

David Harris Flaherty Undergraduate Student Library Scholarship 2018 Recipient

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Award-winning Essay

David Harris Flaherty Scholarship Essay

As a history student who is nearing the end of her degree, an employee of the Greater Victoria Public Library, an aspiring librarian, and an overall library enthusiast, the importance of the library as an institution is not lost on me. I feel very privileged to attend a school with so many phenomenal resources that are so easily accessible.

This year I had the privilege of taking a very unique course through the history department. HSTR 370: “On This Spot: Putting History on the Map” was a course taught by department head, Dr. John Lutz. Through this class, students were able to explore digital technologies in order to both link history to place, and to make it interactive in a way that merely writing a paper does not. The final project for this course was not a 10-page essay, but rather an interactive mapping project on an aspect of local history. To prepare us for this project, our class learned about various tools and techniques through various workshops hosted at the library. The tools learned at these workshops included Google Maps, Google Fusion, OAC, QGIS, ArcMap and more.

For our project, my partner and I decided to research the Victoria Jewish community, focusing on the year when the synagogue was built: 1863. The question that we decided to base our thesis around was: why is the synagogue where it is? Our plan was to answer this question on multiple levels: why the oldest synagogue in western Canada was in Victoria, and why it was in the middle of downtown.

In order to answer these questions, some research was required. After talking with Dr. Lutz, we were given some book suggestions to get us started. One of these books, about the

history of the synagogue, was in the main collection. However, the other two were in Special Collections. Strangely enough, despite being a history student, I had never stepped foot in Special Collections before. Getting to pore over these old, delicate books on early Jewish settlers in Victoria was both a fascinating and informative experience, and we were able to get some very useful information on the people who lived in the area over 150 years ago.

After finding information on the people, and creating our website to show the information on the OAC, we needed a way to figure out where Jewish businesses were in 1863, and then somehow find a way to translate those addresses into where they would be today, because the address model changed very early on in the 20th century. Enter the fire insurance maps!

Fortunately, on the library website, copies of very old fire insurance maps are available to peruse, going all way back to 1885. The 1906 map has both the old addresses and the new ones, so through cross-referencing these maps, we were able to plot out where all these old Jewish businesses would be in modern-day Victoria.

Completing this project would not have been possible only utilising one resource from the library. It is only thanks to the various workshops the library offers, the help in Special Collections, and the seemingly endless online resources that this complex, multidisciplinary project was able to be successfully completed.