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ŻÓŁTY DOM: A Digital Archive of a Grandmother's Legacy

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Link to archive: <https://ayellowhouse.omeka.net/>

Abstract

Archives, as separate entities and as a practice, have been used as a means to preserve and conserve pieces of history across a range of subjects. Physical artifacts, personal photography, or important classified documents may be included within these capsules of the past. Prolific individuals have had their lives collected, organized, and stored away in such minute detail for the ease and accessibility of public use. Not only does the precise organization aid easy research, but it also lends to the art of storytelling. One can trace an individual's legacy from their childhood to their final breath by exploring their archive; the existence of archives makes discovering human nature possible through these preserved memories. The purpose of this project is to show the importance of archives on a more personal level by gathering, organizing, and digitizing photos to create an archive that shows the journey of my grandmother's life. After acquiring all photographs and film negatives from my grandmother's house, I utilized an archives database program to digitize, enter metadata, and upload the photographs to curate an archive collection that is open for access at all times.

Methodology

The first step with any archive is to identify what your archive will consist of and how it will be accessible for users to interact with. I knew that I wanted family members, both in Nebraska and out of the state, to be able to search the archive at any time with no restrictions; thus, I knew that an online archive was the best choice for the items to be housed. I began by visiting the family member who currently keeps all of the photographs, film negatives, etc. that were originally from my grandmother's house. Once I was in possession of the photographs, I sifted through the collection and created different categories that reflected the subject matter of the specific photograph: Family Life, School, Births & Birthdays, Holidays, Holy Sacraments, and Vacations. After assigning a large portion of the photographs to these various categories, I was able to begin the digitization process. I had purchased a hard drive prior that had sufficient space to store the digitized items. One of the largest obstacles I faced was finding a digital archive database that was user-friendly and easy to navigate on both the admin and user side. I am familiar with ContentDM as that is the database Papillion Public Library uses for their archive, however, that program is only compatible with Windows which I do not have access to all the time. The other management system I knew was ArchivesSpace, but unfortunately, you have to be very knowledgeable on coding to create your own third-party host before creating the website. Finally, I found Omeka.net which allows you to use Omeka as a third-party host for your own personal website without any charges. By using Omeka, I was able to free more space on the hard drive and access the site on any computer at any time. The digitizing process was the longest part of this project as sometimes I had to edit the photographs to crop out any white space or ensure the photograph was leveled and centered. In order to digitize the photographs, I

used a normal flatbed scanner, downloaded the files to my hard drive, and renamed the file that would accurately describe the image.

When I had a good number of photographs digitized, I was ready to start crafting the actual digital site. Omeka has templates users can choose from, so most of the labor is from having to upload the file and attach the correct metadata to begin building your archive. I created metadata filters such as names of family members, certain holidays, locations, and years to make navigating the archives accessible for users. This also allows the searching process for specific memories much easier for users as it will have details located in “Tags”, “Title”, “Collection”, and “Description”. “Tags” are simple subjects such as “Christmas” and “Home” that can help narrow down the results of a search while the “Collections” are more broader categories such as “Vacations” or “Family Life” so users can peruse through many items at once. Throughout the digitizing process, I contacted family members to add context or stories belonging to the items which I entered in the description field. For example, I didn’t know exactly where a vacation was taken or what the names were of childhood pets. By including my family in this process, I was able to make this archive even more personal and special as many of these photographs I would not be able to describe without their help. The final, and most important, step will be to send the archives to my family members and witness their reactions of reminiscing on the lovely memories with our grandmother. I have not reached this step as I want to ensure that I have most of the photographs already uploaded and that they are properly edited before making it public.

Naming the Archive

In Polish, "żółty dom" means "yellow house". The bulk of the memories related to our grandmother is attached to the yellow house she lived in since 1963 with the rest of her immediate family including her husband, Frank, and her nine children: Annie, Mark, James, Catherine, Matthew, Jane, Beth, Barbara, and Robert. As our family is Polish and regularly engages in Polish traditions, I decided I wanted to name the archive as an homage to the home of where our memories live in the native tongue of our ancestors.

Navigating the Archive

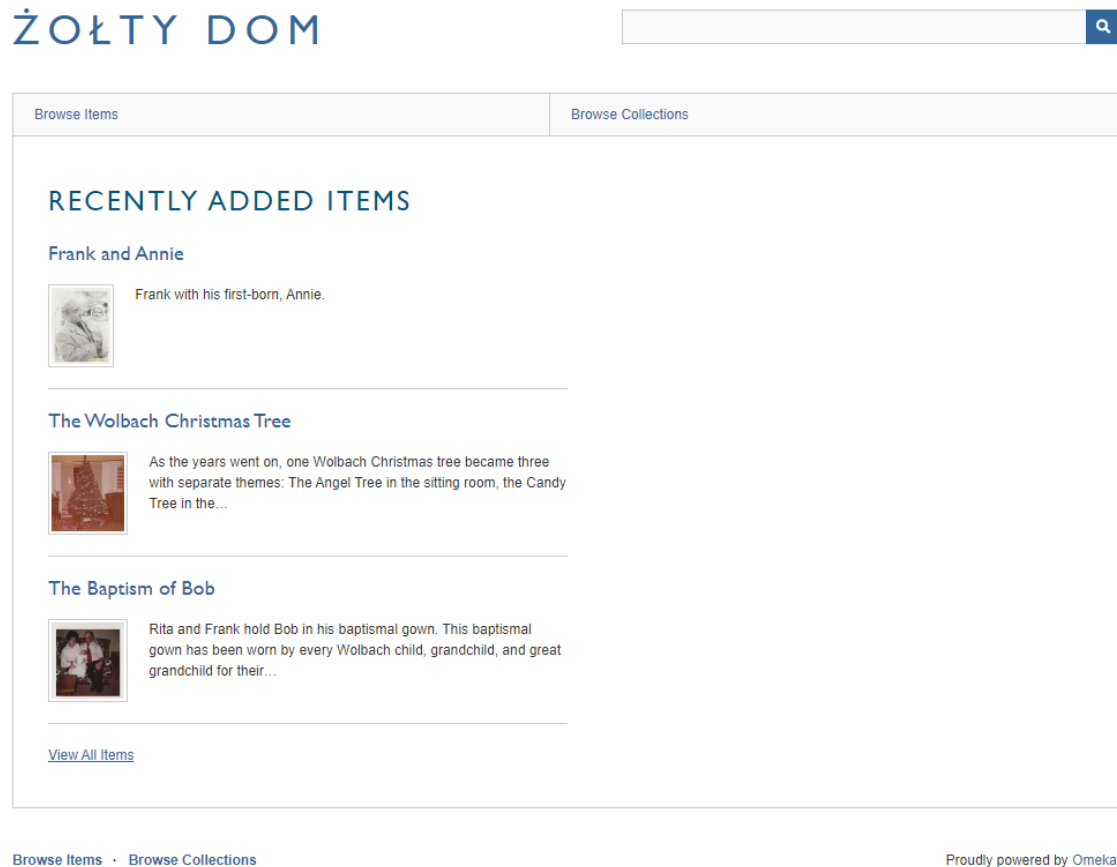


Figure 1

This is the landing page users will see when they first visit the website. There is a search bar near the top right which users can utilize if they are looking for a specific item or want to do a broader search. Users can choose two options: Browse Items or Browse Collections.

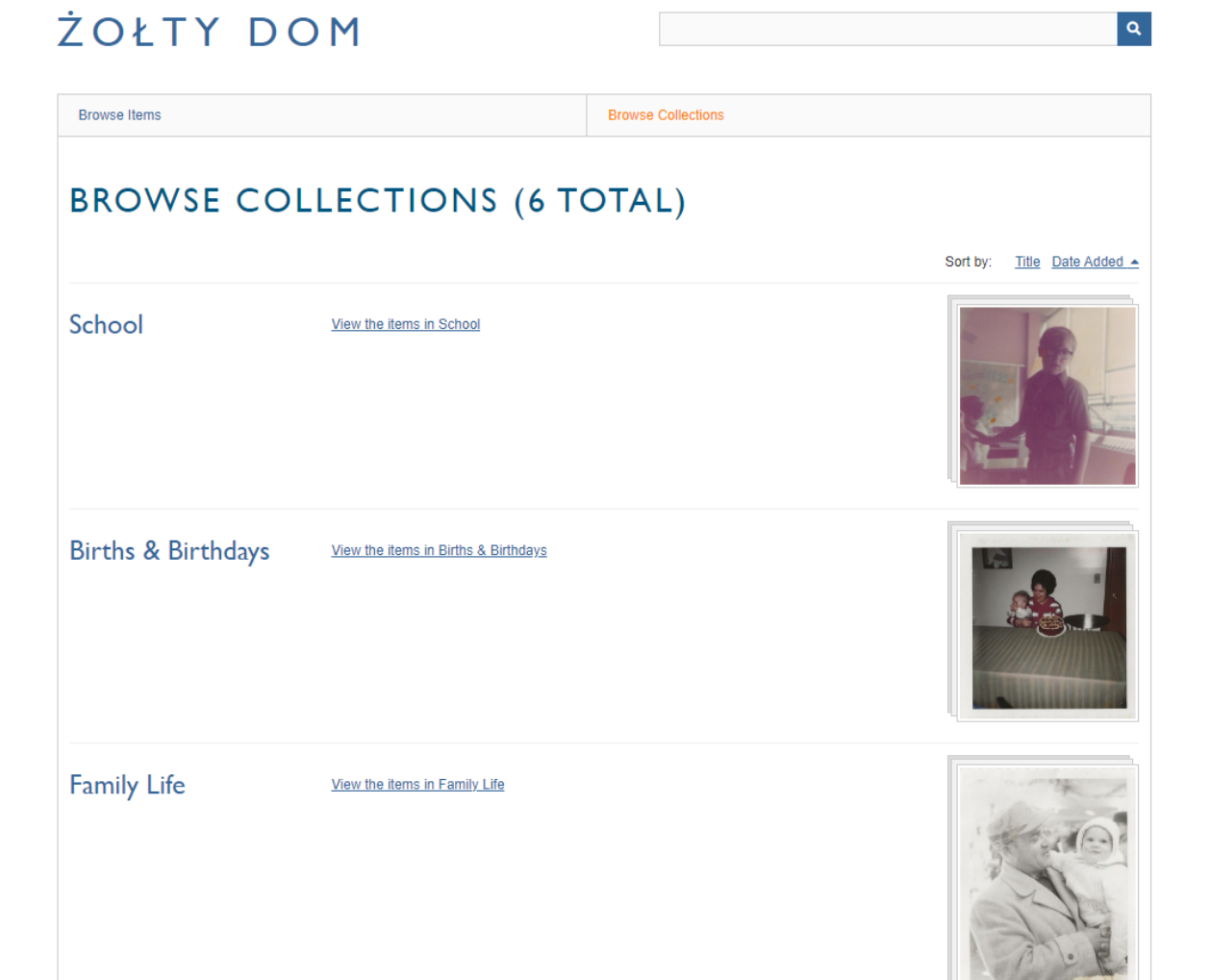


Figure 2

Here are three of the collections users can choose from. All items of the archive are assigned to one of the six collections.

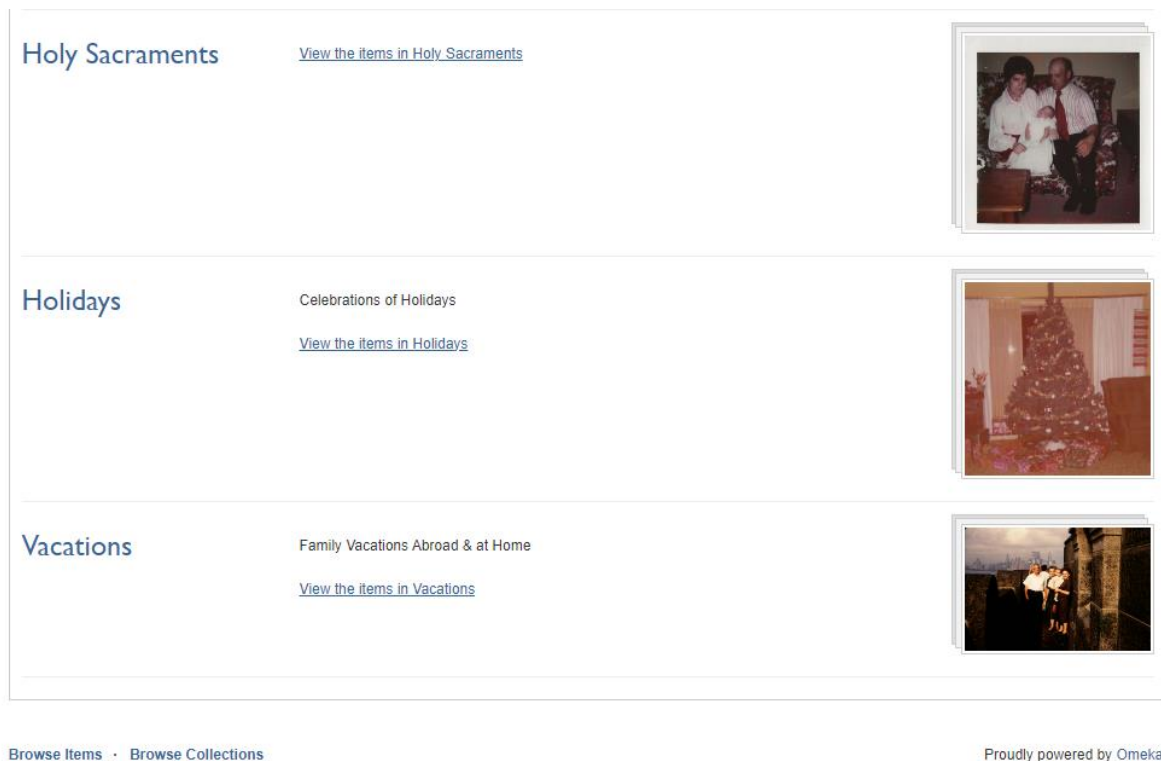


Figure 3

Here are the other three collections. Some collections have a description, so users can understand the scope of what the collection will contain.

[Browse Items](#)
[Browse Collections](#)

SEARCH ITEMS

[Browse All](#)
[Browse by Tag](#)
[Search Items](#)

Search for Keywords

Narrow by Specific Fields

| Field | Type | Terms |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------|
| Select Below | Select Below | <input type="text"/> |

[Add a Field](#)

Search by a range of ID#s (example: 1-4, 156, 79)

Search By Collection

[Select Below](#)

Search By Type

[Select Below](#)

Search By User

[Select Below](#)

Search By Tags

Public/Non-Public

[Select Below](#)

Featured/Non-Featured

[Select Below](#)

[Search for items](#)

[Browse Items](#) · [Browse Collections](#)

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Figure 4

This page allows users to narrow down their searches with specific filters. “Collection” and “Tags” are the two main filters that will affect the search results.

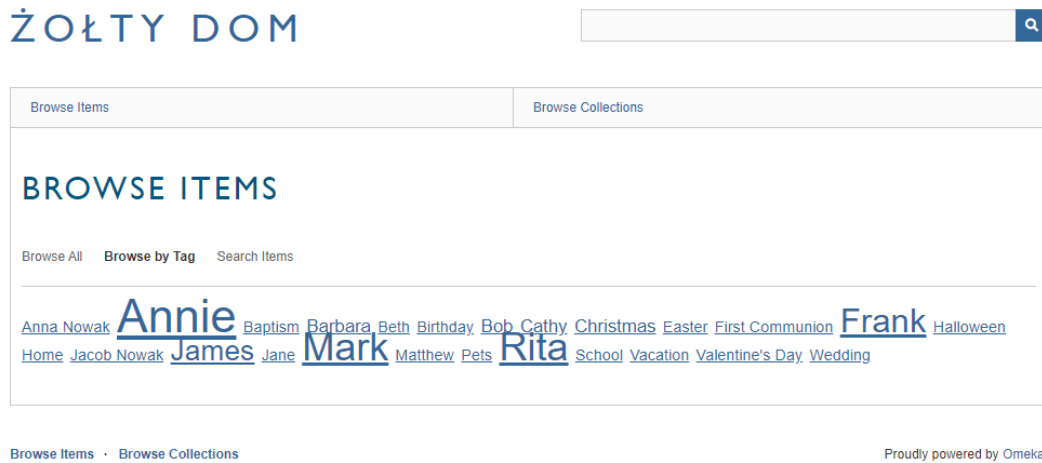


Figure 5

These are just some of the tags that are assigned to the items in the archive. When a tag has more items than the others, the tag grows larger in size to reflect how much it is used throughout the collection.

Browse Items

Browse Collections

ANNIE, MARK, JAMES, AND CATHY WITH EASTER BASKETS

Dublin Core

Title

Annie, Mark, James, and Cathy with Easter Baskets

Description

The kids pose with their Easter baskets in the living room. It is a Polish tradition to have a Catholic priest bless the Easter baskets, known as Świeconka, on Holy Saturday. Baskets usually hold the food to be eaten on Easter, but it can also carry sweets and gifts. The traditional lamb cake dessert can be seen on the table.

Files



Figure 6

Above is a sample item from the archive. When a user selects a specific item, they will see the title, description, image, the collection it is part of, any tags, and a citation of the entry.

Collection

[Holidays](#)

Tags

[Annie](#), [Cathy](#), [Easter](#), [James](#), [Mark](#)

Citation

"Annie, Mark, James, and Cathy with Easter Baskets," *żółty dom*, accessed May 11, 2023, <https://ayellowhouse.omeka.net/items/show/39>.

Figure 7

Above is a sample item from the archive. When a user selects a specific item, they will see the title, description, image, the collection it is part of, any tags, and a citation of the entry.

Creating the Archive

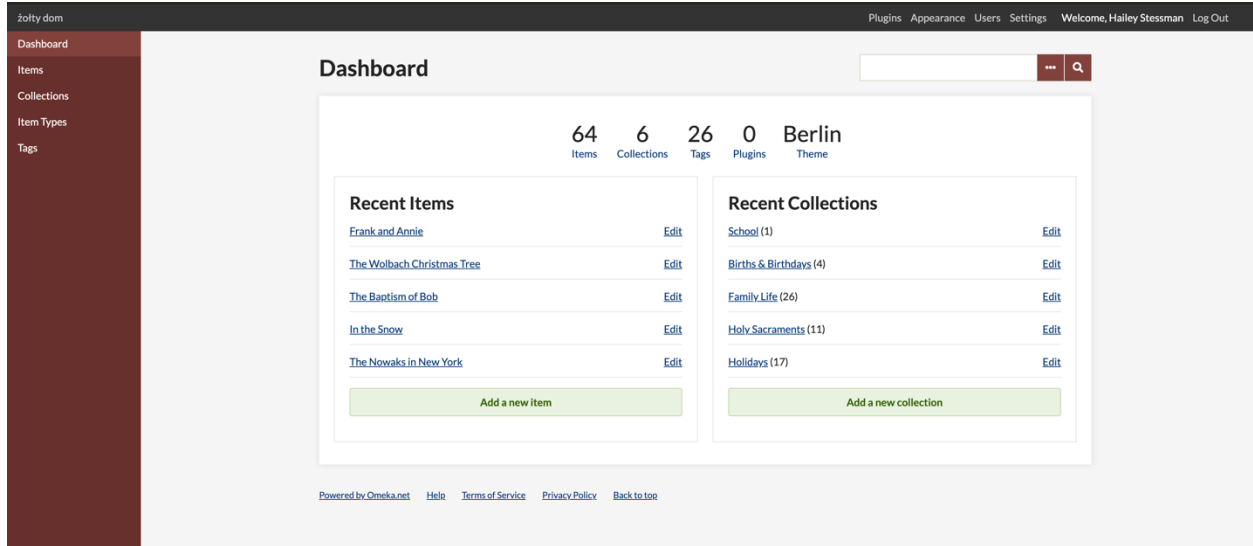


Figure 8

This is the landing page for the Admin side of the archive. From this page, I am able to see the total numbers of the archive: Items, Collection, and Tags.

The screenshot shows the 'Add an Item' page in Omeka. At the top, there's a search bar and a menu icon. Below it, a tabbed interface shows 'Dublin Core' as the active tab, with other tabs for 'Item Type Metadata', 'Files', and 'Tags'. The 'Dublin Core' section explains that this metadata is common to all Omeka records and provides a link to the Dublin Core website. It then contains three main input fields: 'Title' (described as 'A name given to the resource'), 'Subject' (described as 'The topic of the resource'), and 'Description' (described as 'An account of the resource'). Each field has an 'Add Input' button and a 'Use HTML' checkbox. To the right of these fields, there's a sidebar with an 'Add Item' button, checkboxes for 'Public' and 'Featured', and a 'Collection' dropdown menu labeled 'Select Below'.

Figure 9

This page is where the main metadata is attached. For each item, I had to create a Title and Description that accurately reflected the image's subject matter. There are many other metadata types that can be included, however, none of them would be appropriate for this type of archive.

Add an Item

...

Q

Dublin Core

Item Type Metadata

Files

Tags

Files

Add New Files

The maximum file size is 128 MB.

Find a File

Choose File

 No file chosen

Add Another File

Add Item

Public: ☐
Featured: ☐

Collection

Select Below ▼

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Figure 10

Above is where I would attach the file that matches the metadata entered. On the right, I can choose which Collection this item will be housed in.

Add an Item

Search:

[Dublin Core](#) [Item Type Metadata](#) [Files](#) [Tags](#)

Tags

Add Tags

Separate tags with ,

Public: ☐ Featured: ☐

Collection

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Figure 11

Above is where I would attach any appropriate tags to the item. An item can have an unlimited number of tags.

Browse Items (64 total)

...
Q

Add an Item
Show Details
Search Items
Quick Filter ▾

Page 1 of 7 >

Select all 64 results
0 items selected
Edit
Delete






| <input type="checkbox"/> | Title ▾ | Creator ▾ | Type | Date Added ▾ |
|--------------------------|--|-----------|-------------|--------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> |  Frank and Annie (Private) Details · Edit · Delete | | Still Image | Apr 21, 2023 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |  The Wolbach Christmas Tree (Private) Details · Edit · Delete | | Still Image | Apr 21, 2023 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |  The Baptism of Bob (Private) Details · Edit · Delete | | Still Image | Apr 21, 2023 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |  In the Snow (Private) Details · Edit · Delete | | Still Image | Apr 21, 2023 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> |  The Nowaks in New York (Private) Details · Edit · Delete | | Still Image | Apr 21, 2023 |







Figure 12

Above shows me all of the items in a manner where any entry can be easily edited along with showing the details of the specific item.

Browse Collections (6 total)

Add a Collection

All items are in a collection.

| Title | Contributors | Date Added | Total Number of Items |
|--|-----------------|--------------|-----------------------|
|  School (Private) Edit | No contributors | Mar 8, 2023 | 1 |
|  Births & Birthdays (Private) Edit | No contributors | Mar 2, 2023 | 4 |
|  Family Life (Private) Edit | No contributors | Mar 2, 2023 | 26 |
|  Holy Sacraments (Private) Edit | No contributors | Mar 2, 2023 | 11 |
|  Holidays (Private) Edit | No contributors | Feb 13, 2023 | 17 |
|  Vacations (Private) Edit | No contributors | Feb 13, 2023 | 5 |

Add a Collection

All items are in a collection.

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Figure 13

Above I can see all of the collections I have created along with the number of items that are in each one. I also have the ability to edit the collection as a whole or see any items that have not yet been assigned to a collection.

Browse Tags (26 total)

...

Q

Editing Tags

1

united states

✕

1

2

3

- This number counts all records associated with a tag. Filtering "Record types" to "Items" will provide links to all items containing the tag.
- To edit the tag name, click the name and begin editing, and hit "enter" to save. To cancel an edit, click the ESC key or click away from the tag.
- To delete a tag, click the X. Deleting a tag will not delete the tagged records.

Search tags

Record Types ▾

Q Record Type: All

Name ▲

Count

Date created

4 Anna Nowak ✕

29 Annie ✕

4 Baptism ✕

0 Barb ✕

7 Barbara ✕

6 Beth ✕

2 Birthday ✕

7 Bob ✕

8 Cathy ✕

7 Christmas ✕

6 Easter ✕

3 First Communion ✕

17 Frank ✕

2 Halloween ✕

4 Home ✕

3 Jacob Nowak ✕

14 James ✕

6 Jane ✕

20 Mark ✕

6 Matthew ✕

1 Pets ✕

22 Rita ✕

1 School ✕

3 Vacation ✕

1 Valentine's Day ✕

3 Wedding ✕

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Figure 14

From this page, I am able to see every tag that has been created along with how many items belong to each one. This also allows me to see if I have any tags that need to be edited. For example, “Barb” can be deleted since “Barbara” also exists and better describes those items.

Beyond the Archive

Archives are never static; they constantly change and acquire more items that are placed in the collection as time goes on. They are a testament of how crucial and important memories are to our livelihoods and cultures. Without these time capsules of history, we lose a pinnacle outlet of connecting to our loved ones and ancestors. Throughout this process, I have developed an intense admiration toward my family, especially to my grandmother as details of her early life have been a mystery to me. Creating an archive of my family has always been a plan of mine as I want our family to remember how much we mean to one another; the Honors Program allowed me to have the space and time to start that journey. I have also gained skills that will help me continue my career in the world of archives such as understanding metadata, the preciseness of the digitization process, and all of the steps one needs to take to create an archive that is accessible to all. All of the photographs that were included in this archive have now also been organized and stored in a way that reflects the “Tags” and “Collections” of the digital archive. Thus, this project has shown how my family can correctly preserve the photographs they take and how important it is to have physical and digital copies of their memories.

My aspiration is to continue to add to this archive as new memories are being made in the generation of my cousins like great-grandchildren being born while others are entering new chapters in their lives. When my grandmother was taken out of her home and placed in an assisted living home, some of her personal belongings were given out to family members. Now, I want to take pictures of those objects and include them in the archive by following the same process. New tags and collections will be created, and new memories will be captured. Once this archive has grown to a point where I can take a break from uploading items, I will be switching over to my father’s side of the family. Thankfully, my paternal grandmother also has this love of

preserving history and genealogy as she has curated scrapbooks of her and my grandpa's life.

Now, I have the experience and knowledge of how one can create their own familial archive in both a physical and digital format to take on this new project with full confidence. I hope that a project such as mine will inspire others to listen to their ancestors and understand the power of preserving a family's legacy.