

Putting your Image Collection to Work

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Introduction

Over the last 15 years, the Ballarat Tramway Museum has collected and catalogued an extensive photograph collection. As well, we have collected a number of movie films dating from the 1950's. The Question was - how to present these simply and at low cost through our web-site and give protection to the images themselves?

We developed a series of short movies looking at specific Ballarat Precincts using historic photos with trams and showing how these precincts have changed since 1971 when the SEC Operated tramway system closed in Ballarat.

This method enables us to present our collection to visitors beyond those who physically visit us. It is part of our goal to "showcase our collection" and continue to present and interpret our image collection. It provides for people who may not have an interest in trams, but in Ballarat streetscape history to visit our web-site.

Today, people access our web-site by using various means; varying from formal large screen computer systems though to smart phones such as the iPhone, using a variety of browsers.

The presentations grew out of the production we prepared for the 2000 COTMA Conference, "Ballarat Past and Present", which looked at past images and current images in specific precincts.

To see one of our presentations, visit: www.btm.org.au/precincts-index.html

Making the Presentations

The presentations were made using Windows Movie Maker. There are a number of similar programs. These range from some which are free or come with a small price to those large cost programs that are used by the professionals. We found that Windows Movie Maker is a relatively simple program to use; with some trial and error. However, it does not have all the controls and possibilities that others have, but it worked and was sufficient for our needs.

The steps are:

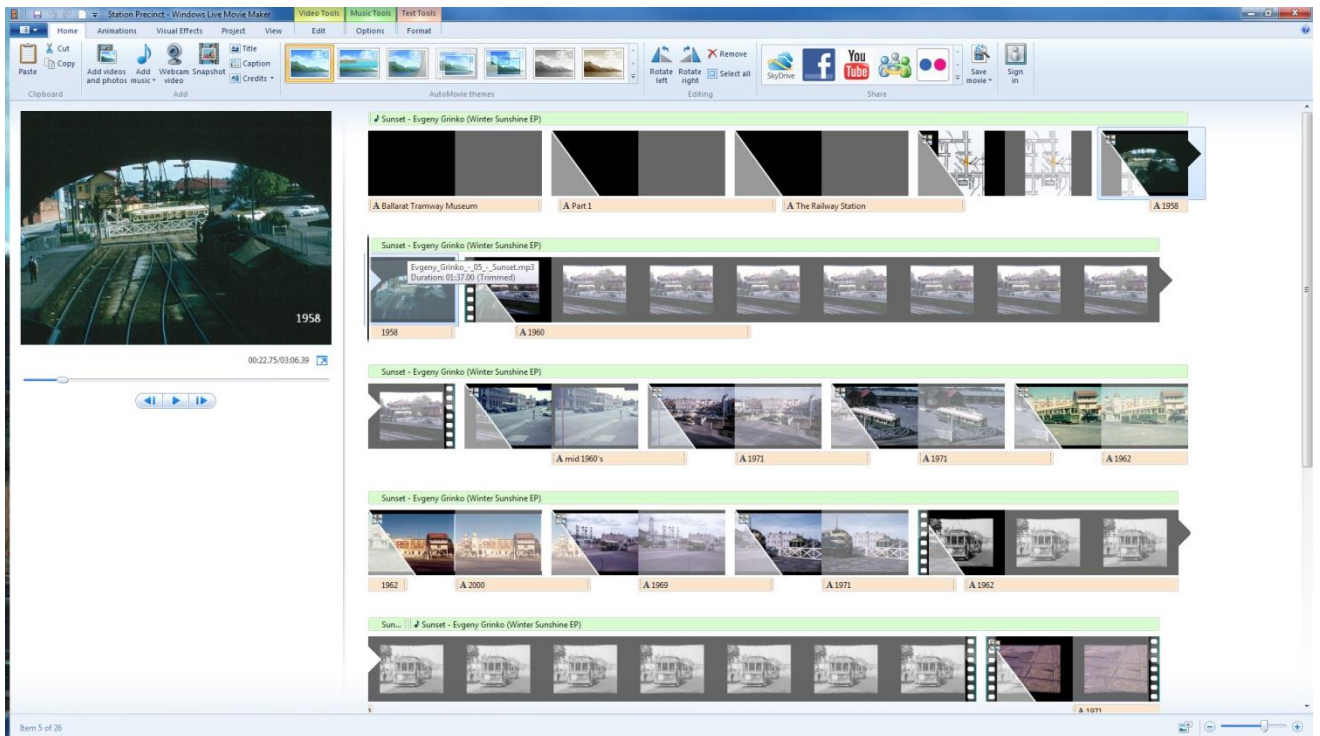
1. Select the photos, movie segments from our collection using our computerised catalogue, rescan them at a higher resolution if needed or edit the movies to the required time lengths.
2. Put together an initial arrangement (storyboard).
3. Work out what photos of "today" need to be taken or filmed.
4. Arrange the photos, movie segments to tell the story of the precinct and its trams.
5. Insert the titles and credits etc.
6. Apply the transitions, timings etc.

7. Select the background music.
8. Insert the sound into the movie.
9. Produce as a formal movie and publish.
10. Create a list of sources, credits etc. and publish.

While this may sound fairly simple, the selection process and assembling the photos, movies etc., will take a few hours of work.

Some points:

- Keep the file sizes appropriate – large files give good quality, but take time to download
- Timing for each photo was 7 seconds with some adjustment for titles, either a bit shorter or longer depending on the time to read.
- Transitions from one to the other – used “Wipe right – narrow”
- Moving the image across the screen – we used “Automatic pan and zoom”
- Overall time – about 2 to 3 mins – watch the boredom factor
- Give credit where credit is due – our Pdf file gives the collection details, donors, photographers etc.
- Keep the transition from one photograph to another consistent
- We have used some photographs from our member’s collections that have not yet been formally collected.



Screen shot from the Station Precinct presentation

Other Matters

An issue that many Historical Societies have is putting their photographs on line and having them used by others in publications without permission – keep the file size small and/or watermark them as we have done in our on-line exhibitions – yes someone could crop these out. Keeping the file size small helps.

Copyright – be sure you own the photos or have the authority to use them in publications – fortunately most tramway enthusiasts are happy as long as it is properly credited. Music selection – use copyright free? Music, but still credit it.

Although we have used music as a background, there is nothing to say you can't have a talking head or voice over as part of an introduction or for the full length of the presentation; it just takes more time to do.

It helps having a fully catalogued and digital imaged collection, even if you have to rescan some to higher resolutions at times.

These movies can be used on digital data screens mounted in panels for exhibitions – using memory cards.

We have used this style of presentation, rather than windows PowerPoint in a number of recent presentations, such as our 40th Anniversary celebrations, looking back at the formation and history of the Museum itself, our members and events.

On the web we have made available both “Flash” and MP4 movies, the latter being suited for the iPhone. Flash software is not built into iPhones or iPads.

Next Steps

As alternative programs and faster download speeds become available, we will review our movies and improve the quality of them. The Museum is also looking at this style of presentation for Podcasts, that could be directly downloaded onto a smart phone using QR codes at tram stops and on board our trams – directly from the ‘clouds’.

Conclusion

Through using software that comes available with Windows products, or other downloadable movie makers, it is possible to make low cost productions that can show your image collections for people that may only be able to visit our museums through the web. By putting an image collection to work helps to tell the stories of the Museum to a wider audience and gets your name out there in other ways.