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ARCHIVES ASSOCIATION OF ONTARIO AWARDS - 2024

The AAO Awards Committee were pleased and honoured to announce the winners of the 2024 AAO Awards at the AAO's Annual General Meeting held on May 10th, 2024.

JAMES J. TALMAN AWARD – MELISSA CAZA

James J. Talman was the second Archivist of Ontario, serving from 1935 to 1939. He subsequently served as Chief Librarian for the University of Western Ontario until 1969. Talman was appreciated for his gentle manner and intellectual approach, and was admired for his prolific publications, some of which include *Basic Documents in Canadian History* (1959), *Huron College, 1863–1963* (1963) and *The Journal of Major John Norton, 1816* (1970).

The James J. Talman Award is given to individuals who have demonstrated an outstanding level of imagination and innovation in contributing to the profession, their institution, or the archival community, or who have challenged conventional thinking about archival work.

The AAO is pleased to present the 2024 James J. Talman Award to Melissa Caza.

Melissa Caza joined McMaster University in 2018 to run the Health Sciences Archives (HSA) with a mandate to collect, preserve, and make available records documenting the history, life, and people of McMaster University's Faculty of Health Sciences as well as Hamilton Health Sciences and its predecessor institutions. Early in her tenure, Melissa was pivotal in organizing celebratory events for McMaster Medical School's 50th anniversary, bringing renewed attention to an archives that had been neglected for years. She ensured the success of historical



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displays and campus tours, revitalized connections, and raised awareness about the Archives collection and services.

Melissa has led efforts to overhaul outdated practices and systems, securing funding for software upgrades, staffing enhancements, and support for student involvement. She has recently secured an internal grant to fund a project archivist to help process and describe a substantial donation from the Hamilton Academy of Medicine, a donation that would never have been made were it not for her ongoing efforts to raise the profile of the HSA.

Over the past five years, Melissa has spearheaded several innovative projects including the Faculty of Health Sciences website archiving project and the Health Sciences Library Voices in Healthcare project. The Voices in Healthcare project is particularly noteworthy because it focused on capturing and celebrating patients' and healthcare professionals' stories of their involvement with the healthcare system to understand personal experience and build empathy in healthcare education and training. This work continues to evolve to include integrating healthcare history into student learning and curating oral histories.

Connected to the Voices project is the Pandemic Stories Project, which was launched to preserve the individual and collective stories of the Faculty of Health Sciences and Hamilton Health Sciences experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic so that future generations can learn about day-to-day experiences of the healthcare and academic community during a historically notable time.

Most recently, Melissa exhibited exemplary leadership in advancing Indigenous reconciliation efforts in her work with the Hamilton Sanatorium records. By supporting the work of Inuit agencies and Indigenous researchers, she has



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contributed to the ongoing truth and reconciliation process, ensuring that Indigenous perspectives are respected and integrated into archival practices. She works closely with the McMaster Indigenous Research Institute in their work exploring the stories of Inuit residents of the Hamilton Mountain Sanatorium and their families. Melissa also played a key role in organizing a private photo viewing for Inuit elders at the Art Gallery of Hamilton in 2023 and she will soon begin work with the Indigenous Health Learning Lodge to help establish an archive strategy to preserve their work to advance the concepts of truth, reconciliation, and anti-colonization with all aspects of Indigenous health and well-being. This work will be one of the first to incorporate OCAP (ownership, control, access, and possession) principles into institutional archiving practices at McMaster. Her interests and training in Indigenous data sovereignty are helping the HSA reshape current practices to recognize the incongruence between colonial approaches to archival practice and Indigenous values pertaining to information ownership.

In the words of her nominators, “...Melissa embodies the spirit of imagination, innovation, and transformative leadership that the James J. Talman Award seeks to honour. Her dedication to advancing archival practices, fostering community engagement, and promoting Indigenous reconciliation sets her apart as a true visionary in our field. We are confident that Melissa’s contributions will continue to inspire and shape the future of archival work.”

For her exceptional contributions to the field of healthcare archives which showcases creativity and innovation and also challenges conventional norms, the Archives Association of Ontario is pleased to present Melissa Caza with the 2024 James J. Talman Award.



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AAO INSTITUTIONAL AWARD – YORK REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD MUSEUM & ARCHIVES AND MARKHAM MUSEUM

The AAO Institutional Award is given to an archival institution that has contributed significantly to the advancement of the archival field or community, or has demonstrated a significant level of innovation and imagination in the establishment of outstanding or model programs or services. Recognition may be granted for an individual project of particular merit or for a program that integrates many facets of archival enterprise.

Examples of projects or programs open to nomination:

- Arrangement and Description (e.g., finding aid systems, information networking, guides or other published finding aids).
- Preservation Management (e.g., design, construction or upgrading of a facility, sharing of conservation skills or facilities).
- Public Programs (e.g., special exhibits or exhibition programs, publications, education or community outreach programs).

The AAO Institutional Award for 2024 is being presented to the York Region District School Board Museum & Archives and Markham Museum for “Standing in the Doorway: Lived Histories and Experiences of the Chinese Community”.

The Markham Museum and the York Region District School Board Museum & Archives, together in collaboration with community partners, created this community-driven program in commemoration of the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1923). This public exhibition tells the story of resistance, resilience, and the many



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accomplishments of York Region's residents of Chinese descent through a three-part virtual and touring exhibition program.

This exhibition undertook an innovative and imaginative approach to engaging the community and showcasing a historically marginalized history through archival textual records, images, oral histories and artifacts using multiple public platforms. It showcases how the Chinese communities that call York Region home have created places of belonging that reflect their heritage and histories, becoming integral to its landscape, identity, and future.

The project was developed at the request of a community member who formed a close-knit partnership with the curators of the two institutions and who aided them in gathering resources as well as assisted them with introductions to community leaders. The project succeeded because of the essential contributions and involvement from members of the community, including over 500 participants, advisors, and contributors of personal records, stories and artifacts. Using archival images, oral history interviews with community members, and loaned artifacts, this exhibition acknowledges the evidence of anti-Chinese racism and discrimination but also celebrates the Chinese residents of York Region and their stories of resilience and perseverance.

The curators worked diligently to ensure that their community partners led the direction of the project and this was recognized, for example, by community member and contributor Donna Quan, who said "Thank you to you and your team for honouring our voices for the "Standing in the Doorway" exhibit. We felt heard, included and appreciated."

Through community connections, the museums gained the support and trust of the community to showcase their stories. They worked with the University of Toronto



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Museum Studies Program to conduct oral history interviews with 17 individuals. Through three-party ethical co-stewardship agreements for the current and future use of the audio material, the institutions strove to engage with the community with transparency and respect. In addition to sharing their stories, lenders also shared personal photographs and textual records to be used in the exhibitions including head taxes, photographs, celebratory ephemera, immigration papers, restaurant menus and signs, and posters, all lent by multiple families for the purpose of documenting, digitizing and sharing their experiences and family histories. In addition to personal archives from community members, the YRDSB Museum & Archives and Markham Museum teams reached out to multiple other archives, museums and libraries to request the use of their archival materials related to Chinese Canadian history.

Access and education were fundamental to the project, resulting in the development of three avenues for community interaction, each is supported by exceptionally high-quality educational materials:

- A website - www.yrdsb2.ca/standing-doorway - launched on May 15, 2023;
- A Travelling Community Exhibition Tour available for short-term (3-month) loans to local York Region museums, archives, libraries and cultural centres from September 27, 2023 – March 31, 2025;
- and an Inter-School Exhibition Tour to YRDSB elementary and secondary schools available, free of charge, for two-week bookings from December 1, 2023 – March 31, 2025.

Recognizing the cultural diversity of York Region, all the primary physical graphics are provided in four written languages (English, French, Simplified Chinese, and Traditional Chinese).



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As of April 2024, the project has reached 25,500 people with the gallery display at the Markham Museum and over 3,500 students in their own schools. The in-school tour was fully booked within a week of its announcement, resulting in the purchase of an additional touring set.

In recognition of the extraordinary and impactful community-driven exhibition which uses archival material to celebrate an important, historically marginalized, community and which develops inter-generational and cross-cultural connections and understanding, the Archives Association of Ontario is pleased to present the York Region District School Board Museum & Archives and the Markham Museum with the 2024 AAO Institutional Award.