

SOCIAL MEDIA HELPS TO FIND MISSING METADATA

Northern Territory Library is successfully using social media to reach out to the community in an attempt to fill in the gaps in metadata in their photographic records, as **HEATHER HOLT** and **CADDIE BRAIN** report.

Reinvigorating the Northern Territory Library's social media presence was high on her list of priorities when Caddie Brain started in the new role of Community Engagement Coordinator at Northern Territory Library (NTL) earlier this year. Quickly gaining popularity, the Library's Facebook page now has over 2,000 likes and has been the focus of innovative collection development work.

Alongside the library's official Facebook page, links began to form with independent community Facebook groups like Lost Darwin and Old Darwin. These groups, which are primarily for the recreational sharing of images, have large memberships, and some of the photos shared have received hundreds of likes and generated considerable online discussion. Recognising a common interest, Caddie was quick to propose an exhibition in the library's beautiful mezzanine space.

Sixty-five of the most popular photos from the Facebook sites were tracked down and reprinted, and original prints and negatives were sent in by current and former Darwin residents from across Australia. Many of the photos shared were already in the PictureNT collection at Northern Territory Library. The exhibition was curated with interaction and collaboration in mind, and stickers and a historic map were provided for people to add their memories and contribute to the discussion, similar to the online discussions on Facebook.

More than 300 people attended the launch, many of whom had never been to the Northern Territory Library before.

The photographic collection at NTL, as is the case in many institutions, has a somewhat limited supply of metadata to go with its images. Many of the images in Territory Stories, the digital repository of NTL, have limited or incomplete descriptions, locations or dates. Around 2,500 of the 51,466 photographs in the collection are titled or described as 'unknown', which limits their usefulness in terms of searching, citing and contextualising them as historical resources.

Bringing together the Facebook fans and the incomplete metadata has begun a process of community engagement, which Emma Darby, NTL Assistant Director of Collections and Engagement, believes will become an important collection development measure in the future.

'As well as using social media to promote events, we are using it to really engage with the history fans out there and ask for extra detail for Territory Stories. We then add the data to our records; we're excited to be able to connect with library users this way.'

A beautiful example of a historic photograph whose metadata was lacking was posted on NTL's Facebook page to mark International Women's Day on 8 March this year. The photo, showing seven women of Chinese heritage, was taken on 9 April 1932. Captioned 'Socialite Chinese women of Darwin', the image had metadata attached to it that identified only one of the women. But a Facebook follower recognised one of the other women in the photo as his aunt and confirmed her name and other biographical details. These details have been added to the metadata at bit.ly/2asLBHp.



Using a map to geolocate photos at the Lost Darwin exhibition



Chinese women of Darwin in 1932



A crowd enjoys the exhibition of photos



Social media followers identified one of these Darwin women



1988 Brunette Downs Races

Similar detective work identified three previously unknown young women posing with horses in the NT outback.

Although the photograph was part of the Northern Territory Government Photographer Slide Collection, there was no metadata indicating the women's identities, the year or the location. The NT's relatively small, interconnected population was an advantage here. When page followers commented on and began a conversation about the photo, they were able to work out the place (by recognising the stockyards), the timeframe (based on the clothing styles) and eventually tagged all three people in the photo. It turned out to be at Brunette Downs Races in 1988 and the metadata has now been updated to include the new data. See bit.ly/29UfmSZ.

There have been fruitful discussions and debates among Northern Territory Library staff as a result of these baby steps towards social-media data harvesting. Some of the topics we have discussed include the following:

- **Reliability and accuracy:** Do we trust the information? To put it simply, more data is better than no data. And if data is wrong, people are more likely to contact us to correct it than if they simply recognise someone.
- **Accessibility:** Commenting on Facebook posts is

eminently easier and potentially less intimidating than any other method of contacting the library to correct or include metadata on images.

- **Ongoing communication:** NTL is committed to always writing back to people once the pages have been updated to demonstrate that their effort was worthwhile.
- **Connecting:** It's all about sparking engagement and conversations – not just gathering likes!

Another nice consequence of this outreach work has been a steady stream of donations to the Northern Territory Library's collection. Personal documents and photographs are rich additions to the collection. Collecting recent history is an important mandate of the Northern Territory Library, and the photographic collection is a popular and important resource for students, genealogists, researchers, and professional and leisure historians. 🌟

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