

Contacts: Tessa Eagan, College of Liberal Arts, teagan@umn.edu, (612) 625-3781
Jeff Falk, University News Service, jfalk@umn.edu, (612) 626-1720

U of M project digitizes immigrant love letters

- *"A Heart Connects Us: Immigrant Letters and the Experience of Migration"*
provides insight into letters written between 1850 and 1970 -

MINNEAPOLIS / ST. PAUL (07/12/2010) — The Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) at the University of Minnesota is in the midst of a pilot project to digitize letters revealing the depth of emotion between immigrants in languages other than English. The letters were exchanged by international migrants who lived in North America and their loved ones who were left behind in the years between 1850 and 1970.

"A Heart Connects Us: Immigrant Letters and the Experience of Migration" provides unique online access to and interpretation of letters for a diverse audience of scholars, teachers, students and the general public. The pilot project includes selected materials from the IHRC's archival collections.

The pilot project's first online exhibition was recently completed and can be accessed at <http://www.ihrc.umn.edu>. Additional student and staff research is being currently conducted to create a multimedia exhibition for spring 2011.

"Our vision is to create access to resources for a diverse group of scholars, students and general readers who want to understand and compare migration across traditional scholarly boundaries," says Donna Gabaccia, director of the IHRC and Rudolph J. Vecoli Chair in Immigration History.

"A Heart Connects Us" is part of IHRC's larger "Digitizing Immigrant Letters" project, which focuses on providing a way for scholars to study the spread of literacy and its effect on transnational human relationships, as well as identities and networks of intimacy during separations.

"Rhythms of writing and reading in the past differ from how we compress time and space in our communications today," said Sonia Cancian, a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Postdoctoral Fellow affiliated with the IHRC and off-site director of the project. "This project will allow scholars to study whether the emotional and identity outcomes are different, as well."

Five collections of letters written in Croatian, Finnish, Italian, Latvian and Ukrainian from among the IHRC's large holdings of immigrant materials were selected for inclusion in "A Heart Connects Us." Between four and seven letters from each collection were transcribed, translated and scanned, and photographs from the collections were added to the online repository.

The ultimate goal of the "Digitizing Immigrant Letters" project is to expand into a multi-institutional digital archive, thus becoming an international resource to connect university researchers to materials currently only available onsite in repositories in Asia, Europe and other North America historical institutions.