Hi and thank you for having me. "Future proofing" is a sci fi term that basically means something's unlikely to become obsolete. Nothing fancy. We're in this weird situation in small and rural libraries where all this ebook/tablet/text-a-librarian stuff can seem futuristic to some at the same time as other people are calling libraries irrelevant.

You and I know that's not where libraries are going. Let's work out how to get that point across to patrons, funders, each other.

People on the internet often ask me to talk about "the future of libraries" and then get dismayed when I don't think things are really going to be terribly different in ten or twenty years. Not in small towns. Not really. I grew up in Boxborough Massachusetts, now I live in Randolph Vermont, about the same size population-wise. Maybe 4500 people. A good size. I love looking at the histories of other small towns and things I encounter when I am driving around. Who was Molly Stark? What weird post offices are around here? (this one is from Salmon Falls a booming mill village inside of Rollinsford)

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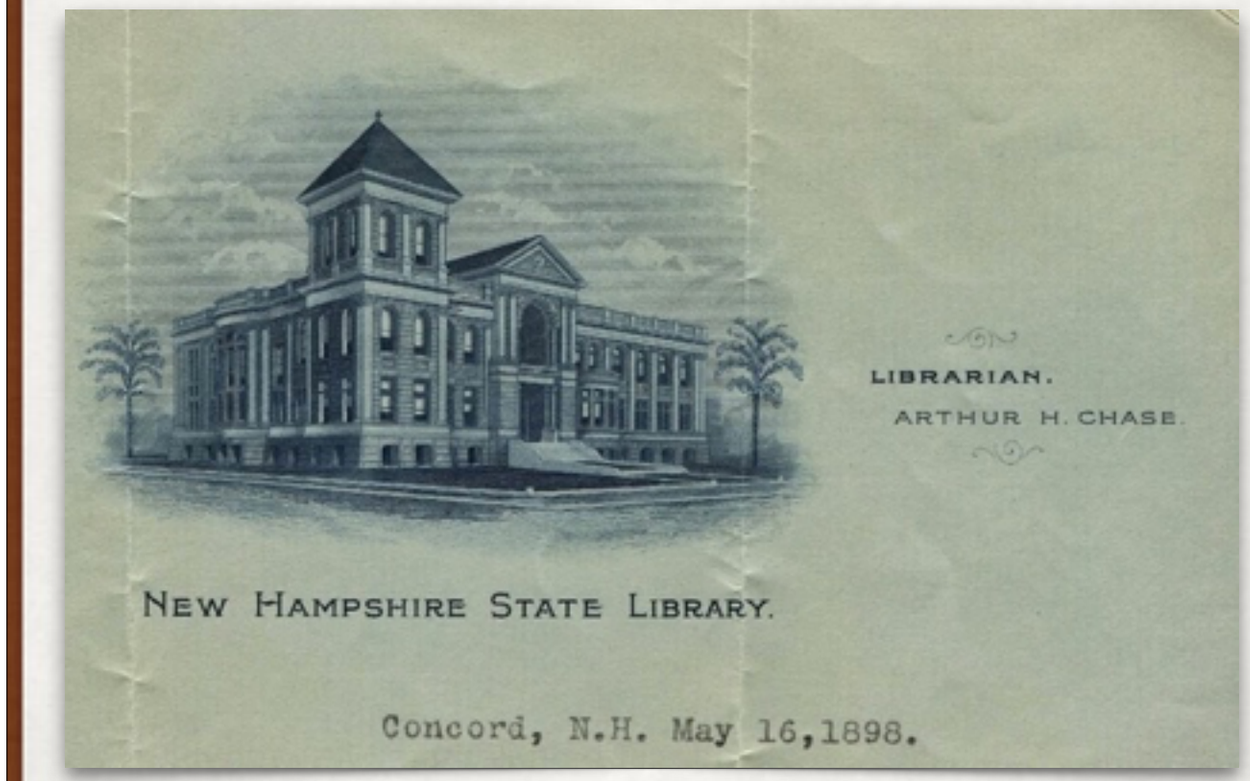
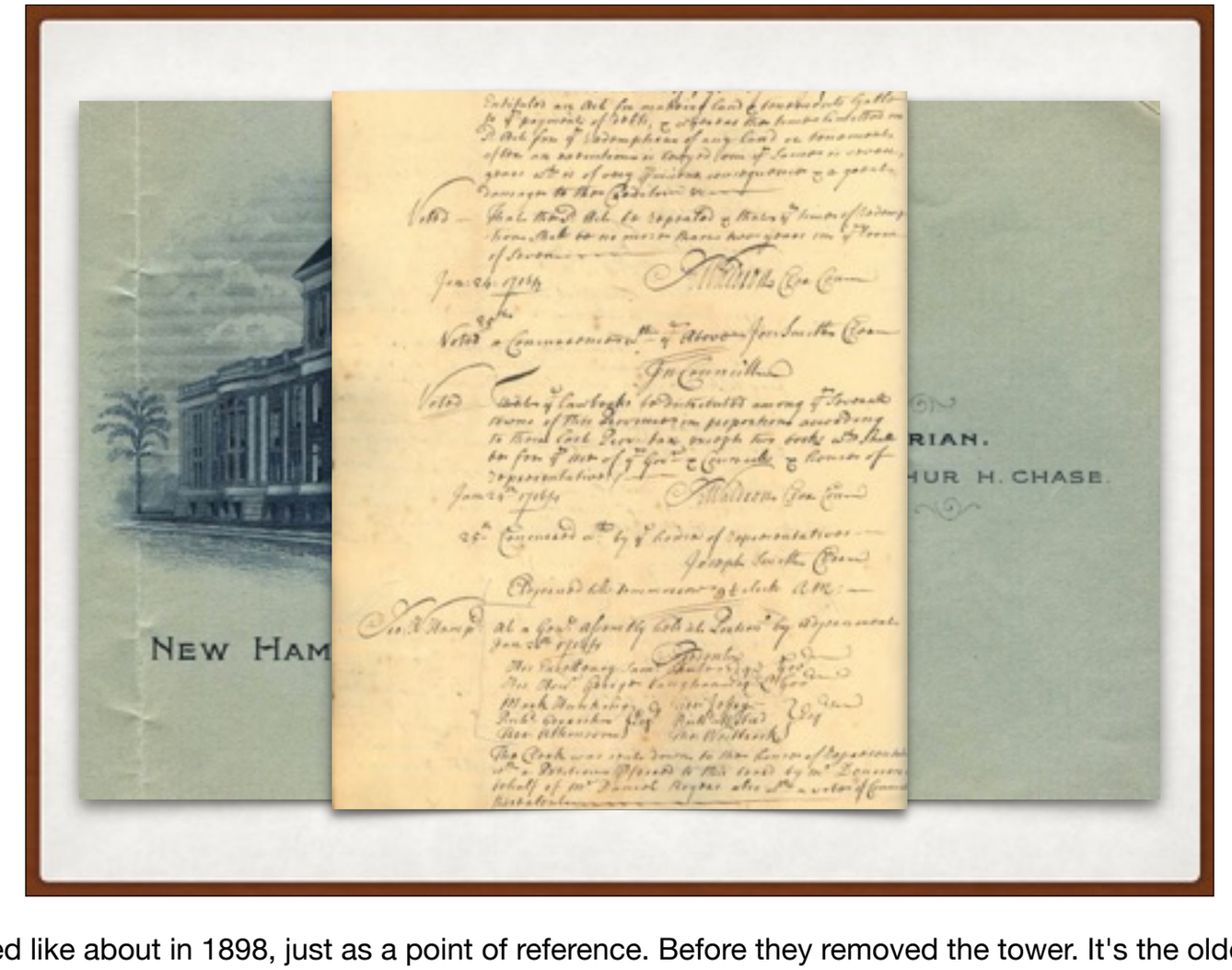
Futurist people are great at having visions and giving a lot of advice on how things should be. It turns out it’s a lot easier to envision a glorious future than to figure out how to get there from where we are right now. We see this in libraries, enduring institutions that evolved a certain way over a long period of time. Truly public institutions, for everyone. A thing that’s rarer and rarer.

Everyone can imagine a great and different way for libraries to BE but not how we can get them there. So let's talk about that…



This is what the NH State Library looked like about in 1898, just as a point of reference. Before they removed the tower. It's the oldest state library in the country. It's older than the state of New Hampshire. Here's the legislation that built it. in 1717. So I think we can all agree that future-proofing and saying the same are not at all the same thing, and that this is okay.



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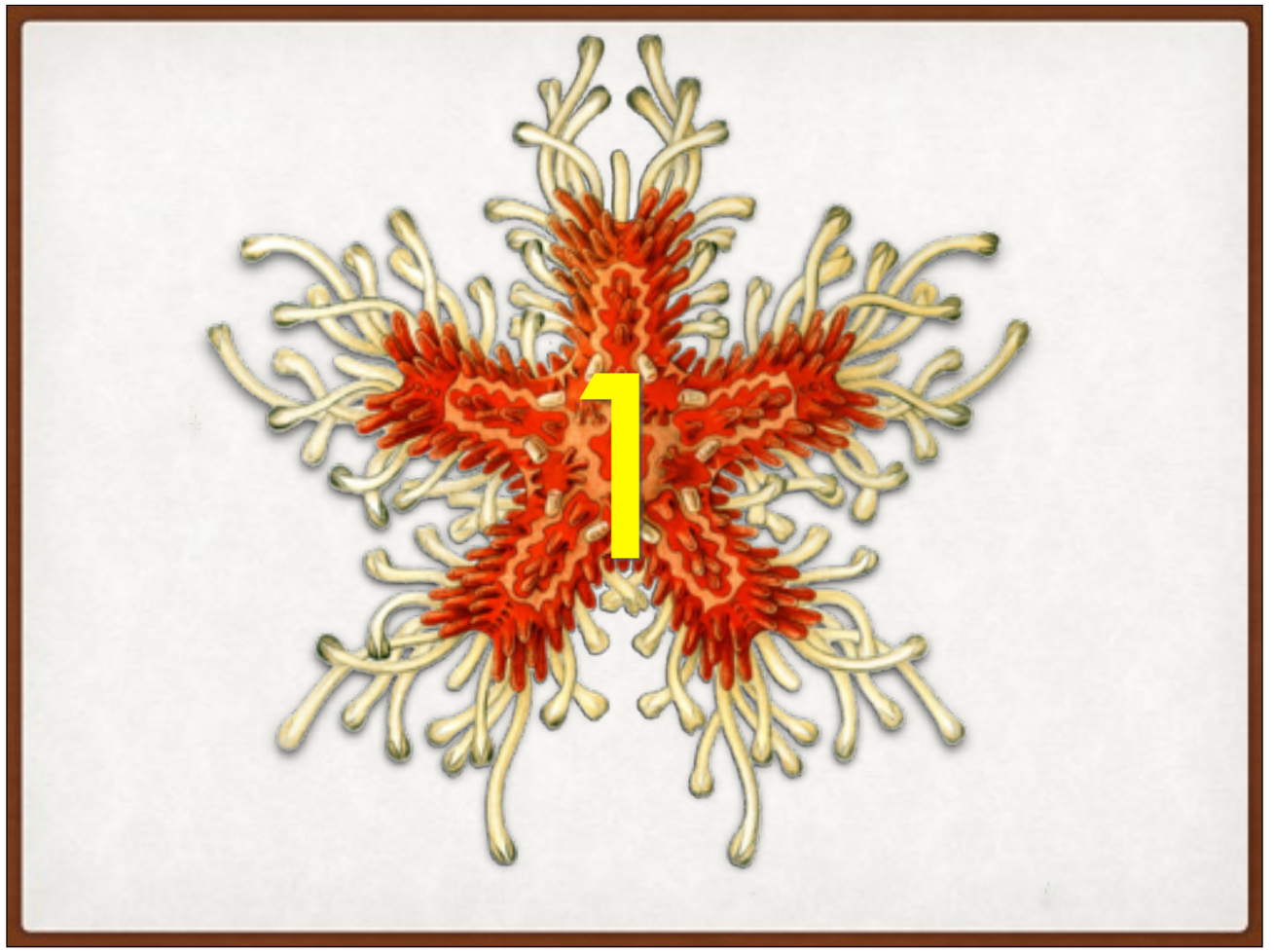
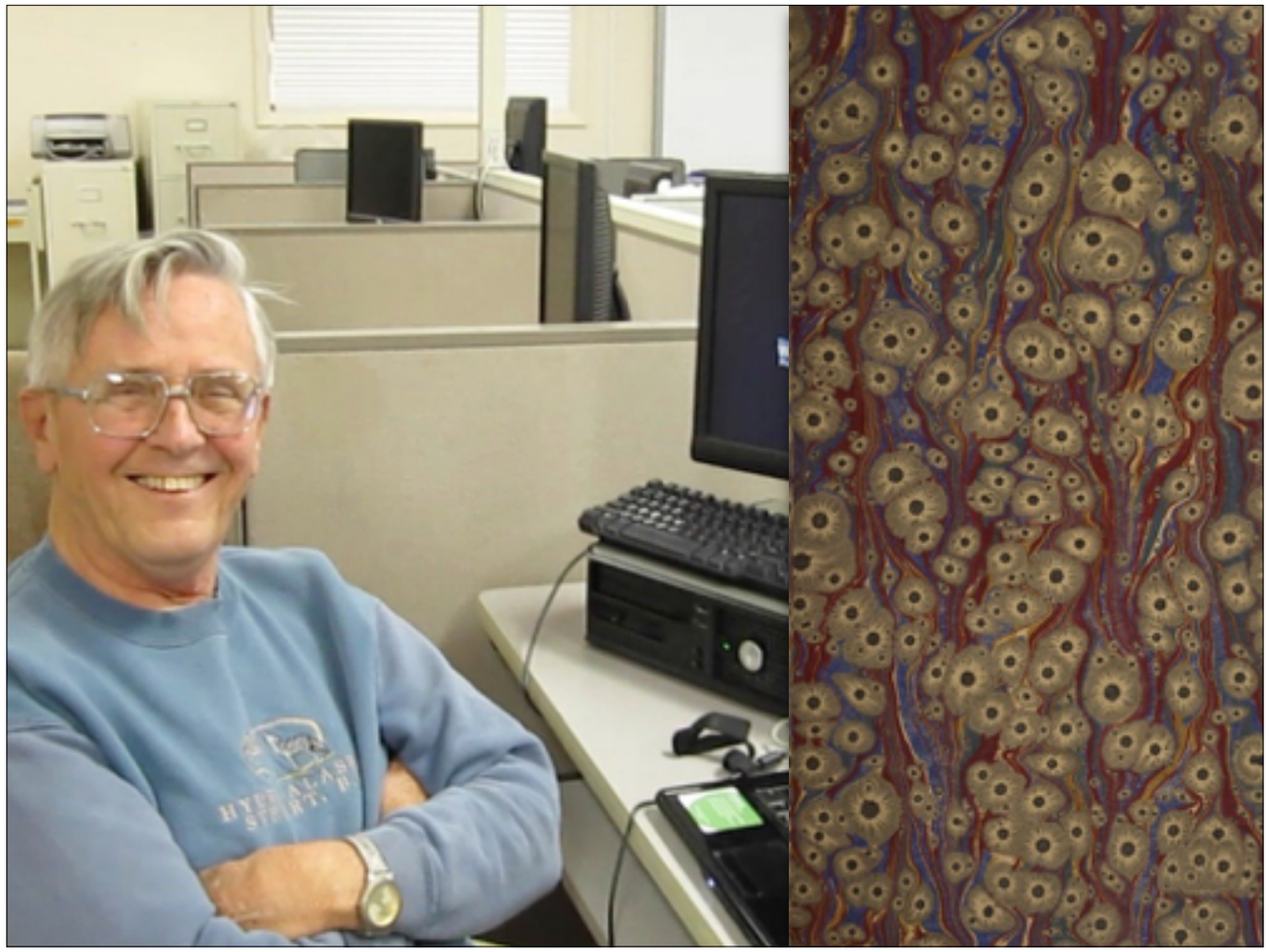


I've shifted my ideas about how to approach and educate people about technology over the years. I'm now working with what I call the One Thousand Starfish approach. I'll explain that in a bit.

I did that thing many kids do and moved away after college. I went to Seattle where I learned some tech skills, got my library degree here at UW, and spent a lot of time in a tech-saturated environment teaching basic computer skills at Seattle Public Library and elsewhere. My idea at the time was that I'd teach basic email and technology classes for a while and then somehow everyone would know those things and we could focus on less 101 topics like privacy and security and copyright.

I laugh to look back and think of it, but that was my feeling.



I moved back home to New England, settling in Vermont. I do a lot of things for work but the two biggest things besides talks like this are

1. Teaching basic technology classes and staffing a drop-in time for adults at a local vocational high school. Think "where are my files?" sorts of things. This is Colin, he is 88. He comes to organize his photos and to fight with his email. He likes help with this fight.
2. Until recently I worked for Open Library, the Internet Archive's ebook lending concern "We lend free ebooks worldwide". I never see another person at this job, just use Slack and Skype and email.

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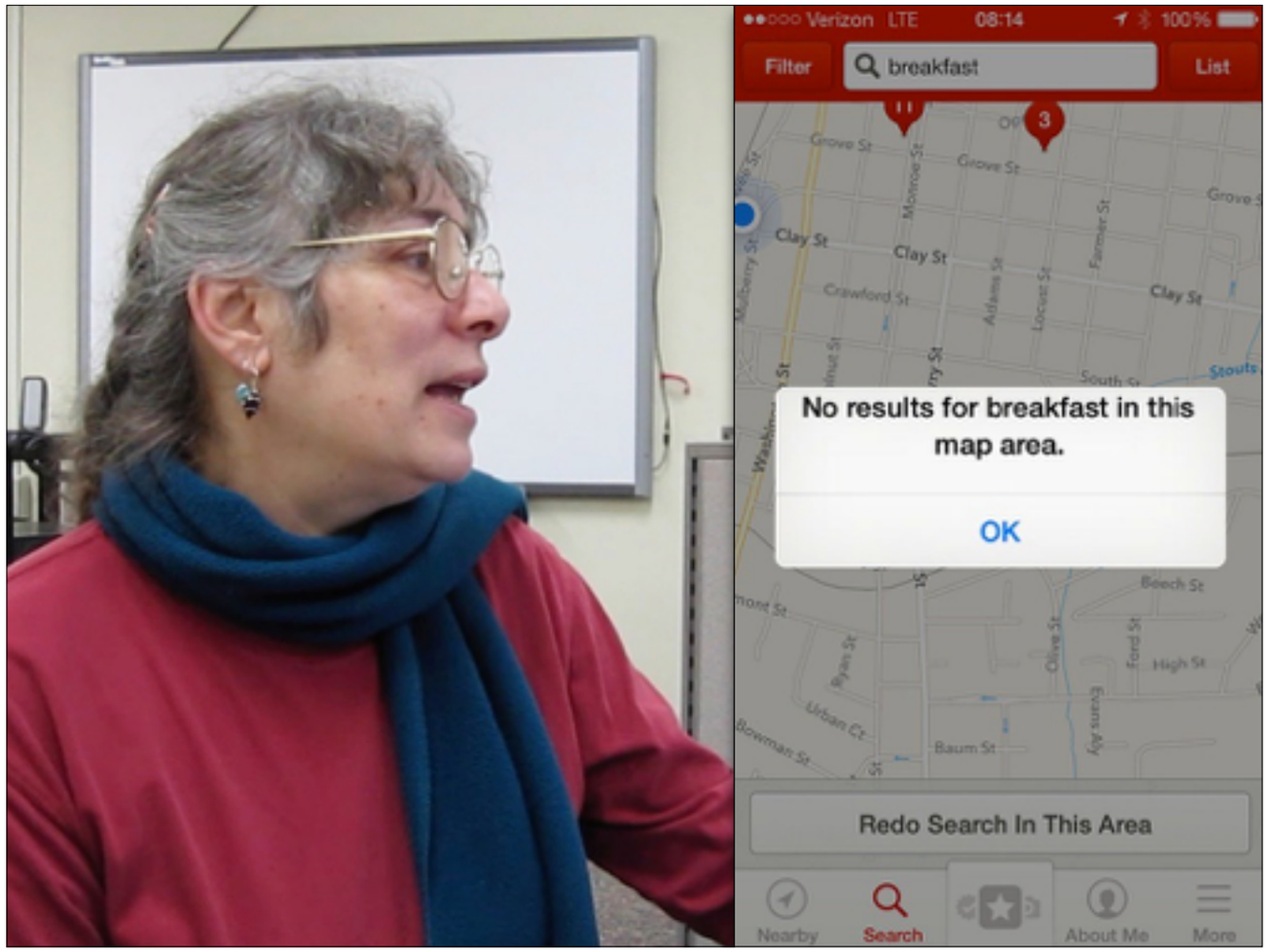
This is Corliss. She comes in to work on her resume so she can get a job somewhere other than the glove factory and the music box factory in our town. So there's a Big City/Small Town aspect to what I do, where “the internet” is the big city.

The thing that is the most interesting to me is how much these two "worlds" are a little invisible to each other. Techies seem to forget that the digital divide exists or have oversimplified it to some nasty "We just need to wait out the old people" analysis (old like me? old like Corliss We're not that old...) And then they build tools that don't take novice users into account, that presume too much, that have bad defaults, that think you can “crowdsource” everything you previously would pay for.

We've used those tools. We don't like them. Our patrons have tried them. They've made them feel bad. They get tired of hearing how "email is dead" when it's just barely live to them. (click - this was me trying to find breakfast in Mississippi….)



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And people in smaller towns (I think of the ones I know in Vermont, this may or may not be true for you in NH but honestly aren't our states sort of the same?) sometimes find a point of pride in *not* being online. This is Fred Tuttle in Tunbridge Vermont, holding a photo of his father who is holding a photo of HIS father. They are proud that they've avoiding the spam and the viruses and the smartphone-facilitated distractions. There's a sort of reverse-snobbery in action. They like me okay but those OTHER people who are online all the time facebooking and tweeting and sexting, there is something WRONG with them. I listen, and learn.

The whole IDEA of computers has changed generally. Back in the day, you'd have a computer if you were an electronic hobbyist. Nowadays, we're told, they're for everyone (click) and their dog. The media writes about people's refrigerators being hacked or their tvs spying on them.

Most people want a computer to do a few dozen things simply, but no one can agree on what few dozen things those are. So computers do a few thousand things and people get stressed out that they don't know how to do the other 975 things it does or 9075 things. Plus they're expensive to fix, and maybe touchy. So people get discouraged....

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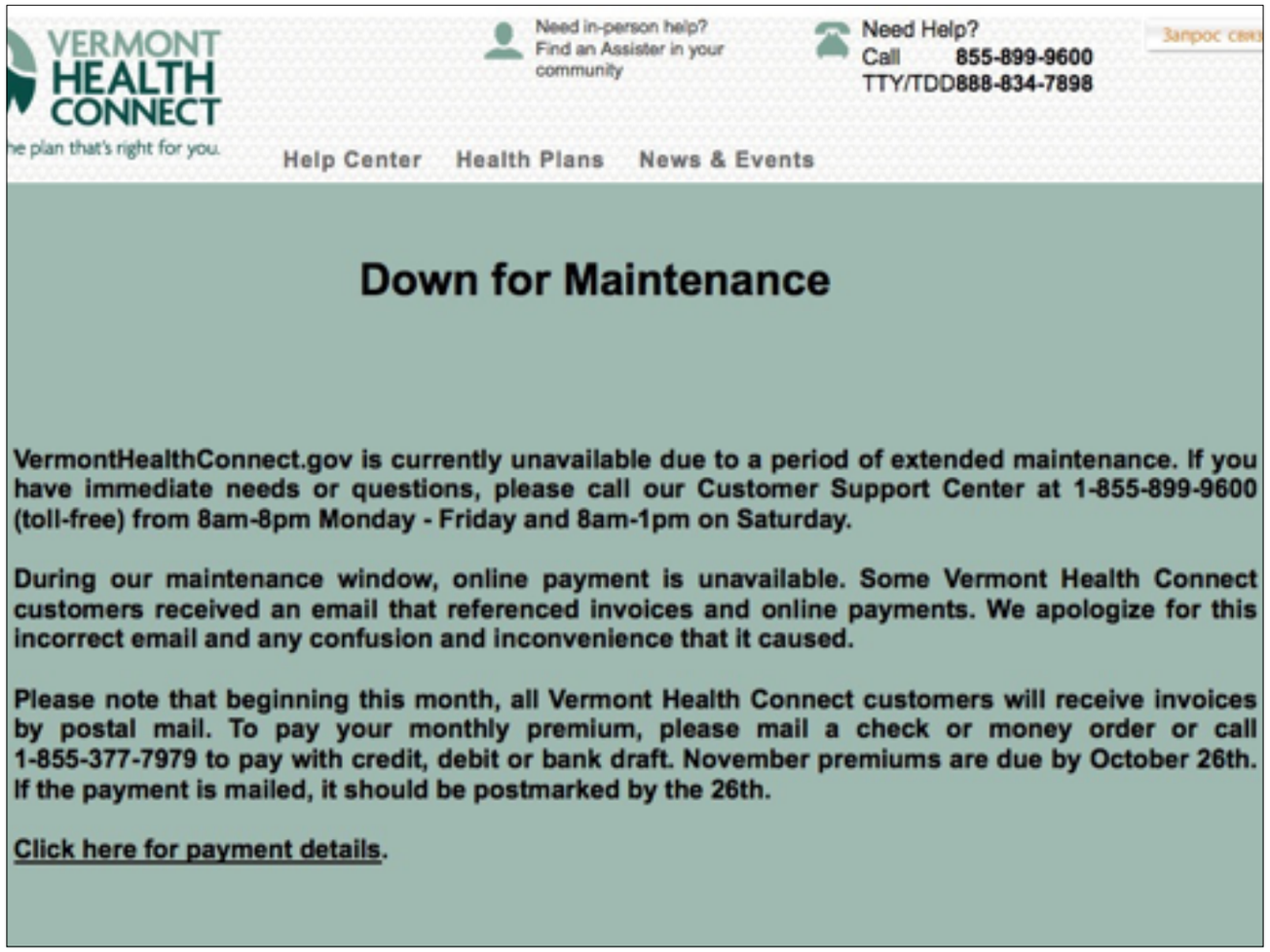


Speaking of discouraged, last year Vermont's healthcare website was down for six weeks. Can you be said to have a website if it's been down for over a month? I get frustrated about this.

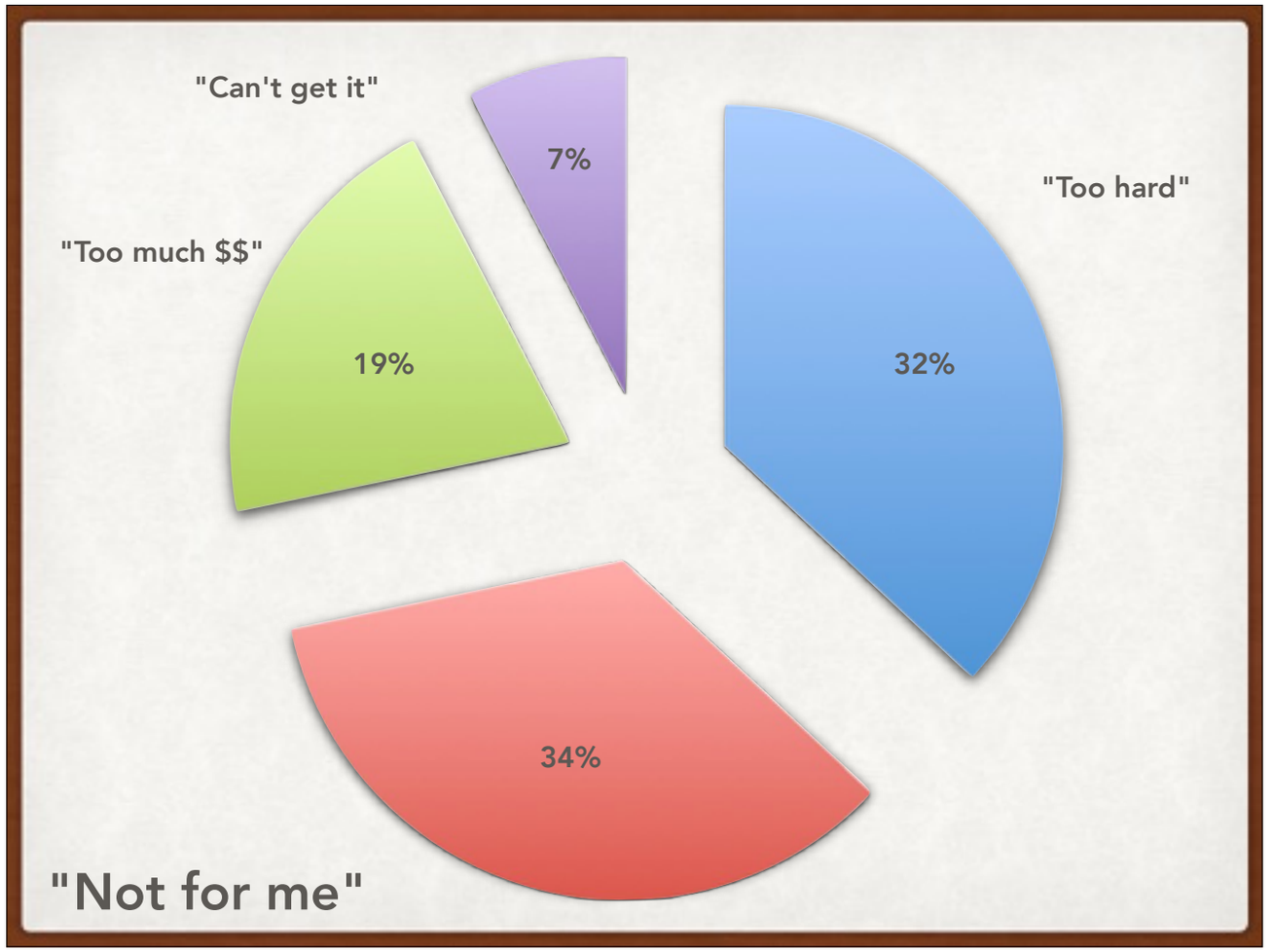
But here's the interesting thing. The State of Vermont made a choice. With the number of people who needed to use the site (we've got 650,000 people in the state a small fraction of those are on state health care) and the amount of support those people needed, it was actually simpler to just keep the website down and do one-on-one phone support rather than struggle with a website that was up and down for a month. At scale, it actually was a solution.

This is the small library strength. This is the small community strength. We can know all of our people. In NYC where you've got several million patrons, good luck with sussing them all out, but we can actually do some of that one on one work. If I know a hundred people in town, and they each know fifty, that's everyone in town.

Back to that starfish comment: Last folksy story, promise.

I work in a vocational high school and there are a lot of kids there who are often dealing with challenges that are more pressing than school. Poverty, bad family situations, food insecurity. School for these kids is just one more tough thing. It's a small school with a decent student/teacher ratio. At the beginning of the year, they list out all the kids at a teacher's meeting and every teacher makes a check box next to the kids they know or know of or are friendly with the families or whatever. There are always some kids left. New kids, kids from far away, maybe kids with problems, shy kids, kids who miss a lot of school. And each teacher takes a kid. Not to get all up in their business, but to maybe notice if something is wrong, make sure the kid has a warm jacket, make sure every kid has a person at the school who is thinking about them.

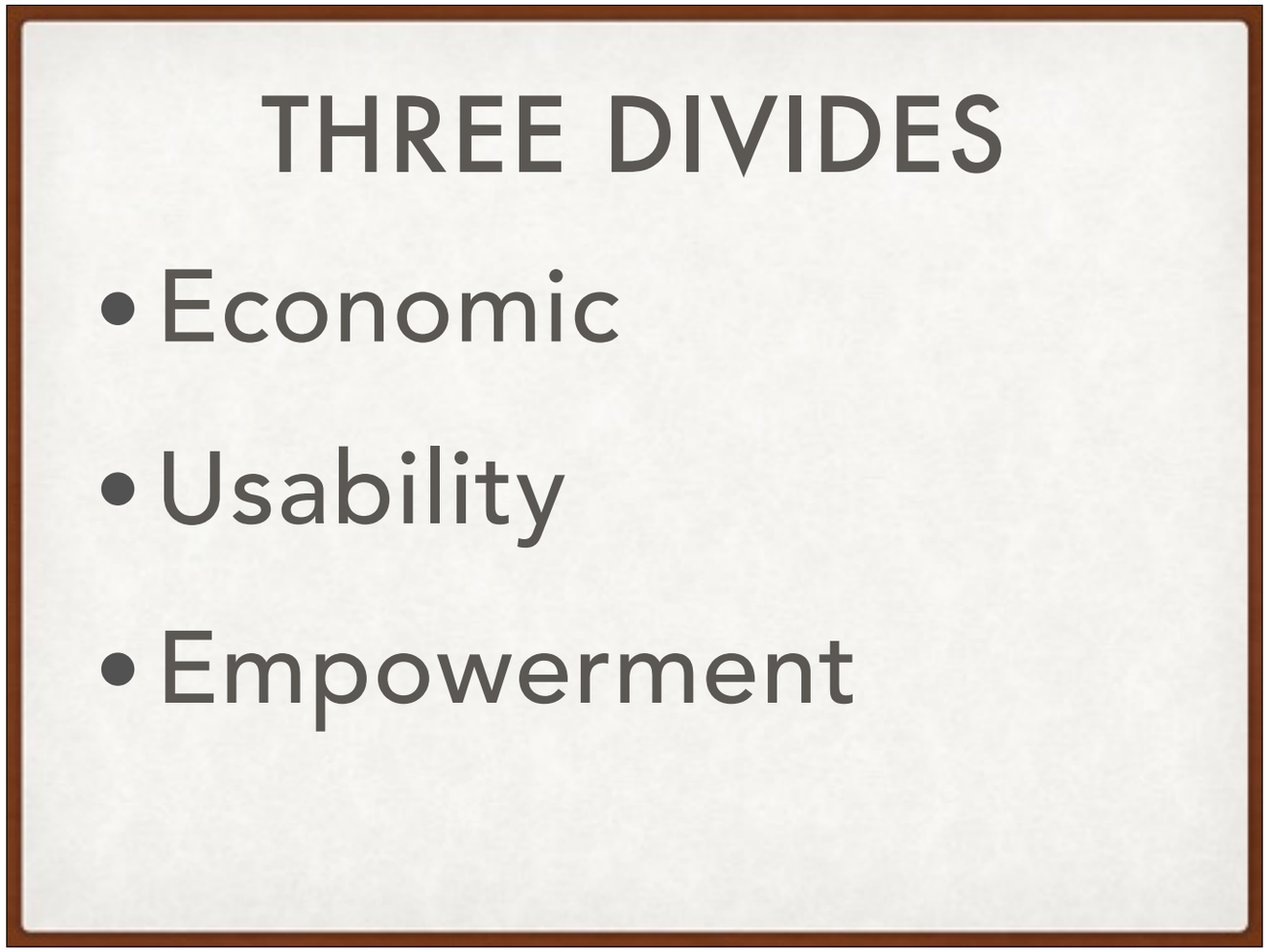
At our small scale, this works. The parable about the kid hucking starfish back into the ocean from the beach and the person saying "What are you doing? You can't save all the starfish!" and the kid says “Well I saved this one” *huck* “and this one” *huck* At small scales you actually can save them all.



What we've learned in the past few years is that the digital divide is less and less about people who literally can't get online (no broadband, no computer). Those people exist, don't get me wrong, but they are a smaller fraction of the 18 or so percent of people who are offline. Some of them are my neighbors, I don't mean to downplay their situation. But the larger group are people who are offline either by choice or by "choice" meaning they have hurdles they'd need to get over in order to really be online.

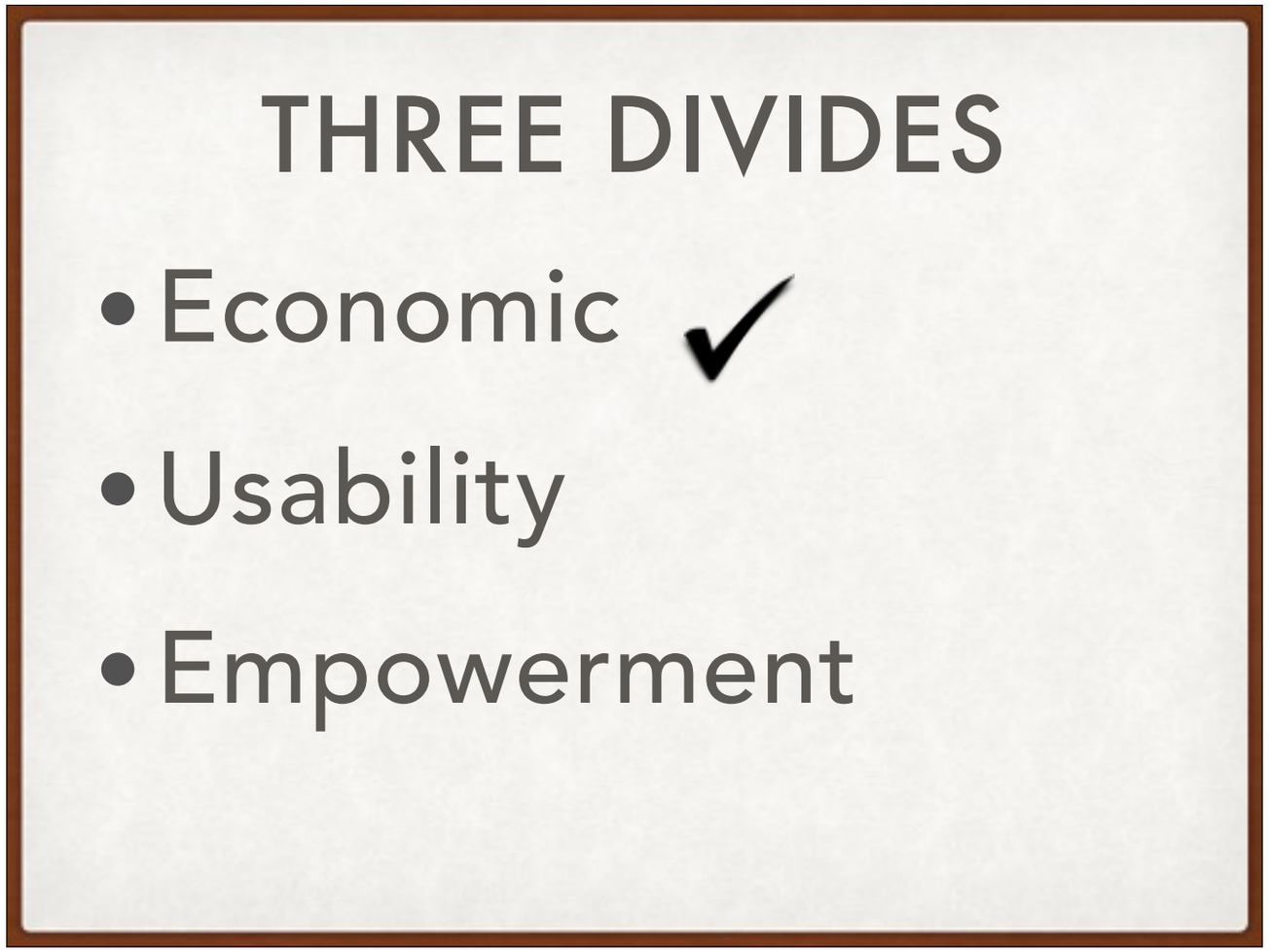
IRS was one of the original organizations (along with the FCC) to study offline America (sidebar: why) and they found that people were pretty evenly split on why they weren't online.

34% "Internet is not for me" (fear, stubborn, who knows)
32% "Internet is not easy to use" (need help, have challenges)
19% "Too expensive" (need access or need computer)
7% "Can't get it" (regulation is helping with this, but slowly)
8% Random misc - I know it doesn’t add up to 100



So looking now at what we need to address. The divides.

The economic one (can’t afford a computer or broadband) is getting addressed by the public libraries. 97% of people in the US have a public library where they can get online or use a computer. Go team. There's also the usability divide (I teach a class on facebook but it really should be called "where are the little triangles that are hiding all my settings?") and lastly the empowerment divide. This is the "I don't see myself as a person who enjoys the internet, or uses the internet, or participates on the internet" The idea even that you might participate is not clear to many people. It’s daunting.



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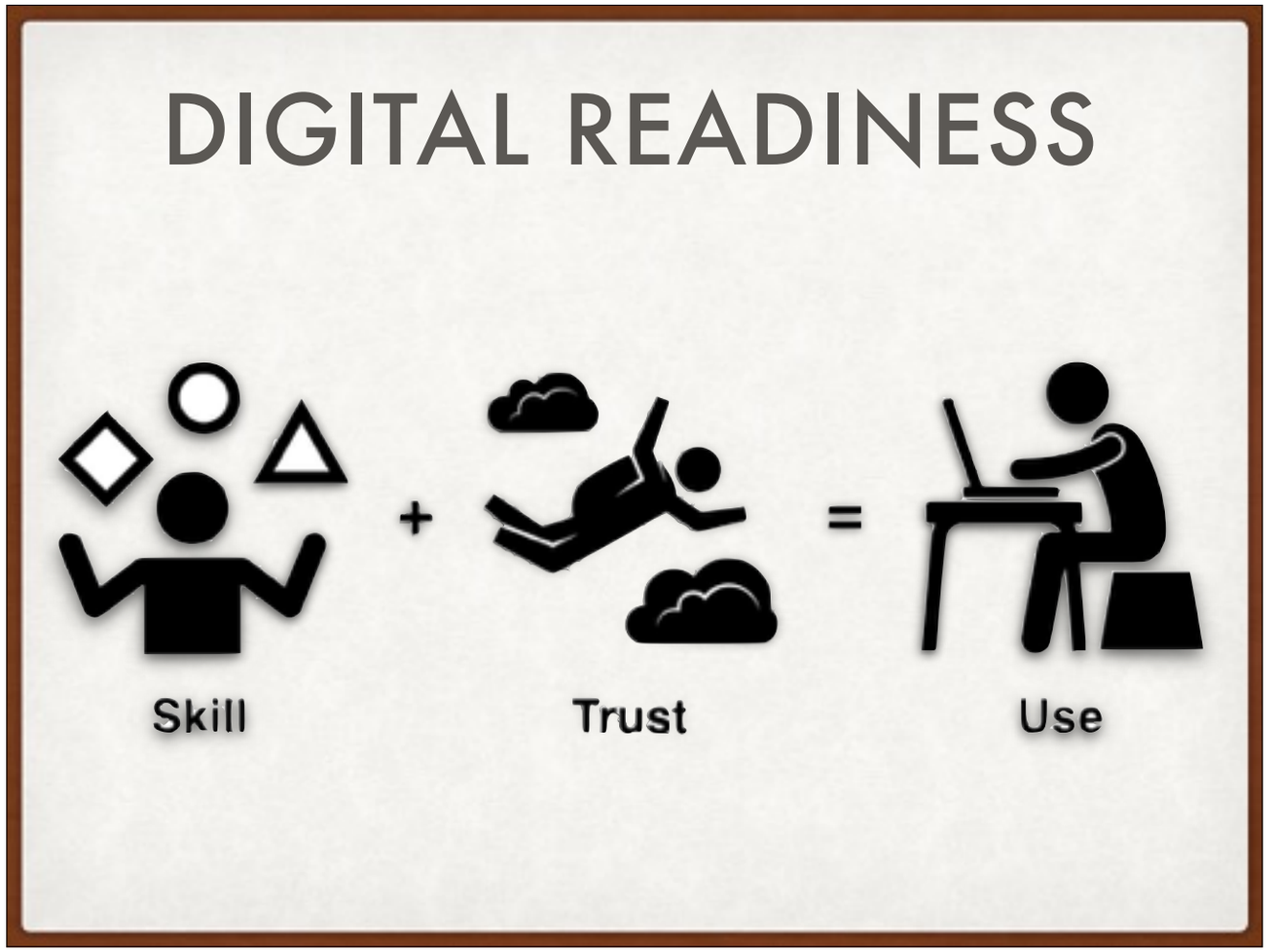

Researchers — Pew Internet —sometimes call this divide the digital readiness gap. People need not only the skills: mouse, click, read, whatever, but also the ability to be … "up for it" to have the confidence to try and the ability to be discerning about online information, make sensible choices, stay safe. More and more learning opportunities are available exclusively online. For people to get to the point where they feel like they can use those options… they need skills and trust.

MEDIA

Wikipedia Emerges as Trusted Internet Source for Ebola Information

By NOAM COHEN OCT. 26, 2014

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As a fresh wave of Ebola fear grips the American public, the Internet is rife with conspiracy theories, supposed miracle cures and Twitter posts of dread.

But amid the fear mongering are several influential sites that are sticking to the facts about Ebola. Millions have come to rely on these sites, including those run by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the World Health Organization and Wikipedia.

James Heilman, an emergency room doctor in British Columbia, leads Wikiproject Medicine, which monitors the site's major public health articles, like Ebola Virus Disease.

So this can be as simple as someone just not feeling like they need to have a twitter or facebook account (tons of people don't! This is normal! my sister isn't on facebook! She's not weird!) or someone who find an error in Wikipedia and just leaves it there instead of fixing it. Wikipedia, right? Is it "an encyclopedia anyone can edit"? or is it the domain of only about 1500 super-active young men? Both! This is confusing to people.

But at a small scale, we can find the incentives for each of our patrons that make the online world seem like more like a place where they could be, and using that crowdsourced "big city" out there to find ideas. I'm fully in favor of everyone making their own choices about whether to be online or not, but it's better to have that place, that online place, be a place you've at least seen before. I have mixed feelings about the inevitability of everything being online but I'm okay acknowledging that online holds SOME charms...

MAKE IT OURS

This is what I have been working on earlier this year. This is a push to try to get librarians more into using Wikipedia. Hey just add one citation! There are even tools to help you do that. This helps make Wikipedia better and helps librarians learn the good (and bad) about interacting with Wikipedia. It's win/win. Ansd it becomes OUR program, not us getting on to someone else's program.

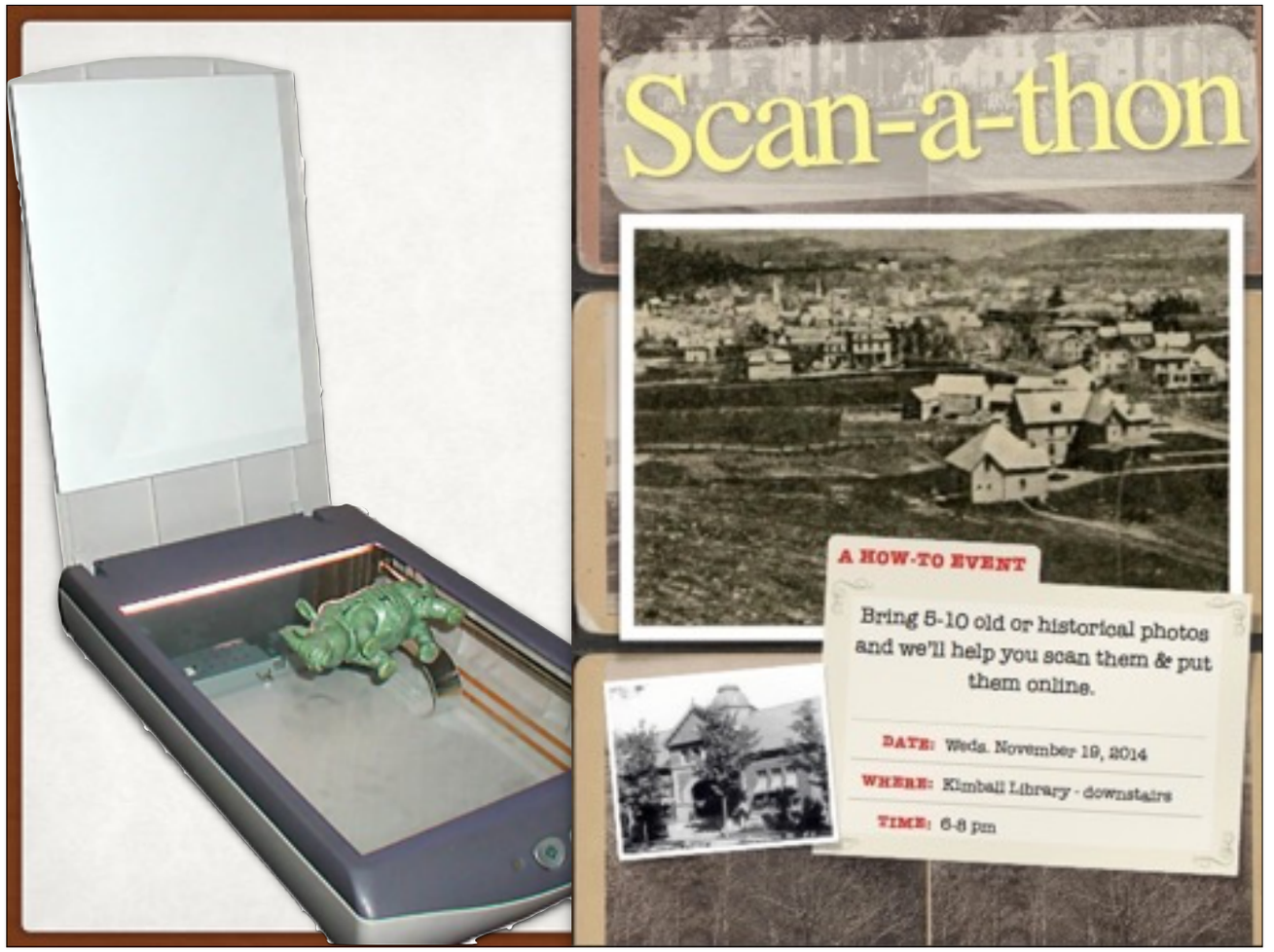
So, back to our patrons. We know that people are telling us they would need help to get online, to use the tools available to them, to use the tools we're offering in the library, to use the tools that they need for home or work. So let's look at “what does help look like?”

One of the things we learned in library school is that people won't go to the library first when they have an information need, they'll ask their friends (even if their friends have no particular expertise) or maybe they'll Google something.

By the time they're at the library in many cases they've tried and discarded other options. In my world it's people who have new grandkids, who need to apply for jobs or unemployment or food stamps, or who want to meet people, buy things, sell things. There are a lot of tipping points that push people towards an uncertain future with technology.

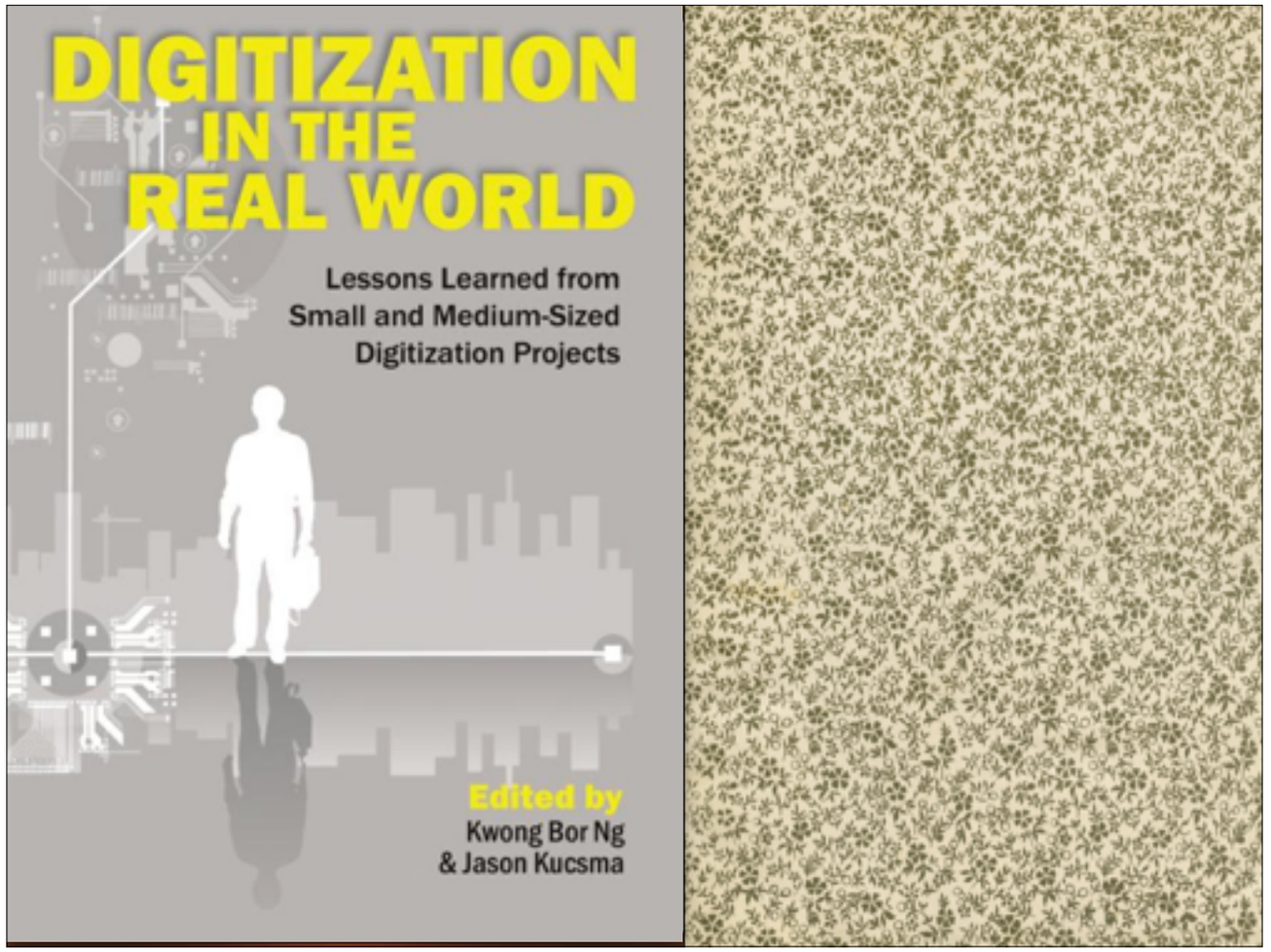
One of the things I try to do is help people's early experiences be good ones. Sometimes this means getting them using the tools before they are forced to. Here are some things that I’ve done, or seen done, maybe you have some of your own.

From a passive content perspective each librarian has tricks, things they show people online that make online seem interesting and non-creepy. This can be an aerial view of someone's house (not always creepy!) or a way to find something on sale with free shipping that costs a ton of money or involves a long car ride, or maybe it's just something about themselves or where they are… Drop-in time often has several people, so I help them one at a time and leave people to work on what we've just done while I help other people. I left an older man at a google prompt "Hey type in something you are interested in" and when I came back he was watching tractor videos! Helping people find their thing, that is the thing.

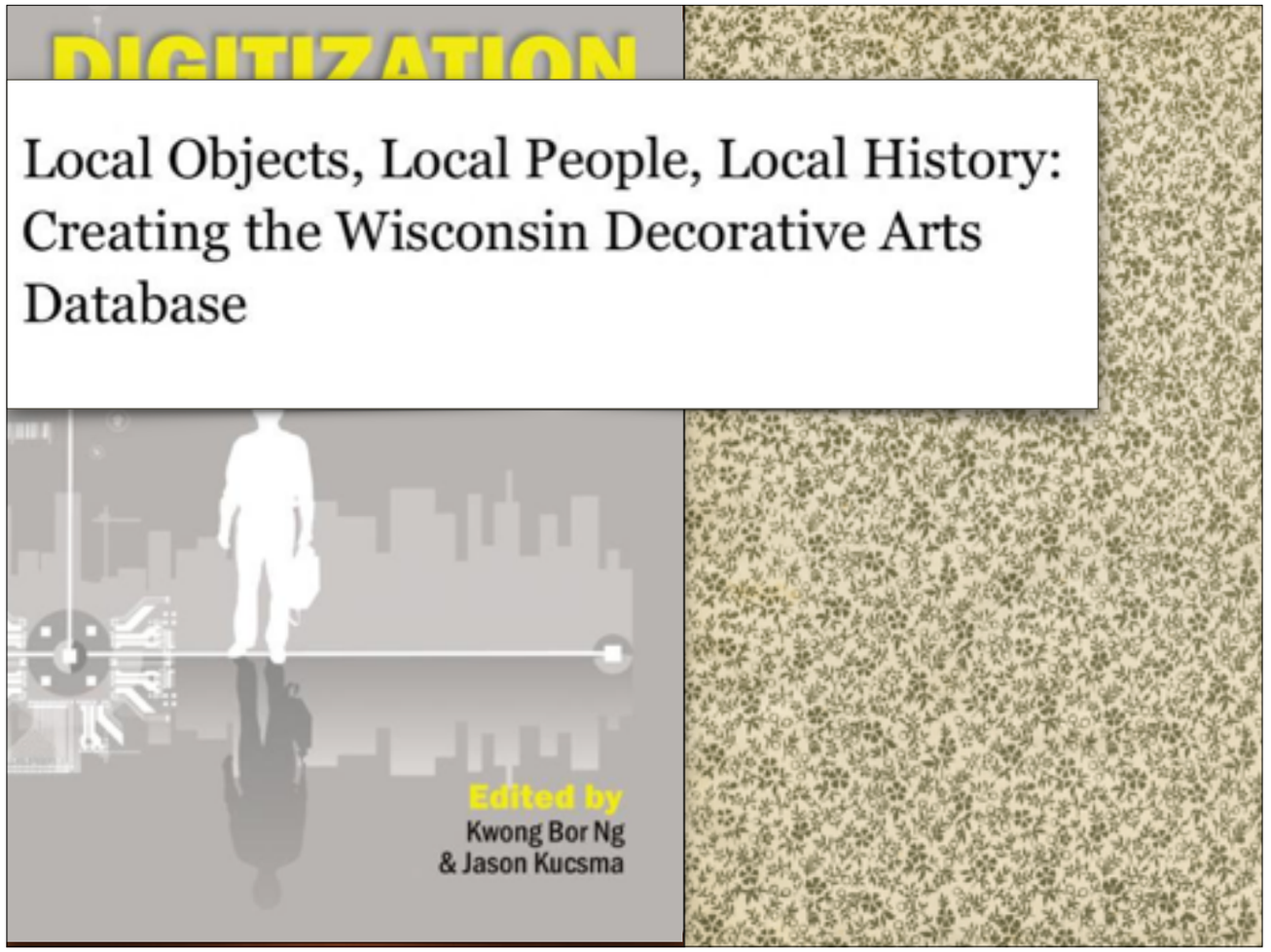


One of the simplest things you can do is start with a scanner, or even a camera and encourage people to digitize things, their things (or your things). It sounds techie when you say it that way but it doesn't have to be. Scan photos or documents. Send people home with a copy. Offer to show them how to email or store that photograph online (free!). Maybe give out some branded USB drives that people can bring with them. I don’t even get into “the cloud”

People who don't feel comfortable with the technology can assist in the organization or the metadata (just don't call it metadata). People think they have to create huge digital archives when really, putting 12 photos on Flickr this month is 12 more photos than were on Flickr last month. And they're your photos! One of my local initiatives is to help people in town put historical photos of the town online where they can be shared and used to illustrate wikipedia pages and sent to others. Little steps. Two scanners, one evening. I’m doing it as a volunteer.



You don't have to reinvent the wheel, no one wants that. But it's folly to presume that you're the only organization with a tight budget and resources. Other people have done it, learn from their stories (check the list of links here.)… Figure out who they teamed up with. Sometimes it’s not so much figuring out who has the specific resources (the photo shop, the drug store with the printer, the photography club) as figuring out who is UP FOR IT (the guy at the filling station who photographs birds, the new empty nester couple in town with some free time and computer knowledge, the retirees who have decades of time and a lot of knowledge and always have felt good about the library...)



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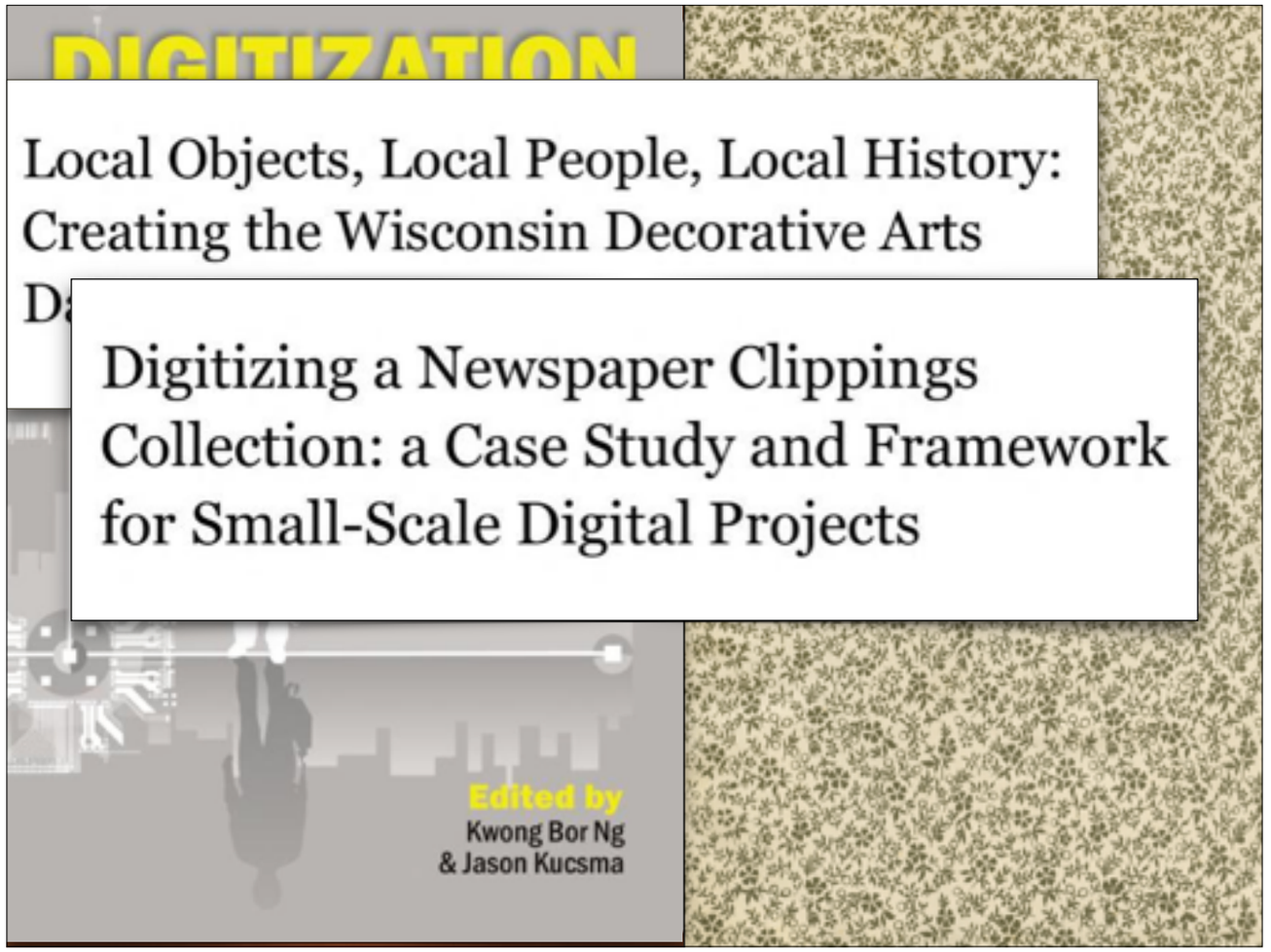

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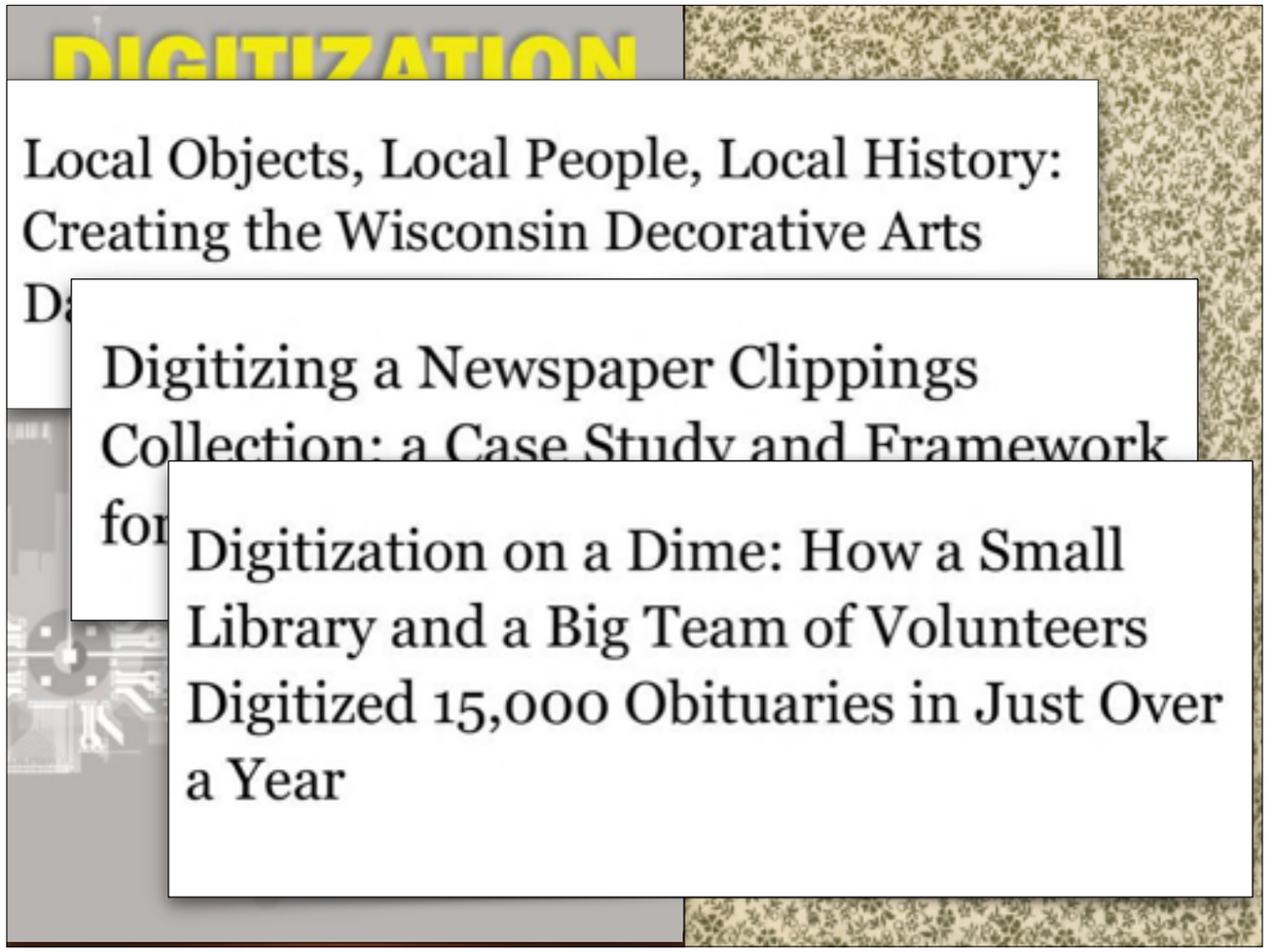

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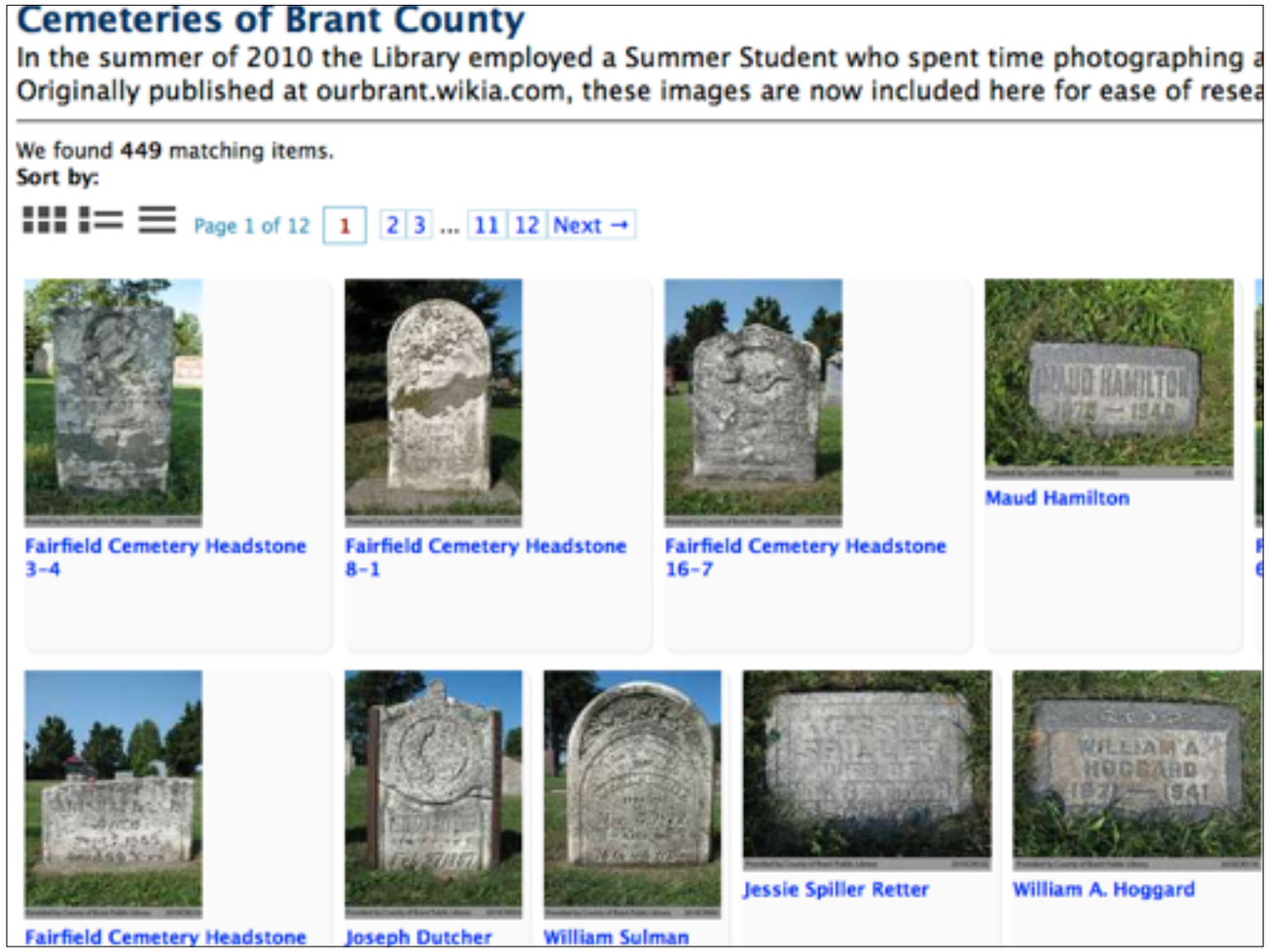
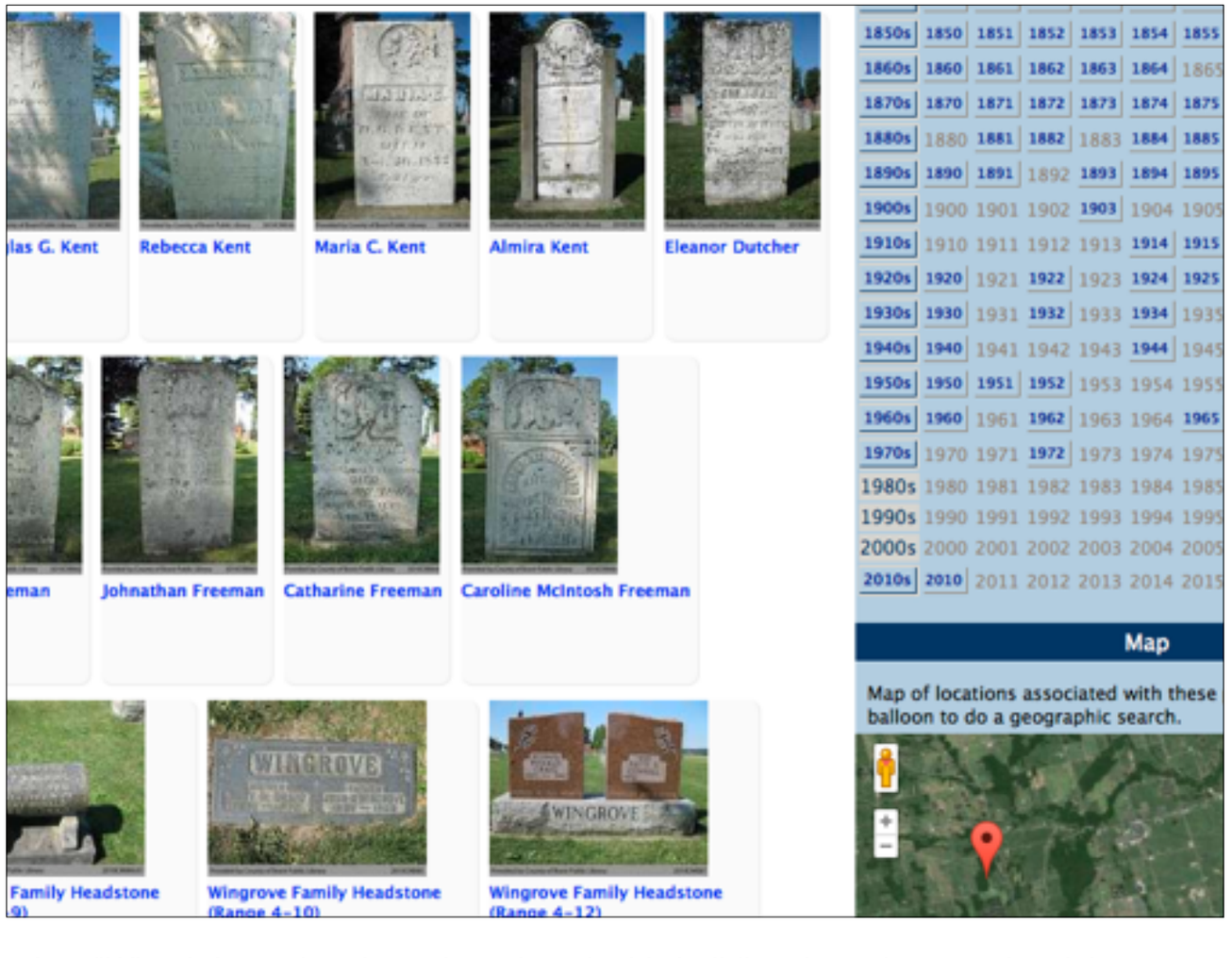


Sometimes I'll start with simple brainstorming. "What information do we have here in this building that other people might want access to?" "How can we share it beyond our borders?" "Can we do this legally and ethically?"

A lot of people start with old family photos or, in some cases, those old cemetery records that you (maybe) keep in a binder. I grump about computers sometimes but one of the things they do really well is sorting. This is a project of Brant County in Ontario, population slightly less than Concord NH. One summer they got a kid to photograph, map and type in the cemetery records from the towns. Then they put it online.... Now people who are looking for relatives in cemeteries can search by date, look on a map and find a grave even if they are nowhere near Ontario. Using the Googles!



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Scan and Share your family history for the community

By Michael-Allan Marion, Brantford Expositor
Wednesday, October 26, 2011 7:04:35 EDT PM

Like
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Brantford - ST. GEORGE - Those interested in preserving the more human aspects of Brant County history can attend a Scan and Share Event at the St George Branch Library on Main Street, on Saturday, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The public is invited to dig through photo albums, the attic, linen close or hope chest for family memorabilia, old photos, land deeds, personal letters, or anything else that connects a family's history to the history of the community.

Bring in what is considered appropriate, enjoy some refreshments and watch while an archivist scans the items and enters them into the online South Dumfries Collection.

The projected is supported by an Ontario Trillium Grant.

For more information, call reference librarian Christine MacArthur at 519-442-2433, or email reference@brant.ca.

mamarion@theexpositor.com

Report an error

One of the neat things about this project is the "hey help us out" aspect. In a few ways. They solicit contributions with "scan and share" events. Brant County has even put up a how to essay called Digitization without Fears. Don't know who is in a photo? Don't let that stop you, you can "tag" the photo as a "mystery" and then people can click through and leave a comment if they have more information.

I know it seems like a pretty big deal and maybe a lot of work, but the secret (besides some grants) is partnership. Working with the other little organizations in the region to get resources, or volunteers, or space or whatever.

Think about what can multiply the efforts you CAN do. Have your library be the go-to place to start your projects, now and in the future. Have it be the place people go to learn about the town. With so much information being all “global” think about what your town’s unique strengths are. What it will have even when every library on the planet has a copy of Gone Girl.

Principal Symons and Teachers

1966-67 This photograph depicts
the Glen Morris Central School in the 1960s.
Frances Kingston during a Digital Preservatio
2011.

St. George Hockey Team

[ca. 1964], This photograph depict
the early 1960s. The original photo was provi
Digital Preservation Day event in Glen Morris

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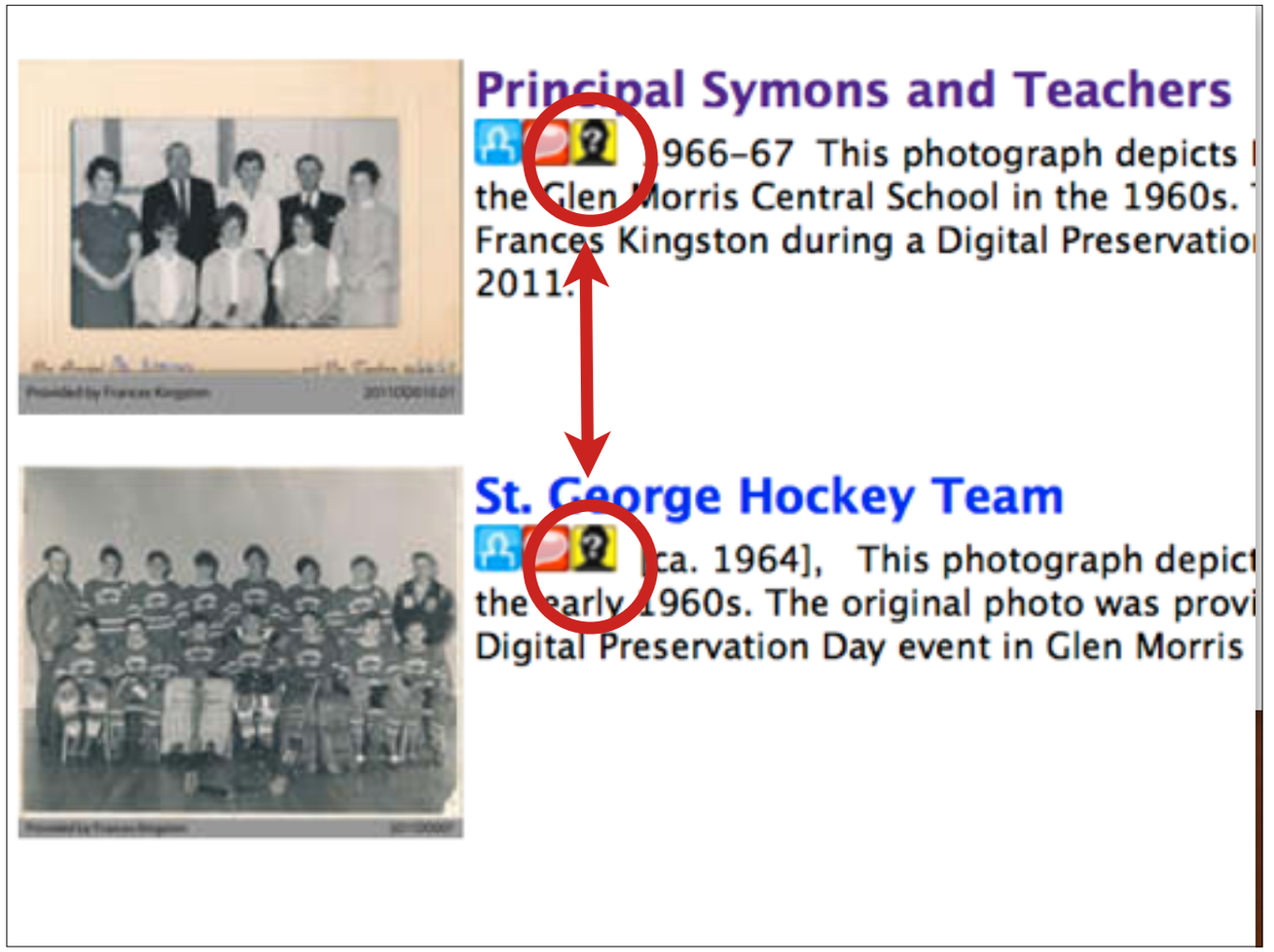

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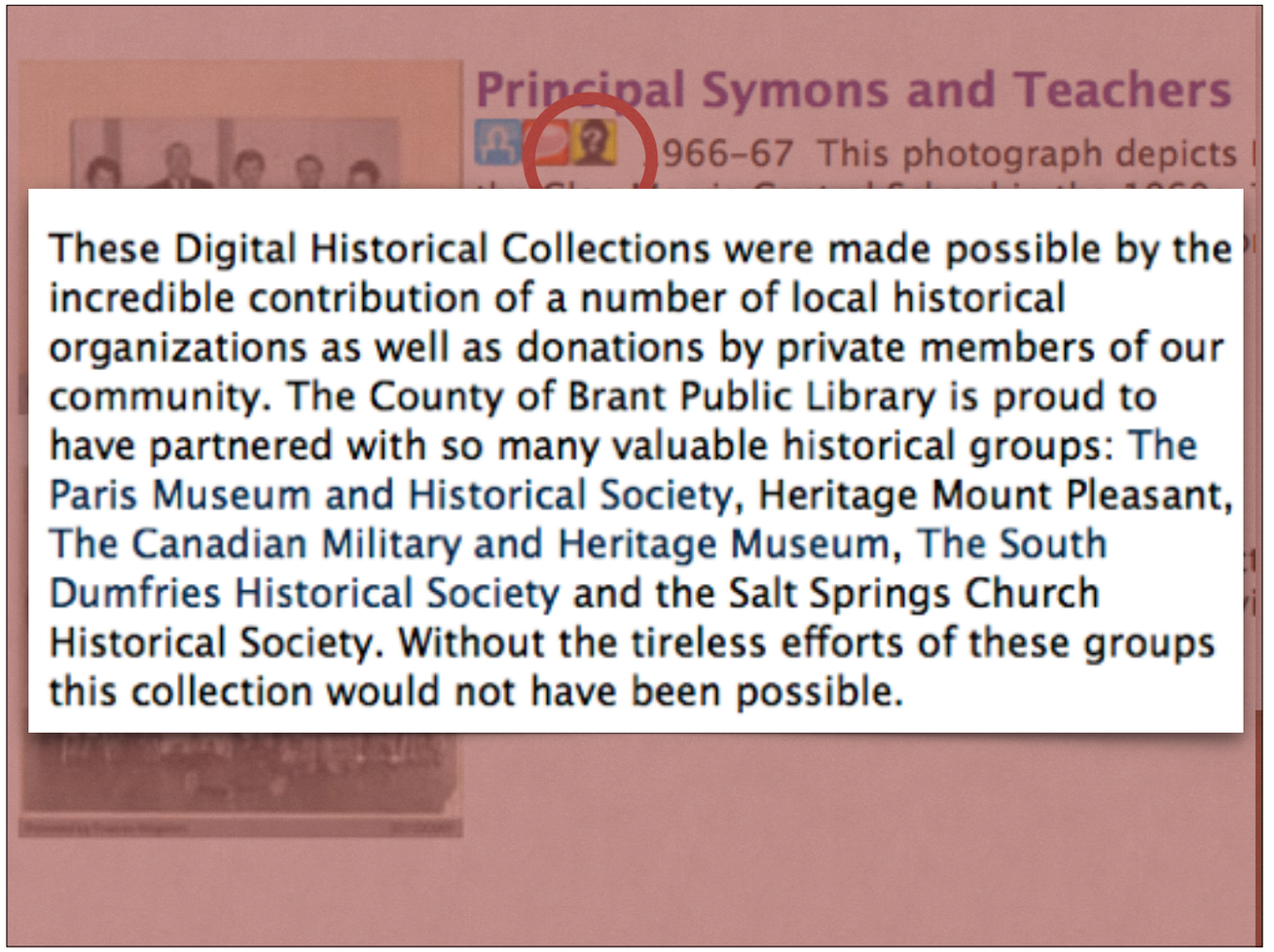

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"Crowdsourcing" as it's often called can be useful to make historical discoveries as with this photo which was uploaded to photo sharing site flickr, though to be a whaling photo until someone said "I think that might be Phineas Gage..." I have sort of a soft spot for this sort of thing because I used Google (and a Google Books view of a book about the history of Princeton MA) to find a photo of my great grandfather as a boy about a hundred years ago. This was a lucky grab because he happened to be friends with the kid whose dad owned the famous hotel. Some luck.

Pictured in the early 1900s, Ralph Beaman (right) and
near the second Summit House. Summit Pond supplied
Water was pumped to a holding tank on the second flo
also supplied ice that was stored in an icehouse on the s

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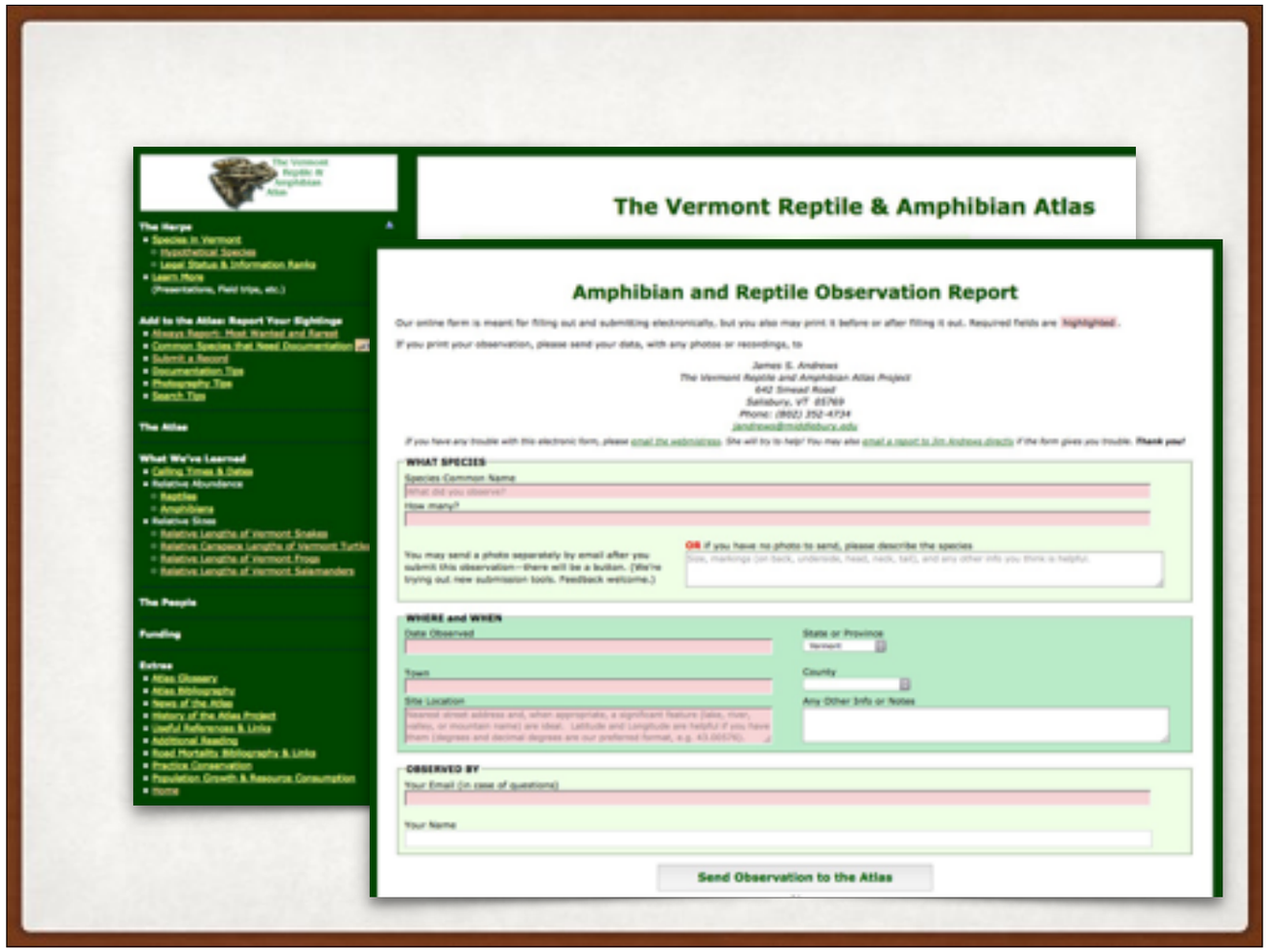

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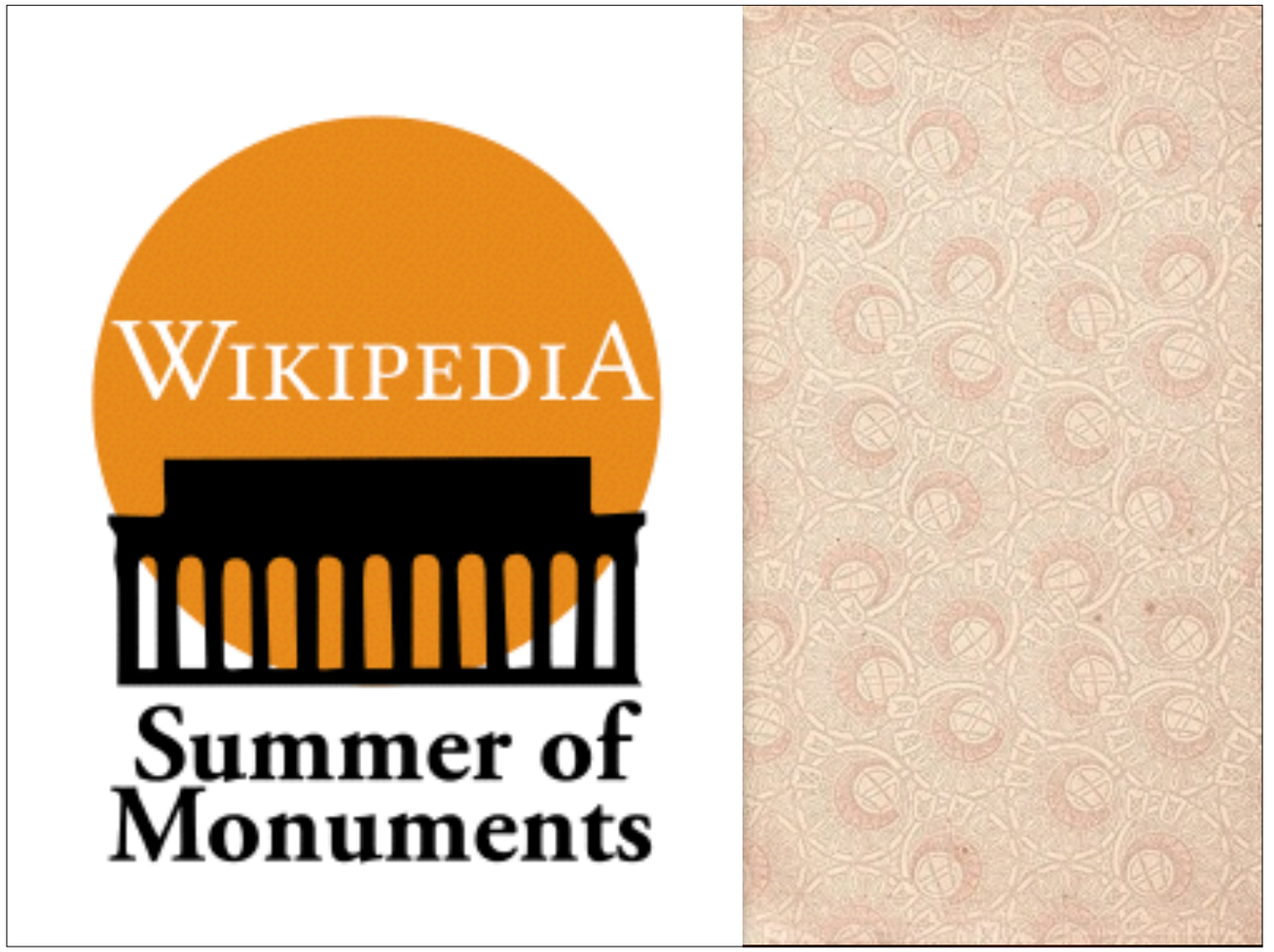
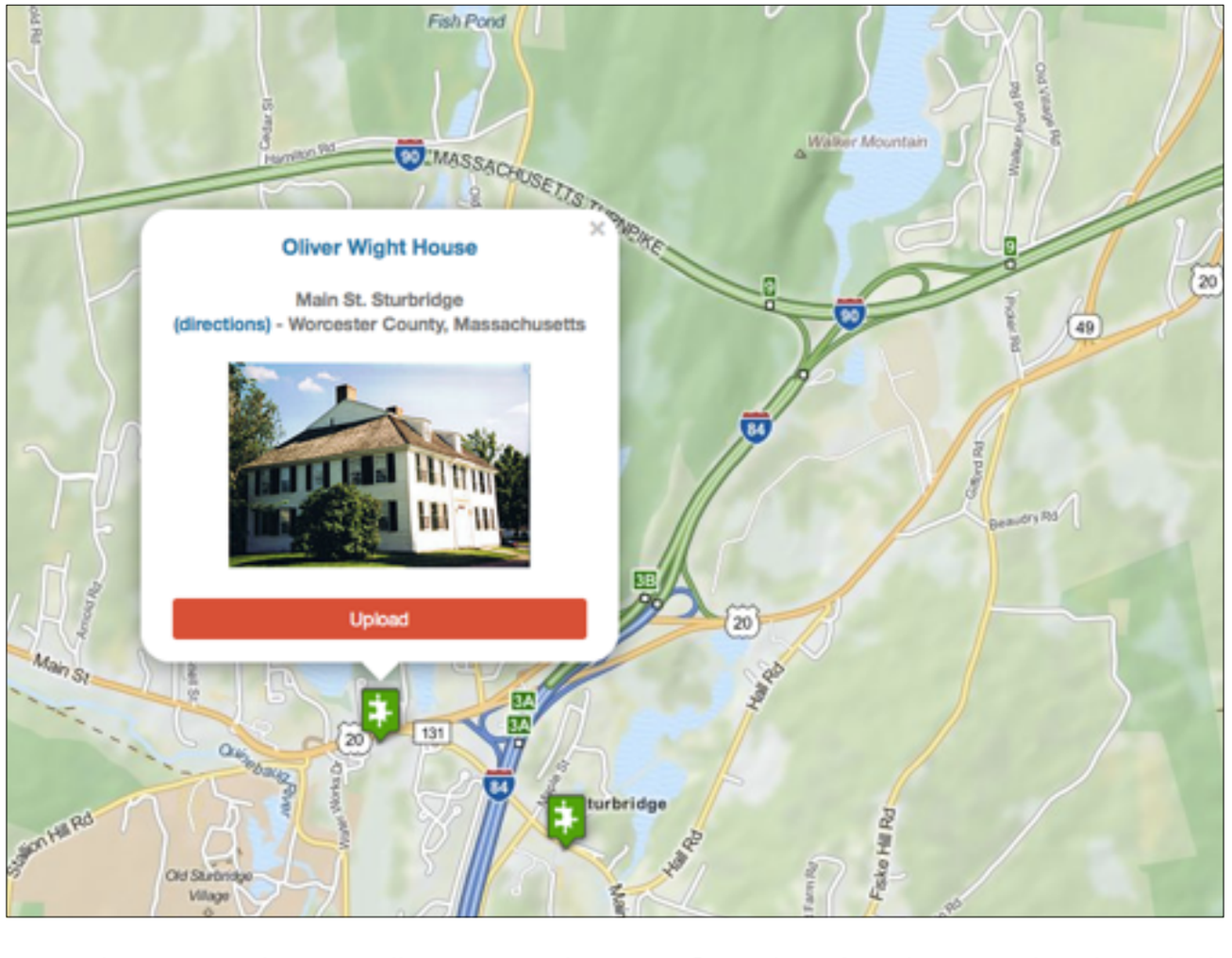


If you don't want to start your own project, maybe you can just contribute to another one. One of my favorite annual projects is the Wikipedia summer of Monuments which is a push (with prizes) to get people to upload images of places on the National Historic Register. These can be in your area (click) or just a place you've been. Here’s what the interface looks like, it's nice. And here's a photograph taken of the Barry Faulkner murals in the NH State House as a result of that project. They're doing it again this year, links on the links page.



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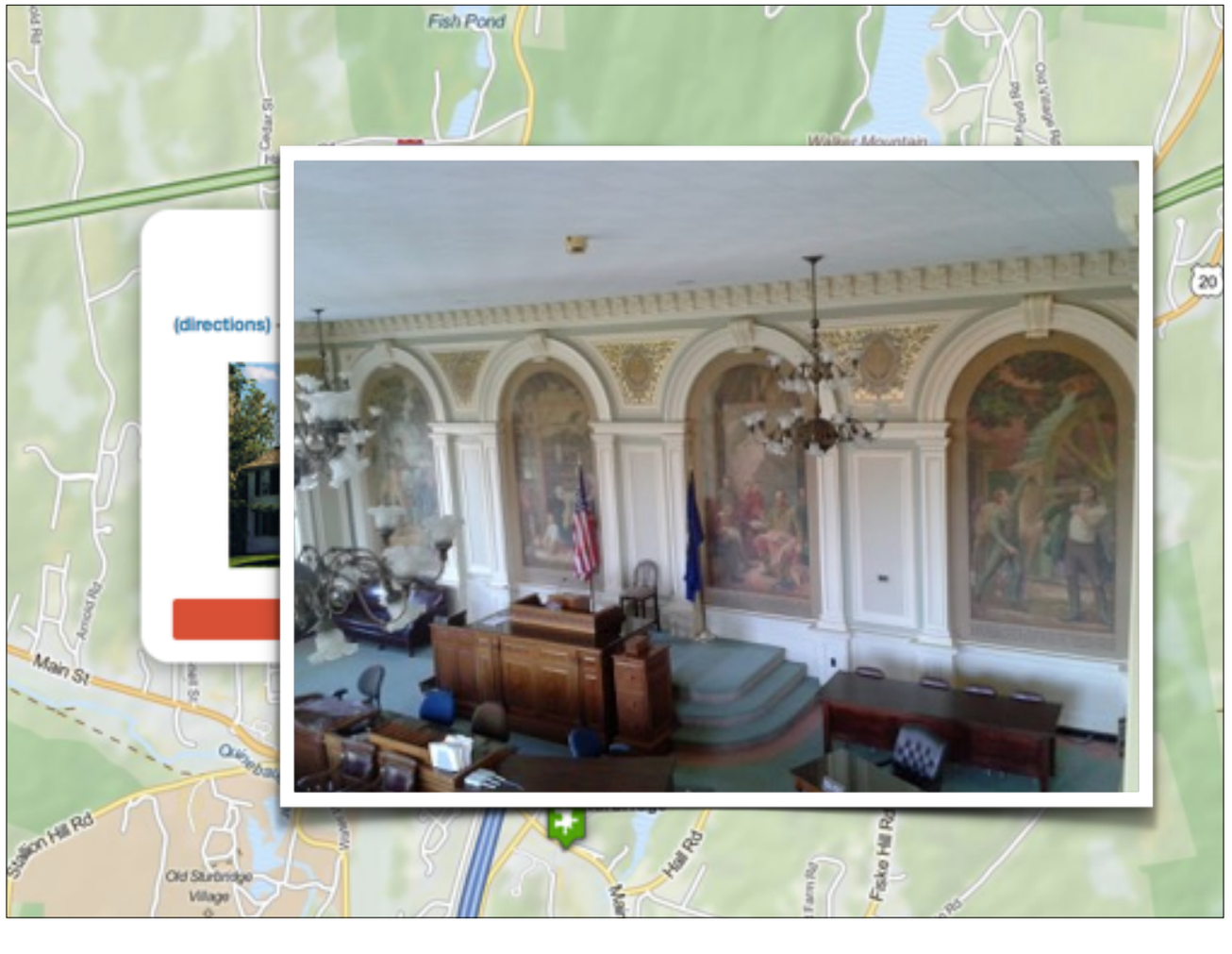

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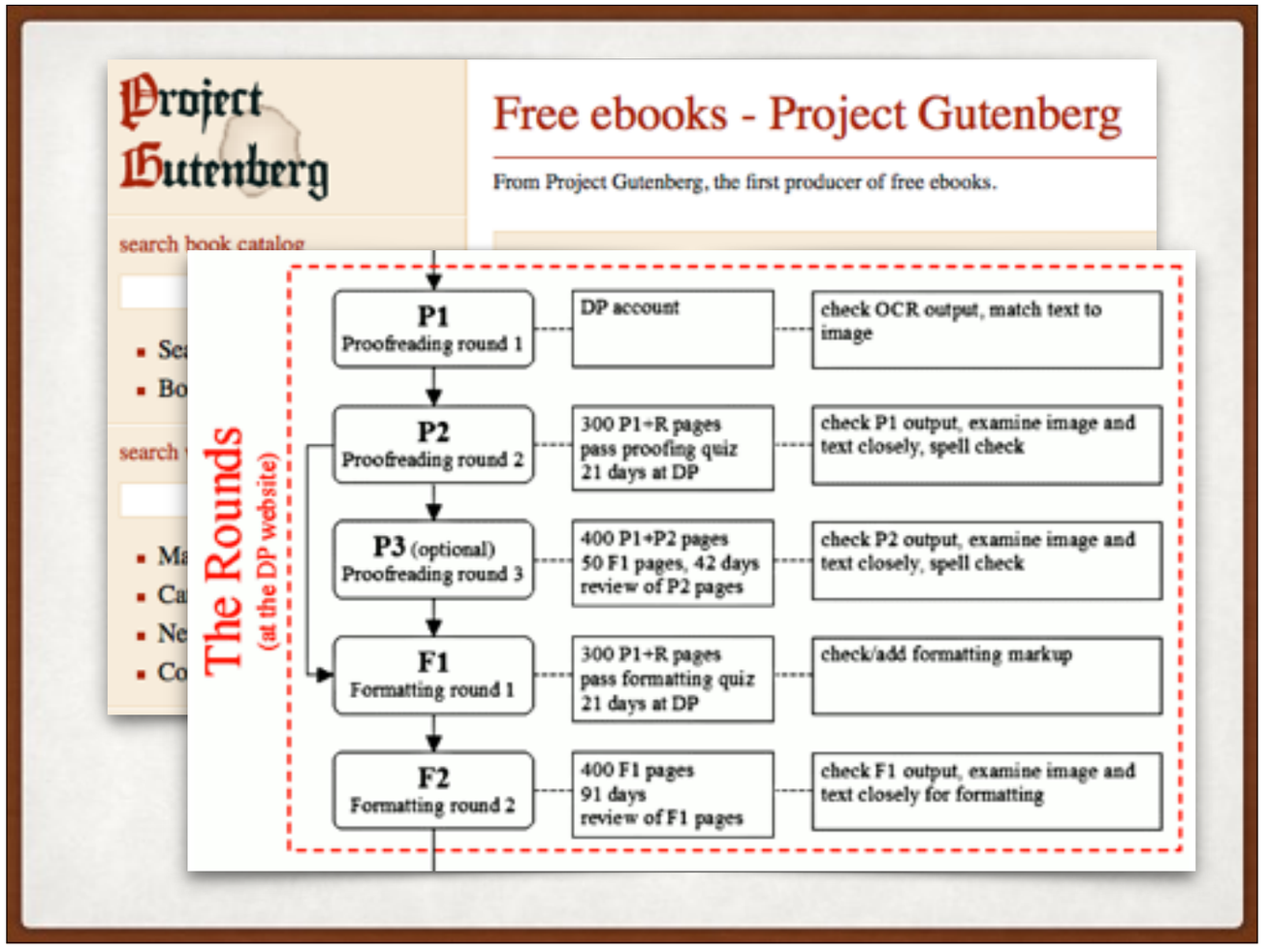
And sometimes helping them see themselves somewhere is showing them that you've been there too. This is a front page story in my small town newspaper a few weeks ago. There is a traveling Bill of Rights display and I was asked if I had a talk to give on a related topic. I gave a talk on whether your TV is spying on you or not (and other privacy related topics) and it went well, though only nominally Bill of Rights-y

For readers, Project Gutenberg is an online archive of public domain texts. You can read them, download them, put them on your device, whatever. They're pretty high quality. According to the Atlantic, "100,000 people around the world have taken part in a massive proofreading project to correct the electronic texts of 25,000 free ebooks on the Gutenberg site." If you're a born nitpicker like I am this is actually fun. It's a little less fun to grapple with the interface and so while I like to use it as an example, it may not be the best way to get started....



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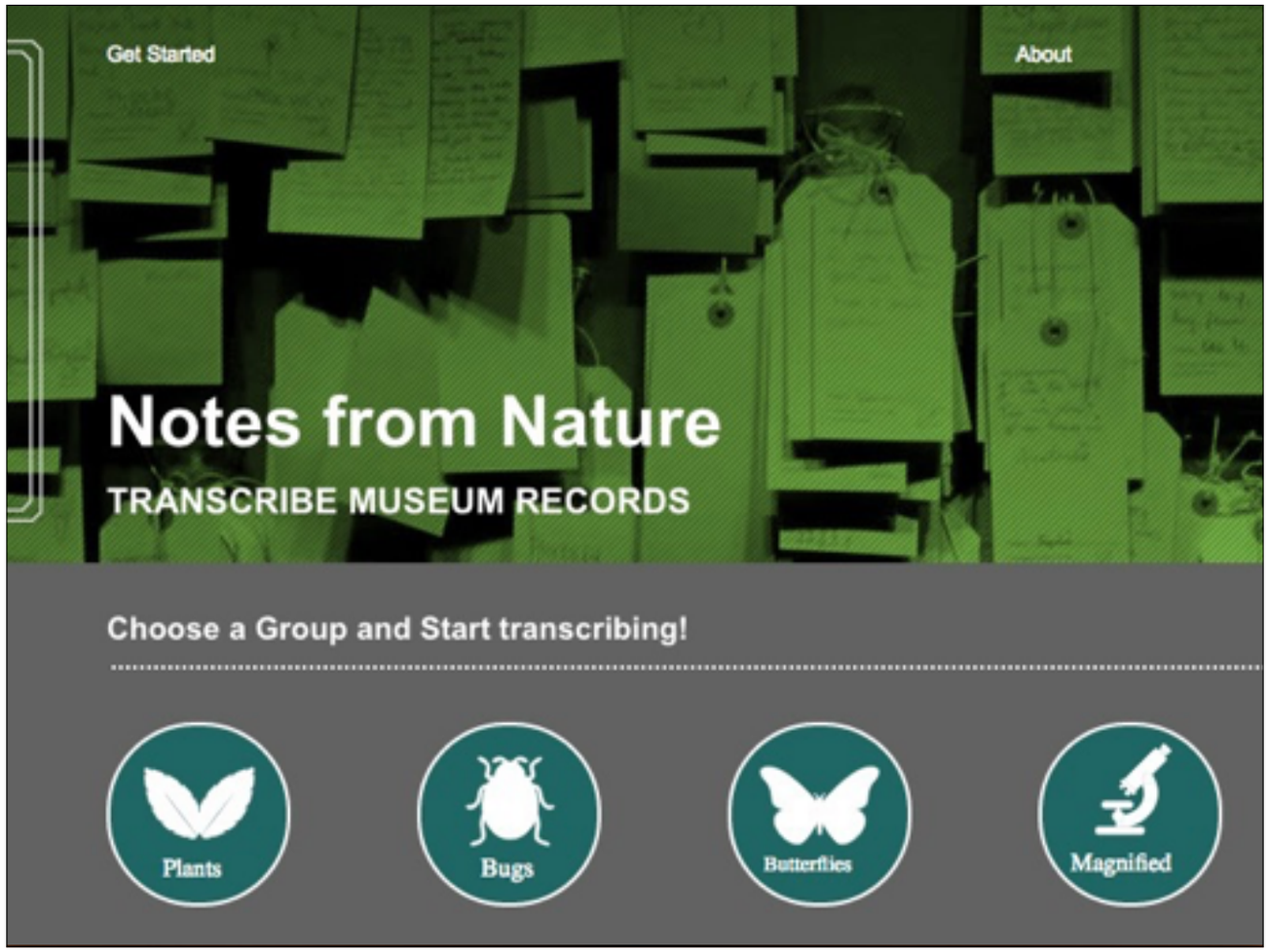

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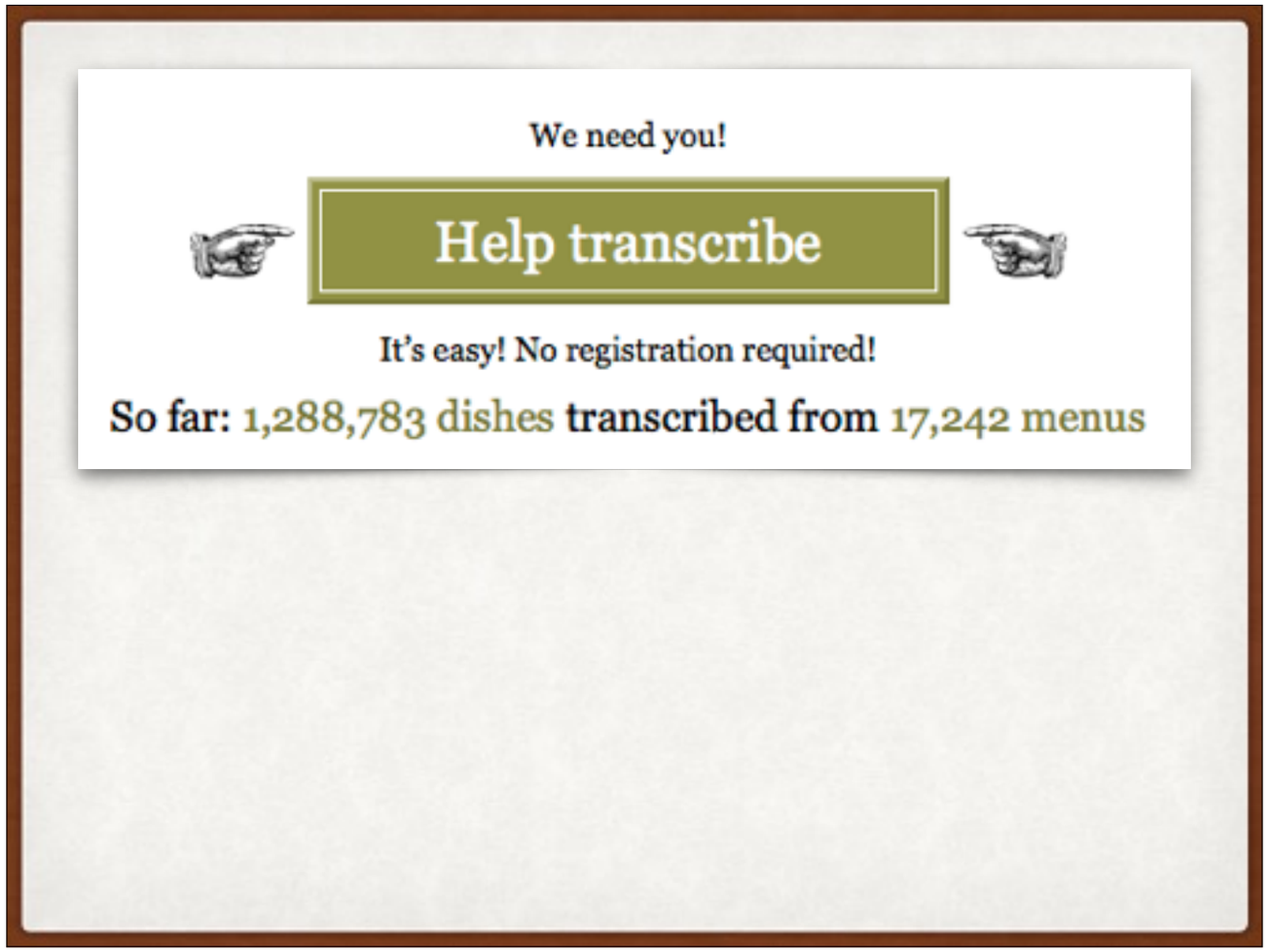

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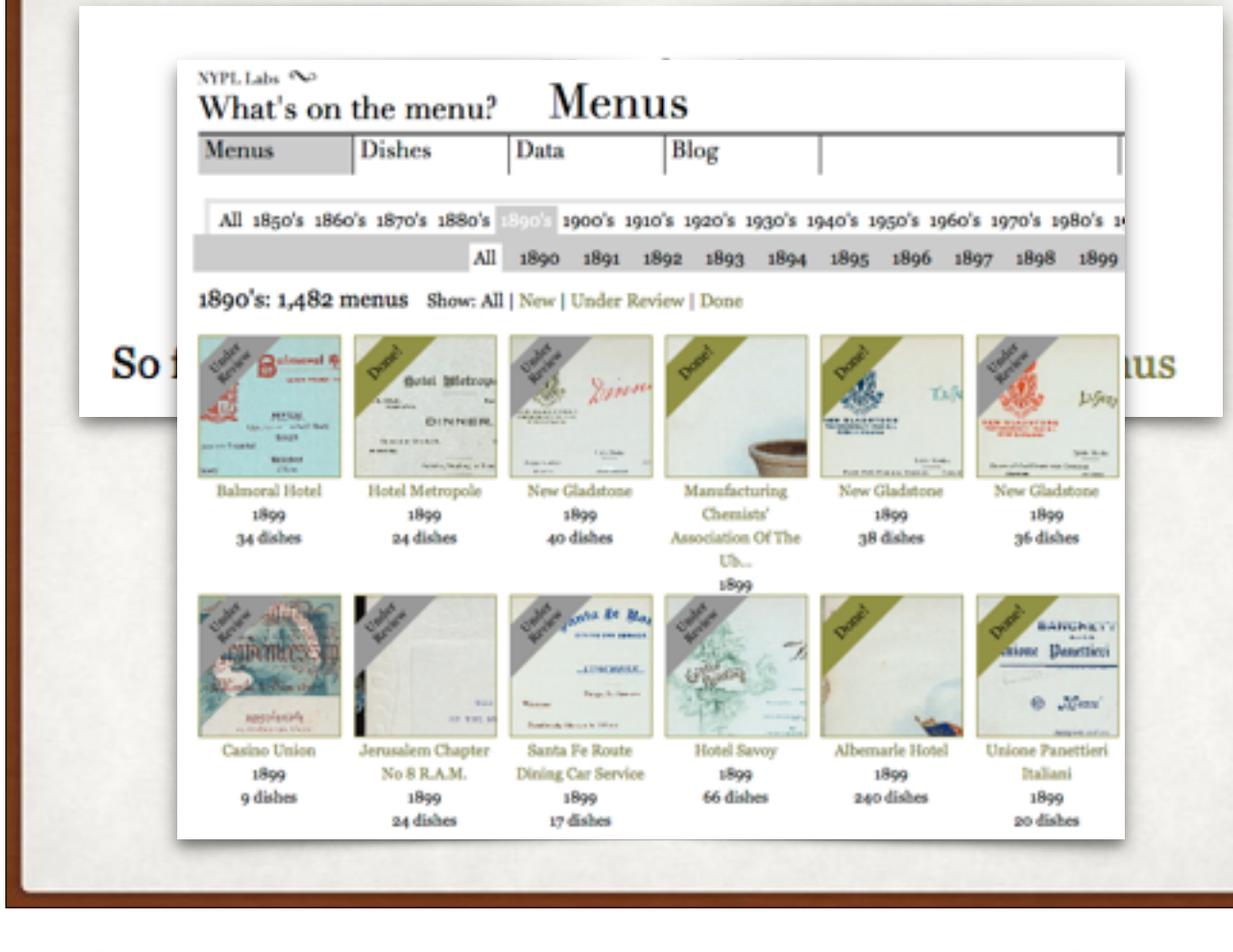

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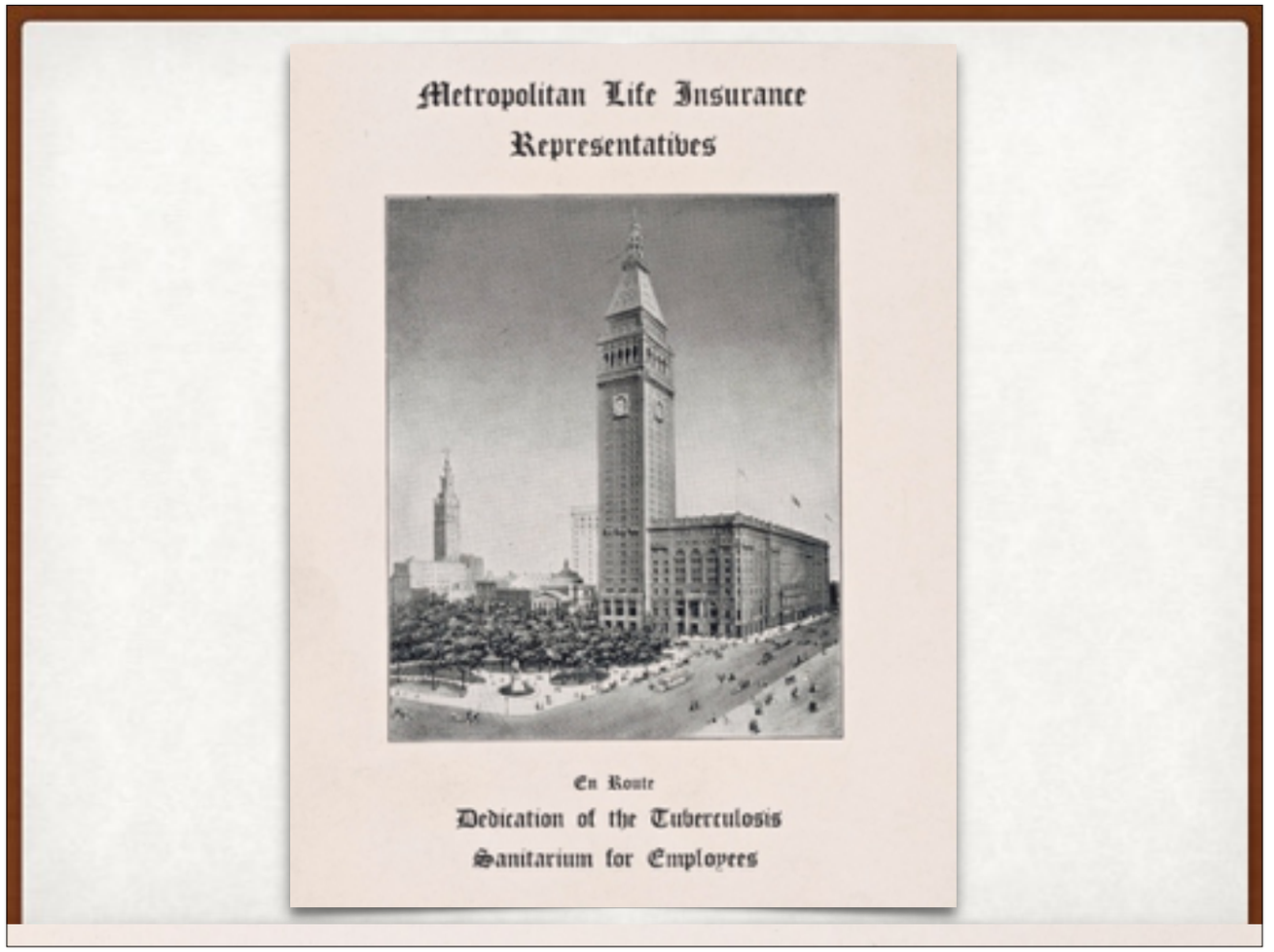
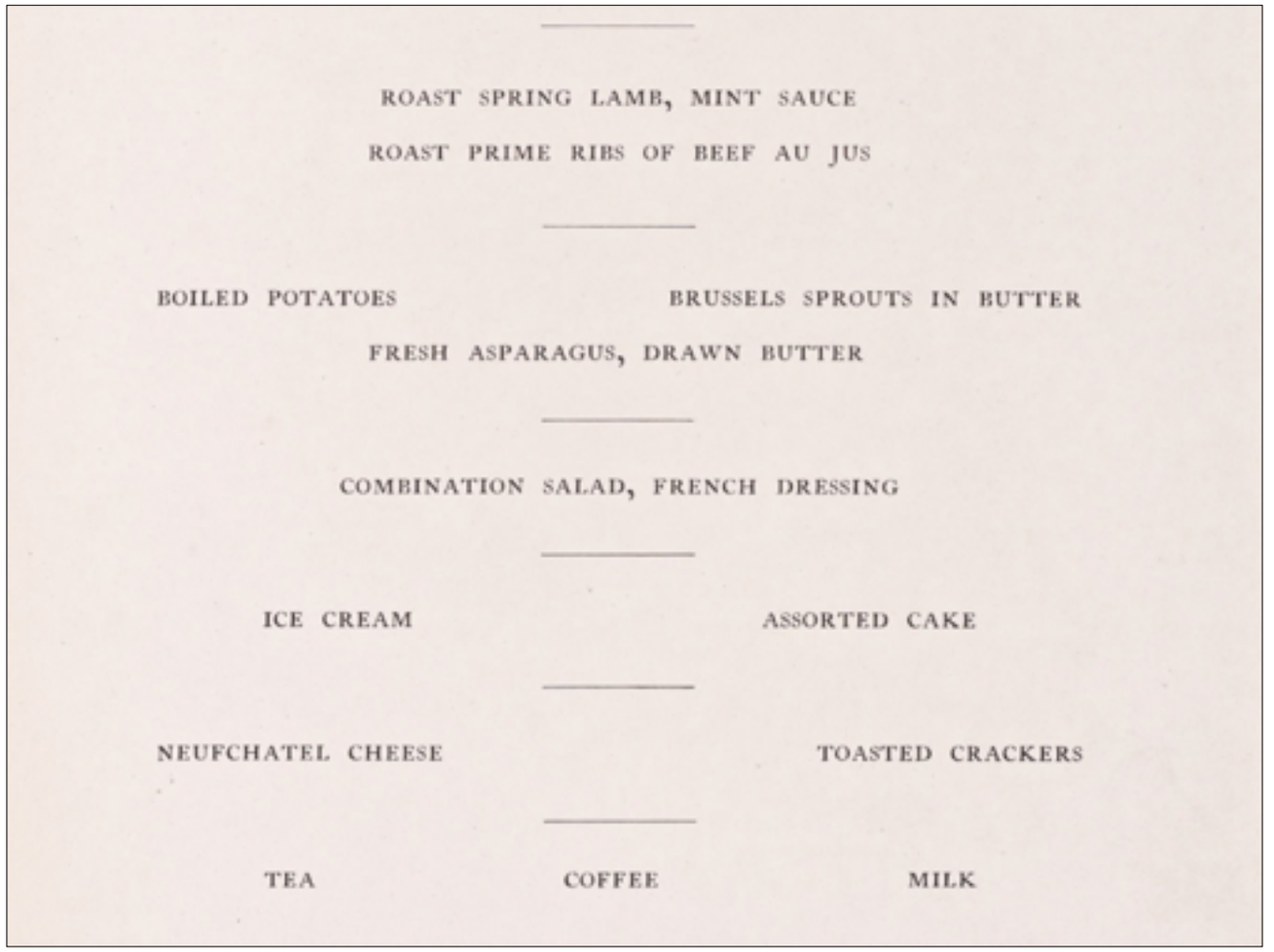


we can even keep with the theme and see what the Metropolitan Life Insurance Representatives en route to the Dedication of the Tuberculosis Sanitarium for Employees ate on the train. And while I was looking up this example, I proofread this menu!



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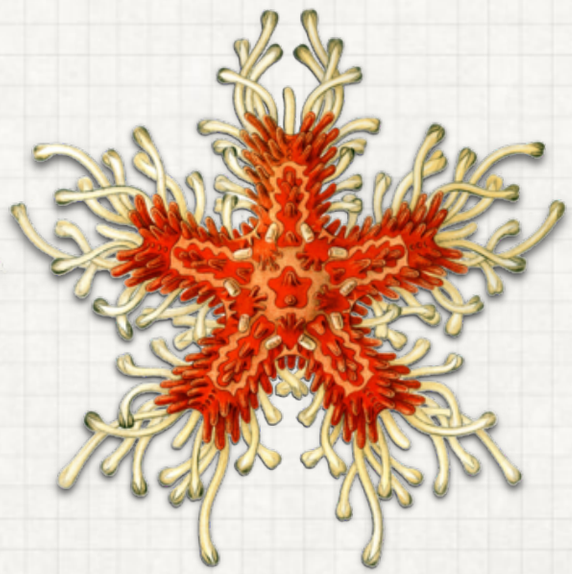
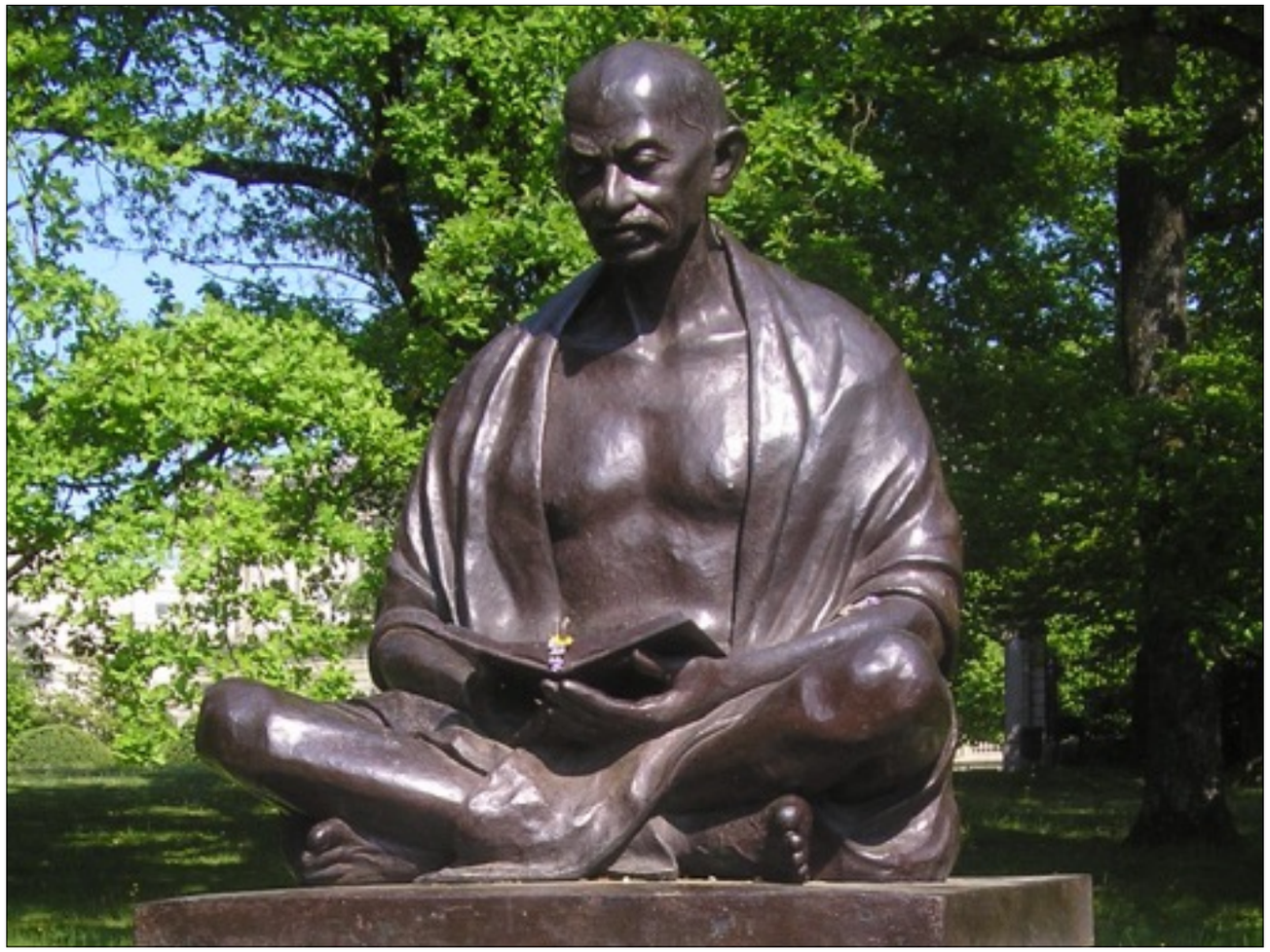
Find ways to break down the barriers between what the computers do and what “real life” is. Find people who model good tech positive behaviors and put them front and center doing projects. Be okay with trying a thing that maybe doesn’t work. Network and share your efforts with all the other small organizations that are likewise trying to remain relevant, organizations like the grange or the historical society or the fraternal orders....

HELPING PEOPLE BE "UP FOR IT"

- Fun-for-them fun-for-you projects
- Where everyone's friends are
- With local groupspeople have heard of
- Setting expectations
- Enjoying and modeling the new normal





Gandhi is quoted a lot as saying "Be the change you want to see in the world", but it's a bit of a paraphrase of his longer statement.

"We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him.... We need not wait to see what others do."

So keep hucking those starfish back into the ocean. This is a project that is at our scale. Let me know how you did.

THANK YOU!

<*librarian.net/talks/nhlta17*>