Looking back through time

ARCHIVE: Collection captures state's past

By Joel Banner Baird
Freelance Staff Writer

UVM collection seeks curators, ages 6 to 96

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Burlington, Vermont — The University of Vermont's online archive of historical photographs is still looking for a new crop of curators, ages 6 to 96.

They also want your photo albums.

Geology professor Paul Bierman, one of the founders of the Landscape Change Project, said the collection was designed from the ground up in 1999 to serve the interest among authorities and services, teachers and students, historians and curiosity-seekers.

On Tuesday, Bierman and his UVM colleagues, Christine Massey, will lead a workshop for home-schooling parents in a hands-on scavenger hunt through their Web site.

"A big part of our mission is to disseminate successful educational models," Bierman said. "Kids see old pictures of their town, of places they know — and they start asking questions. Educators then look for a hook: What can we put them interested in the science of what they're seeing?"

Images dominate the Web site. They include family snapshots, aerial photographs, and scanned drawings from institutional collections, some dating back 200 years.

Many of the images have been matched with more modern photographs of the same location; most have not. Some have linked GPS coordinates to Google-polygon map. Some of the pictures ("Mystery Images") lack dates and/or locations.

With an almost infinite storage and retrieval capacity, Landscape Change has room to grow with its participants. The needs of K-12 students steered the project's mission, Bierman said.

And a National Science Foundation grant of $75,000 jump-started the reciprocity between students and teachers as they built and learned from the virtual library.

"We've been building an academic research with service to the community, and Vermonters have returned the favor," Bierman said.

In the project's infancy, high school students and undergrads collected, scanned, and uploaded the lion's share of photographs. Now even younger students, already Web-savvy, are poised to shoulder more of the work.

The 'Ahf' factor

Massey, whose professional life combines elements of geology and education, said old images of Vermont stimulated an appreciation for the physical and social sciences — and a host of other disciplines.

"There's so much you can pull out of a historical photograph, so many parts of the archive that appeal to so many different people," she said. "It really depends on what lens you use.

To attract diverse curiosity, the site features an online tutorial that helps in the dating of everything from fence posts to benedicts to bicentennials.

"People find the 'Ahf' factor, the 'Wow' factor here," Massey said.

Historians of all ages, she added, are floored by photographs that document the widespread landscape disturbance during the construction of the interstate highway system in the early 1960s.

If you go

WHO: Home-schooling parents and educators
WHAT: A free, hands-on workshop featuring UVM's Landscape Change Project — a digital archive with 200 years of historical images online
WHEN: 8:30 p.m., Tuesday
WHERE: 316 Delaney Hall, 150 Clothesline Ave.
PARKING: Free, available at adjacent parking lot.
MORE INFO: Register with Christine Massey at christine.massey@uvm.edu or 802-359-3069.

Until you've seen that part of the history, it's one of those features of the landscape that nobody looks at twice," she said. Second glances

Shelley Snyder of South Burlington says she's a fervent believer in time travel. Her son at Mount Abraham Union High School in Bristol helped launch the Landscape Change collection.