

Sheep Wagons & Wheels: How the Ivan Doig Archive Brought Digital Inclusivity to the Big Sky Country State Fair

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Abstract

According to the National Digital Inclusion Alliance (NDIA), digital equity is defined as “a condition in which all individuals and communities have the information technology capacity needed for full participation in our society, democracy and economy” (2017). NDIA further explains that digital equity is “necessary for civic and cultural participation, employment, lifelong learning, and access to essential services” (2017). Article X, Section 1 of the Montana Constitution states, “it is the goal of the people to establish a system of education which will develop the full educational potential of each person. Equality of educational opportunity is guaranteed to each person of the state” (Montana Legislative Services, 2017), while Title 22, Part. 4 states that the purpose of libraries is “to provide the benefits of quality public library service to all residents of Montana”, which includes “building digitally inclusive communities” (American Library Association, 2015). In the summer of 2017, two Montana libraries, one public and one academic, teamed up to achieve this purpose by bringing quality library service to an unlikely crowd by collaborating with their local county fair.

“I have found that cattle do well enough, but the better animal hereabout may be sheep. A person can graze five or six of them on the same ground it takes for one cow. Ay, these ridges and foothills, the mountains themselves, there is room up here for thousands and thousands of sheep.”

-- Ivan Doig, Dancing at the Rascal Fair

Introduction

Montana is the 4th largest state in the United States, spanning approximately 147,000 square miles, and is home to just over 1 million people (United States Census Bureau, 2017), 225,000 sheep (National Agricultural Statistics Service, 2017), 82 legally established public libraries (Montana State Library, 2016), and 23 academic libraries (Montana University System, 2019), yet, it remains one of the least digitally equitable states. Only 76.1% of households in Montana reported that they had a broadband internet subscription, and only 86.1% said that they owned a computer in the American Community Survey of 2013-2017 (United States Census Bureau, 2017).

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About Montana State University and Bozeman Public Libraries

Bozeman Public Library (BPL) and Montana State University (MSU) Library are in southwest Montana, in Gallatin County, the 3rd most populous county in the state with a little over 107,000 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2017). The mission of BPL is to “create opportunities that inspire curiosity, exploration and connection” (Bozeman Public Library, n.d.), while the mission of MSU Library, as the state's land grant university, is to “support and advance teaching, learning, and research for Montana State University and the people of Montana by providing access to information and knowledge” (Montana State University Library, 2018).

True to its mission, the Bozeman Public Library offers many different options to ensure digital access for all. BPL offers public computers and printers, as well as access to digital resources like MTLi-brary2Go, Freegal, RB Digital, Hoopla and Lynda. Those resources enable patrons to engage in life-long learning as well as enjoying access to eBooks, magazines and downloadable music. In 2017, BPL launched its first ever bookmobile service for Bozeman and Gallatin County. The bookmobile functions as a mobile branch of the Bozeman Public Library and it strives to serve patrons that may not have an opportunity to visit the library. The bookmobile is equipped with a mobile hotspot enabling digital access for patrons in rural areas, and carries a laptop for patron use. Recently, the bookmobile added electronic media devices for patrons to check out.

MSU Library, although mainly serving a large student population, complements the services offered by Bozeman Public Library. Montana residents may apply for borrower cards to use physical materials as well as access a multitude of online resources that might otherwise be inaccessible to them, from any library computer. They also work hard to curate and digitize primary source collections that have a Montana-focus and support the curriculum and research interests of Montana State University and the people of Montana. One of these local digital collections, the Ivan Doig Archive, led to a very successful partnership between MSU Library, Bozeman Public Library, and the Big Sky Country State Fair.

The Ivan Doig Archive

Well-known in Montana and the Pacific Northwest, author Ivan Doig grew up in Montana and many of his 16 novels are set in his beloved home state. After battling multiple myeloma for many years, Doig passed away on April 9, 2015, and soon after his widow, Carol Doig, began searching for a home for Ivan’s archive. After soliciting proposals from 3 universities, the archive ended up at Montana State University Library in Bozeman, MT after she accepted their ambitious proposal to digitize and

make accessible, via an online database, the entire archive in under a year (Arlitsch, Hawks, McKelvey, Gollehon, and Zauha, 2017.)

Doig spent much of this youth helping his father run sheep and as a ranch hand. Although he eventually left Montana to attend Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois and pursue a career in writing, Doig would continue to use his experiences in Montana as inspiration for his writing. When MSU Library Professor and Outreach Librarian, Jan Zauha, was approached to bring the Ivan Doig Archive to the Big Sky Country State Fair, it was an opportunity to fitting to turn down. Nearly a year after MSU Library successfully finished digitizing the entire archive, resulting in approximately 128,000 individually scanned objects, the Bozeman Public Library Bookmobile and MSU Library teamed up to bring the Ivan Doig Archive and related programming to the Big Sky Country State Fair.

Ivan Doig Archive Exhibit: Voices & Vistas at the Big Sky Country State Fair

MSU Library was given 1,600 square feet of space to bring the Ivan Doig Archive to life at the Big Sky Country State Fair. Inspired by Doig's history of sheep herding and ranching, and a common theme throughout his writing, MSU Library collaborated with the MSU School of Architecture and the Gallatin County Fairgrounds, to bring the archive to life in the form of sheep wagons, reproductions of items from the physical archive including manuscripts, cameras, and replicas of Doig's beloved typewriters, along with a variety of programming and hands-on activities to engage a crowd of fair-goers of all ages. MSU Library also provided computers with the digital version of the Ivan Doig Archive so that visitors could explore the online collection themselves during their visit to the fair.

Partnerships included Yellowstone Writing Project, who held a writing competition with a prompt inspired by Doig, "Tell Us Your Montana Story", and the winning entries were displayed inside the Doig exhibit. They also hosted an interactive writing station where visitors could create found poetry or participate in daily writing marathons. The MSU Wool Lab loaned wool, shearing tools, jars of lanolin, and more that visitors were encouraged to interact with. They also led a discussion about the history of sheep ranching in Montana and the life cycle of wool. Sounds from the MSU Acoustic Atlas, a digital collection of sounds from the greater Yellowstone, were paired with quotes from Doig's novels and played in the background of the exhibit, enhancing the experience of visitors. Country Bookshelf, a local, independent Bozeman bookstore was on hand to sell hard copies of Ivan Doig's books as well as other Montana-themed works. LaVonne Stucky, of Serenity Sheep Stay in Bozeman, loaned various items, including a wood stove and a tin dog sheep rattle, and provided wool-carding demonstrations using a simple drop spindle made from a CD. Paul LaChapelle, an Associate Professor in Political Science at MSU, collected interviews from visitors about their own Montana experiences for StoryCorps, a non-profit organization that aims to "preserve and share humanity's stories" (StoryCorps, Inc., 2019). The exhibit also held story times with MSU Library staff, and a coloring station inside of a pint-sized sheep wagon to engage the fair's youngest visitors.



Photo

Credit: Amanda Hardin (MSU Library)

Ivan Doig Boards the Bookmobile

In order to encourage fair-goers to visit both the bookmobile, and the Ivan Doig Archive exhibit, bookmobile staff visited the Doig exhibit to present a short program on what the bookmobile offers to the residents of Bozeman and Gallatin County, while MSU Library staff presented at the bookmobile to provide an overview of the Ivan Doig Archive, and how they could access and utilize it. Collaboration between MSU Library and the bookmobile staff resulted in a better service for patrons and fairgoers. Prior to the fair, multiple copies of Doig's books were purchased and processed for patrons at the fair to checkout, and to this day Ivan Doig's works still roam Gallatin County onboard the bookmobile.

In addition to carrying copies of Doig's works and collaborative programming, the bookmobile also offered arts and crafts projects, building projects and other activities geared toward younger fairgoers. Since the bookmobile is outfitted with air conditioners, many 4-H kids appreciated having a cool place to go to and read while waiting for their next event. The bookmobile also offered participation stickers for the summer reading program as well as an opportunity to sign up for a library card. Functioning just like a regular library, fairgoers were able to check out books, movies, and other items on the bookmobile to take home that day. The bookmobile staff also collaborated with staff from Yellowstone Forever during the duration of the fair to highlight and educate fairgoers about Yellowstone National Park.



Photo

Credit: Carmen Clark (Bozeman Public Library)

Conclusion

The Big Sky Country State Fair lasted a total of five days, and over 3,500 visitors were recorded between the Bozeman Public Library Bookmobile and the Ivan Doig Archive Exhibit (2,234 visits to the exhibit; 1,287 visits to the bookmobile). MSU Library staff also asked visitors to note where they were from, and found they had a worldwide audience, including fairgoers from Birmingham West Midlands, UK, Davenport, IA, Harare, Zimbabwe, Mandan, ND, Randall, MN, and more.

As much as digital inclusivity is about having access to technology, it is also about access to quality information, and the Ivan Doig Archive is a treasure trove of primary source materials available freely to anyone, anywhere. The Bozeman Public Library Bookmobile helps to ensure that those who cannot visit their local library or do not have internet access at home, can still explore the Ivan Doig Archive or access his books onboard the bus. By participating in an event typically focused on agriculture, food, and music, MSU Library and Bozeman Public Library successfully integrated digital equity into their community and beyond.

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