DigitalNC.org collects yearbooks, among other things

By April Everett
Rowan Public Library  |  Posted: Sunday, December 23, 2012 12:01 a.m.

SALISBURY — Giant, gold-rimmed glasses. Cheesy, big-toothed grin. Fringed Western shirt. Turquoise bolo tie. The year is 1994, the phase is cowgirl, and what blooms is a yearbook photo I will forever wish extinct. Fast forward to 2005. I've answered a Craigslist posting for a temp job transcribing a poorly written manuscript for a peculiar, elderly woman.

I begin to suspect that my "boss" has stolen the manuscript and is trying to pass it off as her own, which is the only crime worse than being the actual author of the wretched work. I pay a visit to the history room of the local university (my "boss" is an alleged alumna), and I pull out volume after volume of their yearbooks until I finally locate her name. It's most definitely not her.

Whether you're looking for a humorous trip down Fashion Faux Pas Lane or trying to solve good, home-grown mysteries, the dusty old yearbook can prove a valuable tool. Fast forward to 2012 and meet North Carolina Yearbooks, a collection of college and high school yearbooks from all over North Carolina. This collection is available for browsing through DigitalNC.org, the official site of the North Carolina Digital Heritage Center. The center is a statewide digitization and digital publishing program maintained by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The center works with libraries, archives, museums, historical societies and other cultural heritage institutions from across the state to provide online access to their special collections.

DigitalNC.org allows you to browse photographs, newspapers, scrapbooks, maps, artwork, manuscripts and more supplied by more than 80 counties in North Carolina. These items are grouped into collections such as Images of North Carolina, North Carolina City Directories and North Carolina Newspapers.

Of course, my personal favorite is the North Carolina Yearbooks collection. The yearbooks offer high quality images and are searchable. They are surprisingly "real" as the onscreen format mimics a real yearbook and allows you to turn pages like a physical book. According to the center's website, the student yearbooks "provide a window into college life in North Carolina from the 1890s to the present. From sports teams to sororities, fashions to hairstyles, these volumes document the changing attitudes and culture of college students year by year." A number of private and state-funded institutions are participating in the yearbooks project.

Visit the Digital Heritage Center online at DigitalNC.org and use the tabs along the top of the page to browse by collection or by county. Note that there are also special exhibits and slide shows covering topics such as basketball, lighthouses and therapeutic travel in North Carolina. While you're browsing, be sure to look up a friend, family member, or your boss in one of the North Carolina yearbooks.


Displays for December: Headquarters, Blackmer exhibit; South, bobbin and lace by Golden Bobbins; East, holiday by Mary Earnhardt.

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