

Developing Real And Virtual Cultural Touring With Digital Images

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The thirty-six volume record of Napoleon's expedition to Egypt, commissioned by the great man himself, created a sensation as it began to appear in 1809.¹ The drawings of Pharaonic monuments and the Sphinx in *Description de l'Egypte* by Vivian Denon and his collaborators conveyed a sense of the exotic, and their publication tempted those who could afford to go there and visit for themselves. Egypt joined the ranks of many enticements for armchair and actual tourists who had the means to visit cultural sites. The Grand Tour of continental classical cultural sites by "Grand Tourists" originated in Britain in the seventeenth century. Travelers on these journeys gathered and brought home cultural artifacts, by legal means and otherwise, leading to the establishment of museums and libraries in Europe in the 18th century.² Originally the property of royalty or the very wealthy, many collections evolved into state-supported cultural institutions with help from philanthropists and fund-raising associations.

In the United States support of the arts and preservation of cultural sites is increasingly recognized as economically sound. On January 19, 1998, the Associated Press reported that the states had appropriated a record \$305 million and Congress an additional \$98 million to support the arts in 1998. As Jonathan Katz, executive director of the National Assembly of State Arts Agencies explained, "Lawmakers . . . recognize that investment in the arts results in many public benefits to their states and communities -- boosting tourism and economic activity, . . . and through their support for arts education, contributing to a more creative and more competitive work force."³ The institutions that flourish with such public support attract modern tourists who find meaning in cultural tourism through learning about the products and processes of other cultures and times as well as their own.⁴

With the rise of the middle class, literacy, and the publication of information and pictures of exotic and strange places and peoples, interest in going to museums and traveling to cultural landmarks has increased. Today, cultural tourism goes beyond traditional high culture sites, to include attractions exhibiting and interpreting common, everyday productive life such as farming or breweries, popular music and even (gasp) theme parks. In the last case, the attraction may be an "authentic reproduction" such as Colonial Williamsburg <<http://www.history.org/>> or Lascaux II

¹ *The Egyptians*, Revised and enlarged edition, by Cyril Aldred. NY, Thames and Hudson, 1984. p. 16.

² *Cultural Tourism in Europe*, edited by Greg Richards. Oxon, UK: CAB International, c1996. pp. 5-6

³ <<http://cnn.com/US/9801/19/briefs.pm/arts.money.ap/index.html>>

⁴ *Ibid.*, Richards, p 22.

<<http://www.cg24.fr/2RICHESS/TOURISME/rtlethot.htm>>, or “authentic” in its own right, such as Disney World <<http://www.disney.com/DisneyWorld/index2.html>>. Although the distinction between culture and entertainment, between original and reproduction, is more blurred than ever, the common thread is education or edification serving as a potent additional ingredient to a rationale for an enterprise and motivation for the tourist. Pictures on the Web are being used to provide information for the creation of a cultural attraction, to enhance and enrich the cultural experience, and above all to market the cultural attraction.

Almost a century ago, the medium for virtual touring was picture postcards, but the effect was the same. Postcards became a very powerful vehicle to encourage the middle class to visit places captured by the photographer or artist for all to see. Popular subjects on these postcards included cultural sites -- museums and other cultural institutions, monuments, artistic works, and places where the architecture, landscape, and people were different or distinctive. The middle class thirst for high culture coupled with increasing opportunities for travel or at least aspirations to travel helped make the picture postcard popular for the recipient as well as for the fortunate sender.

One significant American publisher of postcards, the Detroit Photographic Company, started in the 1890's and drew the attention of William Henry Jackson, a distinguished photographer of the American West, when it obtained the exclusive rights for a Swiss “Photochrom” process for coloring black and white photographs. In the fall of 1897, Jackson joined the firm, bringing his large and valuable collection of negatives with him. Acquiring the use of this collection must have been quite a coup. The firm gave him \$30,000 to join the company and appointed him a director. One year later, the U.S. Congress passed a law permitting the use of private mailing cards and the Detroit Publishing Company issued its first series of mailing cards on July 1, 1898, the date the law went into effect. By 1904, the firm changed its name to Detroit Publishing Company.⁵

The Jackson stock of negatives did not meet all of the needs of the company's customers, so Jackson and others often took extended photographic trips. One such journey took Jackson five months in 1899 and covered 10,000 miles in a specially equipped railroad car. [<<http://lcweb2.loc.gov.....>> pictures of “Photo. Car and Group,” and “Detroit Photographic Co.'s Special” with Jackson seated at table] He photographed new scenes in the American cities and countryside. By 1902, the Detroit Publishing Company was publishing more than seven million cards annually. One collector estimates that the company published 17,000 different cards until 1923 when it turned almost exclusively to printing new cards by contract.⁶

⁵ Stechschulte, Nancy Stickels. *The Detroit Publishing Company Postcards*, A Handbook for Collectors of the Detroit Publishing Company Postcards including Checklists of the Regular Numbers, Contracts, Harveys, Miscellaneous art cards, the 50,000 Series, Sets, Little Phostint Journeys, Mechanical Postcards, the Panoramas, and many others. [author] Big Rapids, MI, c1994., p. viii.

⁶ *The Detroit Publishing Company Postcards*, A Handbook for Collectors of the Detroit Publishing Company Postcards,.... by Nancy Stickels. Big Rapids, MI, [published by the author], 1994

In addition to postcards, the firm published prints and other photographic items for distribution by retailers or for promotional purposes by businesses. However, the postcard business appeared to be its bread and butter, whether for use for mailing messages or for collecting. But the boom was short-lived. By 1910 the public's taste for postcards began to wane. The downward trend in sales continued and the recession of 1920-1922 was the final blow. Jackson was paid off in 1924 and put his negatives into storage. During 1924-1932 the company continued to publish a few contract issues, that is cards printed to order to expressly promote a business. Finally the company was liquidated in 1932 in the depths of the Great Depression.

In 1936 Jackson started the process that eventually brought a large part of his collection to the Library of Congress. He arranged with Henry Ford's son Edsel to have his entire collection of 40,000 negatives deposited at the Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn, Michigan. The William Henry Jackson Historical Collection eventually became part of the Edison Institute of Henry Ford's Greenfield Village.⁷ The Edison Institute in turn gave the glass-plate negatives and duplicate prints to the State Historical Society of Colorado. The Historical Society kept all the negatives and prints made in the United States west of the Mississippi, which includes Jackson's early photographs of the unspoiled West, and gave the remainder to the Library of Congress in 1949.

The photographs of America east of the Mississippi include pictures of Canada, Cuba, Mexico, the West Indies and Panama from around 1880 to the 1920's. These images include views of streets, buildings, historic monuments, industry, transportation and daily life. They provide a rich source of visual evidence and have a number of uses ranging from research for historical restoration, to enriching tourist's cultural experiences, attracting visitors to a site, or the potential benefactor to provide needed funding of a cultural tourist site.

The Library of Congress recognized the value of the Detroit Publishing Company collection, but almost half of it contained unprinted glass negatives. Funds were not available to make prints from these 25,000 negatives which were too fragile to be served to the public. In 1982, the Library found a promising option when it launched its Optical Disk Pilot Project. As part of this project, the negatives were copied on to individual frames of motion picture film which were then transferred to analog video tape from which a laser video disc was produced. Researchers used this video disc at individual workstations in the Prints and Photographs Reading Room for over a decade.⁸

A new frustration evolved as the Library installed a computer network because the analog images could not be employed on a network. Once again, an experimental program, the American Memory project (1990-1994) provided the possibility of resolution of this problem. In 1991, the Library used the ten-year-old film as a source for an analog videodisc, but this time a contractor used a process that included a digital intermediate. This film was scanned at a spatial resolution of 560x420 pixels, low by today's standard but appropriate to the task at hand: conversion to analog video. Three years later, when the World Wide Web beckoned,

⁷ *Time Exposure*, by William Henry Jackson. G.P. Putnam's Son, NY, 1940. p. 321

⁸ *P&P Online catalog - Detroit Publishing Company Collection*, "Digitizing the Collection." <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/pp/dettech.html>>

the Library used copies of the intermediate digital images to present on the Library's "American Memory" site on the World Wide Web. <<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammen/detroit/dethome.html>> American Memory is a series titles for online historical collections of materials selected because they illuminate aspects of American culture and history and serve as an aid to educators. Now it is possible to examine positive images of the negative originals from anywhere in the world.

These Detroit Publishing Company photographs can be accessed online and used to take their viewers on an entire vacation trip, as the Grand Rapids Art Museum proved in the summer of 1997. Using a collection of Detroit Publishing Company prints donated by a local collector, the museum mounted an exhibition that took its viewers from the multi-storied buildings at the center of booming, bustling Detroit to quiet scenes along Michigan's many miles of lake shore (unusual in its geography, the state of Michigan is in reality two peninsulas pointed at each other, each surrounded on three sides by the waters of the North American Great Lakes) and on to remote locales more than 500 miles to the north where timber, copper, and iron were extracted and sent on to feed the United States urban industries.

Although curators at the museum were pleased to have been given the collection of prints, and recognized them as depicting prominent features of the state landscape, they were not familiar with the total work of the Detroit Publishing Company, or the context in which their prints were produced. Thus when Gordon Olson as Grand Rapids City Historian was asked to prepare a gallery talk, he turned to the Library of Congress' American Memory Web site. There, he was able to identify other Michigan images taken at the same time, and fit the Grand Rapids exhibition into the total context of related images and similar Detroit Publishing Company work in other states and countries.

The Library of Congress site also provided numerous bibliographic citations for further research and other locations of additional images at the Colorado Historical Society and the Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village <<http://www.hfmgv.org>>. However, while these institutions noted the presence of Detroit Publishing Company images in their collections, they had not scanned images for presentation on their Web sites. Thus, a gallery lecture was prepared, based primarily on Internet searches, that addressed the specific characteristics of the individual images on display and placed them within the broader context of the total body of Detroit Publishing Company work, the history of the company, and its best known photographers. Not long ago such research would have consumed several months, involved extensive travel, and required a physical examination of a large number of images. Internet research will not replace more traditional forms of historical research, but it will most certainly alter the way historians conduct their special version of cultural touring.

Picture postcards are also a research tool for restoring or reconstructing a heritage site, such as an abandoned mine. One collector suggested the use of picture postcards of mining equipment, mining towns, and of the mines themselves to help preservationists restore abandoned sites as tourist attractions. He reproduced picture postcards of the Pioneer coal mine tunnel at Ashland Pennsylvania and the Mollie Kathleen Mine at Cripple Creek, Colorado, which are now tourist destinations. "Other tourist enterprises," Tom Rosemeyer noted, "have rebuilt entire ghost towns and turned old mining camps into profitable

operations, some of which generate more cash than the original mine,” such as Calico, California, and its Maggie Mining Company.⁹

Recently, the Grand Rapids Public Library mounted an exhibit of early local postcards from its collection. The library staff discovered that more than 200 separate scenic and advertising postcards depicting the city had been created in the decade between 1907 and 1917. Topics of the cards ranged from downtown streets and buildings to factory exteriors, manufactured products, parks and recreation areas, and sports teams. Their research also revealed that several scenes had been altered and published more than once with changed colors, altered content, and in several cases transformed from day to night.

Many of the images in the Detroit Publishing Company collections are of buildings and ways of life the no longer exist. But the researcher must be careful about using the photograph as evidence. Made to place their subjects in the best possible light, the photographs may have deliberately distorted a scene. The photographer may have distorted the original setting by editing out unwanted elements in framing the picture, by adjusting the light, and by posing people. The resulting negative and subsequent prints may have been altered or cropped to remove unwanted information.¹⁰ For example, Detroit Publishing Company postcards from earlier days had horses and carriages removed after the automobile became popular and women’s hemlines shortened to conform to a currently fashionable lengths.¹¹ Using images from the negative collection in the Library of Congress, from a remote location, the researcher can verify the accuracy of or the nature of alternations on a print without ever visiting the collection.

While picture research may result in the reproduction or restoration of historical sites, the uses of images at the tourist site itself can enhance the experience. For instance, Ellis Island has been criticized by a New York Times architectural critic for being too pristine and cleaned up in its restoration: “...the untidiness and uncertainties of the historical process, have been reduced to an artfully arranged display of old luggage.”¹² However, photographs on display restore some sense of the grittiness of a busy, crowded bureaucratic processing center where hundreds of thousands of Europeans arrived after a long voyage in steerage to be examined and certified for entrance into the U.S.

The Louisiana State Museum in the Cabildo in New Orleans has used a Detroit Photographic Co. photograph as a stunning introduction to its exhibit “Freshly Brewed, the

⁹ Rosemeyer, Tom. “Mining America: A Pictorial Postcard History.,” *Rocks and Minerals*, vol. 68, No. 3, May 1993. pp. 168-175.

¹⁰ Carter, John E. “The Trained Eye: Photographs and Historical Context,” *The Public Historian, A Journal of Public History*, Vol. 15, no. 1. Winter 1993. pp. 55 - 66

¹¹ Stechschulte, Nancy Stickels. *The Detroit Publishing Company Postcards, A Handbook for Collectors of the Detroit Publishing Company Postcards including Checklists. . . .* [published by author] Big Rapids, MI, c1994.

¹² Huxtable, Ada Louise. *The Real America: Architecture and Illusion*. The New Press, 1997.

Coffee Trade and the Port of New Orleans.” This enlargement (approximately 2 by 3 meters) of a color photograph of the levee at the base of Canal Street, with a steamboat and dock loaded with goods, conveys the sense of the bustle of this Mississippi-based seaport. It opens up, literally and figuratively, an exhibit in a basement of a building constructed in 1799.

In these, its inaugural years, use of the Internet by historians and historical organizations has followed a predictable course: (1) as a source of promotional information to market historical agencies and their programs, (2) as educational resources for teachers and students, and (3) as a means of professional communication, discussion, and publication. In this latter category one of the best known and most beneficial is H-Net, the Humanities On-line Initiative funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities and Michigan State University. H-Net supports about 100 discussion groups covering a wide range of historical topics. H-Net's home page <<http://www.h-net2.msu.edu/>> contains links to the discussion lists and their Web pages, as well as extensive book reviews, conference announcements, and other resources for historians.

Many institutions publish electronically for educational and marketing purposes. Libraries and museums, in particular, have a wealth of resources to display more broadly on the Web. Many of their collections were acquired by collectors and for research purposes, but as individual benefactors demand more than “art for art’s” sake collecting, exhibits, and research, education of a broader public commands more attention in funding and budget proposals. Museums have been quite effective in the development of Webpages to entice the browser to visit, virtually at first and then actually. Exhibiting works, especially visual works such as photographs provides opportunities for the development of cultural tourism by local enterprises.

More recently, improved technology has permitted the creation of institutional Web sites, such as the Library of Congress's American Memory Collections. They provide virtual access to images and manuscripts; include background information, link to related collections, and deliver researcher copies and, increasingly, publishable images. Web searches under headings such as “museum” or “library” produce tens of thousands of potential sites, and lead the way to further refined quests for historical library and manuscript collections sites. Many agencies, large and small have begun by producing Web sites that replicate introductory print materials, but still require researchers to physically visit their library to conduct research. This situation will doubtless change in the near future. Public and private funding agencies have established initiatives to promote greater electronic access to historical materials, and numerous institutions, large and small, have begun projects to transfer materials into electronic formats, making an increasingly large body of data available to researchers around the globe. And what availability it is! No longer will guardians of collections limit researchers as to what they can see, when they can see it, and what they are doing or wearing (like their pajamas). No longer will the researcher have to justify his or her curiosity.

The Grand Rapids Public Library, for example, has what might be called a typical Web site that describes its various services and collections and provides links to related databases and Web sites. However, it also has worked in collaboration with Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) to provide access to 2,000 of its photographic images of a women's professional baseball team which played in the city for 10 years between 1945 and 1954. Because it possessed the photographs and computerized index, but neither the expertise or

equipment to digitally scan them, the library found the collaboration to be an expedient way to call attention to their holdings and provide greater access to a unique portion of them.

Although commercial clients, such as advertising agencies now prefer digital images to photographic reproductions, much of the picture researching clientele that comes to small repositories like the Grand Rapids Public Library, or major institutions like the Library of Congress, still does not trust electronic copies of images - usually for good reason - and insist on ordering photographs based on their selection from electronic images available on the Web or available only in Library of Congress buildings because of copyright restrictions. These clients usually order photographs for publications which are composed electronically. From a preservation point of view, the Library of Congress would like to achieve a level of quality in which our clients would be satisfied with downloaded the images from our Website, thereby eliminating the need to handle the originals for copying and possibly to visit the Library at all. This view contrasts, it should be noted, to that of museums and other institutions which want to use images on a Website to entice people to visit their real cultural attractions.

Photographs on Websites can be used by those who wish to depict a destination for cultural tourists, just as the picture postcard was almost one hundred years ago. Electronically published images offer ideas and means of enriching the experience of the destination for the visitor. Many of our institutions' collections have been gathered by "tourists" of other eras. Cultural tourists of the past contributed their treasures and discoveries to local institutions because they understood that these objects should be shared and they added meaning to who they were and where they were. Now the researcher can find images of these objects to create an aura of another time and place on Websites.

To these predictable uses has recently been added a new dimension that promises to excite archivists, historians, and public users and stimulate broader, more diverse participation in the collection, preservation, and distribution of historical information and materials. The Internet has been an interactive medium, especially for e-mail, and this is acknowledged by its proponents and users. This interactivity had not been exploited on the Web, where most users are expected to take information from a site without adding to its data. This is beginning to change as a few historical library, museum, and university sites now use Web sites to gather new data and to encourage visitors to the sites to submit personal reminiscences which can be added to the institution's holdings and made available to future researchers. For example, the Lucas County-Maumee Valley (Ohio) Historical Society, working in conjunction with the Lucas County Public Library and the University of Toledo, has developed a Web site entitled Toledo's Attic <<http://www.history.utoledo.edu/attic>> which will not only be a museum Website of artifacts, images, and documents from the area's history, but also a means to gather new material such as student work and oral histories and provide a forum for expanding collections and knowledge about the community's history. Donors of objects, as well as funds, develop a sturdy and potentially contagious bond with the recipient institution and community.

Innovation, once driven largely by the biggest, wealthiest, and most centrally located institutions, now can occur in remote smaller locations because of local initiatives and institutional policies that encourage individual creativity. For example, a new local history Web site at the Grand Rapids (Michigan) Public Library, developed as part of a class in Web site design by students at the Kendall College of Art and Design, will explore possibilities of using the Internet as a tool for collecting and adding to the library's archival collection.

Grand Rapids, Michigan is a city of 200,000 in a metropolitan area of 500,000, in the United States upper Midwest. Its public library serves nearly one million patrons annually, and has an unusually large collection of historical primary source material, including manuscripts, maps, oral histories, and over one million photographs. With a commitment to leadership in the delivery of library services, the Grand Rapids Public Library has committed itself to developing an interactive Web site that will collect and archive local history primary source material. This site is a logical extension of the idea of "Virtual Touring with Early 20th Century Images," demonstrated by the Library of Congress American Memory Web site. Postcards not only documented where one had visited, or where one's friends traveled. Photographers also produced individualized cards with family photographs. Senders then penned a message on the back and used them as a way to stay in touch with family and friends. The Grand Rapids Public Library Web site will create a collection of "postcards" that are messages and images from the community's memory, placed in the library's history department alongside the other materials that document the city's history and carry it forward to succeeding generations.

Administered by the City Historian who also heads the library's local history department, the Web site has two functions, collection of data and research. It is also linked to other sites that describe the library's holdings, and provide access to portions of its photograph collection. Entitled "Grand Rapids Memory Album," the site is form-driven to structure data as it is received. Once visitors sign on, they can examine photographs from the city's history, view and study selected manuscripts and maps, and read first-person accounts from the city's past. It is as if they had opened an album of postcards and related documents sent from the past. Having searched the existing data by a variety of categories, visitors may, if they wish, add their memories to the album. Before beginning their entry, however, they must fill out a form identifying themselves by name and address. They must also check a box indicating their material in either electronic or printed form is designated for donation and becomes the property of the library which may then make it available to other researchers and publish it in any form it sees fit. This portion of the form, based on similar donor's forms used for manuscript material and oral histories, is designed to secure all copyright to the material.

Donors to this memory data bank are also asked to answer a series of optional questions on the form, designed to gather information about their age, sex, race and national origin. In addition, the form invites them to indicate if their donation is associated with collateral material such as photographs and manuscripts. If it is, this material may be scanned and sent along with the written memory, or if they do not have scanning capabilities, it may be collected for copying at a later date. Additional forms further define the material by subject, time period and similar headings, and identify first person accounts. Any of these forms can be altered if experience dictates that changes are necessary and appropriate.

Once the form is completed, the donor submits the memory material for inclusion. To give donors an idea of the type of material that is being sought, the site was initially loaded with examples from the library's oral history and historical photograph collections. The Library also engaged in a promotion campaign to draw attention to the site and encourage donations. Press releases were sent to area, state, and national outlets, and to history organizations. Links to the site were also encouraged, with the result that other genealogical Web sites, and even the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce provided connections to make people aware of Grand Rapids Memory Album.

Just as with other donations, all submitted material is reviewed by the City Historian or a staff archivist to determine its suitability for inclusion in the local history collection. After this review, accepted memory material is added to a searchable database where it can be retrieved by selected categories, by individual records, or by search queries drawn dynamically 'on the fly.' To assist the more casual researcher, selected categories such as certain national origin groups and selected industries have been prepared with introductory descriptions.

Because there are few similar Web sites, there are sure to be questions as the Grand Rapids site is developed. Most important are those associated with the value of the submitted material. There will be limited information about the informants and their knowledge of the events, time periods, personalities, and experiences they describe. Although efforts will be made to gather basic biographical information, and contributions will be reviewed by knowledgeable historians and archivists, final responsibility for verification and validation must rest with the researchers, just as it does with all historical analysis. There are also valid concerns about the donation forms and the use of this material in future publications. However, virtual signatures have been used and found valid in countless other venues from retail stores to the Internal Revenue Service. To review the success of the Grand Rapids Memory Album and any problems or needed revisions, an advisory committee of Grand Rapids-area historian's has been appointed to meet with the city historian to review material submitted and any other concerns.

Conclusions

Shortly after Clifford Lynch was appointed director for the Coalition for Networked Information in Washington, DC, he described his misgivings about the level of investment of infrastructure at the local level, the institutional commitments to maintain and preserve digital resources, and the lack of institutional review and top level planning in digitization initiatives. These concerns must be addressed, as they have been at the Grand Rapids Public Library, before undertaking creation of Websites with well-conceived content. While converting or creating digital files may not be particularly expensive, providing intellectual access through description and indexing is labor intensive and, therefore, costly.¹³

These concerns are valid, but they pale in comparison to the potential for access to rich collections and to the opportunity to enrich collections with personal anecdotes and experiences from a widespread and diverse audience, bound only by having a shared moment in place and time. In time, Grand Rapids Public Library plans include multi-volume presentations on CD-ROM discs. The library also anticipates preparing a set of proposed standards for such sites, and encouraging their creation at other localities, with an idea that one day data may be shared between similar sites.

¹³ Notes by Jeff Bridgers, NDL, LOC, of remarks before a Federal Funders Group, October 22, 1997, in Washington, DC. Distributed to LC INTERNET listserv November 3, 1997.

As we overcome concerns and meet challenges, we will find new opportunities for cross-fertilization of ideas and experiences among institutions, enterprises, donors and researchers. The whales who were able to create Websites and publish on them because they had the resources to do so may now find partners whose financial capital may be meager but who may serve as pilot fish with some powerful ideas and contributions to make. The rewards come from collaboration and linking not only of sites but of mutual goals and, ultimately, clients.