

## Archives and Community Identity in Transition

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**Abstract:** The Jewish Public Library and its Archives (JPL-A) were founded in 1914 in Montreal by mainly Ashkenazi immigrants seeking to preserve and celebrate their Eastern European culture and languages. Changes in the JPL-A since the founding reflect the diversity of the Montreal Jewish community as well as the politics of existing as a minority culture within the province of Quebec. Currently, the Archives are researching and developing a comprehensive education program – entitled Experience Heritage – that combines community heritage, media and information literacy and archive advocacy for middle and high school students. The teaching goals for the program aim to provide the opportunity to explore connections between a student’s personal identity and their community.

In developing the program, the JPL-A is faced with the incongruity in promoting community identity through tangible historical sources juxtaposed with the definition of this “identity” as laid out by the visioning committee of Federation CJA—the JPL-A’s parent agency. Federation CJA currently prioritizes projects dealing with identity and legacy as a response to the rapidly shifting demographics of the Jewish community. Definitions of identity and identities vary however and what can be assumed when examining identity projects that are currently funded is that a group identity through the celebration of actual local community history and origins—as well as certain aspects of diversity—is often overlooked. How then is the JPL-A best to evolve to meet its parent agency’s priorities while respecting the natural evolution of the community’s historical legacy? The JPL-A’s research and development of Experience Heritage is providing discussion on exactly what legacy is being passed onto future generations and the role the Archives plays in that legacy. The project and research is providing the direction from which the JPL-A is attempting to balance institutional, community and political needs and wants.

### About the author:

*Shannon Hodge* is the Archivist for the Jewish Public Library (JPL), North America’s oldest continuously operating Jewish lending institution. The JPL Archives are a community repository focusing on the cultural, social and educational history of the Jews of Montreal. After the fifteen-year absence of a professional archivist, Ms. Hodge was brought into the JPL not only to update and standardize all archival functions, but also to create a dynamic community outreach program that uses the diverse archival and special collections of the Library. Ms. Hodge’s specialty and experience in educational outreach is an important factor in the new growth and visibility of the JPL Archives, both within as well as outside the community. A particular focus in the last year has been on establishing a relationship with schools as a means of teaching community history and primary source literacy. Ms. Hodge’s main areas of interest include the role of community identity in minority cultural archives and primary resource education in archives. Ms. Hodge holds a BA in History and Classics from Bishop’s University and a MLIS from McGill University.