



Western
Libraries

Impact Report | 2024-25

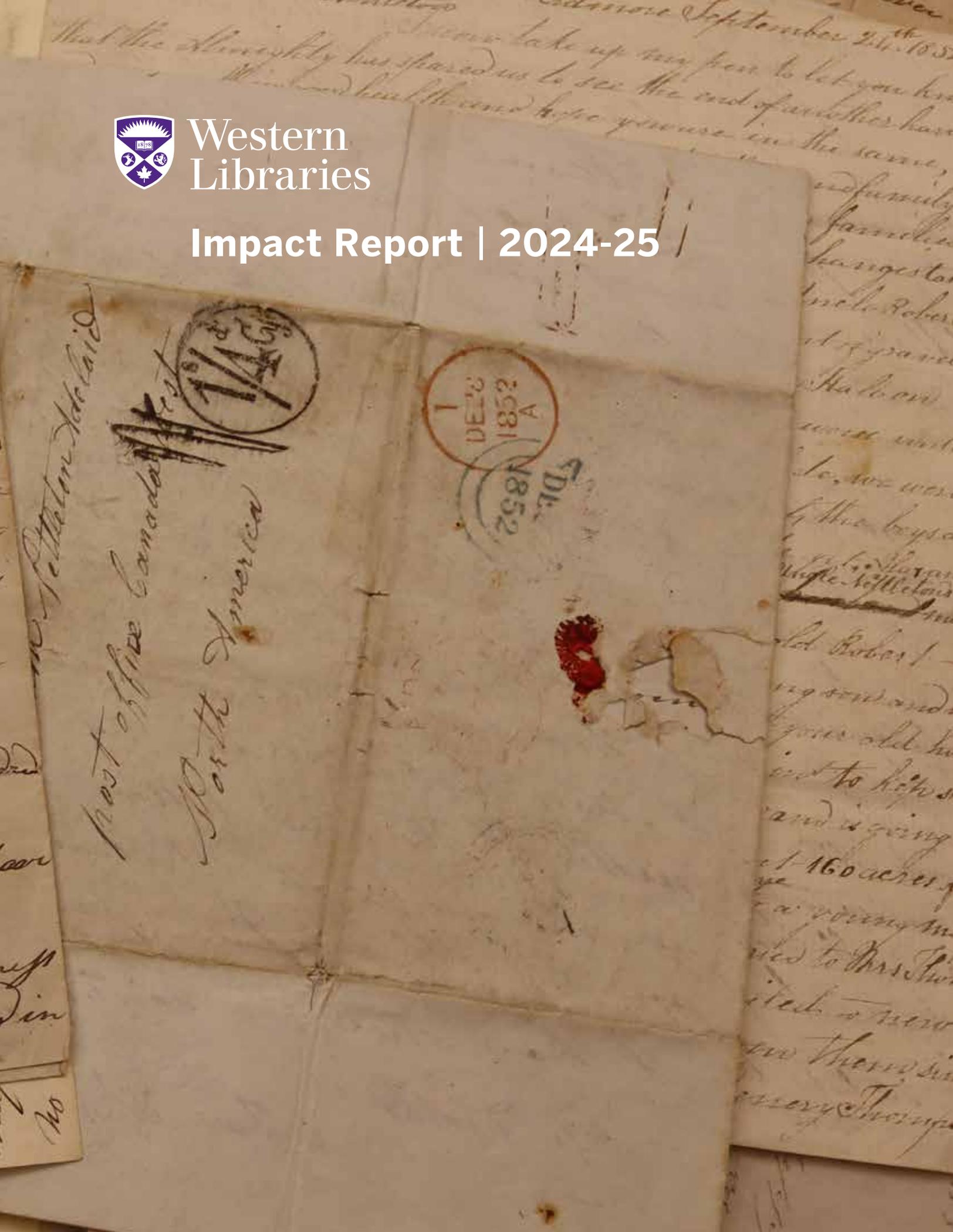


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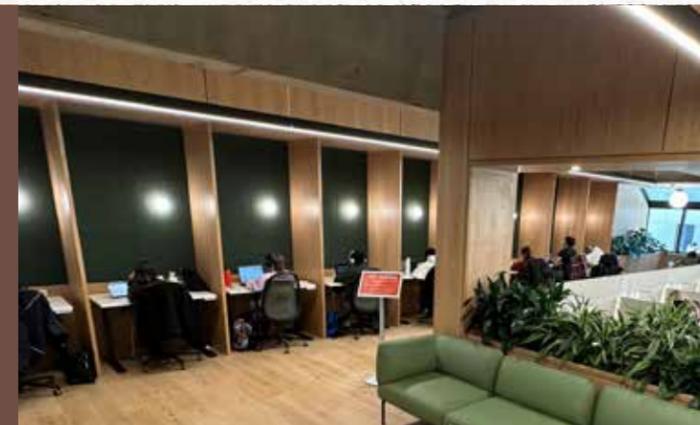


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Western Libraries Impact Report 2024-25

Western Libraries

Western Libraries is the library system of Western University in London, Ontario. As the university's academic commons, we provide essential library and archival expertise, information resources, technology, collaborative spaces, and specialized staff. We support the university's research mission by cultivating and mobilizing knowledge across campus. Western Libraries engages, inspires, and empowers students, scholars, and researchers to achieve excellence in teaching and scholarship, and supports their development as global citizens and leaders.

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A Message from Geoffrey

In reviewing an early draft of this Impact Report, I was struck by the scope, scale, and breadth of the work taking place in Western Libraries, and by the expertise and deep knowledge of our staff. Together we have achieved much over the last year.

In this report, you'll learn about new spaces, including Scholars Lab on The D.B. Weldon Library's ground floor and a new silent study space on its first floor, as well as our support for innovative scholarship and research creation such as the Black Londoners Project and Emma Donoghue's new play, *The Wind Coming Over the Sea*, which premiered at the Blyth Festival this summer. We are also celebrating some exciting new acquisitions, including the historical records of the London Health Sciences Centre, which was originally founded in 1875, three years before Western University itself. Another 15th-century Book of Hours donated by professor Jane Toswell in honour of her father. Designed to aid and guide an individual's daily prayer cycle, it features appeals to Saint Apollonia, the patron saint of dentists and those suffering from toothache. You'll have to read on in this report to understand the connection between the manuscript and professor Toswell's dad.

Student success is central to our mission. In the fall, and for the second year, we presented the Western Libraries Undergraduate Research Awards, or WLURAs, which honour exceptional scholarship by undergraduate students. The award recipients, and the high number of submissions we received, are a testament to the intellectual and creative power of Western students and to the important role that librarians, archivists, staff, and library collections play in their success. As part of the ambitious *All in* campaign, which Western launched in September, we are looking to create an endowment to ensure the future of the WLURAs.

We are also committed to our community. This year we abolished borrowing fees for members of the public, granting them free access to most of our vast print collection. More recently, we became only the second Ontario university to join the Community Scholars Program, which connects the staff of non-profit, charitable, and public service organizations with more than 20,000 academic journal titles and e-books.



Finally, we are supporting EDIDA (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Decolonization and Accessibility) in numerous ways, including a new joint fellowship with the Faculty of Information and Media Studies to support Black and Indigenous students in the Master of Library and Information Science program.

Like many parts of the university, Western Libraries is facing a challenging period. We are being asked to think differently about how we do our work within a resource-constrained environment. Responding to that call will require creativity, ingenuity, and collaboration. I am confident in our ability to navigate these challenges with care, thoughtfulness, and integrity.

My sincere thanks go to my colleagues in Western Libraries for their many contributions over the last year. We should be proud of much.

Geoffrey Robert Little
Vice-Provost & Chief Librarian

Emma Donoghue Brings Western's 19th Century Letters to Life at Blyth Festival

Inspired by Johnson-McConnell family correspondence, Emma Donoghue's new play captures the hopes and hardships of Irish immigrants to Canada

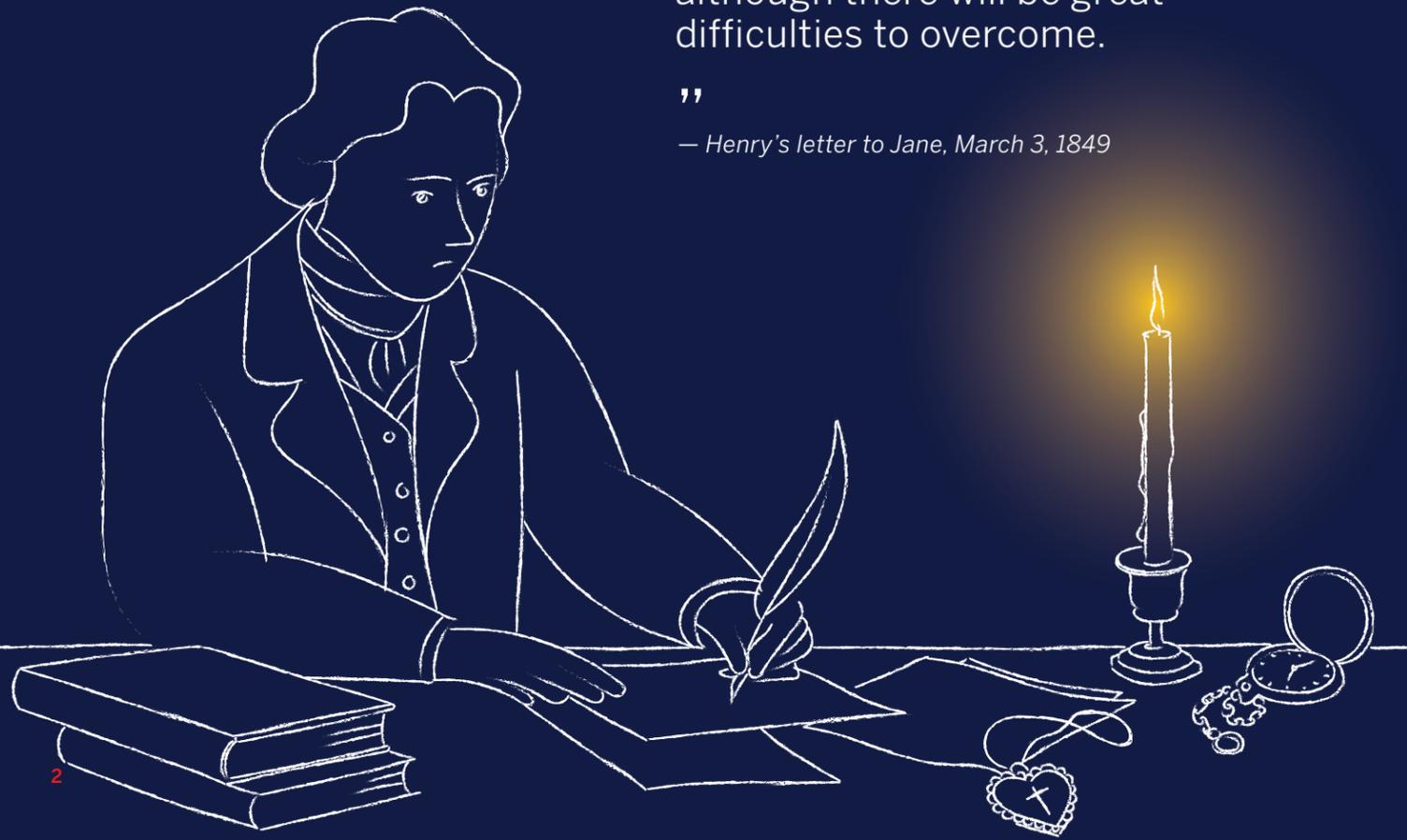
"...but Henry Dear, I leave this to yourself you have some idea which of the two countries would be best. It would be very hard for me to take the children as I know of no person going to that country at present but if you wish me to go, I will go without any hesitation." — Jane Johnson's letter to Henry Johnson, Jan. 9, 1849

The correspondence between Jane Johnson (née McConnell) and her husband Henry Johnson vividly illustrates one family's immigration journey to Canada during the Great Famine—detailing the uncertainty, hardship and hope of Irish immigrants preparing to move to Canada.

These letters, carefully preserved in the Archives and Special Collections (ASC) at Western, served as the inspiration behind award-winning author Emma Donoghue's new play *The Wind Coming over the Sea* at the Blyth Festival.

“Those who are doing well at home and a prospect of continuing to do so ought not to come here, those who are not it is just the place for them although there will be great difficulties to overcome.”

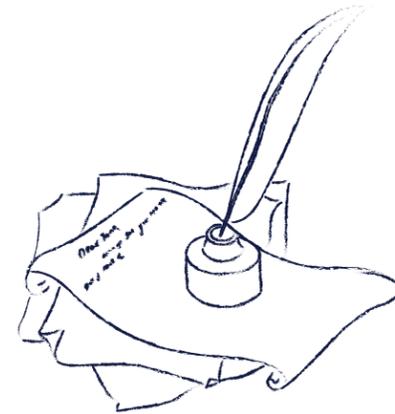
”
— Henry's letter to Jane, March 3, 1849



Donoghue, LLD'13, first came across the letters as a footnote in a text she was researching in 1999, when she was Western's writer-in-residence. She had been looking to learn more about the immigrants who had come before her, especially Irish immigrants. The letters inspired her to write a short story about the Johnsons. Years later, when the Blyth Festival approached her to write a play about Irish immigrants, she immediately thought back to the letters because they were so "eloquent, sturdy, practical and yet emotionally expressive."

In hopes of writing about the letters in more detail, she travelled 5,566 km to Belfast in an effort to find the original copies, only to learn the letters had been in her own city—in the same archives where some of her own work and archival records are kept.

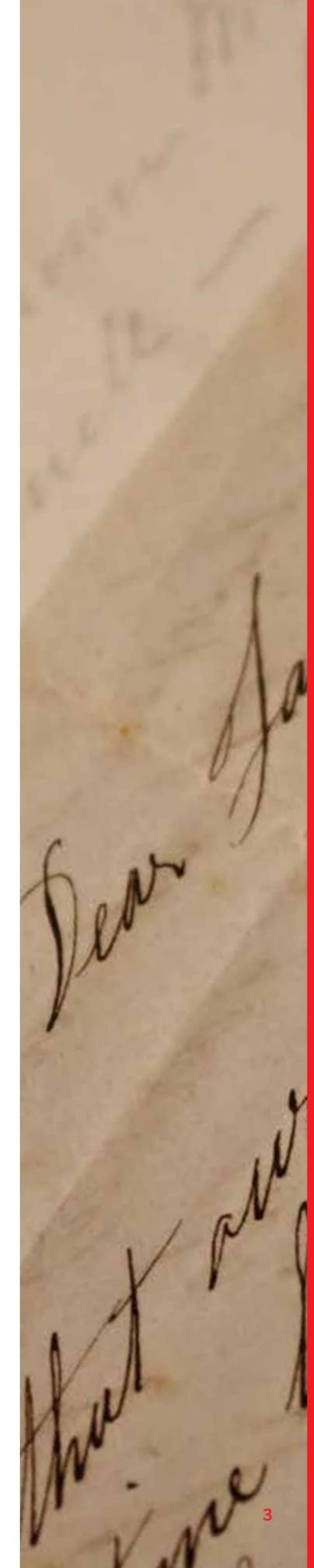
"I was so moved to be laying my hands at last on the actual pages. Not only had Jane and Henry written to each other, but they had managed to keep the letters safe on their travels all that time. Some of them were dirty, some were tattered, some with pages missing and some entire letters were missing," said Donoghue. "I think the letters were so important to the couple, to keep them going. They were an emotional lifeline so they each carefully preserved the ones that they had."



For Amanda Jamieson, a Western archivist at ASC, the letters stand out among the 19th century collections. Often records capture one side of a story, because the person only has the correspondence they received, not the ones they sent.

"With these letters, we can read the back and forth. It's a conversation. You can see two sides of a story, and you also get the family connection as well," said Jamieson. "They're from the 1840s predominantly and our collection only has a small number of letters from that timeframe. These letters are so detailed. There's so much yearning and hyperbole and they're so well written."

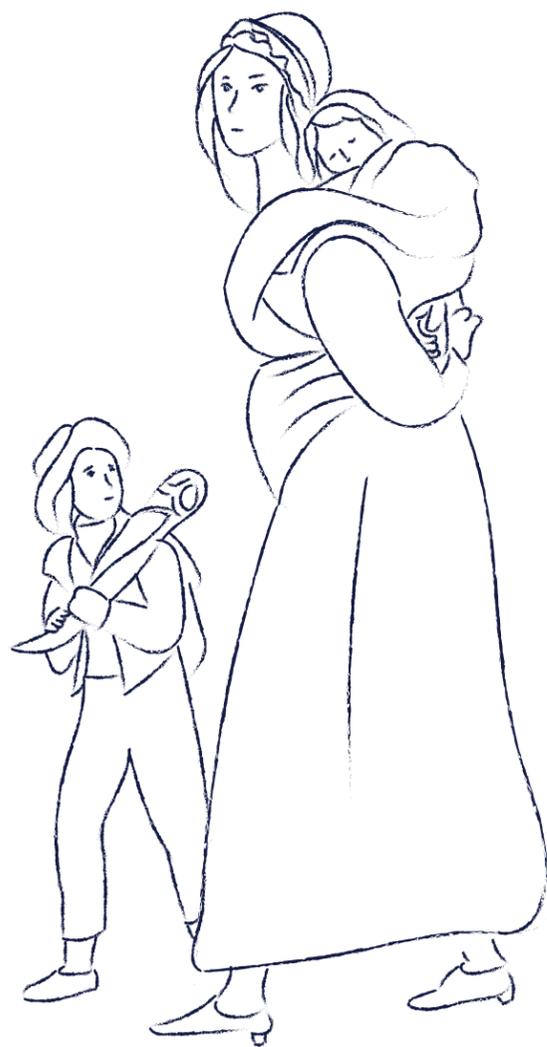
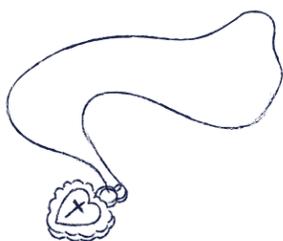
The collection includes correspondence from Jane's father and other relatives of the couple. Preserved with unusual completeness, the letters provide insight into the family's private lives and the broader context of mid-19th century immigration.





“It was around that turbulent time of immigration. Their town, Antrim in Ireland, was becoming destitute and people were becoming so impoverished they had to leave the country. I think that’s why the letters are so emotional as well, because they were leaving under such duress,” said Jamieson, who noted that about 200,000 people fled the country in 1847.

She pointed out the physical documents themselves are striking. Made of high-quality cotton rag paper, the letters have endured with minimal damage. Even the addresses, often as simple as “Post Office, Canada West, North America,” reveal a glimpse of a world where mail still reached its intended recipient across the Atlantic.



“
I am not able to do much; but
the little that I can, I will do.
I intend therefore in my next
letter to send each of you a
small matter to show you that
though absent, none of you are
ever forgotten by me.
”

— Arthur McConnell’s letter to his daughter Jane,
July 5, 1855, sent from Antrim, Ireland to Canada

“We have such a large archives program for the region, and we have the ability to provide really great access with a wonderful reading room and resources to preserve and digitize one-of-a-kind records,” said Jamieson.

The letters were safeguarded for generations by their descendants, including Jane’s great-granddaughter Louise Wyatt, a teacher in London, Ont. who published some of the letters in *Ontario History*.



From the Archives to the Stage

Donoghue used fragments and details from the letters to build monologues that honour the family’s voices while shaping a narrative for the stage.

“Their marriage was this living thing where they both brought skills and strength. This is not what we think of as a classic sort of Victorian marriage. He wasn’t making the decisions for the family, so these letters are a rich source that lends itself well to a 21st century play about two equal parties, full of humour, satire and human warmth,” said Donoghue.

The play is a musical featuring traditional Irish ballads and folk music.

Donoghue described watching her words take shape on the stage for the first time as everything she had wanted.

“It feels particularly alive. Watching these actors play Jane and Henry, it’s sort of like we’re letting the dead walk again. It’s a kind of thrilling magic,” she said. “At the very origin of theatre is having people let themselves get kind of possessed by either imaginary people or dead people or people far away.”

The Blyth Festival, known for championing Canadian and rural stories, proved an ideal home for the production.

“It’s extraordinary that this play has managed to find such an audience and people are relating to it so much based on their own history of their families coming to Canada from many different places—it seems to have touched a real nerve. It’s celebration of the ups and downs of immigration,” said Donoghue. ■

The donation of the letters to Western in the 1970s ensured their story can continue to be shared with the wider public.

“I’m so thrilled by archives,” said Donoghue, “But researching archives is quite a solitary experience, and every now and then I come across something that I feel needs to go to a wider audience, sometimes in the form of a novel and in this case in the form of a play.”



The Detective Work of an Archivist

One archivist's journey through the clues of history, from paper composition to Victorian mourning customs

When Amanda Jamieson picks up a stack of old letters, her mind immediately begins piecing together clues. The colour of the paper. The style of cursive. The way a letter has been folded and sealed. To the untrained eye, these are simply old documents. To Jamieson, an archivist at Western Libraries, they're a puzzle waiting to be solved.

"Usually what we're trying to do is date something—that's our number one priority as archivists," Jamieson explains, carefully handling a blue-tinted letter from the 1850s. "We're trying to give it a date, a context, and a creator."

But dating historical documents requires a specialized skill set that Jamieson has honed over two decades working in archives. Her expertise includes palaeography—the study of handwriting and writing systems—along with an intimate knowledge of paper types, ink styles, and historical writing conventions that most people never think about.

The Paper Tells a Story

Take paper, for instance. Jamieson can tell at a glance whether she's looking at cotton rag paper (common before the 1850s) or wood pulp paper (which became standard after). "This paper, to me, is cotton rag paper," she says, examining a letter. "And for the most part, you see lots of blue papers from this era. The paper gets whiter and cleaner and more standardized later on."

The cursive itself offers clues too. Jamieson watches for the presence of a "long S"—a letter that looks like an 'f' but represents an 's', common in 18th century writing. Its absence helps her narrow down dates. She notices how people's penmanship varies, how some writers cram words together to save space while others sprawl luxuriously across the page.

Creative Solutions to Postal Costs

One of the most fascinating practices Jamieson encounters is cross-hatching—when letter writers, concerned about postage costs based on the number of sheets mailed, would write in one direction, then rotate the paper 90 degrees and write perpendicular lines over the first layer of text. "You'd read it one way, and then you'd have to flip it to read it the other," she explains. "It was quite common in the 19th century to keep that postage down."

Even the envelopes tell stories. In the mid-1800s, the paper and envelope were often the same document, folded and sealed with wax. Jamieson points to a letter with a black border: "When we see black on the outside of a letter, we usually know that the person who's sending the letter is in mourning. This was a common practice from the Victorian era."

Building Context and Provenance

Currently, Jamieson is working with the Johnson-McConnell letters, a collection of letters between family members during the Irish Famine that inspired the work of internationally bestselling author, screenwriter, and playwright Emma Donoghue (story on page 2). But Jamieson's detective skills extend far beyond reading old handwriting. She's also piecing together context and provenance, figuring out who sent letters to whom, and maintaining what archivists call "original order"—preserving the relationships between documents as they were kept by their creators.

"We're creating context. That is a key task in archives," Jamieson says. Sometimes this means using a perpetual calendar to determine which year a partially dated letter was written. Other times, it's recognizing that houses in 1850s London, Ontario didn't have street numbers yet—crucial information for researchers doing genealogical or built heritage work.

What strikes Jamieson most is how these skills have become second nature. "I've internalized a lot of this at this point," she admits. "These are just thoughts that happen, and I don't really give them too much depth because that's not necessarily the most important thing I need to know."

The most important thing? Making sure researchers can access and understand these materials and preserving the voices of ordinary people experiencing extraordinary circumstances. ■

Rare Medieval Music Pages Join Western's Collection

Western has acquired two complete pages of medieval neumes—early forms of written music. Complete neume pages are rare. These are Western's first, purchased from an Ontario vendor with support from legacy donors. They'll enable hands-on research for students studying early musical history.

What Are Neumes?

Unlike modern sheet music, neumes show melodic direction and rhythm without specifying exact pitch. Monks already knew the melodies; neumes were memory aids, not sight-reading tools.

Why They Matter

Dating to the 9th–12th centuries, neumes reveal that Western music developed through oral tradition and memorization—similar to Eastern cultures—rather than rigid notation.

"Neumes are the closest thing to an actual transcription of an intangible idea in someone's mind," said music professor Kate Helsen.

Bringing History to Life

To make neumes come alive for modern audiences, Helsen created "sound walks," featuring posters with images of neume fragments found by Meert-Williston in manuscript waste. Paired with sound beacons linked to a smartphone app, visitors can hear the chants as they approach each one.

"We forget there was a time when sheet music was a momentous discovery," Helsen said. "...Now Western has actual examples of the earliest efforts to capture music."

For a full version of this story, visit [Medieval Neumes](#). ■





Fourth-year classical studies student Stephanie Leith spent her summer searching for medieval manuscript fragments used to support spines and reinforce bindings in the production of the world's first books. She worked under the guidance of special collections librarian Deborah Meert-Williston and her research supervisor, classics professor Kyle Gervais.

Fourth-year classical studies student Stephanie Leith (left) spent her summer searching for medieval manuscript fragments used to support spines and reinforce bindings in the production of the world's first books. She worked under the guidance of special collections librarian Deborah Meert-Williston (centre) and her research supervisor, classics professor Kyle Gervais (right).

Medieval manuscript fragments, once buried in bindings of early books, offer 'window into the past'

She once worked in the high-tech world for search engine giant Google. Now, Stephanie Leith is manually searching early print books, looking to uncover even older works within.

Leith's quest started this past summer, delving into volumes housed in the [Archives and Special Collections \(ASC\)](#) of Western Libraries, hunting for fragments of medieval manuscripts, once used to make bindings of the world's first books.

As bindings and covers fall away over time, the fragments of parchment become visible. Because the text of these fragments was not typically erased before being repurposed for bookbinding, it's often possible to read and analyze that text. Researchers can sometimes identify the work from which it was drawn and determine the approximate date of when the manuscript was first produced.

"These fragments offer a window into the past, telling us more about what life was like in a given time," said Leith, who took on the project through Western's [undergraduate student research internship \(USRI\)](#) program.

The opportunity brought the fourth-year classical studies student the satisfaction she

was seeking when she left her career and returned to school.

"I was driven by a need and thirst for meaning and to contribute to something larger than myself, which is how I see academia," Leith said. "Now I'm contributing to a piece in the giant puzzle of history."

Research Opportunity 'Too Exciting to Let Go'

Leith first learned of the use of early medieval manuscripts in the art of bookbinding as part of classics professor Kyle Gervais' Introduction to Medieval Manuscripts course, during a class visit to the ASC.

"As we shifted from medieval manuscripts on parchment to print books, manuscripts became 'old tech' as printing could ramp up the dissemination of written works faster," Leith said.

"Manuscripts weren't thought to be exciting anymore and were often cut into strips to support the spines of books, reinforcing the sewing supports to make sure the books would still open nicely."

As special collections librarian Deborah Meert-Williston showed examples of fragments found in some of the ASC's rare books, Leith became fascinated, eager to learn more.

"Western Libraries had already identified fragments dating back to the early 12th century, and the possibility of finding more was too exciting to let go. When Dr. Gervais pitched the USRI project to me, I absolutely knew that's how I wanted to spend my summer," Leith said.

Under the supervision of [Gervais](#), whose research interests include digital humanities and the study of pre-modern manuscripts, and with the guidance of Meert-Williston, an [expert on rare books and medieval manuscript materials](#), Leith reviewed 200 early books from the 16th century.



She discovered 16 books containing 62 individual fragments, which she photographed, catalogued and recorded. She also created a [website](#) to document her findings.

Fascinating Findings Buried in Bindings

The limp parchment bindings of 12 out of the 16 books show they've remained untouched for almost 500 years. The fragments predominantly feature texts written in Latin, with two in Dutch and Hebrew. Others, not yet identified, could be in German or Middle English.

The manuscript fragments vary in size and content, falling in four categories: Christian theology, history of medicine, classical history and English literature.

Highlights include three large fragments from the 13th century decretals of Pope Gregory IX, created to organize and clarify the laws of the Roman Catholic Church.

They hold what Leith calls the "little gem" of her discoveries.

It's not just the main text that's intriguing, but the commentary surrounding it.

"You can see two different people had used it for study. Their handwritten notes are around it and they've done a medieval version of 'highlighting,' where they draw a little finger to point out what's important. This is an example of how these tiny fragments tell their own story. Those students, through their notes, are showing this was important enough to be studied, how it was interpreted and what it meant to them at the time."

A small 1562 edition of *The Epistles of St. Ignatius of Antioch* contained not one, but three different fragments.

Gervais identified one of the fragments to be from Julius Caesar's *De Bello Civili 2.4*. 'Hidden' on the spine of the book, it was only found because the book fell apart.

"To discover a pagan work supporting the spine of a Christian one is fascinating," said Leith, who's also pursuing a major in Catholic studies. "In the medieval period, Christianity became dominant, prompting an ongoing debate about classical works—the idea they were valuable, but how could Christians reconcile that if pagans wrote them? Finding writings of Julius Caesar under a religious book shows someone found enough value in it to save it, even if they later turned it into trash. It also tells us they were reading Caesar's works and that Caesar's works were being reproduced into the 13th and 14th century."

Relevance of Research at Western and Beyond

Meert-Williston said Leith's research is helping advance important work for the ASC and Western.

"Although we knew that our early print collection contained manuscript 'waste', so far there has not been a systematic approach to gathering

the fragments all together and creating a record of what we have. Most of the fragments Stephanie identified have not been studied and some of what she uncovered was being seen for the first time in hundreds of years," Meert-Williston said.

She also noted the relevance Leith's and Gervais' ongoing research has beyond Western.

"There is great interest in our medieval manuscript collection, not just from our campus community, but from around the world. Finding, identifying, and describing these fragments is an extremely worthwhile effort because it adds to the quantity and quality of our existing collection, which supports both teaching and research," said Meert-Williston. "Since each medieval manuscript is a unique object, and may contain information not available anywhere else, every fragment offers the academic community the possibility of learning something about the world we didn't know before."

Gervais said the discoveries help give humanities students direct connections to the materials they're studying, a rarity in the field.

"For the classics of Ancient Greece and Rome, the texts we study are here thanks to copies handwritten over time. We have all these fragments, thanks to the fact somebody had an old book kicking around. They no longer saw it as valuable and cut it up to support a new book they did value. Five hundred years later, it is suddenly significant to us, because it's preserving a document hundreds of years older than the book we're looking at."

Preservation, Gervais added, is another important aspect of the manuscript fragment project.

Libraries around the world, including Western, are preserving fragments of ancient medieval manuscripts within early modern books, without knowing they are there. That puts the fragments at risk, often when someone has good intentions of repairing them.

"When a rare book is recovered and rebound, all of this, 'waste' gets

thrown away," Gervais said. "That's why it's important to find it, catalog and preserve it."

Next Steps

Fuelled by the findings of her summer internship, Leith is continuing to work on the project with Gervais.

"It's become a bit of an obsession, like solving a mystery," she said. "And there's so much more to explore."

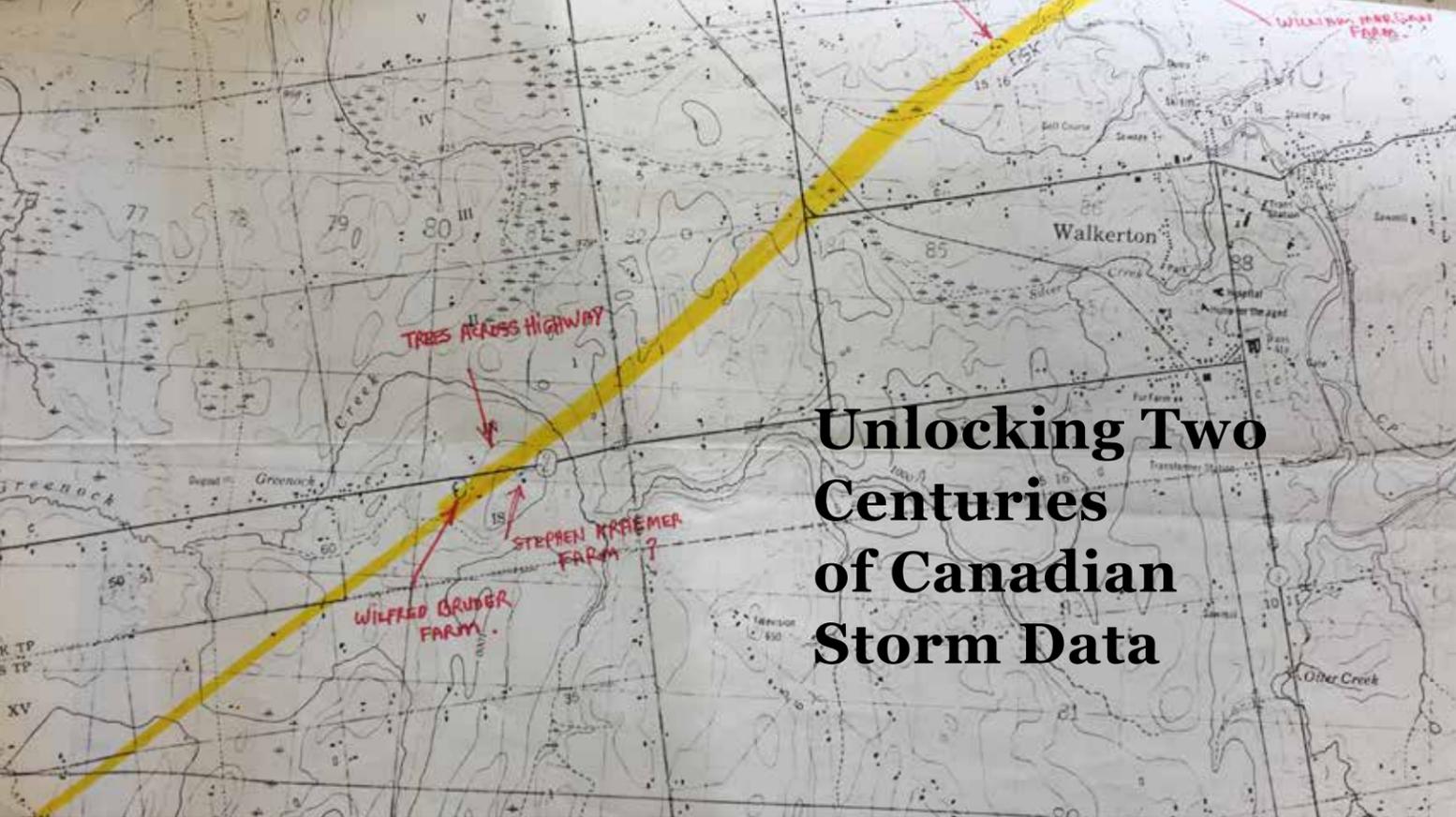
Once Leith finishes studying books in the ASC's 16th century collection, she'll turn her focus to those from the 17th century.

Other next steps include developing a fragment catalogue for Western Libraries and sharing that data on [Fragmentarium](#), a digital laboratory cataloguing medieval manuscript fragments from around the world. This opens the possibility of collaborating with scholars around the world to piece together a manuscript, once cut into pieces and scattered across the globe.

That would be "a gift," for Leith, who's glad to have transferred her love for sharing knowledge at Google to sharing knowledge through tiny pieces of history.

"Working in tech, everything phases out approximately every six months, because things iterate so fast," she said. "What's fascinating about this work is its enduring nature. It's a little footprint in the path of time and part of my footprint now. ♥"





Unlocking Two Centuries of Canadian Storm Data

Michael Newark's pioneering tornado research archive has been transformed into a comprehensive digital resource, making centuries of Canadian storm data accessible to researchers worldwide

For decades, retired Environment Canada meteorologist Michael Newark pursued a singular mission: tracking down every piece of tornado documentation he could find. Newspaper clippings, investigation reports, photographs—Newark methodically assembled Canada's first national tornado database, with records stretching back to 1792. Yet

this treasure trove of storm data remained locked away in filing cabinets, invisible to the researchers who could put it to use.

That changed when the [Northern Tornado Project](#) (NTP) approached Western Libraries with a challenge: transform Newark's comprehensive collection into an [accessible online resource](#). After a two-year collaboration, they succeeded, launching the digital archive in July 2024.

The Challenge: Organizing a Whirlwind of Information

"When we first got [Newark's archive], it was really just like folder of digital documents of various types and sizes," says [Arielle VanderSchans](#), the research and scholarly communications librarian who co-led the project with her colleagues [Joanne Paterson](#) and [Courtney Waugh](#).

The scope was daunting. Thousands of documents needed organizing. Photos were

labelled with random numbers. News clippings from different decades were mixed together. Nothing was searchable.

"It was like getting a file cabinet with no order," VanderSchans explains. "There was a lot of organizing to do before we even got started on metadata, which is where the real work began."

The team spent 18 months organizing and creating detailed digital records for each tornado event by systematically adding titles, locations, dates, and times—metadata that would make the archive useful for research.

"As my colleague Joanne likes to say, 'It all starts with a spreadsheet,'" VanderSchans notes.

A Tool for Modern Research

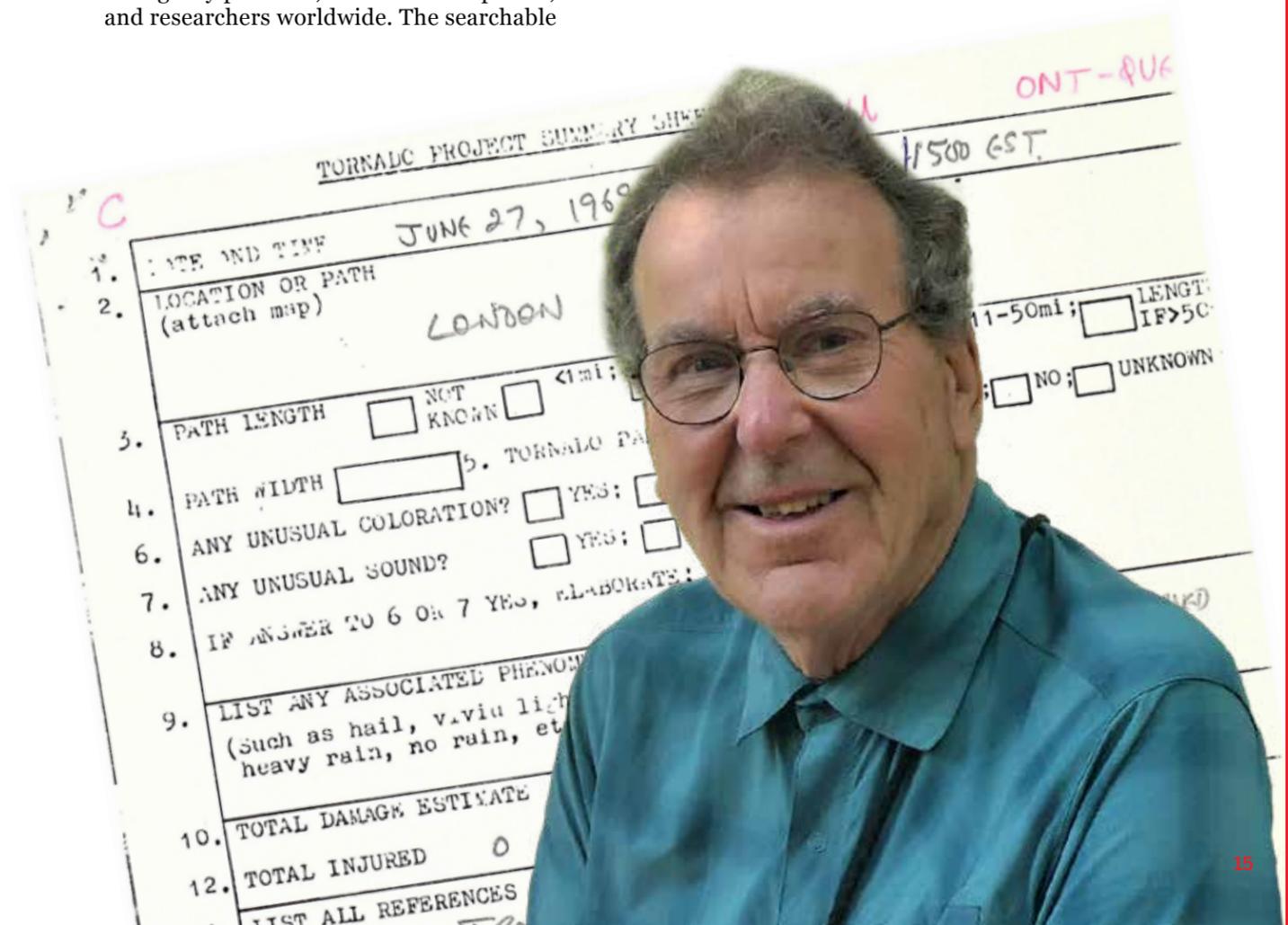
The [Michael Newark Digitized Tornado Archive](#) now serves meteorologists, emergency planners, insurance companies, and researchers worldwide. The searchable

database allows for better risk assessment, improved forecasting, and stronger preparedness planning.

The project shows how careful organization can transform a static collection into a dynamic research tool. By making the historical record openly available online, researchers can now analyse patterns and trends that were previously locked away.

By summer 2026, the team plans to migrate to a new platform with enhanced mapping capabilities, using the geographic coordinates they catalogued to enable better spatial analysis.

The collaboration between Western Libraries and the NTP has preserved an important piece of Canadian meteorological history while creating a foundation for ongoing tornado research and education. ♥



♦ Michael Newark, University of Toronto graduate, retired Environment Canada meteorologist, and a 1969 London Tornado Project Summary Sheet

Making Invisible Histories Visible

The Black Londoners Project

A groundbreaking collaboration between Western researchers and Western Libraries is recovering lost stories from London, Ontario's past

Harpers Weekly. 1864. Negroes Leaving Their Home. Internet Archive.

"I keep a boarding-house, and have now ten boarders, all fugitives, as nearly as I can recollect. One of them came last winter. They have all got employment."

These words from 1855, spoken by a formerly enslaved woman known only as Mrs. Brown, offer a rare glimpse into a thriving but largely invisible community of Black freedom seekers in London, Ontario. Her testimony, recorded in abolitionist Benjamin Drew's *A North-Side View of Slavery*, represents one of just 16 documented accounts of Black Londoners whose stories have been systematically erased from the historical record.

Walking through downtown London today, PhD candidate Ronique Gillis sees invisible histories everywhere. "I think about how some of these places once belonged to Black Londoners as Black businesses or households," she reflects in a [2025 Western News article](#). "The erasure is shocking to me." Her words capture the central challenge facing [The Black Londoners Project](#): how do you recover entire communities that have been systematically written out of history?

The answer lies in an innovative collaboration between Western researchers and Western Libraries Map and Data Centre, using Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology to transform scattered historical traces into an interactive digital map that makes invisible histories visible for the first time.

“
My name is – – – but you must not tell it, for I have children at the South, who would be eaten up if their masters knew.
”

— An 80-year-old freedom seeker, known simply as "An Old Woman,"



◆ Auguste Edouart. 1844. *Dalmany*. Glenn Tilley Morse Collection. The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Why Black Histories Disappeared

[The Black Londoners Project](#), co-founded by English and Writing Studies professors [Alyssa MacLean](#) and [Miranda Green-Barteet](#), confronts a stark reality about historical preservation in 19th century Canada. London's memory of Black history is very limited, even though Black communities were very much present in the early 19th century.

Because the historical record was so systematically biased against people of colour, many records simply weren't preserved. Records for women of colour were even more rarely kept. The record-keeping itself was male-dominated and focused almost entirely on London's white population, leaving Black lives largely undocumented.

Beyond institutional neglect, many formerly enslaved individuals—known as freedom seekers—deliberately avoided documentation due to fear and vulnerability. Some were afraid of being found by former enslavers or had family members who had not yet escaped. This apprehension extended to interactions with census takers and officials, leading many to remain hidden from public records.

The consequences of this systematic erasure are profound. An 80-year-old freedom seeker, known simply as “An Old Woman,” instructed Drew: “My name is — — — but you must not tell it, for I have children at the South, who would be eaten up if their masters knew.” Her words reveal how survival often required invisibility—creating the very silence that historians now struggle to overcome.

“
These records are very hard to find. It's really hard to trace any sort of Black history in London, and a lot of those records have been erased
”

— *Maia Somers, GIS Technician*

Mapping the Unmappable: Technology Helps Reveal Hidden Lives

In addition to [traditional archival research](#), reconstructing the lives of early Black Londoners required spatial thinking, data management, and technical innovation. This is where Western Libraries' Geographic Information Systems (GIS) expertise became crucial.

GIS technology allows researchers to create digital maps that layer different types of information—historical documents, census records, property deeds, and personal testimonies—onto geographical locations. For [Maia Somers](#), GIS technical specialist at the Western Libraries Map and Data Centre, this presented both opportunities and challenges. “These records are very hard to find. It's really hard to trace any sort of Black history in London, and a lot of those records have been erased,” she explains.

Initially supported by GIS specialist [Liz Sutherland](#) and now guided by Somers, the team developed an [interactive dashboard](#) mapping birthplaces, arrival points in London, and final destinations for the 16 documented individuals. Users can click on these points to explore each person's journey, transforming abstract historical data into tangible human stories.

The project currently features three detailed stories online: [Mrs. Brown](#), whose boarding house sheltered other freedom seekers; [Margaret Henderson](#); and the anonymous “[Old Woman](#)” whose protective silence speaks volumes about the dangers these individuals faced. Each represents a different facet of the freedom seeker experience in London.

“The map really gives life to the data,” Somers explains. “It makes it easier to understand the story and connect with the individuals behind it.”

The team is now working toward a more advanced map that will integrate spatial data with archival materials—newspaper clippings, sketches, and other documentation—to create an even richer, interactive experience.

A Model for Uncovering Hidden Histories

This collaboration represents more than a single research project—it's a model for how academic libraries can support community-driven research into underrepresented histories. By combining historical research with spatial data visualization, Western Libraries continues to provide GIS guidance and technical support to help researchers manage and visualize their data in ways that traditional archival methods cannot achieve.

The project builds infrastructure that can support similar efforts to uncover erased or marginalized narratives across Canada and beyond. The methodology developed here—using GIS technology to map fragmented historical records—offers a blueprint for other researchers working to recover lost communities and forgotten voices.

The Black Londoners Project interactive map and database is available online. If our GIS experts can help you bring stories connected to your research to life, please reach out to rsclib@uwo.ca.



← *Timothy H. O'Sullivan. 1862-1865. Five Generations on Smith's plantation, Beaufort, South Carolina. New York Public Library.*



Maia Somers
Geographic Information Systems Technician,
Map and Data Centre,
Western Libraries

“It's super interesting to see how history and spatial data can combine and create a really powerful story.”

Maia Somers (BSc [Hons] '17, Geology and Physical Geography, Western University; MSc '23, Physical Geography, Queen's University) works as a GIS technical specialist at Western Libraries. The primary focus of her work is with the Canadian Severe Storms Laboratory (CSSL) to manage project data including aerial, drone, satellite, and ground surveys. She supports the field survey team with data collection methods and maintains Open Data sites and event dashboards for both the Northern Tornadoes Project and Northern Hail Project.

Maia also collaborates with a variety of other groups in the Western community applying GIS tools and software to create educational maps and applications. She believes GIS is most powerful when it reveals a story in the dataset, making it easier for users to understand and connect with the information.



PRESERVING HISTORY, POWERING RESEARCH

Western Libraries Joins National Digitization Effort

Through a national partnership, Western Libraries is helping unlock new research possibilities by digitizing a vital piece of Ontario's newspaper history

When Western Libraries digitization librarian Leanne Olson packed up 87 reels of microfilm containing editions of the *London Advertiser*, she wasn't just mailing old newspapers—she was ensuring a piece of Ontario's history would be widely accessible for generations to come.

Thanks to a new partnership with the [Canadian Research Knowledge Network](#) (CRKN), Western University Libraries is helping digitize 11 additional years of the *London Advertiser*, a once-prominent daily newspaper that served London, Ontario, until 1937. The project is part of CRKN's inaugural call for [Canadiana Collection Development Projects](#), a national initiative to expand access to Canada's diverse and rich past.

"This is a great partnership," says Elizabeth Mantz, Acting Head of Archives and Special Collections. "It's not just about preserving the past—it's about making it accessible to researchers, genealogists, and the public across Canada and beyond."

A National Stage for Local Stories

The *London Advertiser* was a vital source of news for southwestern Ontario in the early 20th century. Covering everything from local elections and real estate sales to world wars and influenza outbreaks, the

"This is a great partnership. It's not just about preserving the past—it's about making it accessible to researchers, genealogists, and the public across Canada and beyond."

— Elizabeth Mantz, Acting Head of Archives and Special Collections

paper offered a daily snapshot of life in a growing Canadian city.

One of the world's largest digital archives of Canadian heritage, [CRKN's Canadiana platform](#) already hosts issues from 1890 to 1925. With Western's contribution of microfilm from 1925 to 1936, the collection will now offer a more complete historical record—freely accessible to anyone, anywhere.

"Local newspapers are really heavily used," says Olson. "Now access won't be limited to those who are able to access our collections. They'll be fully searchable online and part of a much larger national collection."

The demand is clear. In 2024, the *London Advertiser* ranked #42 among the top 50 most consulted titles in CRKN's Canadiana Collections. A user survey, which gathered over 13,000 responses, found that most users are interested in history, genealogy, and Indigenous studies—areas where historical local newspapers can be an invaluable resource.

A Win-Win Collaboration

For Western, the project is a milestone in its growing digitization efforts. "We don't have the equipment or staff to digitize microfilm at this scale," Olson explains. "This partnership allows us to contribute to a national collection without needing to invest in specialized technology or staffing we simply don't have."

CRKN is handling the digitization, metadata creation, and hosting. Western provides the content and curatorial expertise. "It's a great

model," Olson says. "We're learning a lot, and we're contributing to something bigger than ourselves."

The project also reflects Western's strength in regional history. "We're very well resourced in Canadian newspapers, especially for southwestern Ontario," Mantz notes. "This could open the door to digitizing other regional newspapers in the future."

Research That Reaches Beyond Campus

The impact of digitizing historical newspapers is already evident in the broader research community. [Alyssa MacLean](#), a professor in Western's [Department of English and Writing Studies](#), offers a compelling example. Her research relies heavily on digitized newspapers like *The Provincial Freeman* and *London Free Press*, many of which are available through platforms like Canadiana.

"One of the helpful aspects of having sources online is that we can consult them as a team in asynchronous contexts," she explains. "We can interact with the entire newspaper page, rather than just a photocopy from microfilm."

Her experience highlights the value of making historical newspapers digitally accessible—for academic researchers, but also for genealogists, educators, and community historians alike.

Looking Ahead

For Western Libraries, the project is just the beginning. "We're already thinking about the next call," Olson says. "It takes time and a lot of collaboration across our units to develop a solid project, so we're starting to plan ahead."

Western's digitization efforts continue to grow, with projects like the digitization of the [Western Gazette](#), the university's official student newspaper, also underway. "We're really seeing growing interest in local history," Olson says. "Whether it's alumni researching the university, genealogists tracing family roots, or community members learning about their neighbourhoods, these digitized materials are filling in important gaps."

As Western approaches its 150th anniversary in 2028, projects like this one ensure that the university's legacy—and the stories of the communities it serves—are preserved for generations to come. ♥

For the Record: A Librarian's Fight to Rescue Public Data

As government datasets began to vanish, Kristi Thompson mobilized a national initiative to keep critical evidence accessible



On Jan. 20, 2025—the day of the U.S. presidential inauguration—a quiet digital purge began. Federal agencies began removing thousands of pages and datasets, erasing content related to diversity, gender identity, climate science, and public health almost overnight. This wasn't arbitrary: new executive orders ended DEI programs and ordered agencies to strip related language from public platforms. The impact quickly extended beyond messaging. The National Center for Education Statistics lost most of its staff, climate monitoring initiatives were defunded, and key health and social data portals went offline.

For researchers and the public, the information gap was immediate—and potentially catastrophic. Without access to these datasets, tasks like tracking inflation, modeling climate risk, or evaluating education policy are at risk of becoming increasingly speculative. The loss undermines evidence-based decision-making across sectors, leaving policymakers, analysts, and communities to navigate

critical issues with incomplete or outdated information.

"This kind of destruction goes beyond data loss—it is a deliberate effort to disrupt and control discourse by limiting what can be known," says Kristi Thompson, research data management librarian at Western Libraries. She adds: "An even bigger threat is that the U.S. government has stopped collecting certain data. If the data isn't collected, it never existed. You can't go back and fill in the gaps later."

Thompson documented these events in her recent peer-reviewed article, [The Data Resistance: Preserving Data Set Integrity During Federal Purges](#), published in *Behavior and Social Issues*. In her article, she describes how automated web crawlers failed to capture many of the datasets. Manual intervention was required—fast.



A Coordinated Canadian Response

As U.S. librarians scrambled to copy and preserve what they could, Thompson saw the alarm spreading north.

"We've had our own history of data loss in Canada," she says, pointing to the 2011 cancellation of the long-form census and the closure of the First Nations Statistical Institute. "It can happen here."

In February 2025, she co-founded the Canadian Public Data Rescue Initiative with [Alexandra Cooper](#) of Queen's University. What began as a listserv post quickly evolved into a multi-institutional collaboration. The initiative now includes three subgroups: one focused on rescuing U.S. data, another on mass downloading Canadian government data, and a third to curate and publish individual datasets so they remain usable—not just stored.

"Our job is to turn a disappearing link into durable evidence—cleaned, documented, and deposited where people can actually find and use it," says Thompson.



From Rescue to Reuse

While downloading raw data can come with its own challenges, making sure a file is usable—and safe—is a whole other matter.

Some data collections are only accessible through interactive web tools. Others require registration or a data use agreement. File sizes can be massive, and often special expertise is needed to structure the data and import it into statistical software for analysis.

“If you just grab the raw file, it’s like finding a box of lab notes in a language you don’t speak,” Thompson explains. “Without proper processing, a file can be meaningless.”

Turning a panicked download into a durable public resource requires a series of unglamorous but essential steps: writing metadata, reviewing and organizing documentation, and performing ingest—the process of uploading and preparing files for long-term preservation.

Privacy adds another layer of complexity. Some datasets include survey responses or health details. Even without names, combinations like postal code, age, and language can identify someone. These sensitive variables can make individuals traceable. For example, if a dataset shows a Danish-speaking researcher in a specific region with 45 years of experience, that person could be singled out.

While anonymization isn’t always part of the rescue process itself, Thompson’s broader work in this area has helped researchers prepare sensitive datasets for public sharing. In May 2025, she [co-authored a paper on reducing re-identification risk](#)—the chance that someone could be identified from supposedly anonymous data. Her approach: check for sensitive variables, group rare values into broader categories, and document every change so the dataset remains trustworthy.

These same principles are essential when rescued data is intended

for reuse. Saving a dataset isn’t just about copying it before it disappears—it’s about ensuring it can be shared responsibly and understood by others.

“
When government data disappears, it disrupts the entire system of knowledge that allows governments to function effectively—and allows the public to see whether they are functioning effectively. Data collection and analysis is inherently a political act. A society makes implicit statements about what it values by what it chooses to count.

”
— Kristi Thompson, *Research Data Management Librarian*

From Emergency to Infrastructure

By spring 2025, the Canadian data rescue team had moved from crisis mode to building systems for the future. One major contribution: preparing rescued U.S. datasets for deposit in [DataLumos](#), a public repository hosted by the [Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research \(ICPSR\)](#) at the University of Michigan. The team is also establishing a dedicated archive on [Borealis](#), a national research data repository, to host the Canadian datasets being rescued.

Depositing datasets in repositories like DataLumos or Borealis means they are preserved in a trusted archive, assigned a permanent link (a DOI), and made discoverable for researchers worldwide. It also ensures the data is documented and curated so others can understand and reuse it.

The initiative also ran download sprints to safeguard Canadian government data and began drafting repeatable workflows—step-by-step guides for what to grab, how to describe it, and where to publish it—so future rescue efforts can start faster and finish stronger.

What’s at Stake

Government data is more than numbers. It’s the evidence base for public policy, disaster planning, social equity, and much more. When it disappears, decisions get made in the dark.

“When government data disappears, it disrupts the entire system of knowledge that allows governments to function effectively—and allows the public to see whether they are functioning effectively,” says Thompson.

“Data collection and analysis is inherently a political act. A society makes implicit statements about what it values by what it chooses to count.”

In the face of current and threatened data destruction, Thompson urges researchers to take action—starting with safeguarding their own materials. She encourages them to become “data hoarders,” keeping local copies and tracking the provenance of every file.

“Even if you think the material is backed up elsewhere,” she says, “remember the LOCKSS principle—Lots Of Copies Keep Stuff Safe.”

Practicing good data management, supporting preservation efforts, and using public datasets in their own research are all ways researchers can demonstrate the value of open data—and help protect it.

For Thompson, the work is urgent but also hopeful.

“If data destruction is a way to limit what people can know,” she says, “then preserving data is an act of resistance.”

“
If data destruction is a way to limit what people can know, then preserving data is an act of resistance.

”
— Kristi Thompson, *Research Data Management Librarian*



Kristi Thompson
Research Data
Management
Librarian, Western
Libraries

“Data preservation isn’t just technical work—it’s about protecting evidence for the public good.”

Kristi Thompson is a national leader in research data stewardship and co-founder of the Canadian Public Data Rescue Initiative, which mobilizes librarians and researchers to safeguard vulnerable government data. She also serves as an advisor to Western’s Research Ethics Boards and co-chairs the Digital Research Alliance of Canada’s Sensitive Data Expert Group. Her work spans data rescue, data anonymization, and open education. Thompson co-edited Canada’s first open, bilingual textbook on research data management and has published widely on privacy and preservation.



FROM FINDING SOURCES

TO SEEKING VOICES

A New Open Resource Invites Us to Rethink the Answer

A free, interactive teaching tool challenges educators, students, and professionals to build more inclusive, justice-oriented classrooms and practices

In 2022, Western Libraries made a bold commitment: to decolonize its curriculum and move beyond traditional approaches to teaching information literacy. That commitment has now evolved into a national resource—an Open Educational Resource (OER) titled *Knowledge Justice in the Helping Professions: From Theory to Practice*, launched in August 2025.

Though titled for the helping professions, the resource offers insights and strategies that extend far beyond nursing, psychology, or librarianship. Its core questions—about whose knowledge counts and how we make space for diverse voices—are relevant across disciplines, institutions, and professions.

This free, interactive teaching tool is already generating national interest, with close to 100 educators and librarians signed up, even before the resource had officially launched.

“We built this resource for educators, librarians, and students across Canada,” said [Heather Campbell](#), curriculum librarian and co-lead author. “But its lessons are relevant anywhere—the questions it asks about whose knowledge counts are universal.”

“

We built this resource for educators, librarians, and students across Canada, But its lessons are relevant anywhere—the questions it asks about whose knowledge counts are universal.

”

— Heather Campbell, Curriculum Librarian

A Spark in Nursing

The OER's roots trace back to Western's 2022 Fall Perspectives on Teaching conference, where Ashley McKeown, a lecturer in the Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing, first encountered Western Libraries curriculum work.

"I realized my students—and even my own practice—were relying on a narrow slice of evidence," McKeown recalls. "I went home and rewrote my assignments that night."

That moment sparked an ongoing partnership between McKeown, Campbell, and teaching and learning librarians Lea Sansom and Kathryn Holmes. Together, they began experimenting with how to teach epistemic justice—the idea that social identities influence whose knowledge is heard, valued, or dismissed.

Their work resonated deeply with students and faculty, inspiring new assignments, classroom discussions, and even a presentation to the Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN), where McKeown, Campbell, and doctoral student

“

This resource exists because so many people came together around a shared belief that students deserve to engage with knowledge in more inclusive and critical ways.

”

— Lea Sansom, *Teaching and Learning Librarian*

V. Logan Kennedy shared their curriculum work with nursing educators and regulators.

From Curriculum to OER

Western Libraries Teaching and Learning team quickly realized that putting knowledge justice into practice would require experimentation—and collaboration.

"As librarians, we often teach in other people's classrooms," said Campbell. "Ashley gave us the chance to test new approaches, and together we developed something that truly resonated."

The project was made possible by a dedicated Open Educational Resource (OER) grant from Western Libraries, which provided the primary funding for development. Additional support came from the Centre for Teaching and Learning, the Instructional Technology Resource Centre, and faculty from Education and Health Sciences. Co-authors from across Western—including the Faculty of Education, Faculty of Health Sciences, Arthur Labatt Family School of Nursing, Centre for Teaching and Learning, and Western Libraries—played a vital role in shaping the resource and championing its inclusive vision.

Built in Pressbooks and licensed under Creative Commons, the OER is free to access, share, and adapt. It includes six chapters, embedded videos, reflection activities, and a downloadable workbook.

What Makes This Resource Different

Unlike traditional information literacy modules, the OER reframes how learners engage with knowledge. It introduces tools like the Voices Flower, which shifts the focus from "finding sources" to "seeking voices," and the Framework of Harms, which helps learners evaluate all forms of evidence—peer-reviewed articles, government reports, or social media posts—based on their potential to help or harm.

Rather than relying on checklists or source types, learners are guided to assess the diversity and sufficiency of their evidence, and to reflect on whose perspectives are missing.

"We're teaching students to seek voices, not just sources," said Campbell. "And to ask: What evidence do we value most—and whose voices are being left out as a result?"

The OER also offers practical guidance on Generative AI, helping learners navigate these tools with care and intention. Rather than treating systems like ChatGPT or Gemini as neutral sources, the resource encourages students to reflect on how such technologies—trained on dominant cultural data—can shape the knowledge they encounter.

What's Inside the OER?

Each chapter explores a different facet of knowledge justice:



Chapter 1:

Identity, positionality, and power



Chapter 2:

Epistemic injustice—recognizing who is missing



Chapter 3:

Defining knowledge justice and its role in evidence-based practice



Chapter 4:

Strategies to seek missing voices, including guidance on AI and seeking others lived experience



Chapter 5:

Evaluating knowledge sources through the *Framework of Harms*



Chapter 6:

Real-world applications, featuring interviews with professionals in nursing, psychology, and librarianship

The final chapter is a standout. It builds on the foundation laid in the first five chapters by bringing those ideas into the real world, featuring candid reflections from professionals who are learning to apply knowledge justice in their daily work—often in messy, complex, and emotionally charged contexts. It's where theory meets practice, and where readers see how small, intentional shifts can lead to meaningful change.

"It shows what happens when professionals choose to act differently, when they confront epistemic injustice, reflect on their own social locations, and commit to change," said Campbell. "These stories are an invitation to imagine new ways of practicing."

Why It Matters

The OER asks difficult but essential questions, such as: Whose evidence are we relying on? Who is missing from our understanding of the world? How can we practice knowledge justice in spaces dominated by hidden algorithms and systemic biases?

“Our students know that inequities exist. They live them every day,” said McKeown. “Avoiding those conversations in the classroom does them a disservice.”

For Western Libraries, the OER is more than a teaching tool. “This resource helps us fulfill our operational goal of being leaders in library instruction,” said Campbell. “It’s also a concrete example of how we’re embedding our curriculum across the university.”

Early Impact and Future Plans

Western instructors in nursing, health sciences, dietetics, medicine, library and information science, and philosophy plan to integrate the OER into their courses this year. Nationally, the resource’s authors have presented the curriculum at conferences across the country, sparking conversations in disciplines from psychology to library science.

Looking ahead, the team plans to release a companion teaching guide and explore future volumes focused on academic research and knowledge production.

“Knowledge justice is a collaborative practice,” said Sansom. “We hope this inspires faculty at Western and beyond to reach out to their librarians and explore these ideas together.”

Ready to Explore?

Visit [Knowledge Justice in the Helping Professions](#) or the [Western Libraries curriculum](#) online and discover how you can bring knowledge justice into your classroom or professional practice. ▀

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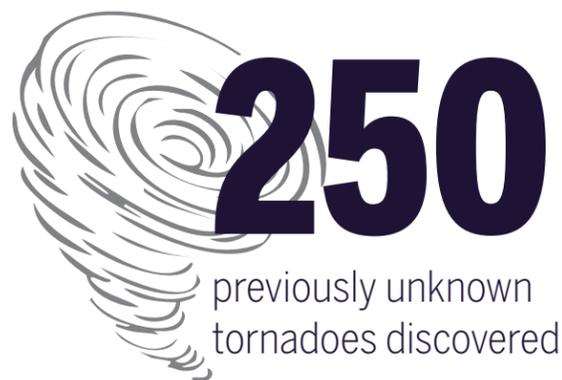


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Beyond Basic Weather Maps: Creating Tools for Tornado Professionals



How the Map and Data Centre transformed decades of tornado data into one of Canada's most sophisticated weather research tools

**250**
previously unknown
tornadoes discovered

When the [Northern Tornadoes Project](#) (NTP) approached Western's [Map and Data Centre](#) with decades of tornado research, the challenge was clear: how do you transform raw historical data into something meteorologists, emergency planners, and researchers can actually use? The answer required

sophisticated Geographic Information Systems (GIS) expertise, careful platform design, and ongoing technical maintenance—exactly what GIS technician [Maia Somers](#) and her colleagues specialize in.

The result, launched in May 2024, is Canada's [Advanced Tornado Dashboard](#)—a platform that does more than display data. It reveals patterns, enables complex filtering, and has helped document over 250 previously unknown tornadoes across the country, including 45 newly identified fatalities from 1980-2009.

Designed for Professional Users

The Map and Data Centre's first task was understanding what professionals actually needed. Weather Network reporters covering severe storms, insurance companies assessing regional risks, and municipal planners

developing emergency protocols all required analytical capabilities that basic public dashboards couldn't provide.

The solution meant building two complementary systems with distinct technical requirements. While the [NTP's main dashboard](#) needed to stay simple and updated regularly with recent events from 2017 forward, the Advanced Dashboard required sophisticated filtering, historical depth, and membership-based access control.

"We'll get reporters from newspapers or the Weather Network or meteorologists that will come in and look at this dashboard to analyze the historical database," explains Somers.

The technical architecture the Map and Data Centre created using ArcGIS Online goes far beyond basic mapping. For the first time, users can view actual tornado tracks where documented, with enhanced detail for complex, non-linear paths. The platform enables filtering by month, time of day, tornado length and width, Enhanced Fujita rating (a scale used to measure tornado intensity), motion patterns, and economic losses.

"The filters that we create in the back end help them do that," Somers says. "If researchers are going in there to use it, they are now able to find specific subsets of a dataset."

“

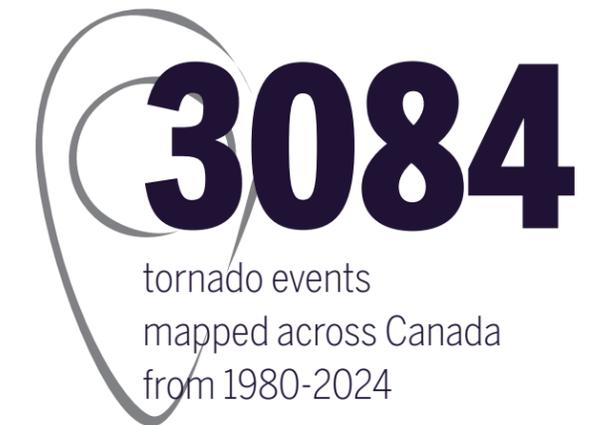
ESRI has asked us if we would be able to include NTP's tornado event layer in the Living Atlas of the World, because it is important information that is consistently being collected and updated live. This is positioning Western's Map and Data Centre among elite institutions creating GIS infrastructure with global impact.

”

— Maia Somers, GIS Technician

Building the Platform

The project began in 2023 when GIS specialist [Liz Sutherland](#) and former Map and Data Centre employee Jordan Fuller started developing the technical framework. When Somers joined in April 2024, she brought the dashboard to completion before its summer launch, working closely with the NTP team led by [David Sills](#).

**3084**
tornado events
mapped across Canada
from 1980-2024

The technical work involved more than just displaying points on a map. The Map and Data Centre had to create systems for visualizing tornado paths, building intuitive filter mechanisms, managing membership access, and ensuring the platform could handle 3,084 tornado events spanning from 1980 through 2024—with plans to eventually extend back to 1792.

Each technical decision shaped how users interact with the data. The backend filtering system allows researchers to quickly isolate specific subsets—say, all major tornadoes (rated EF3 or higher) in Quebec during summer months, or all tornadoes causing fatalities in a specific decade. This granular control transforms how professionals analyze historical patterns and assess risk.

The Technical Heavy Lifting

For Somers, launching the dashboard was just the beginning. Her role requires continuous technical maintenance and refinement—what she calls “the technical heavy lifting.”



4000+
views since the launch of the
Advanced Dashboard

Each year, she integrates new field season data into the Advanced Dashboard. The 2024 tornado season data was incorporated last winter, requiring careful quality control and metadata updates. But the work extends far beyond these annual additions.

“We’re constantly in discussion about it with the team,” she explains. “I get emails multiple times a month and then do an annual update as well, on top of the small little tweaks that I make every month. It’s constantly evolving.”

Those “small tweaks” involve updating attributes as the NTP research team confirms new details about historical events, refining visualizations, and ensuring data accuracy.

The Map and Data Centre also manages the entire membership system, processing requests and controlling access to maintain the platform’s professional focus.

National and International Recognition

The technical sophistication of the platform hasn’t gone unnoticed. [ESRI](#), the leading geographic information systems company, has invited Western Libraries to include tornado data in their [Living Atlas of the World](#)—a collection of authoritative geographic datasets used by GIS professionals globally.

“ESRI has asked us if we would be able to include NTP’s tornado event layer in the Living Atlas of the World, because it is important information that is consistently being collected and updated live,” Somers explains.

This recognition positions Western’s Map and Data Centre among elite institutions creating GIS infrastructure with global impact. The platform supports scientific studies, helps industry professionals assess risk levels, and enables municipalities to improve emergency management planning. The historical data also helps improve tornado probability modelling and challenges the misconception that tornadoes rarely occur in Canada.

The Advanced Dashboard demonstrates how specialized GIS expertise transforms research data into genuinely useful tools. By creating sophisticated technical infrastructure and maintaining it through ongoing collaboration, the Map and Data Centre has built a platform that serves both immediate professional needs and long-term scientific understanding of severe weather patterns across Canada.

The NTP Advanced Dashboard is [available by membership request](#). The [Map and Data Centre](#) provides GIS support for research projects across Western University. 📍



What’s Next: Creating Canada’s First Hail Intensity Scale

Unlike tornadoes, which have the Enhanced Fujita scale for measuring intensity, hailstorms have no standardized classification system. The [Northern Hail Project](#) (NHP), supported by Western Libraries’ GIS expertise, is working to create Canada’s first hail intensity scale—a critical step given that hail has been identified as the largest contributor to insured losses from severe convective storms globally, with Canada experiencing its first billion-dollar hailstorm in Calgary in 2020.

The challenge? “Hail is ice and it melts, so as a researcher, you have to be right there while the hailstorm is still happening,” explains [Maia Somers](#), GIS technical specialist at Western Libraries. This has led the research team to become storm chasers, racing to collect samples.

Since taking over the project from former colleague Jordan Fuller, Somers has worked with the team to develop new types of weather mapping, including “hail swath” visualization that tracks entire storm footprints using radar data combined with ground samples.

With the help of GIS technical specialist [Liz Sutherland](#), the project has also launched [an open data site](#) with an interactive dashboard where users can explore hail events investigated by the NHP Storm Survey Team. This work could influence how hailstorms are understood across North America. 📍

MADE IN CANADA

A bilingual, open textbook co-created by Western librarians is setting the national standard for research data management

When Canada's [Tri-Agency Research Data Management Policy](#) introduced new requirements for data planning and sharing, researchers, librarians, and educators across the country faced a challenge: there was no comprehensive, Canadian-specific resource to guide them. In response, Western Libraries helped lead a national effort to fill the gap. The result: [Research Data Management in the Canadian Context](#), a bilingual, open textbook co-edited by Western librarians [Kristi Thompson](#), [Elizabeth Hill](#), and [Emily Carlisle](#), alongside [Danielle Dennie](#) (Laurentian University) and [Émilie Fortin](#) (Université Laval), who oversaw French-language submissions and led development of the French edition.

Today, it's being adopted in courses and training programs across the country.

Building Canada's RDM Playbook

The idea began in 2021 as a conversation among research data management (RDM) professionals who saw a gap in Canadian resources.

"We saw a real need for Canadian-specific guidance," says data librarian Hill. "Before this, instructors had to rely on U.K. materials that didn't reflect our laws, policies, or infrastructure. This book reflects our bilingual context and Indigenous data sovereignty considerations—turning policy into practical, teachable workflows."

With Hill's and Thompson's expertise in data management and Carlisle's background in open access publishing and editorial management, the team launched a national call for contributions—accepting chapters in English and French and securing professional translation and copyediting

"The editorial work was intensive but essential," says Hill. "Emily led that effort with care and coordination to ensure consistency across chapters and translations."

To support this ambitious work, they raised close to \$45,000 in grants, including a prestigious [SSHRC Connection Grant](#) and significant support from [Compute Ontario](#). This national backing ensured the book met professional standards while remaining freely available as an open resource. Additional support came from Western University, the University of British Columbia, Dalhousie University, Western Libraries, Concordia University Library, and the Digital Research Alliance of Canada.

From Policy to Practice

RDM can sound abstract, but it's essential for research quality and compliance. Good RDM supports replicability, protects public

“This book reflects our bilingual context and Indigenous data sovereignty considerations—turning policy into practical, teachable workflows.”

— Elizabeth Hill, Data Librarian

OPEN BY DESIGN

trust, and is now required under Canada's Tri-Agency RDM Policy, which mandated in 2021 that researchers applying for grant-funded, data-related research must write Data Management Plans and prepare data for archiving.

"Research data management is about planning for the future—so others can verify, build on, and reuse what we discover," says Thompson, a research data management librarian at Western Libraries.

The textbook explains these principles in plain language and connects them to Canadian requirements—such as where to deposit data and how to handle sensitive information.

The opening chapter of the second section of the book, co-authored by Hill and colleagues from across Canada, provides a historical and policy overview of Canadian RDM and links it directly to practical steps researchers can adopt.

The resource also aligns directly with funder expectations and Canadian infrastructure, helping researchers meet compliance while elevating research quality.

Impact so Far

Since its launch, the textbook has gained significant traction:

High engagement: As of August 2025, the English edition has drawn 16,700 visitors and 33,900 page views, with about 28,000 chapter views.

Adoption in courses: Library and Information Science (LIS) programs at multiple Canadian universities—including Western, UBC, and Dalhousie—now use it as a core text, giving students a Canadian-focused foundation in RDM.



Emily Carlisle
Research and Scholarly
Communication Librarian,
Western Libraries

Emily Carlisle supports researchers, students, and faculty in making their work openly accessible. As Western Libraries research and scholarly communication librarian since 2020, she provides guidance on Open Access publishing, Open Educational Resources (OER), and the use of open publishing platforms like Pressbooks. Her work helps scholars make informed decisions about licensing, reuse, and adaptation—advancing both research visibility and student success.

Her current research explores the history of Open Education and publisher "openwashing." She also co-led the launch of Western's inaugural OER Grant and Support Program, which funded five faculty-led projects in its first year.

Policy support: Institutional RDM teams report using the book to train staff and guide the creation of compliance workflows.

National Recognition: The Digital Research Alliance of Canada featured the book in bilingual webinars, and the Tri-Agencies recommend it as a learning resource.

Global interest: A group of Japanese academics has begun translating the book for local use, and international audiences have been eager to learn about Canada’s bilingual approach, geographic diversity, and funding systems.

Thompson credits the strong collaboration of Canada’s RDM community for the book’s success. “The level of interest from authors across the country made developing content smooth,” she says. “It showed the strength and partnership of this community.”

Designed for Adoption, Built for Adaptation

The textbook’s modular structure allows instructors to assign individual chapters or the full text. It’s available online through [eCampusOntario Pressbooks](#), downloadable in multiple formats, and openly licensed for adaptation.

What is RDM, and why does it matter?

Research data management (RDM) is the process of organizing, documenting, storing, and preserving research data so it can be understood, verified, and reused. Good RDM practices:

- Support research integrity by making results reproducible.
- Meet funder requirements, such as the Tri-Agency RDM Policy.
- Protect sensitive information through proper handling and documentation.
- Increase impact by enabling data sharing and reuse.

In short, RDM ensures that research data remains a valuable, trustworthy resource—long after a project ends.

“Open was non-negotiable. If we’re telling others that open access to information is important, we should follow suit by making our own publications open access, too. This project was an example of us doing just that.”

— *Emily Carlisle, Research and Scholarly Communication Librarian*

The book’s organization reflects how RDM is taught: foundational principles, Canadian context, practical workflows, and specialized topics like sensitive or geospatial data. Fully bilingual and professionally edited, the resource is easy to remix. Pressbooks supports embedded media, updates, and export to print-ready PDF or EPUB. ♥

Crowdsourcing Project Makes Rare Handwritten Documents Accessible and Searchable

Western Libraries invites community volunteers to help transcribe historical records

When the pandemic prevented visitors from accessing Western Libraries Archives and Special Collections in person, archives assistant [Theresa Regnier](#) and archivist [Anne Quirk](#) found a creative solution: invite the community to help make handwritten documents accessible anywhere through volunteer transcription.

Using [FromThePage](#) software, the team launched [a crowdsourced transcription project](#) that allows volunteers to convert handwritten historical documents into typed, searchable text. Community members can sign up to help transcribe materials ranging from Victorian-era diaries to World War I letters.

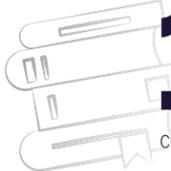
“The response was overwhelming,” says digitization librarian [Leanne Olson](#). The pilot project’s success led to its continuation, with Olson helping with digitizing materials and archival staff regularly uploading new items to the collection.

Available collections include diaries from London’s Harris Family women in the late 1800s, journals from nursing student Kathleen McIntyre at Victoria Hospital School of Nursing in the 1920s, and records from the Wawanosh family, band chiefs of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation. Volunteers can also transcribe material from John Davis Barnett, Western’s first librarian, along with various university and city records.

The platform displays page images alongside text boxes where volunteers type what they see. This simple approach makes historical documents accessible to everyone while creating searchable digital archives.

FromThePage has helped institutions worldwide engage the public with their collections. Over one million pages have been transcribed through the platform, which is used by Harvard, Stanford, the British Library, and other major institutions.

For Western’s archives, the project offers a way for history enthusiasts to contribute meaningfully from home while preserving and sharing London’s rich historical legacy. ♥

 **12**
collections

 **196**
contributors

 **2799**
pages transcribed

 **3300**
active pages

THE COMMUNITY SCHOLARS PROGRAM

Western Libraries Bridges Research Gap for Local Non-Profits

Community Scholars Program provides free access to thousands of academic journals and e-books

Western Libraries is proud to announce its [Community Scholars Program \(CSP\)](#), effective Oct. 1, 2025. This innovative initiative currently provides free access to over 20,000 academic journal titles and e-books to Community Scholars—staff at charitable and non-profit organizations in partner universities' communities.

Led by Simon Fraser University Library in partnership with Canadian university libraries, the CSP addresses a critical gap in research access. While thousands of researchers publish findings on social challenges in peer-reviewed journals, these resources remain largely inaccessible to the more than 170,000 non-profit organizations across Canada working on the front lines of social issues.

Western Libraries' participation expands this program's reach into southwestern Ontario, connecting local organizations working in social services, arts, human rights, housing, health, and environmental conservation with the research they need to strengthen their impact.

"Academic libraries can help ensure that research serves not just the university community, but the broader public good," said Geoffrey Robert Little, vice-provost and chief librarian of Western Libraries. By joining the CSP, Western Libraries is helping to democratize access to knowledge and ensuring that evidence-based research can directly inform the work of organizations making a real difference in our communities."

Community Scholars will be able to search and access publications from anywhere with an internet connection, receive support from library staff, and participate in specialized workshops. The program also provides access to "grey literature" through the [Policy Commons database](#)—including government reports, policy documents, white papers, and research from think tanks and NGOs—materials that are often unavailable through traditional academic databases but can be highly relevant to community-based work.

Ready to apply? Local organizations interested in joining the CSP can [contact Western Libraries directly](#). 📍

“
By joining the Community Scholars Program, Western Libraries is ... ensuring that evidence-based research can directly inform the work of organizations making a real difference in our communities.
”

— Geoffrey Robert Little, Vice-Provost & Chief Librarian

Current Library Partners



Breaking Down Barriers to Knowledge

Western Libraries waives fees for community members

In January 2025, Western Libraries eliminated borrowing fees for members of the public and organizations, granting them free access to most of its extensive print collections.

Previously, organizations were charged \$500 annually, while individuals paid \$35 for three months or \$100 yearly. Removing these fees aligns with the accessibility and inclusion goals of both Western Libraries and the University.

"We believe that everyone should have the opportunity to learn, discover, and engage with knowledge, regardless of their affiliation or background," says Geoffrey Robert Little, vice-provost and chief librarian of Western Libraries. "By removing these fees, we are reinforcing our commitment to supporting the intellectual curiosity and research needs of our entire community."

Expanding Community Impact

The change opens doors for community members to support research and professional development, program development, advocacy and policy work, industry research, and grant writing. Guest borrowers can now access most materials and utilize library services and spaces open to the public at Western Libraries and its affiliated university college libraries, strengthening Western's role as a vital resource for the broader London community and region. 📍



Western Libraries Launches Open Repository

As an early adopter of Scholaris, Western advances Open Access and shapes Canada's shared research infrastructure

In 2025, Western Libraries launched the [Western University Open Repository](#), marking a major milestone in our commitment to advancing open access and supporting sustainable, community-driven infrastructure at Western and beyond.

The Open Repository replaces the legacy Scholarship@Western platform and is now part of Scholaris, Canada's new national shared repository service developed by the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), the Ontario Council of University Libraries (OCUL), and other partners using open-source DSpace software.

Shaping Canada's Repository Future as an Early Adopter

This migration represents a critical opportunity to help shape the direction of shared repository infrastructure across Canada. As an early adopter of Scholaris, Western doesn't just benefit from this national initiative—we help guide it, ensuring Western's voice and values influence how

Canadian institutions approach scholarly repositories for years to come.

By moving away from a commercially owned platform and working with colleagues from across the country, we're embracing a cost-effective, open-source solution aligned with our values of openness and transparency.

Impact and Benefits

Scholaris provides Western with a streamlined interface, scalable infrastructure, technical expertise, and community support while combining institutional branding with centrally managed hosting and access to a national repository network. The platform enhances the discoverability and impact of Canadian research through improved knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Western's Open Repository provides global access to our scholars' work—from theses and dissertations to publications and research outputs—positioning Western as a leader in building systems that make scholarship open, equitable, and impactful. ■

Archives Launches New Search Tool

Western Archives has migrated to AtoM (Access to Memory), a new web-based platform providing easier access to archival collections. Ongoing refinements will continue into 2026.

The database includes more than 72,000 descriptions of fonds, collections, and items,

plus over 8,000 searchable digital images. The open-source software supports international archival standards and makes it simpler for researchers to discover and explore Western's rich archival holdings. Visit [AtoM](#) to start searching. ■

Western Libraries Supports Launch of Research Information Management System

Western Libraries is playing a key role in the implementation and ongoing support of Western's new [Research Information Management System](#) (RIMS), working in collaboration with the Office of the Provost and Western Research.

Built on the [Symplectic Elements](#) platform—used by leading institutions like U of T, University of Michigan, and Carnegie Mellon—RIMS is designed to showcase research accomplishments, streamline reporting, and reduce duplication of work across campus. The centralized system draws data from trusted

sources including ORCID, Scopus, PubMed, and Web of Science to build up-to-date researcher profiles that faculty control and customize.

A phased rollout began in 2025 with librarians, archivists, and senior academic leaders. Faculty-by-faculty onboarding is anticipated to begin in early 2026. Western Libraries provides comprehensive support throughout implementation, including guides, FAQs, workshops, and profile-building assistance. ■



“

This is a space where ideas take shape—where students and faculty come together to explore, create, and contribute meaningfully to the global research conversation.

”

— Geoffrey Robert Little, Vice-Provost & Chief Librarian

Designed to meet the evolving needs of researchers, the new Scholars Lab at Weldon Library enhances Western’s capacity to foster meaningful, interdisciplinary scholarship

Western Libraries has opened the doors to a transformative new space designed to elevate research, collaboration, and creativity across disciplines: the [Scholars Lab](#). Located at the heart of campus, this dynamic environment is already reshaping how graduate students, faculty, and research partners engage with knowledge.

“The Scholars Lab is a bold investment in the future of research at Western. It reflects our deep commitment to fostering scholarship that is collaborative, inclusive, and forward-looking,” says vice-provost and chief librarian Geoffrey Robert Little. “This is a space where ideas take shape—where students and faculty come together to explore, create, and contribute meaningfully to the global research conversation.”

More than just a physical space, the Scholars Lab is a hub for intellectual exploration and scholarly exchange. With 80 mix-used seats and cutting-edge technology, the open-plan Scholars Square is ideal for workshops, presentations, and community events.

The Scholars Lab was conceived with graduate students in mind, offering them a dedicated environment to dive deep into their research, collaborate with peers and faculty, and share their work with the world. It complements the Learning Commons, which primarily supports undergraduate learning, by providing a parallel space for advanced scholarship.

Already, the lab has hosted a public lecture by the [Starling Centre](#) and a student-led research showcase. Looking ahead, it’s slated to host the 40th Society of Graduate Students Research Forum.

As Western continues to invest in research excellence, the Scholars Lab is emerging as a cornerstone of that vision—an incubator for ideas, a platform for discovery, and a vibrant community for scholars at every stage of their journey. ▀

Five Zones for Every Research Journey

Beyond Scholars Square, the Lab features five distinct zones, each tailored to support different facets of scholarly work:

Scholars Lab Instruction Room

- A 36-seat active learning space designed for hands-on engagement with library resources, such as rare books or archival material.

Project Room

- A collaborative boardroom-style space for up to 28 people, equipped for hybrid meetings and group work.

Graduate Student Commons

- A thoughtfully designed area for focused study and small-group collaboration, featuring height-adjustable desks and private rooms.

Creation Suite

- A blank canvas space designed for the development and exploration of various types of programming.

Media Suite

- A production suite for audio and video recording—ideal for podcasts, research presentations, and digital storytelling.



Amplifying Student Voices at Western Libraries

In 2024, Western Libraries launched the Library Student Advisory Council (LSAC) to strengthen communication between students and library administration

This diverse group of 12-14 undergraduate and graduate students—including representatives from the [University Students’ Council \(USC\)](#) and the [Society of Graduate Students \(SOGS\)](#)—meets with library leadership to provide feedback on services, spaces, and programs. Through constructive dialogue, the LSAC helps shape the future of Western Libraries, ensuring student perspectives are heard and, where possible, acted on.

Recent discussions have addressed exam hours, study space needs, collection management, and the development of new facilities like the Scholars Lab. Student participation is recognized through the Co-Curricular Record (CCR), empowering students to collaboratively influence library enhancements that support their academic success. ▀





Student feedback inspired a brand-new space with everything needed for deep, uninterrupted study

When students told us what they needed most from their library, reducing noise levels in study areas was top of the list.

As one undergraduate student from the Faculty of Social Sciences put it: “Weldon is way too noisy, especially in the quiet areas there is never silence.”

We took this feedback to heart. In late 2024, Western Libraries opened a brand-new silent study room at the base of the grand stairwell in what was formerly the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL). The space provides a dedicated environment for students, faculty, and staff to focus, featuring 90 seats and a range of seating options including individual study carrels. Acoustic panels on the walls and ceiling help absorb sound for an even quieter experience.

I enjoy studying here. It is quiet and everyone seems to put in effort to keep it that way. I also like that it has standing desks.

I really like this silent study room. The sunlight that comes through the windows is very comfortable. The table variety is also great. It gives students a space to study without having to worry about booking a study room every time. I also like how the space is actually silent.

Ergonomic height-adjustable desks

Customizable workspaces for maximum productivity.

Individual study carrels

Private nooks for distraction-free focus.

Comfy couches

Plush seating to make those long study sessions more relaxing.

WELDON'S NEW SILENT STUDY SPACE IS HERE



Large windows

Plenty of natural light to boost mood and productivity.

Room dividers

Living plants bring a touch of nature indoors while creating separation between zones.

Abundance of power outlets

Power outlets are built into surfaces throughout the room, including lounge chairs.

Additional features include ergonomic height-adjustable desks and an abundance of power outlets. We even embedded outlets into the comfy lounge chairs, so visitors can charge up while they study, wherever they settle! With large windows and (soon-to-come) living room dividers made of real plants, the design creates an inviting atmosphere that promotes productivity and relaxation.

This spectacular space has been three years in the making and marks a significant milestone in Weldon's Library Revitalization, Phase 2. Phase 1 introduced a new two-story student learning commons and restructured staff areas to maximize study space.

The success of these renovations earned Weldon multiple awards, including the title of “Best of Year” in the library category from Interior Design Magazine, an esteemed U.S. publication with an international audience. 🏆

Amazing! I can focus here better than in my office at home. Always had a great experience because I get my stuff done. No distractions. Also, I go outside for lunch, go to the bathroom, and make a call and I can leave my stuff here, never have missed anything.

I really appreciate the silent study room. It's quiet, clean and a great place to focus, but the temperature can be a little cold.

Bringing Art and Ideas to Life in the Library

A new display program invites the campus community to share ideas and spark conversation

You may have noticed fantasy-inspired sculptures in Weldon's display cases, tiny paintings on the walls, or a variety of themed book displays near the entrance of Weldon this year. If you wondered what (or who) is behind these exhibits, it's all part of a new display program launched by user experience librarian Jennifer Robinson.

[The Learning Commons Display Program](#) invites students, faculty, researchers, and staff to collaborate with the library on displays that engage, educate, and enrich the campus community. Display cases, bookcases, and art rails throughout the Weldon Learning Commons are available for exhibits that explore a variety of topics and highlight library collections, services, or areas of expertise.

Since the program's inception, Weldon hosted a diverse array of exhibits: the Gender Studies Student Collective explored themes of feminism and anti-colonialism; *Fallen Tales from the Bookshelf* featured 3D-objects inspired by fantasy literature; first-year SASAH students displayed their "everyday life projects"; and the Western Ukrainian Club's *On the Ruins with Hope* shared photographs documenting the resilience of Ukrainian women.

In the summer, the library featured books removed from the U.S. Naval Academy's library,

prompting conversations about intellectual freedom and the right to read. Staff also contributed their own creative work to a staff creativity display, from pottery to poetry.

The response has been positive. "So cool and informative. Love this and gave me an educational study break!" wrote one visitor. Survey results from the *Fallen Tales* exhibit showed that 93% of respondents found the library an appropriate place for art, and 83% enjoyed sharing library space with creative work.

Interested in participating? We'd love to hear your idea. Please reach out to jrobins@uwo.ca.



→ Jade Dunn, Ella Rose Brown and Jennifer Robinson (l-r)



Gender Studies Student Collective (GSSC) Art Show November-December 2024

Student-organized art exhibit exploring feminism, LGBTQ+, body positivity, anti-racism, and anti-colonialism. An experiential learning opportunity sponsored by SASAH and visual arts faculty.

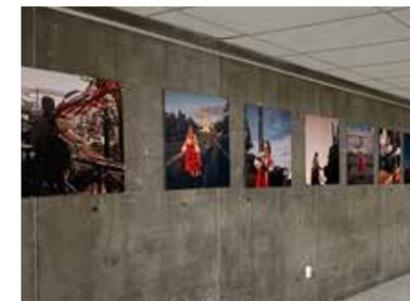


SASAH Students ARTHUM 1020 March-April 2025

First-year SASAH students displayed their "everyday life projects"—eight-week experiments in attention and observation inspired by works like Thoreau's *Walden*.

Fallen Tales from the Bookshelf February 5-26, 2025

Fantasy-inspired 3D objects that appear to have stepped out of storybooks, curated by artLAB Gallery Intern Venus Nwaokoro. Paired with related books from Weldon's collection.



On the Ruins with Hope April 2025

Photography exhibition by the Western Ukrainian Club documenting the resilience of Ukrainian women, connecting scholarly research on war and displacement with personal perspectives.

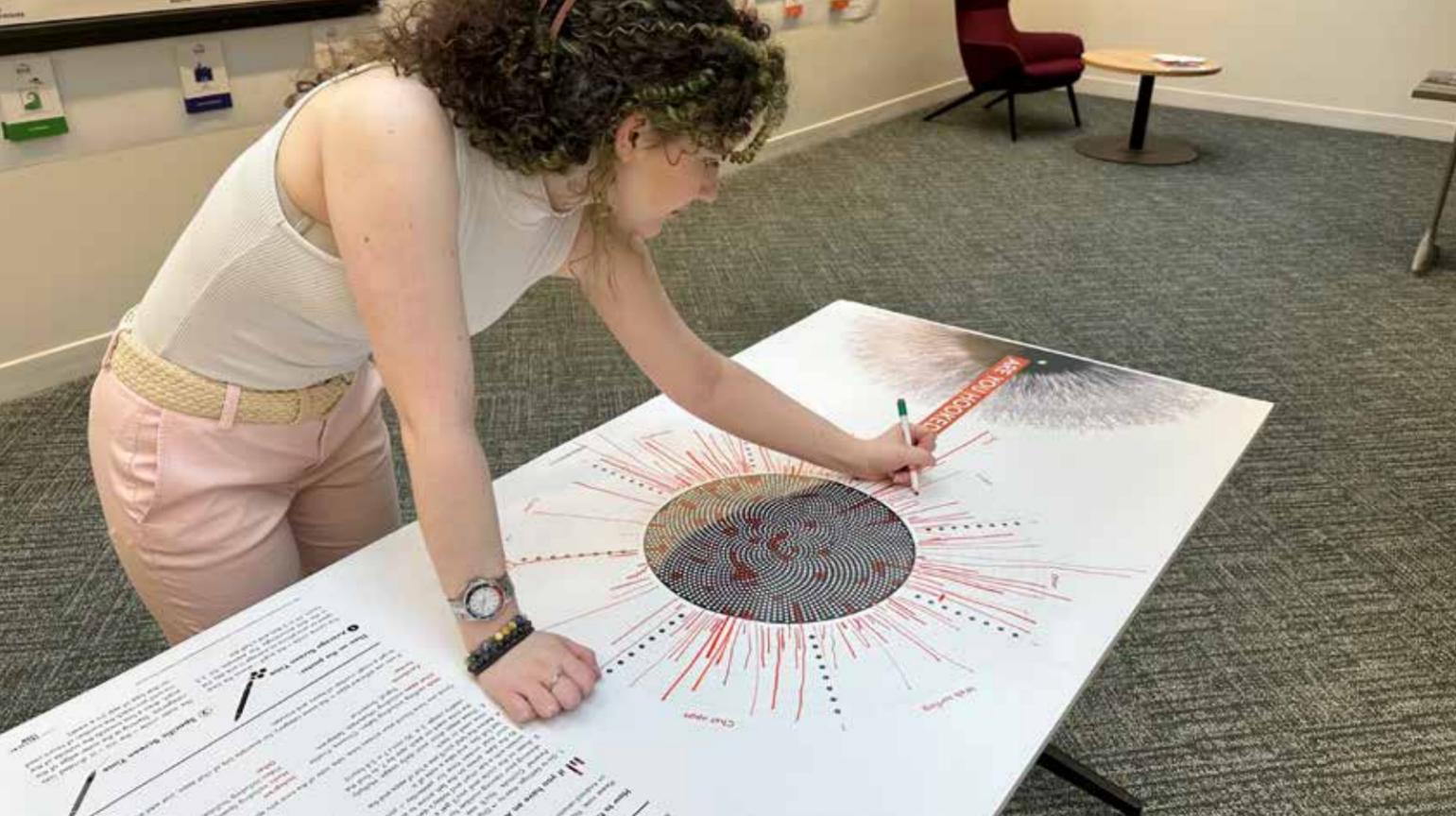
Small Intentions March 12-26, 2025

Curated by artLAB Intern Maggie Shook, this exhibit explored the unique charm and quiet power of small paintings, featuring works by eight artists.



Banned Books May-August 2025

Featured books removed from the U.S. Naval Academy based on an executive order targeting works about diversity, equity, inclusion, and 2SLGBTQ+ and Black experiences. Displayed with context about intellectual freedom and censorship challenges in Canada.

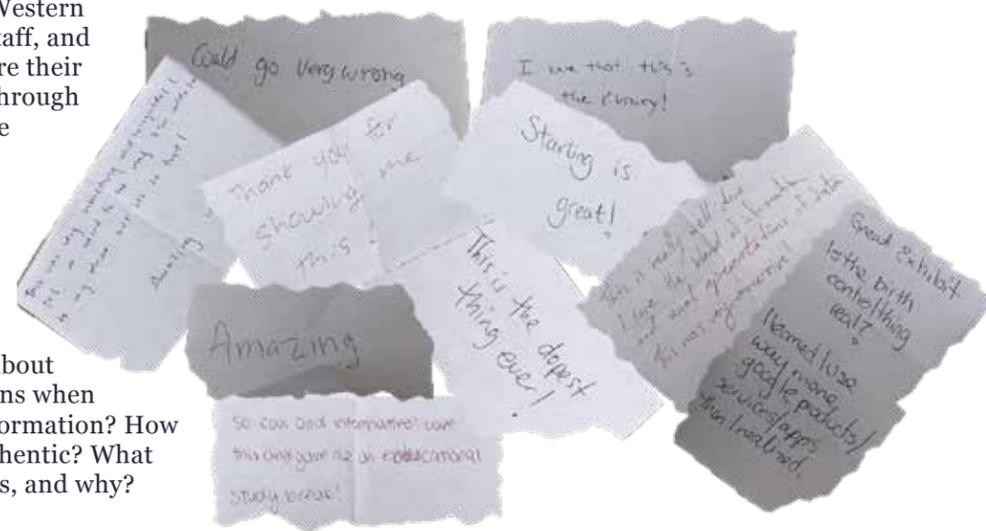


Confronting the Digital Age

The Glass Room Exhibit at Weldon sparked conversation about technology and privacy

From January to April 2025, Western University students, faculty, staff, and Londoners, were able to explore their relationship with technology through [The Glass Room](#), an interactive exhibition housed in Weldon's Learning Commons.

Developed by Berlin-based non-profit Tactical Tech, the internationally acclaimed exhibition challenges visitors to examine critical questions about their digital lives: What happens when we rely on social media for information? How can we verify if images are authentic? What data is being collected about us, and why?



Visitors to the Weldon stop of The Glass Room were encouraged to share their reflections on post-it notes, and their responses revealed the exhibition's impact.

“
This is the dopest thing ever!

”
— Feedback from a student attendee

“This is the dopest thing ever!” one student wrote, while another noted it was “so cool and informative” and provided “an educational study break.” Other comments ranged from enthusiastic praise for “the blend of information and visual representations of data” to one anonymous submission that simply stated, “We are cooked.”

This was only the second time The Glass Room has been installed in Canada, following the country's first Glass Room at the Satellite Project Space in downtown London in October 2024, which attracted over 200 community members. The exhibition has reached more than 500,000 participants across 71 countries since 2016.

Hosted by the [Starling Centre for Just Technologies and Just Societies](#) and Western Libraries, the exhibit fulfilled one of Starling's core pillars: fostering community awareness and engagement in emerging technologies like artificial intelligence, as well as technologies already embedded in our everyday lives. ♡



Beryl Ivey Library Collection Joins Western Libraries

Following the integration of Brescia University College with Western University in May 2024, Western Libraries successfully incorporated the Beryl Ivey Library collection into its system

The integration, completed in spring 2025, involved the careful relocation and processing of nearly 49,000 items from the former Brescia library. Collections were strategically distributed across all five main Western Libraries locations to best support continuing academic programs and research needs.

Notable additions include materials supporting the Brescia School of Food and Nutritional Sciences—now part of Western’s Faculty of Health Sciences—which have been housed at Taylor alongside other specialized health sciences resources. These materials include an [extensive cookbook collection](#) originally donated to Brescia by Martha Molina Steers. Business, law, and music collections found new homes in their respective libraries, while archival materials were preserved for their future home, the Ursuline Museum and Archives.

Western Libraries welcomed four former Brescia library staff members to the organization: Kate Beswick, Kathleen Dahl, Katie Holmes, and Alicia Calkins. The project’s success was made possible through the collaborative efforts of the Libraries Integration Steering Committee, collections librarians, technical services staff, facilities teams, and student library assistants who managed the physical transfer and processing of materials.

This integration honours Brescia’s legacy while ensuring continued access to resources that support student success and scholarly research across Western’s academic community. ♥



Two MLIS Fellowships for Black and Indigenous Students Awarded

In September 2025, the Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS) and Western Libraries announced that Master of Library and Information Science (MLIS) students Savannah Simon and Olivia Couchie were named the inaugural recipients of the Western Libraries-FIMS MLIS Fellowships for Black and Indigenous Students. The fellowships, funded by FIMS and Western Libraries as part of a commitment to increasing diversity within librarianship and the information profession, were awarded for the first time.

“Librarianship is rooted in the stewardship of knowledge, and that responsibility demands diversity of thought and experience,” said Geoffrey Robert Little, vice-provost and chief librarian of Western Libraries. “These fellowships are an investment in voices and perspectives that will strengthen librarianship, advance equity in access to information, and honour multiple knowledge traditions. By supporting these students, Western Libraries and FIMS are acting on their responsibility to ensure libraries reflect and serve the diversity of the communities they support.”

Olivia Couchie is a member of the Nipissing First Nation and is local to London, Ontario. She has previously completed a double major in Gender and Women’s Studies and Criminology, as well as a Master of Arts in Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies, both at Western. As a new Master of Library and Information Science student, Olivia says she’s “most looking forward to the courses in the MLIS program and the chance to learn from and alongside others who care about access to knowledge and community.”

Savannah Simon is from Natoaganeg First Nation, just outside Miramichi, New Brunswick. She completed her BA (Honors) in History at St. Thomas University in Fredericton. This year Savannah is looking forward to the mentorship and experiential learning opportunities available through co-op placements and other student activities.

“I am so excited to see how this opportunity will help me grow and learn, not only as a student, but also as an upcoming professional in this field. My goal has always been to give back to my community with the utmost of my abilities, and I believe that the MLIS program at Western will prepare me to do just that,” she said.

As the home Faculty for the Master of Library and Information program, Acting Dean Susan Knabe said that FIMS is very pleased to be involved in the partnership with Western Libraries, and that the initiative will “provide students like Olivia and Savannah with the opportunity to explore how information, knowledge and librarianship can meet the needs of diverse communities.”

The Western Libraries—FIMS MLIS Fellowships for Black and Indigenous Students are intended to recruit and support applicants who identify as Indigenous (First Nations, Inuit or Métis) or Black who demonstrate academic achievement, community involvement, and a desire to build a career in libraries and the information profession. Recipients receive funding for tuition and fees and are provided with a two-term, paid co-op placement with Western Libraries. ♥



◆ Savannah Simon (l) and Olivia Couchie (r)



Celebrating Excellence in Undergraduate Research

Nicole Bussey, Victoria Chechulina, Olivia Holland, Joel Friesen Waldner, and Karen Wen are the five recipients of the 2024 [Western Libraries Undergraduate Research Awards](#) (WLURAs). The WLURAs recognize the outstanding research of undergraduates from across all programs at Western. Award winners are chosen based on their exceptional use of library and archival resources, their insightful reflections on the research process, and their adherence to proper citation practices, with a careful evaluation of these criteria guiding the selection process.

“The WLURAs are an amazing way to recognize exciting undergraduate research and celebrate connections between student researchers, and our expert librarians and archivists,” said Geoffrey Robert Little, vice-provost and chief librarian of Western Libraries. “I am proud of the ways in which we are supporting student success while promoting the thoughtful use of Western Libraries’ deep and rich collections.”

This year’s submissions featured a diverse array of research projects spanning Japanese American music, equity-efficiency trade-off studies, World War I, unmanned underwater vehicles, and Shakespeare.

To be considered for a WLURA, applicants were required to submit a research project from one of their courses, accompanied by answers to four reflection questions about their research process. Their submission

also included a bibliography in the citation style of their discipline.

“Before the WLURA application, I had never really considered my research process,” said Holland, whose research project focused on the life and death of Edward Martin Roberts, a Canadian soldier wounded in the Battle of Vimy Ridge during the first World War. “During research, I was more focused on what information I found rather than how I discovered it.”

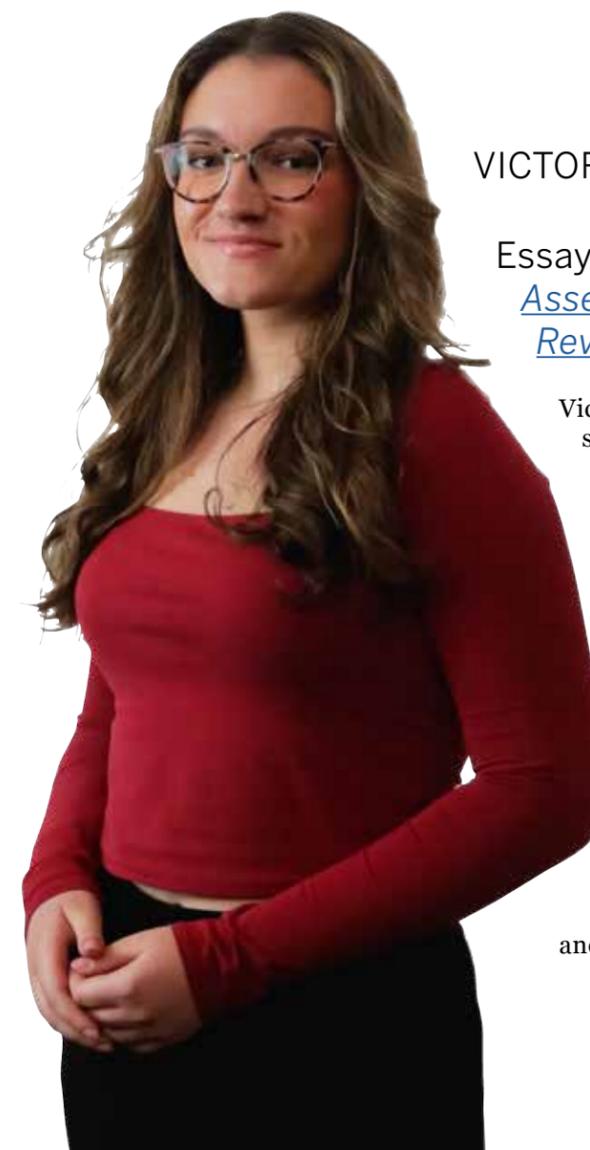
WLURA winner Wen, whose submission investigates the theme of jealousy in Shakespeare’s Othello, said she had a similar learning experience: “I’ve realized that I can sometimes get too focused on the final product that I overlook the significance of the research journey itself. But the application has helped me see the process as equally important.”

Applications are due each year on April 30. Winners receive a certificate and a \$1,000 scholarship. Their projects can be accessed through [Western University Open Repository](#).

“The WLURA application allowed me to reflect on the iterative, scholarly process I had to follow to arrive at my research question,” Chechulina noted, “and how I can apply this important skill in the future.”

Meet this year’s WLURA winners! ♡

“I hope this project can be used to inform future studies and maybe even shape how we apply research to health policy.”



VICTORIA CHECHULINA

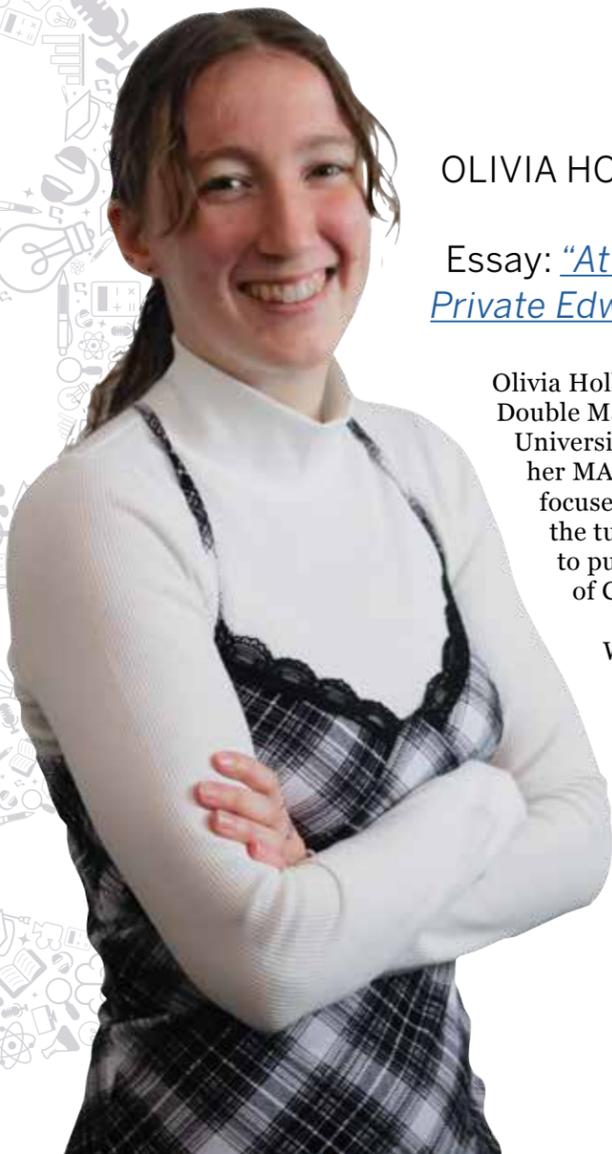
Essay: [Do Equity-Efficiency Trade-Off Studies Assess Validity and Reliability? A Systematic Review](#)

Victoria Chechulina, a third-year student in the medical sciences and scholar’s electives programs, specializes in epidemiology and biostatistics. She conducts research at Western and Sepsis Canada, focusing on sepsis, health economics, and clinical epidemiology.

Victoria’s current work aims to improve research methods for integrating health equity into economic evaluations, crucial for addressing inequities in health outcomes. Outside of academics, she is passionate about mentorship and trying every item on the Spoke Kitchen menu.

“The WLURA application helped me appreciate Western Libraries’ resources, which were invaluable for my systematic review, from database access to discussing my search strategy with a librarian. It also encouraged me to reflect on the iterative research process and how to apply this skill in the future.”

“This paper became something more than course work; I was trying to put the pieces of someone’s life together. Don’t wait to write something you are passionate about!”



OLIVIA HOLLAND

Essay: [“At Rest:” The Life and Death of Private Edward Martin Roberts](#)

Olivia Holland just graduated with an Honours Double Major in History and English from King’s University College and she is now completing her MA in History at Western. Olivia’s research focuses on Canadian women in varsity sports at the turn of the twentieth century, with plans to pursue a doctorate exploring the tourism of Canadian nurses during the World Wars.

When she is not in the library studying, Olivia can be found reading, figure skating, or rewatching *The Lord of the Rings*.

“Before the WLURA application, I focused on the information found rather than the discovery process. Reflecting on my research approach helped me identify ways to improve, making me a better researcher.”

Nicole Bussey

Essay: [Don’t Bite the Hand, Make Love to It: Disrupting Pervasive White Representation in Mitski’s “Your Best American Girl”](#)

Nicole Bussey holds an Honours BA in both Media and Communications and Popular Music Studies from Western University, where she earned the Gold Medal for the highest GPA in the Media, Information and Technoculture (MIT) program. Her research focuses on women in music.

Completing three Western Undergraduate Summer Research Internships (USRI) projects at the Faculty of Information and Media Studies (FIMS) allowed her to hone her research skills, and her passion for artist development led her to a marketing internship at AWAL, SONY Music Canada.

A storyteller, songwriter and vocalist, Nicole is skilled in guitar, piano, and digital production. In her free time, she enjoys Tori Amos CDs and reading fiction.

“The WLURA application highlighted the importance of an accessible library database for research and motivated me to engage more with these resources for future projects.”

Joel Friesen Waldner

Essay: [Recent Developments of Next-generation Unmanned Underwater Vehicle-based Structural Health Monitoring Technologies](#)

Joel Friesen Waldner is currently in his third year of studying Electrical and Artificial Intelligence Systems Engineering at Western University.

Over the last two summers, he interned at Western’s Smart Cities Laboratory, conducting research on unmanned underwater vehicles for structural inspection and the application of virtual reality in civil engineering. His work has been published in the *Journal of Infrastructure Intelligence and Resilience*.

“The WLURA helped me think about how, with each new resource accessed, my understanding of the topic of underwater drones expanded and required a shift in how I defined the ultimate questions I was trying to answer.”

Karen Wen

Essay: [Representation of Possessive Fear: Destructive Jealousy in Othello](#)

Karen Wen is a second-year student at Western pursuing an Honors Specialization in English Language and Literature and a Major in the School for Advanced Studies in the Arts and Humanities. She is passionate about the intersection of science and literature and actively involved in medical humanities initiatives outside of school.

“My research processes range from spontaneous brainstorming to structured approaches. The WLURA application has helped me reflect on these methods and recognize the importance of seemingly minor details. It also enhanced my appreciation for the support from librarians, professors, and TAs. I’ve come to value the research journey itself, making my experience more meaningful.”



A staff member retrieves materials from the high-density storage at Western's Archives and Research Collections Centre, where LHSC's historical records now reside.

Preserving a Legacy: LHSC's Historic Archives Find a New Home at Western Libraries

A transformative donation opens new doors for research, discovery, and community memory

The sky-high shelves in Western's climate-controlled Archives and Research Collections Centre now house a remarkable gift: more than 150 years of medical history, entrusted to Western by the [London Health Sciences Centre](#) (LHSC).

This donation marks a meaningful chapter in the collaboration between two institutions with deep roots in London's medical and academic history. Comprising 152 boxes of photographs, handwritten letters, medical records, and other artifacts, the collection traces the evolution of health care in the region.

"These records are a major part of London's history and health care in Canada," said Anne Quirk, archivist in Archives and Special Collections at Western Libraries. "Bringing them into a secure, professionally managed archival environment means we can preserve them and eventually open them up to researchers. It's a celebration of this community's health-care legacy."

A Century and a Half of Stories

The donated materials span institutions such as Beck Memorial Sanatorium, South Street Hospital, War Memorial Children's Hospital, Westminster Hospital, and the London General Training School for Nurses—one of the earliest nursing programs in the region.

Among the collection are items that speak to the lived experiences of health-care workers: letters from nurses, including one expressing frustration over not receiving time off for Christmas and





hinting at a potential strike; a nurse’s uniform; a ceramic device for steam inhalations; and a wide range of medical records and administrative documents.

Darren Hamilton, clinical librarian specialist at LHSC, led the initiative to ensure the archives were preserved for future generations.

“I connected with archival experts from across Ontario,” said Hamilton. “Anne Quirk and the team at Western Libraries were excited to develop this collaboration that maintains LHSC’s history at home in London at Western. These items are invaluable to those researching health care in London and I am pleased that they will be well kept by the Western team.”

Research Potential: Unlocking New Narratives

While the materials have not yet been processed, the potential for research is already clear. Plans are underway to create a finding aid, enter descriptive information into Western’s searchable archives database, and explore digitization for broader access.

“We’re excited about the possibilities,” said Quirk. “These materials could support research in medical history, public health, nursing education, and even local business and social history. The scope is vast.”

Western Libraries has a strong track record of supporting research through its archival

holdings. A recent example is the [Bucke-Grosh expedition project](#), where a team of endurance athletes retraced a 19th century gold-seeking journey using documents from the [Dr. Richard Maurice Bucke and Family fonds](#). Bucke, a co-founder of Western’s medical school, survived the harrowing trek and left behind journals and maps that helped modern history enthusiasts reconstruct the route.

“That project shows how archival materials can help in bringing history to life,” said Quirk. “We scanned over 600 documents for the team, and they used them to correct and enrich the story of Bucke’s journey. That kind of impact is exactly what we hope to see with the LHSC collection.”

Looking Ahead

As Western Libraries begins the careful work of processing the LHSC archives, the academic community can look forward to new opportunities for interdisciplinary research, public engagement, and historical insight.

“This is more than a donation—it’s an invitation to explore, question, and understand,” said Quirk. “We’re honoured to be the stewards of this legacy.”



Support Western Libraries

For nearly 150 years, Western Libraries has been the intellectual heart of our university—adapting to meet the evolving needs of students, researchers, and faculty

Your gift supports:

- **Innovation** in research and learning
- **Diverse collections** for current and future scholars
- **Undergraduate research awards** celebrating student excellence

Ways to give:

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- Monthly giving
- Memorial gifts
- Securities
- Endowments
- Planned giving
- Gifts-in-kind

Every contribution makes a difference. Join our community of supporters and help us empower learning and discovery for generations to come.

Donate today!





Western Libraries Establishes EDIDA Committee to Advance Inclusive Excellence

Western Libraries has formed a dedicated EDIDA (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Decolonization and Accessibility) committee to support the implementation of Western University's [EDIDA Strategic Plan](#). The committee, co-chaired by [Alanna Marson](#) and [John Critchley](#), brings together members from across Western Libraries' units to identify, recommend, implement, and assess EDIDA initiatives and strategies at Western Libraries, working closely with the Office of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion and campus partners.

By May 2025, the committee compiled an [Action Planning Tool](#) submission featuring 16 tactical goals and 53 action steps spanning four of the five strategic priority areas. This work involved collaboration with 11 Western Libraries' units to identify ongoing and planned initiatives aligned with the university's strategic plan. Key initiatives include a joint fellowship with FIMS to support Black and Indigenous MLIS students, inclusive metadata practices, the Four Seasons of Reconciliation staff learning program, and partnerships with equity-deserving groups for appropriate stewardship of special collections.

On Nov. 4, 2025, the committee hosted an EDIDA showcase where Western Libraries staff explored eight initiative displays, reflected on progress, and identified collaboration opportunities across units.

The [initial implementation phase](#) runs through June 2027, with an interim progress report due in May 2026. ♥



John Critchley

Records Management
Operations Assistant, Archives
and Special Collections

John operates the university's Records Centre. He also supports archivists and librarians, including organizing annual monetary appraisals of donations. John has a unique position in Western Libraries, with his primary focus in supporting all departments on campus by providing storage and retrieval services for administrative records.

Before joining Western Libraries, John worked as a field archaeologist and project director in Ontario and the US and participated in excavations in Cyprus and Crete. His use of Western Archives' collections for archaeological research, combined with his love of history, made his current position a natural fit.

Outside of work, John's passion is playing music. He's been playing bass in bands since he was a teenager, covering everything from punk/new wave to Celtic/East Coast, folk, Americana, and popular music. Currently, he is working on writing and recording music with his band *Codename Justine*.



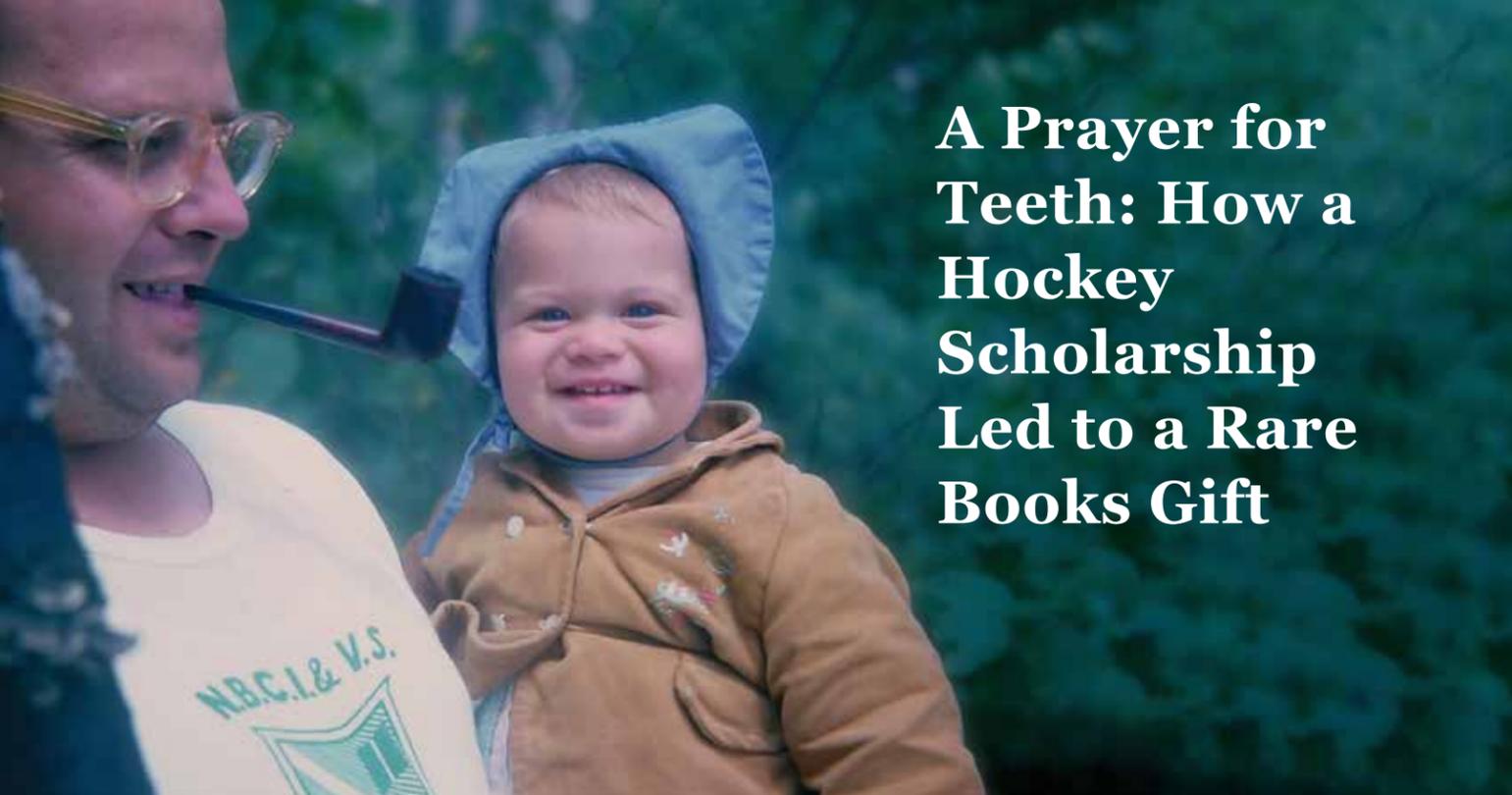
Alanna Marson

Acting Head of User Experience
and User Services, Western
Libraries

Alanna is the acting head of user experience and user services at Western Libraries and serves as an EDIDA co-lead. With close to 20 years of experience in academic and hospital libraries, she has worked across Western's research and scholarly communications, teaching and learning, and collections and content strategies teams.

She is passionate about advancing inclusive, community-centered library spaces through campus-wide committee work and is currently participating in the inaugural FLOURISH: BPOC Academic Library Leadership Program, hosted by the Canadian Association of Research Libraries (CARL), which aims to increase BPOC representation in library leadership.

Outside the library, Alanna finds joy in the outdoors—whether hiking trails or paddling in her canoe.



A Prayer for Teeth: How a Hockey Scholarship Led to a Rare Books Gift

Medieval scholar selects a 15th century manuscript to honour her father's legacy and becomes the first donor to Western Libraries' new rare books fund

When English professor [Jane Toswell](#)'s father arrived at Western in the late 1940s on a hockey scholarship, he found two things he loved: tables laden with as much milk as a young man from northern Ontario could want, and a defenceman position that kept him skating backwards into pucks, sticks, and elbows.

After a year of taking hits, he made a practical decision. "Dad," Jane asked him once, "why did you give up the scholarship?" Her father replied: "Jane, I wanted to have some teeth."

Decades later, that memory would guide Toswell to an extraordinary find—a 15th-century Dominican Book of Hours containing prayers to Saint Apollonia, the patron saint of dentists and those suffering from toothache.

"A manuscript with prayers to Saint Apollonia just kind of spoke to me," says Toswell, program director of medieval studies at Western.

Honouring Multiple Legacies

Following her father's death just over a decade ago, Toswell's mother decided to make a gift to the university. As a scholar who has devoted her career to studying medieval manuscripts, particularly early medieval England psalters and texts, Jane knew she wanted to select a manuscript for the collection.

"I'm a manuscript person. This is what I love," she explains. "But my father was a hockey and football coach who later became a guidance counsellor. These were not obvious paradigms for medieval manuscripts. It took me a while to find the right one."

The manuscript she ultimately selected, acquired from the dealer who had sold Western its very first manuscripts when the medieval studies program was established, is a remarkably complete 15th-century Book of Hours—a personalized prayer book that offers

an intimate window into medieval devotional life.

Toswell's gift marks an important milestone as the first donation to Western Libraries' newly established rare books fund, which enables supporters to contribute directly toward acquiring rare materials that support teaching and research across disciplines.

A Resource Across Disciplines

The Book of Hours exemplifies the scholarly value of these acquisitions. While it serves as a cornerstone resource for medieval studies, it also supports teaching and research in Classics, History, English, French, and related fields as part of Western's active medieval manuscript collection.

"I love seeing books that really represent not the highest end or the rarest aspects, but really the most common usage of a manuscript," Toswell notes, examining the beautifully justified script and alternating red and blue initials [at its unboxing](#) with classical studies graduate student James Kenneth. "Most everyday books would have been more like this—something a Dominican friar might have carried with them, used for daily prayer, small and light enough to fit in a saddle holster."

The manuscript features a complete calendar with saints' feast days marked in red and black (the origin of our phrase "red letter day"), prayers in both Latin and German, and meticulous hand-drawn initials that reveal the careful planning behind its creation. Despite being nearly 600 years old, it's missing only one page—an astonishing level of preservation.

Working with primary sources like this manuscript allows students to engage directly with history. "You can see the process," Toswell explains, pointing to a correction where a medieval scribe crossed out an error and added the proper word in the margin. And Kenneth adds: "It's almost like you're sitting there with that scribe. We



“I asked my dad, why did you give up the scholarship? to which he replied, ‘I wanted to have some teeth.’”

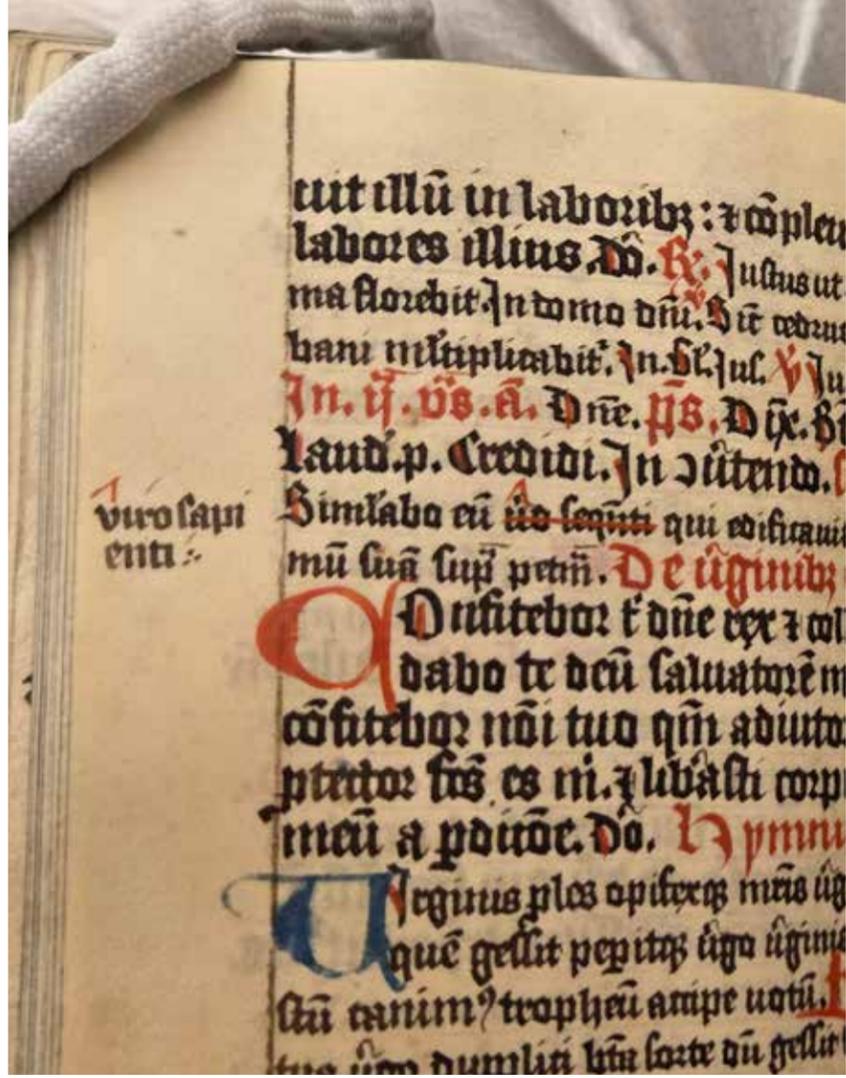
— Jane Toswell, English Professor



• Jane Toswell (r) and James Kenneth (l) at the official unboxing of the Book of Hours in the Scholars Lab Instruction Room.

“
It’s almost like you’re sitting there with that scribe. We all make mistakes when we’re writing—this gives you a glimpse into their world.
”

— James Kenneth, Master’s Student in Classical Studies, Western University



all make mistakes when we’re writing—this gives you a glimpse into their world.”

For Toswell, the gift brings together her father’s Western story, her mother’s generosity, and her own devotion to medieval manuscripts. In selecting a Book of Hours with prayers to Saint Apollonia, she found the perfect way to honour a young defenseman who once chose to keep his teeth—and stayed connected to Western for the rest of his life.

To learn more about supporting Western Libraries’ rare books fund, [visit the library website](#) or contact library@uwo.ca.



By the Numbers

Western Libraries provides the infrastructure and support needed to catalyse and transform research at Western. These numbers illuminate just some of the work that we do to power discovery, collaboration, engagement, and innovation across our campus and beyond.

Accelerating Research Discovery

Research support: 12,464 questions answered

Via chat, email and in-person, helping researchers overcome roadblocks in real-time.



- 7,668 questions received via email and chat, ranging from access and discovery issues to specialized research support in data, GIS, and scholarly publishing
- 2,875 reference consultations at service desks
- 1,921 research consultations (in-person, email, phone, virtual)

Catalogue searches: 1,658,980

Database searches: 4,781,088

E-journal views: 5,629,946

Breaking Down Barriers to Knowledge

Through Interlibrary Loans (ILL), we connect Western researchers to the world and connect the global research community to Western.

January 2025: **4,326 ILL requests** fulfilled in a single month

Our busiest ILL month in recorded history.

15,421 ILL requests fulfilled for partner libraries

Supporting the global research community.

17,544 ILL requests fulfilled for Western researchers

17.6% increase from 2023-24 | 49% increase from 2022-23

Growing & Evolving Collections

Library acquisitions budget: **\$15,740,896**

Amount spent on collections per student: **\$417.35**

Total collections: **6,107,486 items**

Physical and digital books, journals, and other materials
(5.6% growth from 2022-23 to 2024-25)

Volume holdings: **5,301,830 items**

Including 2,515,638 e-books supporting research and learning

Other materials: **805,656 items**

Scores, audio, video, maps, special collections, theses and dissertations

5,436 linear metres of archival collections

Supporting Teaching & Learning Excellence

Course readings: **305,155 uses**

Instruction sessions and workshops:
11,699 faculty, students, and staff engaged

Social Media Engagement

Instagram



554K+ views on Instagram

8,076 likes

400 new followers for a total of **4,853** followers

TikTok



277K+ video views

12,052 likes

640 new followers for a total of **1,033** (more than doubling our followership)

YouTube



88,636 views on YouTube of "[Evaluating Sources](#)", a guide to confirming source validity for a total of **978,823 views**.

Dear Jane
my Father received your letter on the 3rd
my Mother and I was with me all night when the
letter came the next day my Father sent up for us
to have the glad. God news of you all being well. as it bears
at present thanks be to the most High for all this
mercies. Dear Jane I thought you would have written
me a slip in Fathers letter but I was disappointed
but I hope it is not out of sight out of mind with you
but Dear Jane I never can forget your friendship above
all my sisters living but Dear Jane may I ever flatter my
self with the hope of seeing you and your Dear Husband
family in this world but if God had decreed it otherwise
I am sorry to hear of your having such hard work
but we will all meet in a better place for we think with
a little capital that to begin business you could make a
good livelihood at home for this country is a great deal
better both for trade and Farmers every thing is expected to
be very high on account of the War between Russia
and Turkey Oat meal is 4^s 8^d a hundred Wheat 15^s a hundred
Potatoes from 8 down to 3^s a hundred butter 1^l 10^s a pound
and 6^d a pound eggs 17^s a dozen Langford has always for
the new and then he has commenced that fortunate
trade of selling Whiskey Mr. Jagert has resigned business
and he has taken his concern in the Shop
other by Town or Country in the Shop