Is That Your Final Answer?

Michigan History Meets Millionaire

Although "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire" and Michigan History day are not usually linked, late this spring the Clarke staff and the elementary grade students at Sacred Heart Academy in Mount Pleasant, shared both information and fun by bringing the two together.

The wildly popular "Millionaire" show gave us a fun format to involve the children in Michigan history. Multiple choice questions were developed by the Clarke staff and the children's teachers. The teachers reviewed the questions so that they reflected material the children had studied and were phrased in a way that would make a correct answer likely, since we wanted this to be a positive experience for the "contestants."

Computer presentation software made it possible to illustrate each answer with a graphic from the Clarke's collection and incorporate "tv-like" special effects. We used each answer to create a way to move beyond a game show format and explain, briefly, the significance of the answer in lives of the children.

For example, one question asked the "contestants" to identify what was "green gold." The answer, "lumber" not only earned the contestant a prize but created an opportunity to explain the importance of lumbering.

Many nineteenth century Michigan residents made their livelihood in what was then the largest timber producing state in the nation. Despite the economic benefits of the industry, the almost complete removal of the state's original forest has created problems that remain with us today. Contemporary reforestation projects and habitat rehabilitation are also part of the lumbering era's legacy. Hopefully, the discussion about the short and long-term consequences of "green gold" led students to realize that Michigan's lumbering experience argues that the immediate economic gain must be weighed against potentially negative long-term social and ecological consequences.

You, too, might want to "take the challenge" and answer the questions posed to
the children. The answers are printed below.

1. Shipping cargo on boats has always been an important part of the state’s history. Many ships have sunk. What is the name of the large ship that most recently sank on the Great Lakes?
   a. Peter Corcoran
   b. Edmund Fitzgerald
   c. Little Debbie

2. Today over 100,000 miles of paved highways help make Michigan the “automobile capital” of America. What year was the first mile of paved highway poured in Michigan?
   a. 1889
   b. 1909
   c. 1939

3. Michigan is widely known as the automotive state, but what is the second most important state product?
   a. Chemical
   b. Agriculture (farm products)
   c. Fish

4. Around 1900 two men who lived in Battle Creek, C.W. Post and W.K. Kellogg, began to sell something we still eat for breakfast every day. What did they sell?
   a. Orange juice
   b. Bagels
   c. Breakfast cereal

5. For much of the 1800s Michigan led the nation in a product that people in the state called “green gold.” What was “green gold?”
   a. Lumber
   b. Green tea
   c. Emeralds

6. In the 1800s so many people moved from Europe to Michigan that they often settled whole towns. Where do you think the people who first settled Clare came from?
   a. France
   b. Ireland
   c. Italy

7. In the 1850s many people believed slavery was wrong. In Michigan some people helped slaves escape from the south to Canada by participating in:
   a. Prohibition
   b. Democratic Party
   c. Underground railroad

8. In 1837 Michigan and Ohio almost went to war because the two states could not agree on where the boundary between them should be located. Ohio won, and the boundary was placed just to the north of Toledo. As “compensation” for losing what did Congress give Michigan?
   a. A new state capital building
   b. New roads
   c. The western two-thirds of the upper peninsula

9. From what country did the first Europeans come from who explored the Great Lakes?
   a. Germany
   b. Mexico
   c. France

10. Having discovered that Michigan and the Great Lakes did not lead to China, the French found a local item that had great value in their homeland. What was this item?
    a. Wine
    b. Furs
    c. Christmas trees

11. Many famous sports teams and stars have played in Michigan. Which of these three teams was the first one to play?
    a. Detroit Tigers
    b. Detroit Red Wings
    c. Lansing Lugnuts

The correct answers are: 1b; 2b; 3b; 4c; 5a; 6b; 7c; 8c; 9c; 10b; 11a.

The children answered eight of the eleven questions correctly. If you didn’t do as well perhaps a remedial course in Michigan history is in order! If you did as well, or better, treat yourself to the same prize that the contestants were awarded; a genuine Michigan apple.
The New World of Electronic Acquisition

If there is a stereotypical rare books librarian he or she is the wizened figure pouring over a table of offerings, looking carefully for the treasure hidden among the dross. To be sure the image is more fiction than reality. Rare book libraries have long relied on a significant number of book dealers, as well as generous donors. Only occasionally is a true find the result of luck at an estate sale book table.

Increasingly, however, dealers, average individuals selling off a few dusty books, and librarians interested in buying material are meeting in the virtual world. Electronic tools offer all of us significant advantages.

For the seller electronic auction houses such as Ebay or electronic listing networks maintained by dealers such as Biblioﬁnd give them a way to market their product far more broadly than they could accomplish by putting it on a shelf in their store or a table in the garage. Dealers in particular are finding the electronic marketplace a cheaper way to market items than the traditional sale catalog. Although many dealers continue to produce catalogs, most have taken to supplementing their catalog with electronic listings of material.

From the librarian’s viewpoint, buying in the electronic marketplace also has advantages. Searches for wanted material will often turn up multiple copies of the same volume at different locations and, more importantly, at different prices. The postage to ship a book from Santa Barbara is the same as that to ship it from Sault Ste. Marie, thus lower priced volumes help stretch the acquisition budget.

Equally important, the combination of an on-line catalog and an electronic “store” gives librarians the possibility to switch quickly back and forth on our computer screen to compare what is offered to what is already in the library. As collections grow in size and staff changes it is extraordinarily difficult to remember everything “back there” in the stacks. Checking the catalog before buying makes for more informed purchases.

How the Clarke uses electronic sources to add to the collection is an interesting case study in the new world of electronic acquisition. After discovering an out-of-print book that we would like to add to the collection, we routinely log on to a book selling utility, such as Biblioﬁnd.com, to see if a copy of the volume is available for purchase. In some cases we will also use a book selling utility to compare prices asked in a dealer’s catalog. In one particularly memorable incident a dealer asked $1,000 in a published catalog for a volume in which the Clarke was interested. The price seemed high and a quick search on Biblioﬁnd revealed that the same volume was listed by the same dealer for $750.00.

The “down side” to most dealer-run utilities is that they support only requests for particular authors or specific book titles. If you don’t know that a volume is “out there” in the first place you can’t find it. Ebay and other electronic auction houses go one step better than the dealers by including subject searching on their site. About once a week a Clarke staff member logs on to Ebay and searches for “Michigan history.” The search often results in about 500 to 600 “hits.” Some of the items, such as the inevitable collection of Michigan-related sports items, are passed by quickly. But we usually also find about a half dozen out-of-print Michigan titles that we never knew existed.

When the Ebay item has been printed by a “major” publisher, we frequently check Biblioﬁnd to determine what would be a “fair
price” for the item. Many local items, however, such as community or corporate histories, never find their way to Bibliofind. These are indeed treasures on which we place bids.

Although we bid regularly on Ebay, we do not purchase everything we bid on. Occasionally, a particularly aggressive competitor will not be denied. In Kalamazoo County one very aggressive collector has consistently outbid every bidder, including the Clarke, on items of local interest. We have also discovered that a public agency in Monroe County will usually outbid all comers for material from that corner of the state. We try to bid responsibly; comparing the value of a particular item for our collection with the price required to obtain the item.

On occasion we have bid “high.” For example, when a copy of the 1903 Iosco county plat map appeared on Ebay we were extremely excited. Our collection of plat books is among the best in the state, but this volume had long alluded us. Only three copies of the work were known to exist; two in Tawas City; in a local museum that is frequently closed and in the county register of deeds office, and one in the Burton Historical Collection in Detroit. In the end we paid $173.00 for the book, and beat back some spirited competition from other bidders.

Electronic tools are transforming library acquisitions, and helping us build a better collection of books here in the Clarke.

**Board Membership Changes**

Because of health concerns, Dr. Robert Croll has resigned from the Clarke Historical Library Board of Governors. Dr. Croll, now an emeritus faculty member at Central Michigan University, has served on the Board for since 1986. During his fourteen years of service, Dr. Croll has been a consistent friend of the Library, sharing his sound advice and thoughtful opinions on a wide variety of issues. We will surely miss him.

At its spring 2000 meeting, the Board of Governors elected Robert Logie to replace Dr. Croll on the Board. Mr. Logie, an attorney by profession, is the current mayor of Grand Rapids. He has a deep and abiding interest in state history. He has served in the past as chair of the Grand Rapids Historical Commission and also as a past president of the Historical Society of Michigan.

**Microfilm Specialist Changes**

Joy Smith, who for two years has served as the Library’s microfilm specialist, has taken a new position in the University’s Geography Department. Barbara Kirchner has replaced Joy as the Library’s microfilmer. Barb has worked for many years in the University Library’s microforms department. She brings her extensive experience helping people use microfilms to her new job.

**New Civil War Bibliography on the Web**

As we prepare to print the newsletter, the staff is in the final stages of bringing up a bibliography of the Library’s Civil War holdings on the Clarke website.

The bibliography will initially list all of our unpublished, manuscript holdings regarding the war. Arranged by subject, the site will feature some collections not yet described in CENTRA, the Library’s on-line catalog. More importantly, the descriptions found in the bibliography for both material in and not in CENTRA are considerably more detailed than those found in the catalog.

We hope this bibliography will be a useful tool for researchers interested in discovering the Clarke’s holdings in this area.
A Final Word

Kids and computers – it is an interesting combination for a historical library more often associated with old leather bindings and thoughtful, dare I say elderly, scholars using these fine resources for serious purpose. Computers, however, are merely new tools, to accomplish old goals, some of them involving children.

Computers are a fundamental tool for everyone involved in today’s library “business.” We use them to communicate regularly. On a typical day I will receive and respond to fifteen or twenty emails. We use computers to catalog material and retrieve information about our holdings for our users. We have invested substantially in placing significant bodies of information on the world wide web. Increasingly we use computers to find new items to add to the collection. We may well be collecting old “stuff,” but the tools we need to employ to do that collecting, and everything else the staff accomplishes, are decidedly modern.

Although we could not do our work without computers, the fundamental nature of the work itself has changed very little. We still seek to find information that documents Michigan, obtain it for the collection, and describe it for use. The tools may change but the objectives do not.

One of the ironies of the Clarke is that we have a wonderful group of children’s books that we almost never let children touch. Jelly stains and accidental rips are not a part of the stewardship the staff exercises over the collection. Unlike a typical public library, the life cycle of our children’s books is not summed up by the “alternate” 3R’s; read ‘em, rip ‘em, and replace ‘em. Our books are here for the long haul.

Despite this “elitist” attitude toward allowing children to use some of our holdings, gifting children with a love of history and books is a fundamental part of the Library’s mission. A few children seem born with a love of history and books almost magically found in their hearts. For many others, a thoughtful, and hopefully lively, hour spent talking about Michigan and its past may do the trick.

For Michigan history day we invested considerable staff time not only in the content of the “millionaire” game but also the presentation. With the latest in computerized bells and whistles we presented some very basic concepts about Michigan and the past.

The bells and whistles were secondary to the main purpose. We did not add them in to demonstrate to the children our technical competence. That is a dangerous undertaking since some of them probably can make the computer do tasks I can’t. Rather, we used the “gimmicks” found in computer software to reach out and involve a generation of television and video game kids in the more subtle pleasures of the printed word and the past.

Much like the use of computers to acquire “old” material, computers are tools employed to help “hook” kids on what the Library does: preserve information about the past for use in the present. That fundamental mission for the Library is as old as the charge given us by Norman E. Clarke, Sr., the library’s founder.

At the dedication of the Library he said, “It is my prayer that those who now assume custodianship of this infant beginning will cause it to grow in stature and by unselfish and intelligent application, make it a stimulating force in historically orienting both students and instructors.”

Computers and kids. In the end they aren’t very foreign at all to the Clarke. The computers support what we are most about; sharing with others, including children, a profound love of the past.

Frank Boles