Historic Pittsburgh Website

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Since its inception in 1999, the **Historic Pittsburgh** website (http://digital.library.pitt.edu/pittsburgh/) has grown to become a mature and popular online resource serving the western Pennsylvania scholarly and research community as well as displaced Pittsburghers around the world. It is a comprehensive, virtual collection of local resources that supports inquiries into the history of the city and western Pennsylvania region from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries.

This collaborative project enables access to historic material held by the University of Pittsburgh's Archives Service Center, the Library & Archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania at the Heinz History Center, and the Carnegie Museum of Art. Created by the Digital Research Library (DRL) at the University of Pittsburgh, the website serves as a model of cooperation between libraries and museums in providing online access to their respective materials.

Initiated as a test-bed project by the newly formed DRL in 1998, the website began full-scale production in 1999 to include rich textual and cartographic resources as well as encoded finding aids that describe locally held archival collections. The Henry Hillman Library Endowment within the University Library System provided the majority of the initial funding to support this project. A federal grant from the Institute of Museum & Library Services funded the addition of the Image Collections component in 2004.

The website presently contains digitized books, maps, and photographs as well as encoded finding aids, census data, a chronology, and library catalog. To serve this array of content on the website, the DRL implements a combination of homegrown databases and a suite of digital library tools, known as DLXS, developed by the University of Michigan's Digital Library Production Service.

Full-Text Collection

Historic Pittsburgh enables access to over 500 books that can be searched by keyword or bibliographic information including author, title and subject. The texts cover the growth and development of Pittsburgh and the surrounding Western Pennsylvania area from the period of exploration and settlement to the period of industrial revolution and modernization. Most of the full-text materials were published or produced before the early 1920s and are out of copyright. Others are from the late 1920s through the early 1960s whose copyrights were not renewed, and therefore, are in the public domain. In a few cases, permissions were obtained from the publisher.

The full-text collection contains biographies, general histories and historical overviews

(political, social, industrial, etc.) as well as primary source material (e.g., first hand accounts, city bureau reports); resources on the steel industry and its role in the industrial revolution; substantial genealogical resources and other sources giving names of people, and their families' histories (e.g. where families originated such as England, Ireland, Germany or Scotland), and; folktales and caricatures of famous Pittsburghers.

Maps Collection

Historic Pittsburgh includes access to over 1,100 maps (26 volumes) drawn by the G. M. Hopkins Company that depict the changing urban landscape of Pittsburgh and parts of Allegheny County from 1872 to 1939. Griffith M. Hopkins and his brother, Henry W. Hopkins, founded their own publishing house in Philadelphia in 1865. In the early years, they were involved in county atlas production, but gradually they focused on city plans and atlases. Overall, they produced more than 175 atlases of counties and cities in New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

The maps show extremely detailed information such as: ownership of particular lots, the building footprints and construction material, the width of streets, where sewage lines ended (at the river's edge which might explain prevalence of typhoid as late as 1907); location of government buildings, factories, churches, cemeteries, schools, lakes, ponds, and other major infrastructure landmarks. The DRL meticulously gathered data from the maps to enable their searchability by street name, building name, and building type (e.g., church, industry, school, etc.). Users can specify a viewing resolution and can utilize zoom and panning features to examine the online maps.

The website also enables access to the 1914 Warrantee Atlas of Allegheny County. The atlas depicts the original land grants that settlers of present-day Allegheny County received from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania after William Penn and his descendants vested the land to the legislature. The atlas includes the name of the individual who received the grant, the date the land was warranted and surveyed, property dimensions, patent information, and sometimes the name the property was given by the title owner.

Image Collections

Historic Pittsburgh provides access to over 8,000 visual images of the Pittsburgh area culled from dozens of photographic collections held by partner repositories. The wide range of photographs offer a compelling and comprehensive look at how Pittsburghers lived and worked in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The images reflect the cultural, educational, and social development of the greater Pittsburgh region, as well as its urban structures and regional landscapes between the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. Within this timeframe, the images portray Pittsburgh's diverse workforce and ethnic communities and neighborhoods, the iron, coke and steel industries and related manufacturing facilities, public schools and family activities, and civic renaissance efforts.

While the image collections are searchable by keyword as a group or selectively, the web site features innovative avenues for exploring the images by theme, location, and time period. The rich subject headings the project team had diligently created were mined to identify a series of stories that could be developed as pathways into the collection. Thus visitors to the site can view images that reflect where Pittsburghers worked, how they entertained themselves, and where and how they lived. Moreover, the images can be viewed geographically by neighborhood or by time period, such as the Gilded Age, the Great Depression, and World War II.

Guides to Archival Collections (Finding Aids)

Historic Pittsburgh offers access to over 700 finding aids that describe archival collections maintained by the University of Pittsburgh's Archives Service Center and the Library & Archives at the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania at the Heinz History Center. The EAD encoded finding aids provide information about the history and significance of the collections, the types of materials in the collections, and information about use and availability of the collections. The archival collections contain manuscripts, photographs, maps, atlases, newspapers, film, recordings, and memorabilia. They comprise personal and family papers, organization records (hospitals, schools, universities, churches, synagogues, etc.), and records of business and industry.

Census Schedules

Historic Pittsburgh allows users to search the U.S. Census schedules for the City of Pittsburgh (1850-1880) and for Allegheny City (1850-1870). These data were given to the DRL by a history professor at the University of Pittsburgh, who gathered the information for a department project over twenty years ago. The DRL imported the electronic files into a database and made them searchable online.

Chronology

Historic Pittsburgh features access to an online chronology of Pittsburgh taken from the fifth edition (1999) of Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City by Stefan Lorant, a renowned photojournalism pioneer and author. With over 3,200 entries covering the years 1717-2004, the online chronology can be browsed by decade and year, or searched by keyword and date. It is updated annually by the Library & Archives at the Heinz History Center. The chronology homepage includes a dynamically-generated On This Day in Pittsburgh History feature drawn from database entries.

Online Library Catalog

Historic Pittsburgh enables access to the catalog of records held by the Library & Archives of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania (HSWP) at the Heinz History Center.

For Teachers: Suggested Classroom Applications

Historic Pittsburgh can offer both an entry point and substantive classroom resource for teachers of American History at various grade and university levels. The website includes several examples in which Historic Pittsburgh's digital resources could be brought together so as to stimulate student interest and promote more involved learning.

Users and Use of the Website

Surveys conducted over the years have indicated that the website attracts a wide range of users. Not surprisingly, survey respondents most often associated themselves as genealogists and family historians. The site is also used by teachers and their students in secondary and higher educational institutions, city planners, historians, writers, engineers, architects, realtors, and documentary film makers, to name but a few. Respondents indicated that the main reasons for visiting the site were for entertainment, local history research, and genealogy research.

On average, users of the website send over one email per day to our feedback address. Email is distributed to partner institutions for reply unless it can be answered promptly by DRL staff.

According to web server logs, Historic Pittsburgh experiences fairly consistent usage from month to month. During the first ten months of 2005, page images from 78% of the book titles are viewed on average each month. Every month 90% of the available online maps are viewed. Likewise, 89% of the photographic images on the website are viewed every month. Similarly impressive statistics are also reflected in the use of the other components of the website.