Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Project

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Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Project

- Regional initiative
- Improves access to information on the built environment
- Web-based
- Image-rich

Basic Components

- Building Information Database
- Architect Biographies
- Digital Image Library
- The Future – Geographic Information Layer

Access vs. Preservation

- Preservation is not the top priority – Access is most important goal
- Focus first on rich, existing data sources
- Images are scanned to increase accessibility of archives – preservation is a side benefit
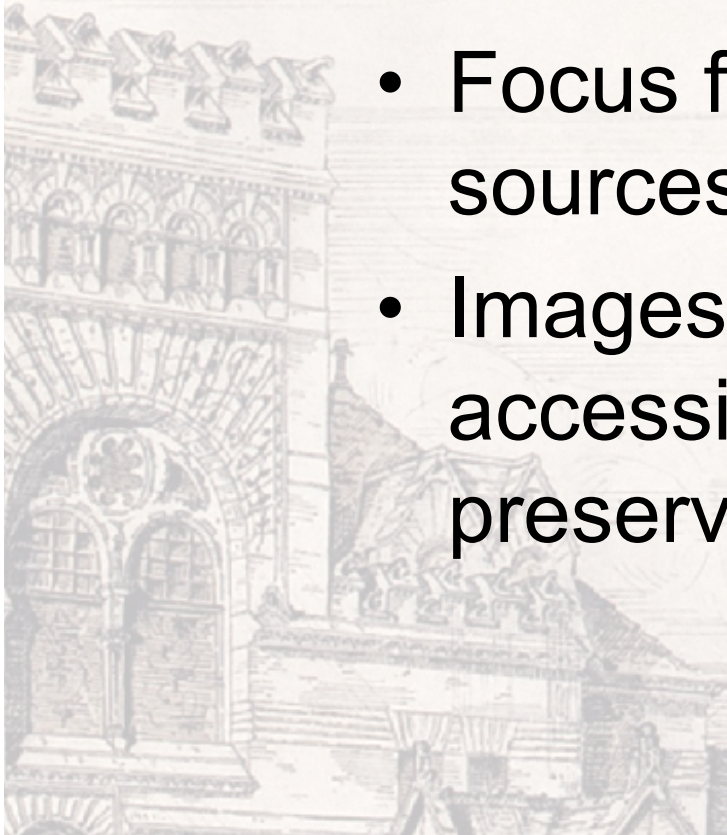
Sources of Data

- **Architectural Archives**
  - MARC Records
  - Electronic Finding Aids
- **Private Collections**
  - Insurance Policies and Surveys
  - Building Owner Drawings and Photographs
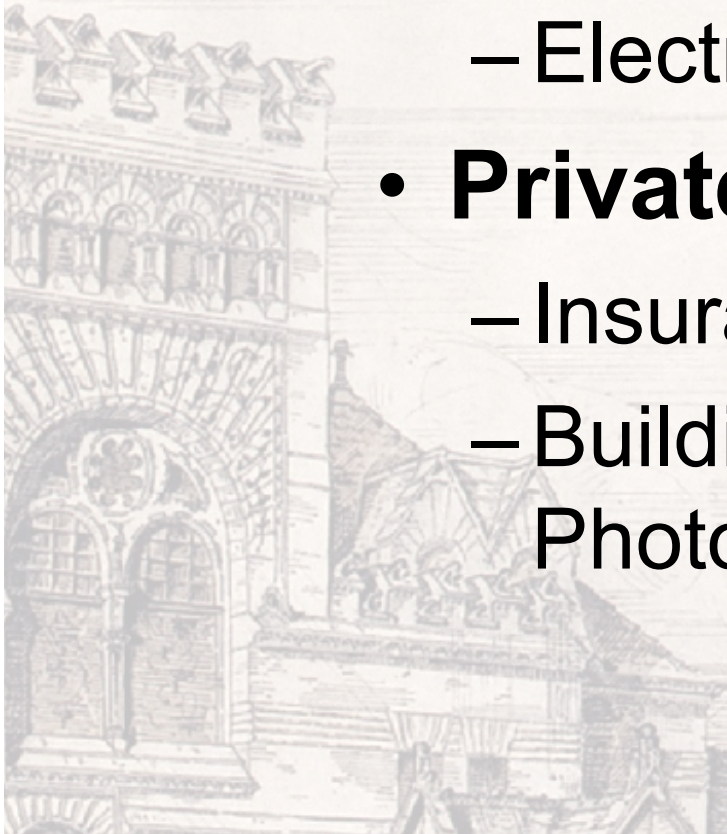
Sources of Data (cont'd)

- **Historic Building Registries**
  - National Register of Historic Places
  - Pennsylvania Cultural Resources Database
  - Philadelphia Register of Historic Places
- **Building Surveys**
  - Historic American Building Survey (HABS) / Historic American Engineering Survey (HAER)
  - Census of Stained Glass Windows
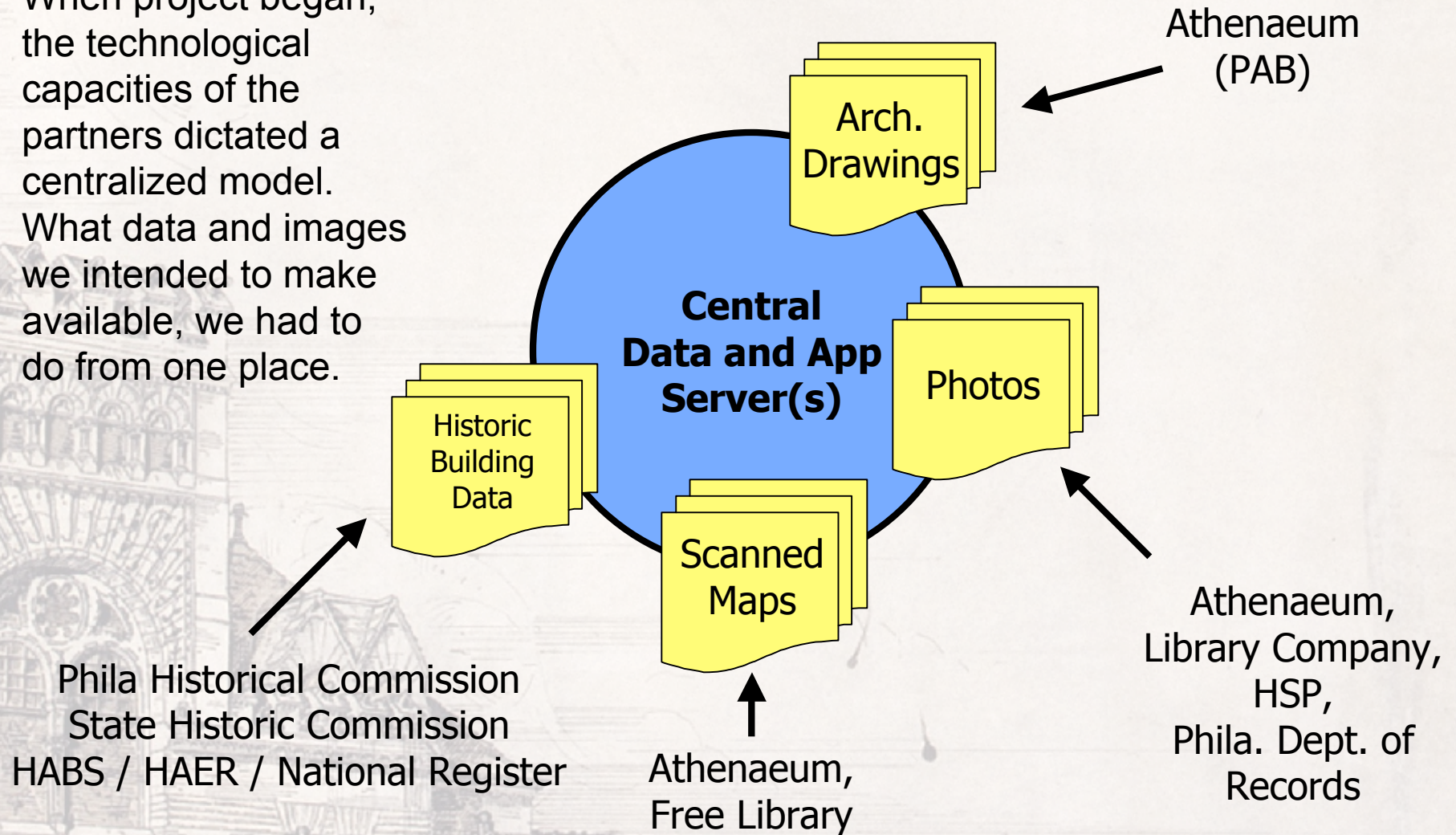
Challenges of Using Extant Data Sources

- Data accuracy and timeliness questionable
  - particularly true for governmental information on historic resources in the United States
- Information from other sources needs to be matched up with PAB records, almost always by hand
- Difficulty updating imported data without reintroducing previous errors
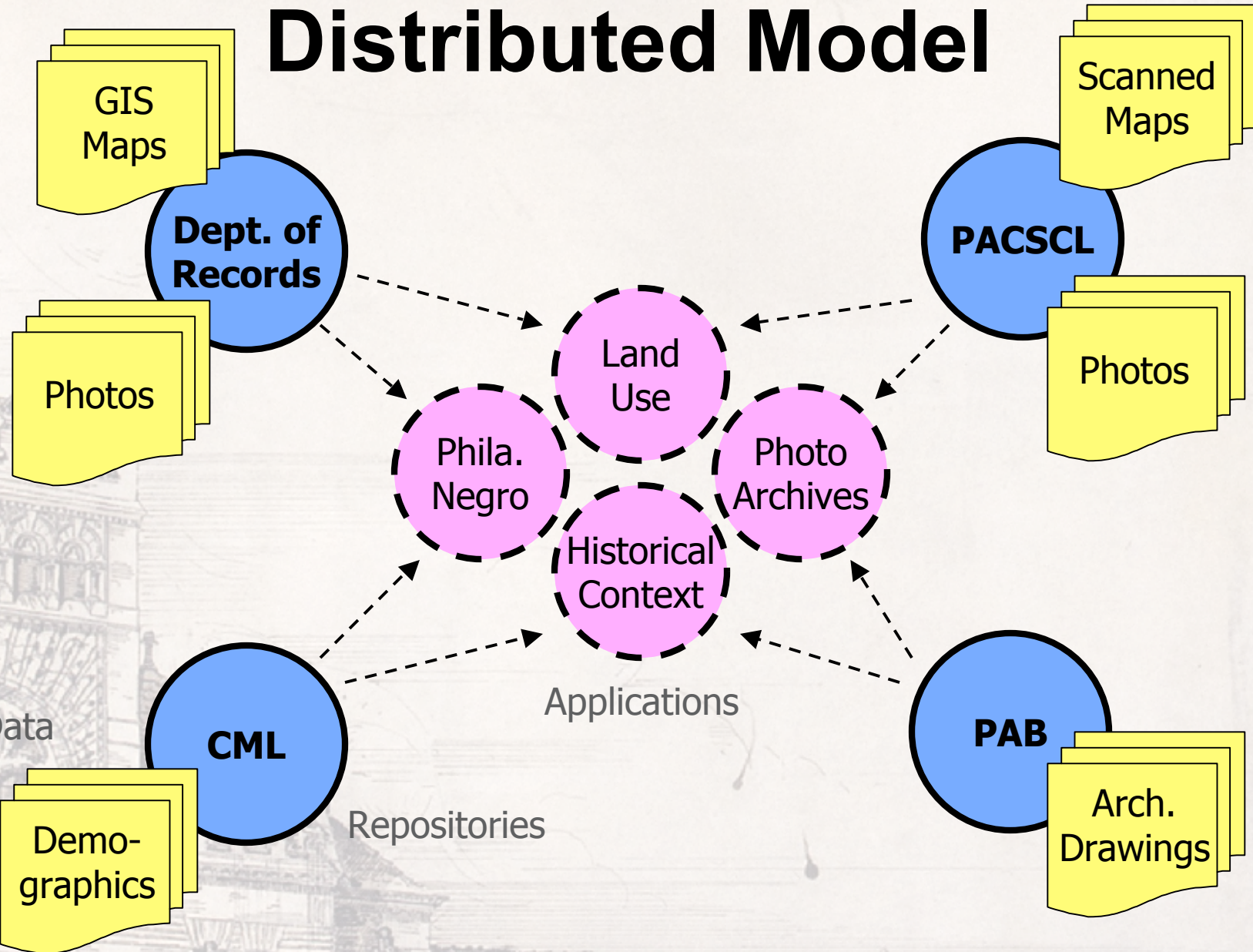
Pragmatics 101: Metadata

- Gathered data in very different formats, considering different information
- Necessary structure for building history not provided by any developed metadata standard
- Metadata inspired by
  - Existing legacy datasets
  - Standards: Dublin Core, MARC
  - Primarily *access* needs

Centralized Model

When project began, the technological capacities of the partners dictated a centralized model. What data and images we intended to make available, we had to do from one place.

Central Data and App Server(s)

Arch. Drawings

Athenaeum (PAB)

Photos

Historic Building Data

Scanned Maps

Phila Historical Commission
State Historic Commission
HABS / HAER / National Register

Athenaeum,
Free Library

Athenaeum,
Library Company,
HSP,
Phila. Dept. of
Records
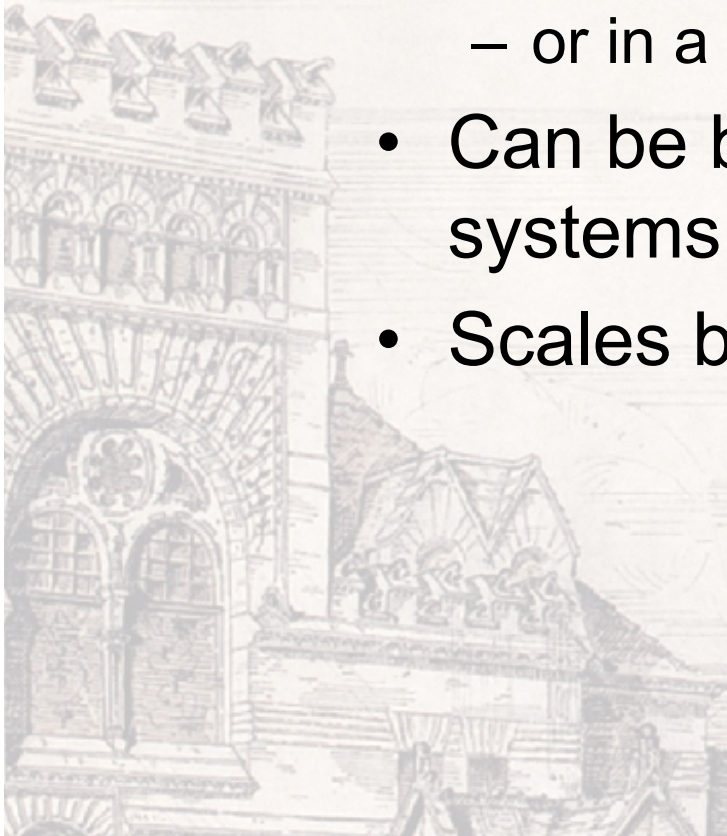
Distributed Model

- Data stored by each institution (or small group of institutions)
  - or in a distributed set of centralized systems
- Can be built using existing systems, or systems designed for other purposes
- Scales by institution

Challenges

- Metadata Standards – Dublin Core?
- Geospatial and Temporal Metadata
  - Map extents, feature points
  - Date and time, both instant and spanned
- Precision, Specificity, and Uncertainty
  - "702 Chestnut St." vs. "7th & Chestnut" vs. "Chestnut St." vs. "Philadelphia"
  - "1902" vs. "c. 1900" vs. "Early 20th Century"

Challenges (cont'd)

- Aggregation / Correlation / Change
  - Changing place names, boundaries, addresses, and uncertain correlations (city directories)
  - Re-aggregating data sets (e.g., census data) to provide useful comparisons over time

- User Interface
  - Providing useful interaction both to experience GIS experts, but also to scholars and hobbyists, and even tourists.

GeoHistory Next Steps

- Technology Infrastructure Devel.
  - Conceptual foundation, model
  - Time-enable geographic tools
  - Geo-temporal metadata tools
- Data Development
- Training, Evangelism, Support

Sustainability

- Three main sources:
  - Grant funding
    - Data/image expansion
    - Congruent projects
  - Subscriptions and reproductions
    - System maintenance, hardware,
    - Internal collections processing
  - Digitization services

Digitization Services

- Regional Digital Imaging Center
  - Digitization of large format and delicate items
  - Outsourced options for online content delivery
- "Relevant content" projects
  - Synergy provides savings to client institution and grows PAB

Conclusion

- Content
- Metadata and Interoperability
- Sustainability

www.PhiladelphiaBuildings.org

www.PhilaGeoHistory.org