keep alive memories of resistance in the face of a political culture that insists there are no alternatives to the way things are, and that ‘resistance is futile’.
4. In the importance of diversity and pluralism, of recording and making available a wide range of approaches to social change and social justice. We aim, as best we can, to feature resources reflecting a variety of viewpoints and alternative approaches to social justice.
5. In the value of knowing our history, of knowing that people have been working at the grassroots for a better world for many decades and of learning about the problems they faced and how they tried to deal with them.
6. In the value of passing on the experience and knowledge of elders, and of people who have passed on, to the activists of today and tomorrow. These are threads of wisdom and experience that can be woven into the tapestries of our movements for change.
7. In the importance of sharing information as well as preserving it. Our goal is to make the contents of the archive available as widely as possible, in a variety of formats and languages.
8. In connecting people in different places. For people to act locally and think globally, it helps to know what people in other places are facing and how they are trying to bring about change.
9. In the values of democracy, civil liberties, freedom of speech, universal human rights, secularism, equality, economic justice, ecology, and the creation and preservation of community, which we seek to support through the CONNEXIONS ARCHIVE.

Connecting Issues and People - Connecting our Past to our Future
www.connexions.org