



By Tim Linscott

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A deep-rooted sense of community, a strong streak of curiosity and being a history major doesn't hurt, either.

For Robin Quinn, head librarian at Hasting Memorial Library in Grant, a phone call from a representative from the Mari Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center in Chadron sparked an idea and struck a passionate chord.

Representatives from the Sandoz High Plains Heritage Center called Quinn in January 2012 to explain that they were getting rid of their extra microfilm catalog, which included microfilms of papers from Perkins County, including the original Tribune and the Madrid Era.

The dilemma Quinn had was that the library does not have a microfilm reader. She looked into finding one and the cost ran around \$3,000.

"They are becoming obsolete, so finding them is hard," Quinn said, noting that investing in dying technology may not be prudent.

If she turned the offer down from High Plains Heritage Center, the microfilms would be simply thrown out.

Quinn contacted the Nebraska State Historical Society on what to do about the matter and after a discussion with them, a lightbulb went on.

The state historical society was in the process of digitalizing its entire database of records, including newspapers, using a company out of Iowa.

This gave Quinn an idea. She contacted Advantage Preservation Companies, an Iowa-based company specializing in digital projects, and began the process of turning microfilms into digital copies.

The library foundation board stepped up with half of the funds for the project while Grant citizen Marvin Stumpf gave a sizeable donation to the project as well. Total cost of the project now stands at over \$7,000.

Within a few months a small, thin, black external hard drive showed up at the library.

Upon plugging it into a computer, Quinn saw it launched a database of every single issue of every single newspaper in Perkins County from 1889-2001.

“Everything is there. Elsie, Madrid, Vengango, the Tribune from the day it started, all until 2001, it is all there,” Quinn said.

The hard drive opens a web browser that has a search engine, allowing people to look as broadly or specifically as they want for anything in Perkins County.

Quinn found information on her great-grandmother and library staff helped a woman in Missouri find 13 long-lost relatives.

Not only can the database help with genealogy, it can pin-point historical happenings throughout the county, dig up documents like legals as well as just looking back in history.

“It is kind of fun to look back at some of the old papers,” Quinn said. “It is a complete collection of newspapers. There is no other way to access these archives except the historical society in Lincoln.”

The state historical society, over four hours from Grant, currently has a waiting period to search through archives.

Russ Pankonin, co-Publisher of The Grant Tribune-Sentinel, feels preserving the history of a community through the local newspaper is vital to each community.

“The value of preserving the newspapers of Perkins County is simply immeasurable. The Tribune-Sentinel records the weekly history of Perkins County and it’s communities,” Pankonin said. “To have the papers from Madrid, Elsie and Venango is also a gem for those communities.”

Having a record of papers from Madrid is especially important to Pankonin as bound versions of a Madrid publication kept at the Tribune office were sadly destroyed several years ago. The bound books were kept in the basement and an incident where a sewer backed up four feet destroyed several editions.

“It’s great to know a digital version still exists,” Pankonin said. “We applaud the efforts of the Hastings Memorial Library to undertake this project. These digital versions will be a valuable resource for local research and genealogy for many years to come.”

Each screen can be printed as a whole, or specific items from the page, which is complete with advertising, by-lines and legal notices.

“Once you get the hang of searching for things, it is really easy,” Quinn said.

A back-up of all files are kept by Advantage Preservation Companies.

What is amazing is that the Hastings Memorial Library is currently the only library doing such a project.

Quinn indicated that at a library conference in October the notion of libraries doing this was made known to other libraries, giving credence to Perkins County being innovators in preservation.

“Our data base was used as a display screen for other libraries to look at,” Quinn said.

Keeping a complete history of a county is very important to Quinn, a self-proclaimed history buff, and this data base has given a complete record of all history in Perkins County in the palm of her hand.

“I think it is extremely important to preserve history. There are over 100 years of local history right here. Some newspapers people may never know existed have information on what happened in this county in 1889,” Quinn said. “That is pretty close to the beginning of where we live.”

Patrons can use a public computer during regular working hours to explore the past.

Donations are still being sought to catch the collection up to 2013. Quinn hopes every two years to purchase the previous archive, which is normally done in a year-and-a-half increment,

to keep everything current.