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
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.
Distributed Model

Dept. of Records
- GIS Maps
- Photos

PACSCL
- Scanned Maps
- Photos

CML
- Data
- Demographics

PAB
- Arch. Drawings

Repositories
- Land Use
- Historical Context
- Photo Archives
- Phila. Negro

Applications
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
  - “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.PhilaGeoHistory.org