



## Building the Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network

### FRIDAY, December 2, 2005 Facilitation Report-out Transcripts

(Please note that tables did not report out in numerical order so these reports are also not numerical order)

#### TABLE 1 (history/tourism)

We were looking at the first question in terms of how does spatial data play a role in the work that you do today, and there are a number of initiatives that are going on around neighborhood tours development. In Germantown, there are efforts looking at the 300 year history and looking at things that are happening in Germantown and how that can be used currently in programming but develop going forward. The Rosenbach Museum & Library does some literary walking tours and some other things that have neighborhood focus, including student mapping activities. So there are some opportunities to build off some tourism things that we've done and see are happening currently.

There are a number of approaches that are very interesting to people – that they would like to see incorporated into the work that would happen through the GeoHistory project, particularly making sure that the products that are developed are user-friendly for consumers and tourists, that there's regional content coming from a variety of sources – and actually there is some material currently available through some of the programming that WHYY does that maybe could be integrated into this program around arts, culture, some of the radio broadcasting, video content and so forth.

Also, having students doing a lot of the legwork for us, coming up with the idea of even creating a program where there are citizen historians (similar to what the birdwatchers of America do – they have people who count birds) – we could have people on the ground mapping history.

There need to be specific user interface developments just for tourism, for culture.

Another thing is creating a clearinghouse where work that's currently being developed can be shared and utilized. We're not really setting ourselves up for the sharing of some of the research that's being done. Take Amy Hiller's project with all her student work, for example – who's putting together a repository of that? And how is it going to be used? And so, we don't want to lose the value of that work. We need to think about that, and having systems that can support ongoing use of that work.

Another aspect is leveraging the transportation system both for tourists and also for commuters, to tap into this geohistory framework. So I guess we need to have some people from SEPTA and AMTRAK here.

Kinds of data that are available now: *Radio Times* archives, video content, even things like short spots and things that are being developed for the Lincoln Legacy; photo archives, a project that the City of Philadelphia is working on under Joan Decker; their historic structure reports. For collections institutions, one of the things we're not really looking at now but are real great opportunities is that level of collections information below the catalog description, the finding aids. Some of those have very deep, rich information that could feed into this. Some of that is already electronic.

Inventorying walking tours that can be utilized for repackaging and customized by individuals that would use the Network. Another idea that came up in terms of grassroots participation is to have a National Memory Day so that we could actually collect personal stories about communities so that those stories can be utilized over and over again.

Additional roles institutions can play: developing protocols on how to document neighborhoods, how to make things available for teachers and community groups, provide community heritage assistance, and supporting the documentation of gaps in history. We do that very well at collecting institutions in terms of our own collections where we have gaps in our collections, but now that we're going to be working in an integrated framework how do we will in the gaps for the bigger story for the whole community -- and, included in that, histories that are being obliterated as we speak today.

There should be some bringing together of archaeology and GIS. We've had a number of projects that were done in Philadelphia where extraordinary archaeology findings have been uncovered in areas that we've eventually built over; those stories that were down under the street were unique stories, including the story at the National Constitution Center site of the most intact colonial site in North America.

Other opportunities for partnerships of people who are not here today -- one of the things that is really going to be important is that we broaden it so that we have more conversation with tourism people, people who are working with ethnic groups, so there are pan-ethnic organizations in the city, there are folklore projects, the national heritage initiative going on in Philadelphia -- bringing some of those people in, people who are working on tours right now, such as the Poor Richard's Tour, the organized tour companies, bring them in as part of this to help shape the landscape.

In doing that, we also need to use the system to help us shape what we're going to do going forward. So, using GIS to track how people are using it, so we can figure out how we might need to enhance that, what things might be missing -- we need a feedback loop in all of this.

The last thing that we put down -- and it wasn't a question that we had to answer, but we thought it was important -- in this whole project, we need to have some kind of

assessment of how it's going, so it's more than just a feedback loop but really assessing if it's really working well, have some kind of research evaluation. Actually, Beth Twiss-Garrity brought that up; it's a tool that's used in the museum community when an exhibit goes up. They often have a peer review and have some other assessment happen to make sure this really accomplishes what it is proposed to accomplish and that the outcomes are good.

### **Table 2 – City/regional Planning and Real Estate**

First: the great usefulness of geohistory is that it offers these opportunities to borrow ideas from the past. I was thinking that Society Hill came together during the course of the 1960s. People all over Philadelphia, and more than just Philadelphia, were very excited to see what was happening there, because they had this glimpse of what the late eighteenth/early nineteenth century city was like. Maps from various spots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century can give us similar, although much more abstract views into the past. There are ideas there that we can borrow and recycle, as human beings have always done.

Second: the history of city planning in Philadelphia embraces Thomas Holme doing his survey work for William Penn and Edmund Bacon and his contemporaries in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century – but there's a huge 200-year gap between the two. Although there was little formal city planning going on during that period, there was planning going on. It didn't just happen by happenstance. We need to flesh out that period to a much better extent than we have. I do think that the old atlases can help us understand how the development of the city occurred during the nineteenth century.

### **Table 3 – Natural science and environmental sciences**

The group was pretty much divided between content providers and content consumers, which provided a very interesting discussion. Some of the things we talked about V. has already mentioned. A lot of people have information that they use. They tend to use it either internally for their organization or pull information from somewhere and use it internally for their information.

The thing that particularly interested people was integrating the information that they currently use and they have access to, they create, with other information that's out there and I think the idea of a clearinghouse, which wasn't something that we specifically talked about, but I think it's integral to integrating information, is really critical. The communities of interest we came up with included archaeology; our group because it's being focused on the natural environment was particularly concerned about making the information available but also making sure that some information was protected in some way. We're looking at things from emergency recovery situations and not necessarily wanting every archaeological site that's out there or every watershed that's out there to be available to whoever might want to destroy or do bad things to these resources. Some of the other groups we're looking at include K-12 groups, neighborhood people, neighborhood historians, how available mineral resources influenced development, those kind of things. One of the big things that we talked about was the things that collecting

institutions can provide: metadata and metadata about the metadata – how reliable it was, what its source is, so that people can judge how reliable the information is and how they want to use the information that you are providing, including whatever geographic information is out there.

One of the other things was student interns for data entry, so that information could be accessible to other people.

#### **Table 4/Group 5 – History and Social Sciences**

We spent some time talking to each other and trying to figure out what our interests are in this field and what we can provide – what our institutions and companies have. It appears that we're all very interested in GIS and that we can see how we can apply what we know and what we have to a system such as the GeoHistory Network; but it looks like a lot of people have a lot more data than the time and money to digitize the data and bring it to the masses.

Some examples of data sources represented at our table include: the Free Library's insurance maps, environmental maps, land use maps; in the cultural resource management industry we have archaeological data and very specific historic property-based data; Furman University's resources include lexographic indexing of historic documents and more qualitative things, which could be linked geographically to places to get more of a social environment in the GIS. The Penn Archives has land acquisition records for West Philadelphia on their campus and the Henry Howard Houston land acquisition records for northwest Philadelphia. Temple University has the amazing resource of the Urban Archives. We talked about Philadelphia University with its collection of textile references, trade documents, and asbestos records.

What we need to make some of these data sources available: mainly, we need a GIS infrastructure that will allow us to take large sources of data, once digitized, and get them in a centralized place. We also need tools for data visualization – as an example, we talked about 3D representations of data and how the technology has advanced to the point where it's no longer a black-box voodoo science.

#### **Table 10 -- History**

We looked at, from the museum standpoint, what are the people who come into museums looking for that would be a GIS base. A lot of questions that museums, archives, and libraries often get are sometimes GIS-related questions. People love seeing historical maps layered over time – “where's my house? Where is it located? What did it look like 100 years ago?” There are a lot of possibilities for GIS to be helping to serve the museum visitor.

The other thing we discovered from academia is that we have people who are collecting data who are discovering that having some kind of a GIS focus will help them get a handle on their data. They almost have to create a GIS interface in order to figure out

how to get all this information together and how to conceptualize it. We had specific things in here, as well. We looked at some of the data currently available, such as PM HC having all the National Register properties in some sort of a GIS database; the Delaware State Historic Preservation Office has something very similar. We're using these applications right now; we're looking at trying to continue to support those types of applications.

One of the things that really interested us to begin with was the Boston Streets Project, which is a very detailed mapping project which is available at the Tufts University site. This can be a sort of genesis for the Philadelphia project as well.

Specific data that might be available at various holdings that could help: at the Atwater Kent, there are a lot of the lithographs, 20 or 25, maybe more, of the Wainwrights that aren't at The Library Company or at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. We discussed the fact that the entire project can become a massive union catalog in which you don't have to go to different institutions to find collections which have been broken up among various institutions, so that when you get to these institutions you have to deal with different policies, different personnel, and sometimes you don't get everything. This way, we can re-unify collections that had been creative.

At the National Archives, we have a lot of things which might be available. One thing which I brought out is the lighthouse drawings. We do have maps of lighthouse all throughout the country, but at NARA we have architectural plans for a lot of the lighthouses. Again, it's something that could be layered down.

The major thing we looked at is this: what role can collecting institutions play in the process? It is to help coordinate the various collections, creating this union list and linking collections together to help the researcher. A lot of times, the researcher only finds things by accident: they know about something, they research a topic extensively in one research facility, but they don't realize that there's something that connects to it – that's actually that last little piece that puts everything together, that's somehow stuck in a second institution or a third institution. This project is again helping to coordinate and to link together the various institutions in the Philadelphia area.

Finally, one thing that we asked as a possibility for something going forward is for all the public institutions to take a survey, compile a list of questions that the public asks them over the course of a week, and just see how do they have geographic parameters and spatial parameters – and focus our attention on addressing the needs of the geohistory project.

## **Table 9 – History**

A lot of the things that we discussed have been covered in great detail, and so I'll try to focus on a few of the things that are a little bit less repetitive. One of those was – talking about users helping people build their sense of place – Anne Knowles suggested the Newberry Library of Chicago as a place that has developed a local history interfaces and

could be an important model for that sort of thing. Another thing that we stressed was the need for cooperative projects and to consider the value and the educational experiences that entry-level participants in the pilot projects might get, whether they're in graduate school, undergraduate school, elementary or high school and so on. On a related note, we talked about using the GeoHistory network in some of the ways that Amy Hillier discussed – enriching the curriculum of Philadelphia public and private schools. That's a really important contribution that we can make. One thing that we discussed that V and the environmental folks noted was that another way of approaching this question of what should be in here is by thinking about the user groups and the burning research questions that they might have. I think the future of urban history is very much an environmental history, so lots of the things the environmental group mentioned are vital to overlay with the buildings and streets and built environment data that we're already building into this network. Infrastructure things like parks could really add to that.

One of the things that we talked about was the idea that the GeoHistory Network could serve as a clearinghouse for a lot of these smaller and more focused projects that are already being done. Another thing was what should and should not be included or excluded, and who will make that decision. On the one hand, PACSCL institutions know what's in their collections and know what they would like to contribute. On the other hand, if we just allow people to contribute whatever they want we may wind up with a network that has no rhyme or reason to it. Finally, the topic came out earlier about some groups having information but not wanting to display all of it. So maybe some focus needs to be put on ways to allow them to display only part of their data to allow the maximum amount of participation in the project.

Here are some examples of burning questions for historical research. Forgive me if these projects are already underway: A racial and ethnic geography of the city over time in relation to industry, the development of labor, and particularly in relation to health: a historic epidemiology of Philadelphia would be absolutely fascinating. A historical geography of Philadelphia's economic and cultural rise and I'll let you fill in the blank in relation to other cities. It makes sense that you are focusing on Philadelphia, but what makes Philadelphia particularly interesting to the rest of the country is how it relates to other places. So what if you could create a platform for comparison between Philadelphia and New York? I would love to see that. An animation of land use change and urban growth. Think of the lovely little series of maps that the folks in Boston have done, showing how landfill transformed the shape of Boston over time. Doing that in Philadelphia would be equally interesting. A historical GIS of the Civil War. Somebody will do that someday; since you folks already have a consortium working on the Civil War, what if you started looking at "in and out of Philadelphia: the flows of supplies and people, the impact of labor loss and shifts of labor onto women and children; the impact of mortality on the home front – were certain neighborhoods suffering more loss of menfolk than others; donation of funds to the war; and the growth of war-generated wealth in industries like the iron industry. And lastly, how about a historical atlas of Philadelphia?

## **Table 8 – Demographics**

We were grouped together by the issue of demographics, but who was at the table was largely people from the Census Bureau, people from the National Archives. You can see what kind of data and what its geographical relevance might be. We also had some researchers, users of GIS data, at our table. The geographic perspective that we brought was largely based on the census – the historical census records wind up in the National Archives. The census also performs contract survey research based on the same census districts and tracts for other federal agencies. So federal agencies are using that kind of geographical data to do their own research on things like purchasing consumer behavior and that kind of information. So that kind of data is being generated in other federal agencies, and I hope that it's coming to the National Archives. There's all kinds of interesting stuff, but because of privacy issues it's probably not going to be publicly available for quite some time.

We also have someone from the Chemical Heritage Foundation who is particularly interested in pedagogy and using the strengths of GIS to really make information pop out and capture people's interest when they are learning about a subject.

The kinds of data that we talked about were census, church records, watershed, other physical data, business and personal records, immigration and settlement information, photographs, census narrative – these were the kinds of data in our collections. Our friends in the Census Bureau were talking again about the importance of the stability of administrative units over time, and making sure that researchers understand when it's easy and when it's hard to roll up smaller administrative units into larger ones or to trace the same unit over time, and that that's a major role that collecting institutions can play – in helping make that data more usable.

Some of the GIS approaches that we were interested in were environmental research. Because we were at the demographics table there were a lot of interesting research topics that people were talking about wanting to do, like overlaying environmental data on health data, racial data, economic data for populations. There is a ton of really interesting research there to be done overlaying those layers on top of each other, tracking disease again, using the visuals of GIS to really make history come alive for people.

One really interesting use of GIS, I thought, was in the tracking of individual migration patterns over time. We talked about this a little bit in the context of genealogy but also in movements of populations – for example, the Acadians coming from Canada, a group settled in Philadelphia, and many ended up in New Orleans, and so you could do a fabulous population study of migration patterns over time. Additionally, our Chemical Heritage Foundation member was particularly interested in intellectual lineages or intellectual genealogies – so if you have a chemistry researcher learning their discipline in the lab of another researcher, you could actually geographically place the lab and watch the distribution of graduate students from those labs, founding other labs, and you could trace the intellectual patterns of influence. Again, the privacy issue came up for us.

Additional roles for collecting institutions – really the focus of energy in this conversation for this question was not about supplying our information into GIS systems but about preserving the GIS systems over time. Whose responsibility is it, how do researchers find out who will take their data when they're done with it so that it can be reused by other institutions? In organizations that have both a library and an archives, is the library or the archives responsible for keeping the data? All these kinds of things remain to be worked out, ensuring continuity of access.

Publicity is the idea, again, of making sure that researchers who are generating this stuff know where they can store it when they're done with it to make it available to other researchers. And the communities we believe would be interested in this kind of information are almost everybody. I'm not sure there's anything new in here that any other tables haven't already talked about.

### **Table 7 – Architecture/landscape**

In terms of the GIS approaches that the architecture table thought were most significant, one was the desire to see a growth of Philadelphia over time and I think we've heard that before in terms of a historical atlas of the city. We were particularly impressed with the overlaying possibilities of both the photographs and the maps on something that's universally available, such as Google Earth. We had talked about Digital Sanborn maps that are available through subscription, and here's a question that we can throw out to the entire crowd: the person at our table indicated that they are only available in black and white. Does anybody know if the Digital Sanborns are available in color?

In terms of other things they'd like to see – a depth of research in terms of the city directories and further insurance surveys. Everyone agrees that we need to make whatever we do with a GeoHistory network as free as possible and we understand the need to actually produce something, but at the very root of it I think we're all agreed, certainly at this table, that it should be as freely available as possible.

All of the folks at the table were very willing to contribute data and services to the project. A database of 1500 church buildings from the Partners for Sacred Places; the photographs and prints from The Library Company of Philadelphia; the Civil War database as well as the material available in the National Register and HABS/HAL databases from the National Park Service.. In terms of prioritizing, we're looking at establishing standards for data entry and for what Lex had talked about being a gazetteer or a standard taxonomy of the terms and the uses that we have in the database.

### **Table 6 – History and Social Sciences**

Most everything we have has been said already. Our people do use geography in institutional and membership histories – we have someone here who's very involved with one of the cemeteries and he sees this as vital to that, both in terms of what he's doing now and what he can do. History is time and space, so of course this offers the space aspect of it and, done well, can work with time as well. It gives us a chance to visualize



the space over time. We recognize geographic factors in the research we do in neighborhoods. We had somebody who worked on the *Workshop of the World* publication of industrial Philadelphia, and that's also going to be data that perhaps we can use – which was Question 2. It offers us an opportunity to identify patterns of development over time. We talked extensively about a Civil War geohistory tour as well. We can also use it to study population migration and occupational fits.

How do we incorporate geography in the data that we collect? We have someone who was using it extensively as part of a mapping system and using it to group like resources. Something that we talked about that nobody else has mentioned was using geohistory as a way to spatially consider history in ways that are outside of lines, points, and polygons. I'm not exactly sure if that translates well, but it's something that we thought was interesting, particularly in terms of networks of social relationships, that sort of thing.

GIS approaches, what kind of data can we provide? We were fortunate here in that we have the City of Philadelphia – the City of Philadelphia Archives can provide a great deal. We also have membership information from the Union League; we have information on Quakers from the Haverford Library, that sort of thing – so there are abundant opportunities for that.

Additional roles: we were particularly interested in the role in cataloging. We want to be able to find this information in the future, whether it's a sort of a large NUCMUC, which I think has been brought up at other points as well. I think if we were to rank the community's interest in this, that would be the #1 thing that we would like to see.

## **Table 6 – Social Sciences**

One of the things mentioned: a lot of the institutions that have data here are very small and take great care in their collections – collections of data that could otherwise get lost in the vast mess that is the Internet. One of the things collecting institutions can add to this is warmth – to make these things that otherwise are just numbers and boxes have depth, have interest, have background, have interpretation, and have a history. There was some mention of doing metadata videos describing a collection that goes along with a collection, or oral histories or background, just to give some meaning to what could get lost.

## **Conclusion – David Moltke-Hansen**

As I was listening around the room, I was struck by a couple of things: those who took their focus, environment or tourism or what have you, defining their engagement and those who were thinking about the project, the GeoHistory Network primarily, and there I saw lots of open mouths rising out of the nest on the one hand and circling birds with prey in their mouths coming back to the nest on the other. We're all of us at once in the nest, mouths open, looking up, and in the sky, ready to bring nourishment to those below. The trick is to go from that kind of system to a more elaborate and ongoing, market-regulated system with the whole range from the wholesalers to the retailers on the supply

side and serving niche markets and general markets on the demand side. We have more opportunity tomorrow to explore some of these questions, the technical challenges of doing all of this, and to think further about what we want not just the GeoHistory Network to look like but what we want to do going forward to carry what is extraordinary intellectual excitement that we've heard today. I don't know about the rest of you, but I'm exhausted by my enthusiasm. It's been really a quite wonderful feast, and this bird is going to go home to close his beak for a little while. Thank you very much for being here today and giving as much as you have in these discussions, and thanks especially to our panelists for their presentations earlier. We look forward to seeing you tomorrow, when we once again will have the opportunity to say thank you to the Chemical Heritage Foundation for being a splendid host and to ESRI for being sponsors. We'll look forward to seeing you tomorrow.

**Observation from Mark Lecher, ESRI** [beginning inaudible] ... Basically, what you are talking about with data clearinghouses – you can think of that as data portals and a lot of that is already being developed now, and the GeoHistory Network could be one for history in the area. In the aspect of a central nervous system, all these portals are interconnected, so the data is being updated, consumers and users are consuming data from all these portals, using it and making decisions. You guys who are making your own data are putting them up and everything is interacting together. A lot of that basis is already in place at PASDA. They have web services; they have data that's free; Maurie Kelly, who is here from PASDA, already made an offer to host some people's data.

Two other short points. Talking about “workerbees,” there's a project in Pittsburgh – Pittsburgh had a problem addressing their street centerlines and accurately knowing where all their students are. So they had a project with the school system where students would take paper maps out to their neighborhoods and write down addresses. That data was brought back and older students input that data into their system. Pittsburgh grew their road center line data with their students. It's a really good learning experience for their students, and something that could work here. The last point, there are many GIS professionals within Pennsylvania. We get together once a year in May, in Harrisburg, for a conference. Some of you might be interested in going to the PAGIS conference. I can provide a weblink tomorrow in my presentation.

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