An Introduction to Omeka

Omeka is a free, flexible, and open source web-publishing platform for the display of library, museum, archives, and scholarly collections and exhibitions. Its "five-minute setup" makes launching an online exhibition as easy as launching a blog.

In this tutorial we demonstrate and encourage you to try creating an Omeka instance using the freely available Omeka.net service. The steps in this tutorial will take you through creating items in your repository, describing those objects, adding them to collections. A follow on tutorial uses Omeka to create an engaging and compelling curated exhibit.

All the files (bundled as a zip file) to carry out this exercise are available here: http://digitalnomad.ie/introtoomeka.zip. You can download them, unzip them and save them to your desktop to work with them.

You will create a new account at http://omeka.net; and download the archive of files at http://digitalnomad.ie/introtoomeka.zip.

This tutorial is available as a PDF file (included in the zip file) so you can print out and follow along on your own system.

Version 1.0 of this tutorial was created in October 2011 and has been most recently updated in October 2017.

Step 1 - Sign Up for an Account with Omeka.net
The lovely folks from Omeka make it possible to have your own Omeka server for absolutely free. The first step in this tutorial is to sign up for a free account. To do this, browse to http://omeka.net/signup and click the button "Start your Omeka trial"
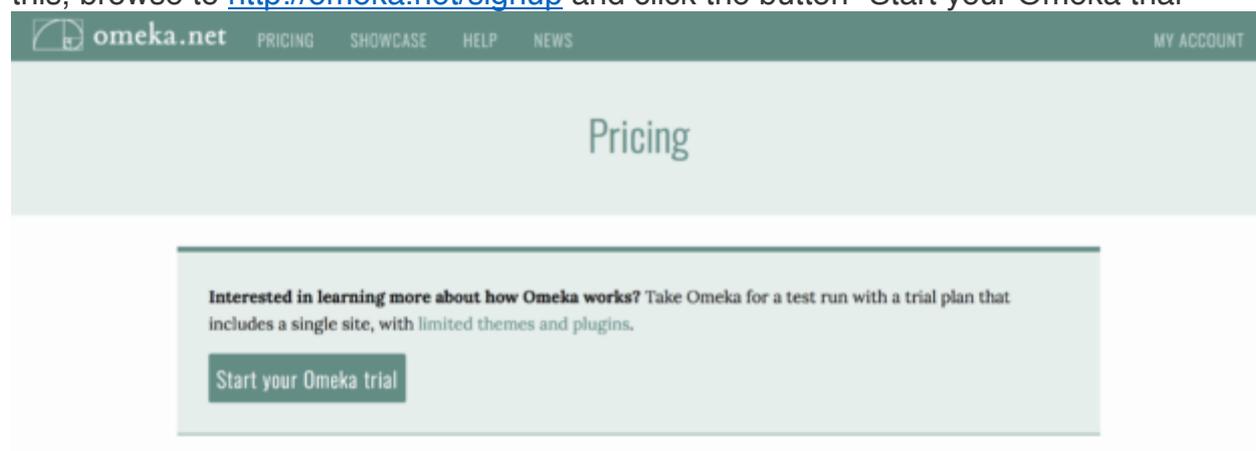
Step 2 – Submit and Confirm Your Details
There are a variety of paid packages available - and I hope you will discover that Omeka may well be worth the investment for your projects. We are going to sign up

for a trial package and will need to fill up a short form to do so. It's nice to know that there are options and that you can migrate your plan as your needs increase. However, today let's use the trial to go through this tutorial. The button for this up at the top in the middle of the screen.


You will get a Basic plan with 500Mb of storage, 1 site, 15 plugins and 5 themes for free. A very generous offer. Choose a memorable username (write this down as you will need it along with your password to continue this tutorial). This need not be your real name. Then indicate a memorable password, confirm it and enter your full name. Your email is where Omeka will send your server information, so make sure this is an account your can access for the purposes of this tutorial. Finally agree to the terms of service, enter the CAPTCHA and click the **Sign Up** button.

When you do you will get a confirmation screen and then wait for a confirmation email with an activation link. Please be patient this can take a few minutes (mileage may vary - it took me 10 minutes yesterday).

When you do receive an email confirming your account it will provide a URL for you to click to confirm your email and start using Omeka.
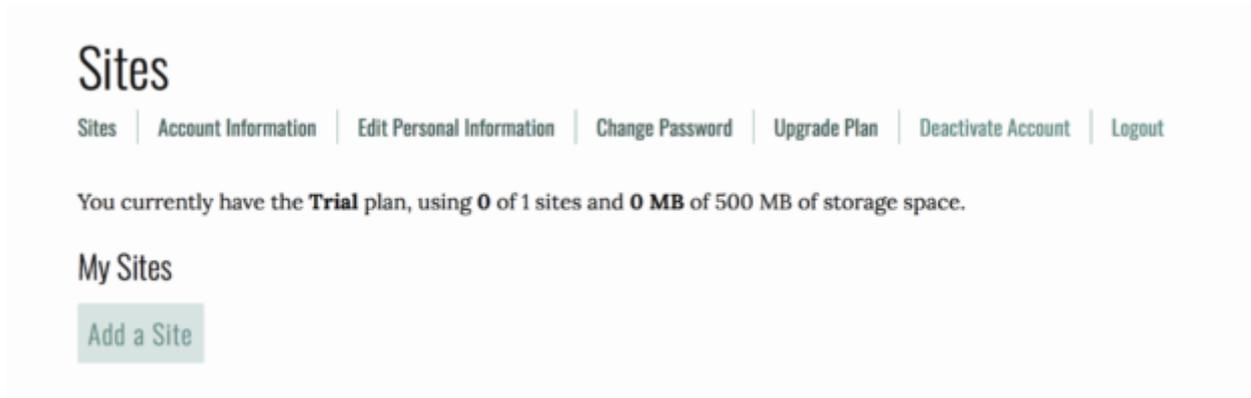
When you click the URL you should see the above screen. You are now logged in and ready to go!

Step 3 – Log In and Meet the Omeka Dashboard

Click the small button in the bottom right corner of the screen to 'Add a Site". Without a site there isn't much to see.
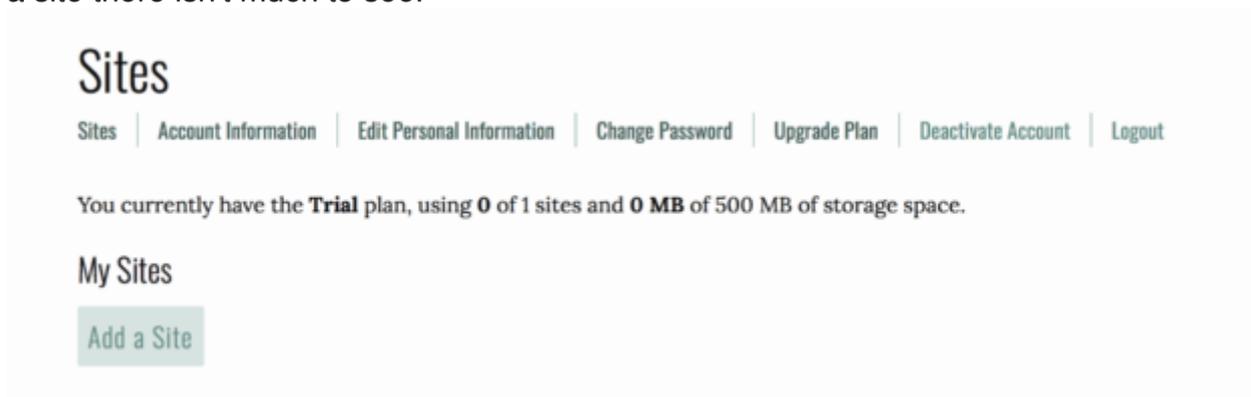
Enter a name for your Site. This one word will be used to generate a unique subdomain at omeka.net. You can now give your site a title and give it a short description. This can be changed in the future and your sole site can also be deleted if you want to use your one trial site for something else. For this tutorial enter some data that make sense to you and what we are doing today.

Click Add Your New Site. Now you have something to play with. Omeka shows you the name of your site, how much space it is using and gives you the option to: view the site as it will look to users; manage the site and also push the nuclear button and delete the site.

Let's Manage the site we have created. Click the Manage Site button and you should see a Dashboard resembling the one below:
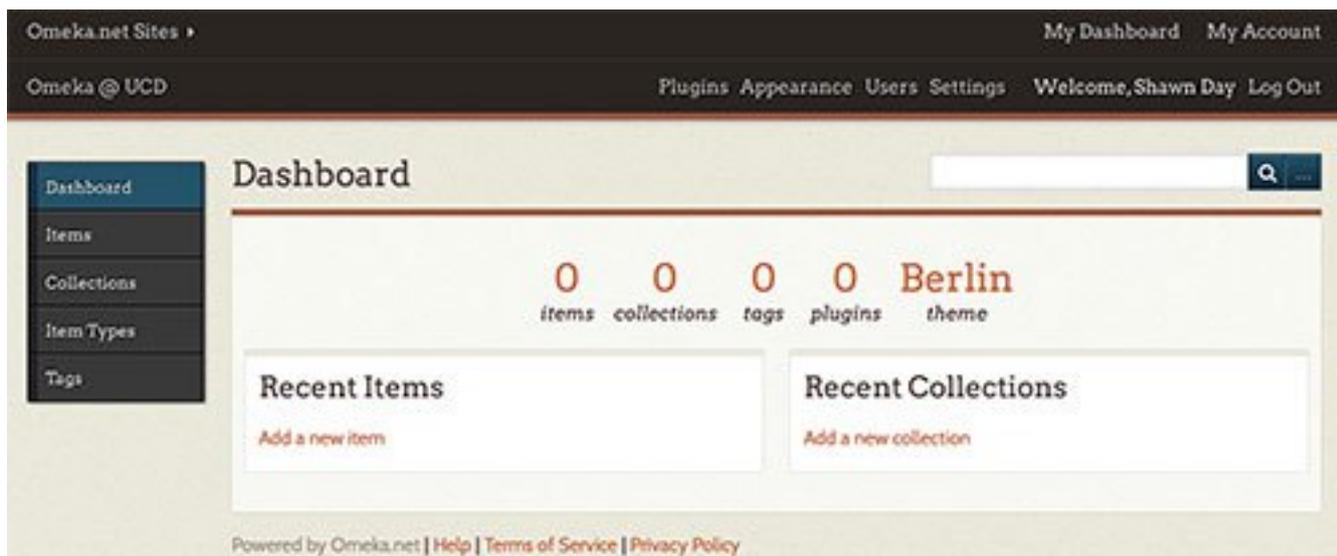
This is where we will manage our Omeka instance. The Dashboard is for administrators and Editors.

Let's see what the site looks like to users at this stage. Click the site name (in this case Omeka @ UCD) and you will see what a user sees.
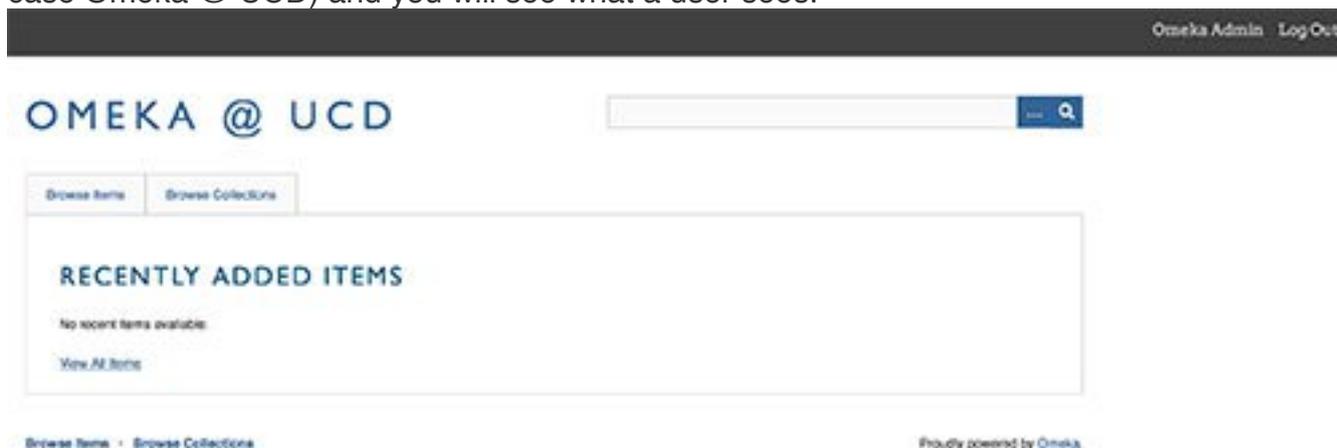

It's fresh, it's clean, it's ready to go but it's empty. So let's get started.

Step 4 – Add an Item

So. The Dashboard shows us that there is nothing to see in our Omeka instance. 0 – items, 0 – collections, 0 – tags and 0 – plugins. It's time to change that.

Omeka is designed for managing and staging items. These are digital objects and Omeka collects information from you about these objects to aid in their organisation, storage, discovery, preservation, retrieval and staging.

You can click the Items summary from your dashboard or Items from the left menu. When you do you will get a list of items currently in your Omeka.

Choose Add Item.

Omeka is configured to describe objects using Dublin Core metadata. When you add an item, Omeka provides a form to guide you through the population of the DC fields.
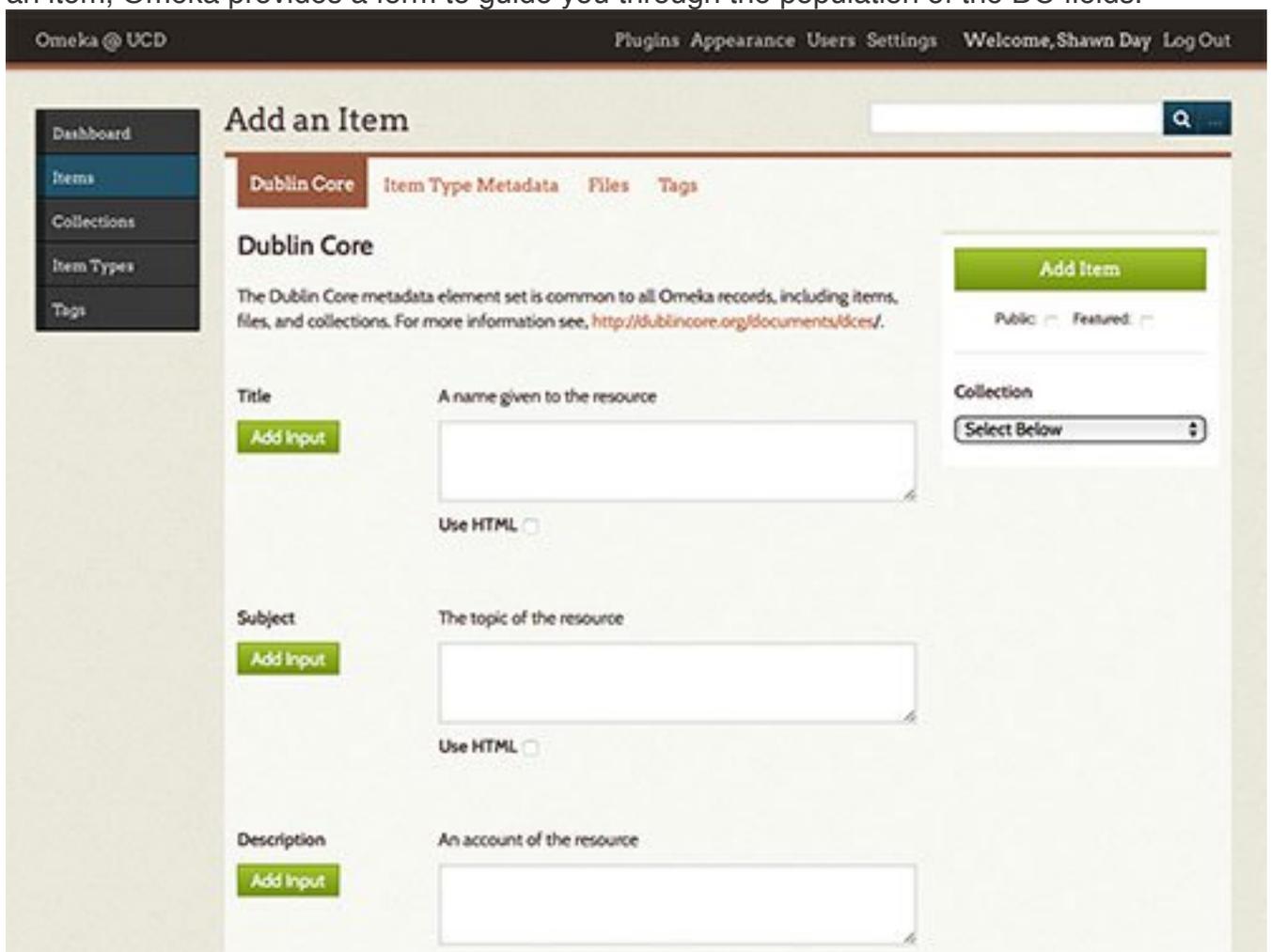

We are going to describe this photograph:

American Hotel, Guelph, 1890

This is a newspaper photograph of the American Hotel in Guelph taken in 1890. It was published in the Guelph Daily Mercury in August of that year and subsequently. It was scanned by Shawn Day and placed into the public domain under CC0.
Using this information attempt to enter useful metadata into the 15 fields of the DC screen.

Then choose the Item Type Metadata tab and choose Still Image.
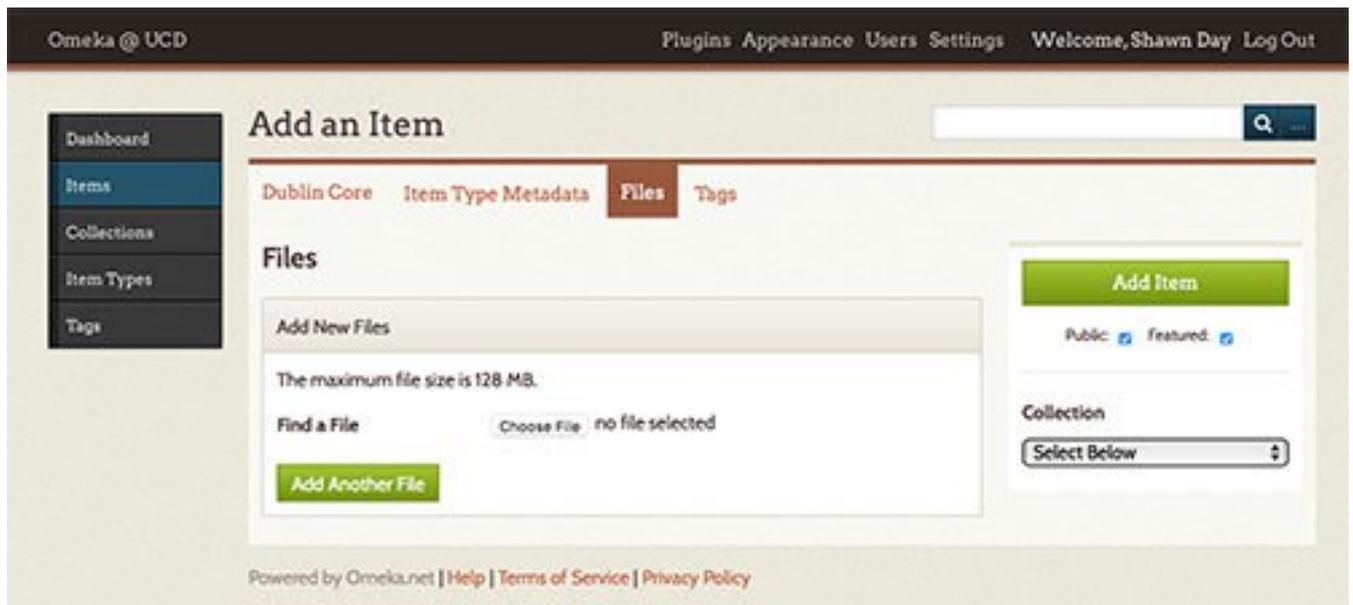
Finally, from the Files tab, choose File: **sd2001-001AmericanHotel1890.jpg** which is the representation of this photograph included in the files downloaded at the outset of this tutorial.

Finally – and most importantly Click the Add Item button to save all of this information and create your first item.

Voila:
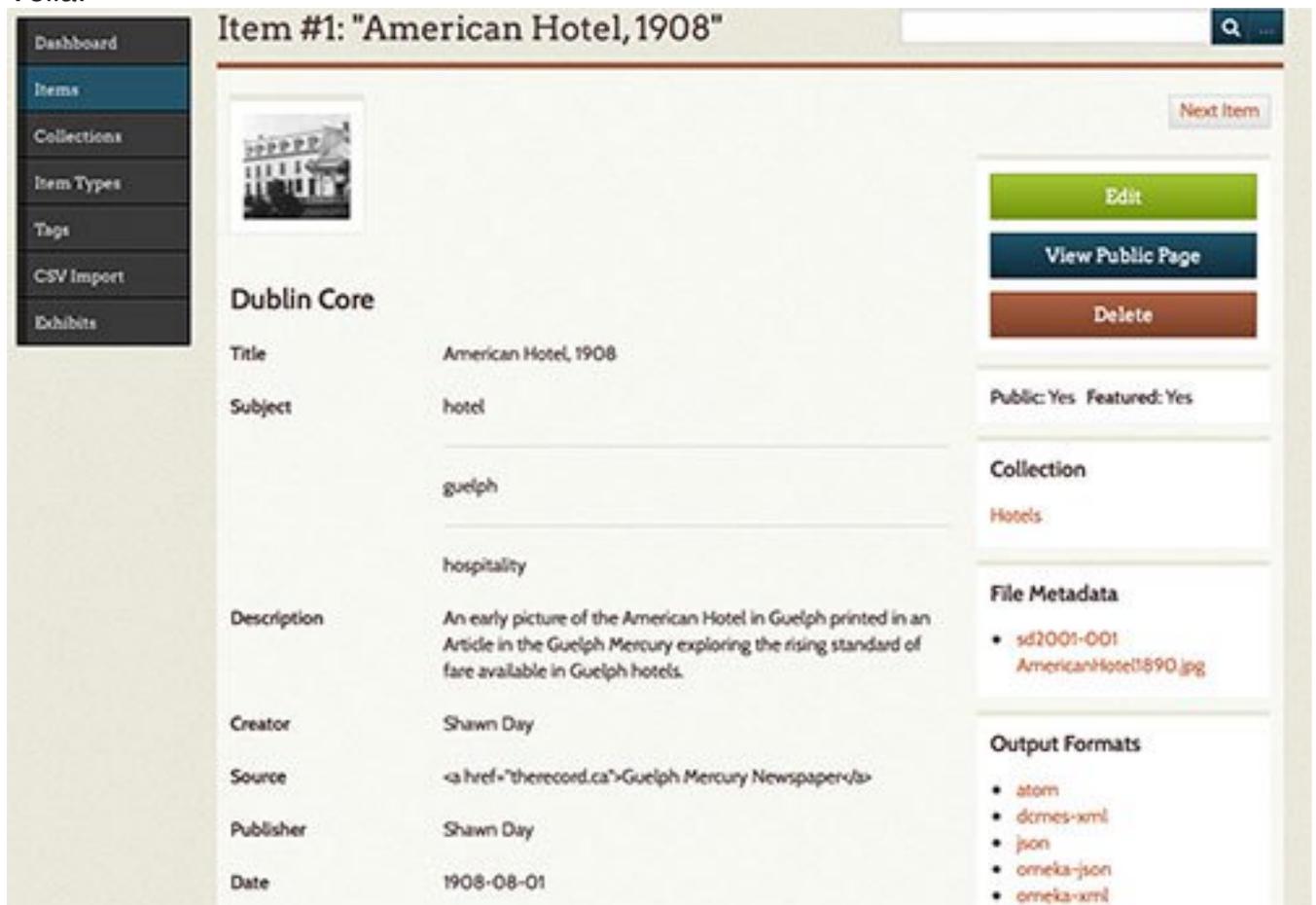
Step 5 – Create a Collection and Add Item to it
Collections of items help to organise the objects in our repository.

You will note that there is now one item in our repository. We now need a collection to add it to.

Please click on Collections in the left hand tabs/menu:

Collections are similar to items in that they are well described digital objects in their own right. Please click on 'Add a Collection' and you will see a similar screen helping you define the metadata associated with your collection. Please create a new collection 'Hotels' and fill up as many of the DC fields that you feel comfortable with. Click Save as you did with the Item and you should have a shiny new Collection:
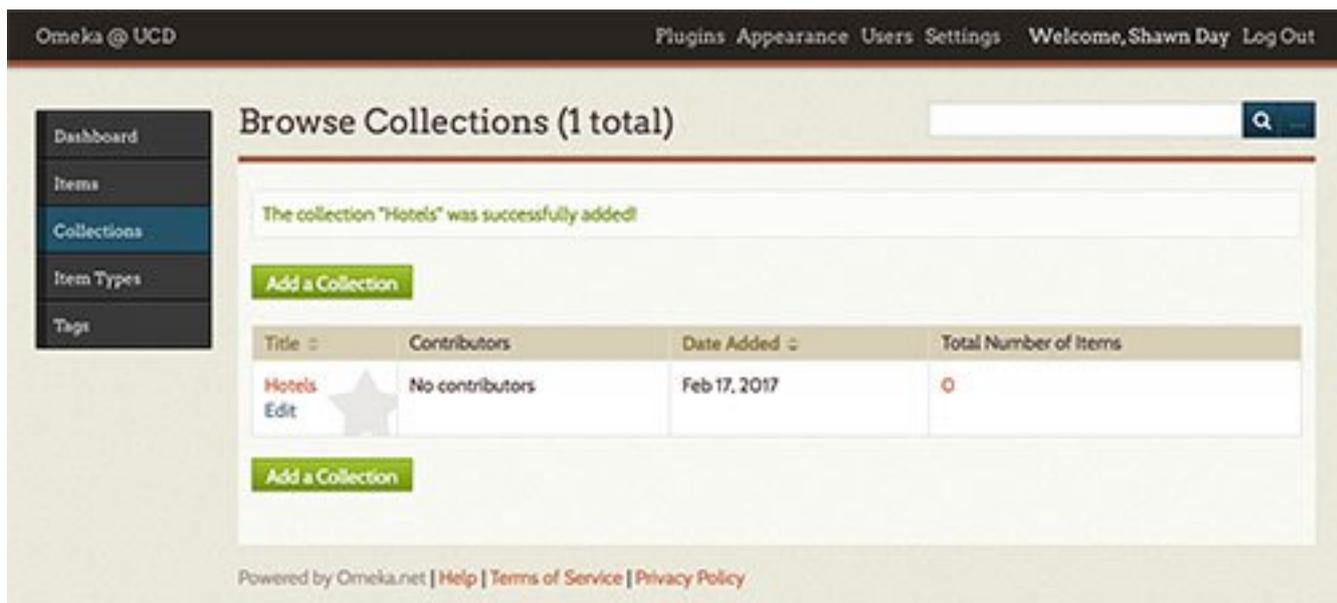
You can now add your item to the collection. Choose Items from the left hand menu and then note that you can edit the item metadata by choosing Edit below the title of the Item. When you do so you will see the drop down menu to the right which now offers Hotels as a collection option. Select it and Click Save.

Your Collection Hotels now contains one item.

Add a second collection using the same process and call it People.

This process may seem a might laborious. You may be asking yourself is there a better way? In fact, there is!

Step 6 – Add a group of *Items* to the repository

One of the files that you downloaded to your computer at the outset of the tutorial is a spreadsheet file of a list of hotels, with their associated metadata and URLs to images that accompany each of them.

Omeka has a facility for creating new items by importing a CSV file of the records. To enable this functionality we need to learn about Plug-Ins for Omeka. Plug-Ins allow additionally functionality to enabled to allow for additional tasks to be carried out by our Omeka installation.

Please Choose Plug-Ins from the top menu of Omeka.

You will be presented with a list of all available Plug-Ins. There are 15 made available to you under the free plan. There are even more available with other plans or using your own installation of Omeka.

Plugins (15 total)

COinS
Version 2.0.3 by Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media
Adds COinS metadata to item pages, making them Zotero readable.

[Install]

CSV Import
Version 2.0.4 by Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media
Imports items, tags, and files from CSV files.

[Activate] [Uninstall]

Docs Viewer
Version 2.0 by Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media
Embeds a Google document viewer into item show pages. PDF documents, PowerPoint presentations, TIFF files, and some Microsoft Word documents are supported.

[Install]

Exhibit Builder
Version 3.3.2 by Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media
Build rich exhibits using Omeka.

[Configure] [Deactivate] [Uninstall]

GoogleAnalytics
Version 1.3-2.0 by Scholars' Lab
A small plugin to include Google Analytics JavaScript code on pages.

[Install]

We want to import a CSV file containing object metadata so we need to enable the CSV Import Plugin. If it is not installed, first click install. Then click the 'Activate' button.
The only visible change you will see is an additional menu tab to the left.
When you click on this tab, you will be presented with a screen that will lead us through the process of importing.

From the directory of files you downloaded Choose File: **mcAteerPeople.csv.** This file is a collection of 8 records fully populated and linked to image files on this server. Make sure that Automat columns is selected. This will make things easier. Also select Still Image from Item Type and Add to the Collection People created earlier. Also click the box labelled Make All Items Public. Now click the **Next** Button at the foot of the screen.

You will now get an additional screen showing how records in the file will be mapped to your Dublin Core metadata schema. Take a look that all fields show a corresponding field in the Map to Element and not 'Select Below' Alas, our first one does. As you can see it is the Title Field, so choose Dublin Core Title from the drop down list.

The only other aspect we have to intervene in is to let Omeka know where our images are. In this case, the last column header is URL and contains a link to the image stored online. **Click in the box labelled "Files?'**.

Once you have completed these steps click 'Import CSV File' and if all goes to plan you will now see a status screen.

Omeka will import this file in the background. If you refresh your screen you should get a new message indicating 'Completed' and an indication of how many items were imported as well of whether any items were skipped.

Please repeat this process using the file 'mcAteerHotels.csv' and add an additional 8 records to our repository. When you are doing this make sure that you add these items to the 'Hotels' collection you created and not to the 'People' collection.

When this is completed you should have a rich repository and if you choose Items from the tabs/menu to the left you should have burgeoning list of items.

Moreover if you view your site to see what Users would see it is looking nicely populated.

Step 7 Change Appearance

We haven't customised the way users experience our Omeka repository. Let's try changing the theme.

Back at the Dashboard, Choose 'Appearance' from the top menu. Omeka will now show us the installed themes available to change the look of our site.

Choose the Seasons Theme by clicking on 'Use this Theme'. You can then further click on the button 'Configure Theme' below the chosen theme preview. When you do this you will see a variety of other options.

Appearance

Themes   Navigation   Settings

Configure Theme: Seasons

Configurations apply to this theme only.

Save Changes

Style

Style Sheet   Choose a style sheet.

Winter

Header and Footer

Logo File   Choose a logo file. This will replace the site title in the header of the theme. Recommended maximum width for the logo is 500px.

Choose File   no file selected

Footer Text   Add some text to be displayed in your theme's footer.

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Display Copyright in Footer   Check this box if you wish to display your site's copyright information in the footer.

Use Advanced Site-wide Search   Check this box if you wish to allow users to search your whole site by record (i.e. item, collection, file) and choose their boolean method.

You can make changes and then remember to '**Save Changes**'. Try altering a few parameters - such as choosing a different **style sheet**. When you have finished click to Save Changes. When you do, click on the Title of your site and you will get a new window showing how users will now see the site. Note that it has gone from a modernistic blue and white theme to a funkier (subjective??) minimalistic black and yellow theme with a different arrangement of your screen elements.
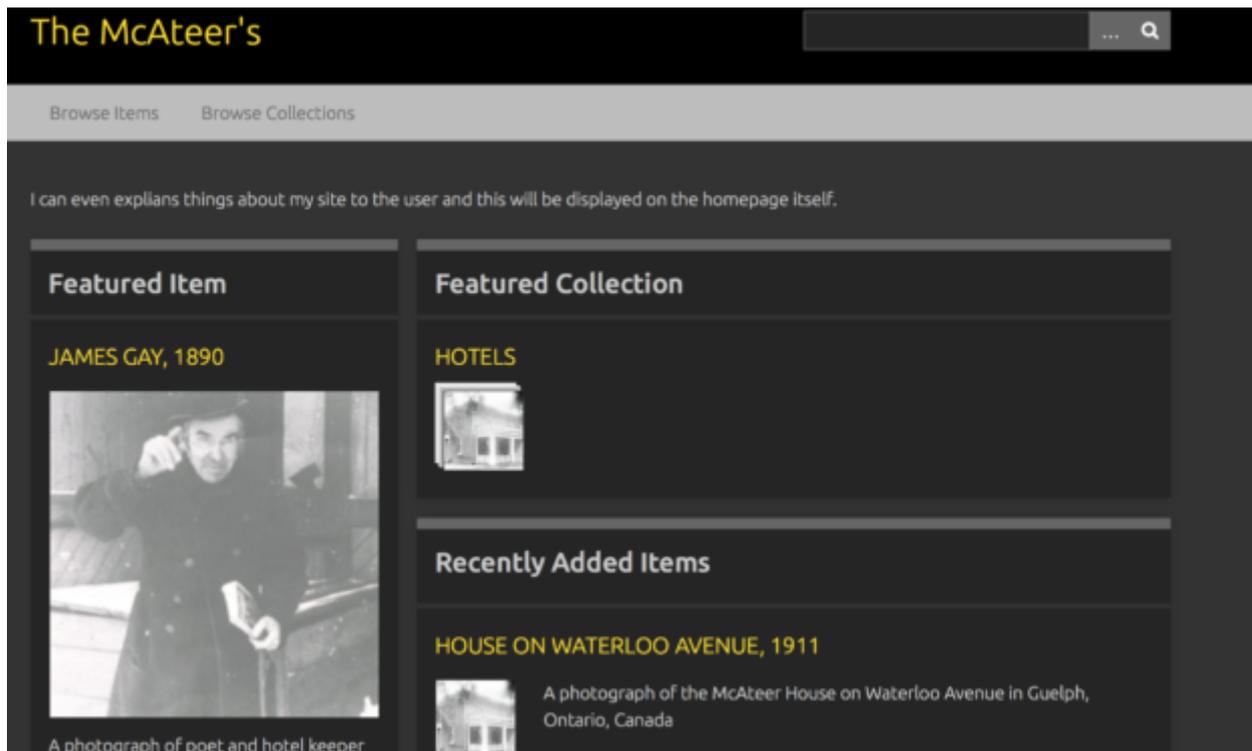
You now have a lively and engaging repository of digital objects constructed using Omeka. The subject of our next tutorial is how we can curate from this repository to create compelling Exhibits of digital objects and narrative. If you wish you can choose to proceed to this tutorial from the link below.

But wait! There's more …

If you would like to learn more about extending Omeka proceed to our second tutorial: Creating Exhibits in Omeka

Thanks.