

# **White Paper Report**

Report ID: 98612

Application Number: PK5006408

Project Director: Joan Decker (joan.decker@phila.gov)

Institution: City of Philadelphia, Department of Records

Reporting Period: 10/1/2008-9/30/2010

Report Due: 12/31/2010

Date Submitted: 12/15/2010

**White Paper**

**ID #PK-50064-08**

**Title: A Partnership to Increase Access to Our Nation's  
Historical Records**

**Project Director: Joan Decker, Commissioner**

**Institution: City of Philadelphia, Department of Records**

**December 15, 2010**

## A Partnership to Increase Access to Our Nation's Historical Records

ID #PK-50064-08

**Purpose:** Development of an enhanced Web site ([www.PhillyHistory.org](http://www.PhillyHistory.org)) featuring historically significant collections at the City of Philadelphia's Department of Records and the Free Library of Philadelphia and the creation of tools to increase the level of access to and usefulness of these collections for researchers, students, and members of the general public.

**Project Director:** Commissioner Joan Decker, City of Philadelphia Department of Records

## Introduction:

The Philadelphia City Archives, managed by the City of Philadelphia Department of Records, contains an estimated 1-2 million photographs, dating to the 1860s. Since 2005, many of these images have been available on *PhillyHistory.org*, a website that provides free public access to the images as well as web-based administrative management capabilities. The images on *PhillyHistory.org* are geocoded (assigned a latitude and longitude) enabling users to search them by geographic criteria such as address, intersection, or neighborhood in addition to more traditional search criteria such as keyword, date, and topic. In the five years since its creation, the Department of Records has regularly updated *PhillyHistory.org*, adding new features such as a smart phone application, a blog, the ability to download the images to Google Earth, bookmarked searches, and the option to share and save favorite photos.

The Department of Records also views *PhillyHistory.org* as a useful tool for linking critical historical collections. *PhillyHistory.org* contains several collaboration features that assist organizations with sharing their digital collections with new audiences. An integrated search system enables the public to search images from multiple institutions via one website while a system of watermarks, metadata fields, and approved levels of access differentiates the collections. In 2008, the Department of Records utilized these features and partnered with the Philadelphia Water Department to make 1,580 historic photos from their collection available on *PhillyHistory.org*.

The *Advancing Knowledge* grant awarded to the Department of Records in 2008 was intended to build on these initial collaborative efforts by assisting with creating links between *PhillyHistory.org* and the historic image collections of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The Free Library contains a number of digital image and map collections. Two of these collections, the Historical Images of Philadelphia and the United States Centennial Exhibition Digital Collection, were chosen for inclusion on *PhillyHistory.org*. Containing a total of 1,755 images, the collections include historically significant photographs of the Centennial Exhibition of 1876 and the development of Philadelphia in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

By including images from the Free Library on *PhillyHistory.org*, the Department of Records and Free Library sought to increase public accessibility to the photographs. The two organizations attract different audiences and hosting the images in two separate locations prevented researchers from more easily making connections between the collections. Through the *Advancing Knowledge* grant, the Department of Records hoped to develop a technology infrastructure that would assist in linking and integrating these nationally significant collections as well as granting further access to the Free Library images through geographic search options and other features on *PhillyHistory.org*.

## A. Project Activities

Project activities fell into three main areas:

1. integration of Free Library images and metadata with *PhillyHistory.org*
2. creation of a place name alias system for use in geocoding the Centennial images, and
3. development of additional features to promote public participation in the site.

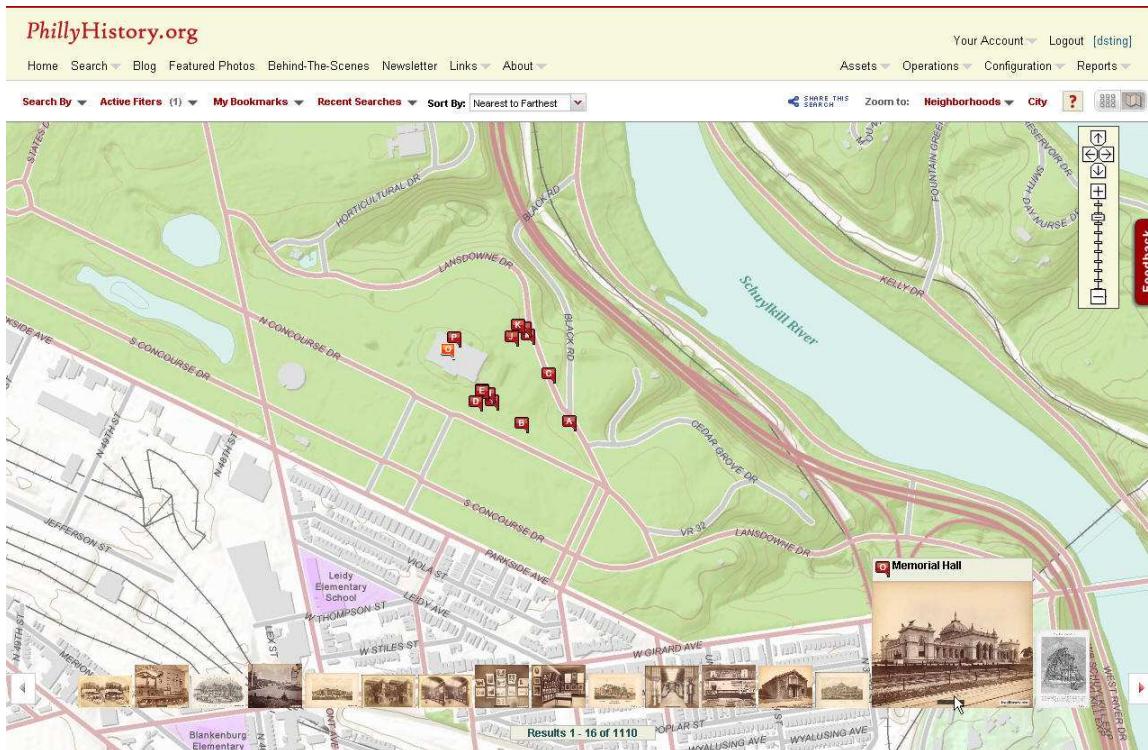


Image 1: Centennial Exhibition Collection images available on *PhillyHistory.org*.

In preparation for integration of the two collections, the Free Library provided the *PhillyHistory.org* team with an XML file of the metadata that corresponded to the images in the two collections. They also provided high-resolution files of all 1,752 images. To load the data from the Free Library into *PhillyHistory.org*, the software team needed to create a bulk data uploader that would match the content from the XML file with the fields available on *PhillyHistory.org*. Although based on Dublin Core, the metadata fields on *PhillyHistory.org* are customizable based on the needs of the collection. Assets from the City Archives collection do not need to have the same fields as assets from the Free Library.

After reviewing the metadata from the Free Library, the *PhillyHistory.org* team identified fields for inclusion on *PhillyHistory.org*. They then created a data loader that would take the metadata from the XML file and load it into *PhillyHistory.org*, creating a separate record for each image and dividing the metadata into the identified fields. In addition to standard fields such as title and description, the records also included the subjects from the Free Library catalog, quotations related to the images, and a note identifying the *Advancing Knowledge* grant as the funding source.

The metadata available for each image included a hyperlink to the image as it was visible on the Free Library site. *PhillyHistory.org* visitors could click this link to access additional information about the photo as well as browse the other digital resources available at the Free Library. Since the Free Library

and *PhillyHistory.org* attract different visitors, the Department of Records hoped that linking these historic collections would introduce these resources to new audiences and encourage members of the *PhillyHistory.org* community to discover other collections available in the city.

## Opening Day

**Title** Opening Day

**Description** Opening day, the orators 1 silver albumen print; 33 x 41 cm. Mounted on backing board. "Opening day, May 10, 1876. The opening ceremonies took place on the terraces of the Art Gallery and in the area facing the Main Building. Speakers' stands were erected in front of the Art Gallery, and stands for a great choir and orchestra were placed directly opposite, before the entrance of the Main Building. President and Mrs. Grant were present as were the Emperor Pedro II and Empress Theresa of Brazil." -- Looney, Old Philadelphia in Early Photographs, p. 197. Opening day ceremony of the 1876 Centennial Exhibition depicting Art Gallery with trolley cars and crowd of attendees with umbrellas under stormy skies.

**Notes** Free Library Subjects: Centennial Exhibition, Clouds, Crowds, Exhibition buildings, Memorial Hall, Pennsylvania, People, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Street railroads, Umbrellas, West End Passenger Railway Co.

**Address** Main Exhibition Building

**Date** 5/10/1876

**Photographers** Centennial Photographic Co.

**Collection** Free Library - Centennial Exhibition

**Collection ID** C030356

**Asset ID** 98355

**Topics**

**Series** Centennial Exhibition 1876

**Hyperlink** View Additional Photo Information on the Free Library's Website

**Hyperlink** Find out more in the PhillyHistory Blog!

**Grant Text** The addition of this image to PhillyHistory.org is supported by Advancing Knowledge: The IMLS/NEH Digital Partnership grant program.

See an error? [Submit an Error Report](#)  
[Submit a Management Note](#)

Image 2: "Opening Day, 1876." Detail view of Free Library of Philadelphia image on *PhillyHistory.org*.

An important component of the project was adding geographic search capabilities to the photographs. Geographic searches are overwhelmingly the most frequently conducted searches on *PhillyHistory.org*. In a survey of *PhillyHistory.org* users, 75.6% of respondents stated that they utilized the neighborhood search feature and 73.7% used the address search. Keyword search, the next highest response, was used by only 40.7% of users. Site statistics show that from June 2009 to June 2010, users performed 702,783 address searches on the site, the most used search criteria.

In order to enable geographic search of the Free Library images, the photographs needed to be geocoded (assigned latitude and longitude coordinates) that identified the location depicted in the image. For the Historical Images of Philadelphia collection this was straightforward as the images were generally of intersections or addresses that could be automatically geocoded when loaded into *PhillyHistory.org*. The images from the Centennial Exhibition Collection were more difficult to geocode. The Centennial Exhibition took place in Fairmount Park, an area of Philadelphia that is radically different from when the Centennial was held there in 1876. The Centennial site was constructed on a temporary plan and an area that was filled with buildings and activities is now open green space with few structures remaining from the exhibition. The difference between contemporary street and place names and those that predominated in earlier periods is a significant challenge to attaching geographic coordinates to historical material.

The majority of the images in the Centennial Exhibition collection are associated with a building. In the absence of an address or intersection, the *PhillyHistory.org* team chose to find the latitude and longitude for each building and use that as the identified location for each photograph. In order to find the map coordinates, the team needed to discover specifically where each building had been located. Fortunately, the Free Library collection included a detailed map of the exhibition grounds that had been digitized at a high resolution. Using ESRI ArcGIS Desktop, the *PhillyHistory.org* team was able to georeference the historic map with a current plan of Fairmount Park. To ensure an accurate comparison between the maps, the GIS (Geographic Information Systems) analyst identified several anchor points, locations that existed on both maps. These points included bridges, intersections, and the two buildings that still existed from the Centennial – the Ohio State House and Memorial Hall. With these points identified, the combined map could be stretched and warped to eliminate differences in scale between the two maps.

After the map was successfully georeferenced, the *PhillyHistory.org* team reviewed the photographs and created a list of the locations and buildings identified in the images. The GIS analyst matched this list with the buildings on the map and then generated latitude and longitude coordinates for each place using the center point of the building. For example, the Main Exhibition Hall was identified as being located at -75.2100955, 39.9779625. Those coordinates were then entered into a database of place names. When the metadata was uploaded, the system searched the description and notes field for text that matched a building name and then geocoded the photograph to the location associated with that building.

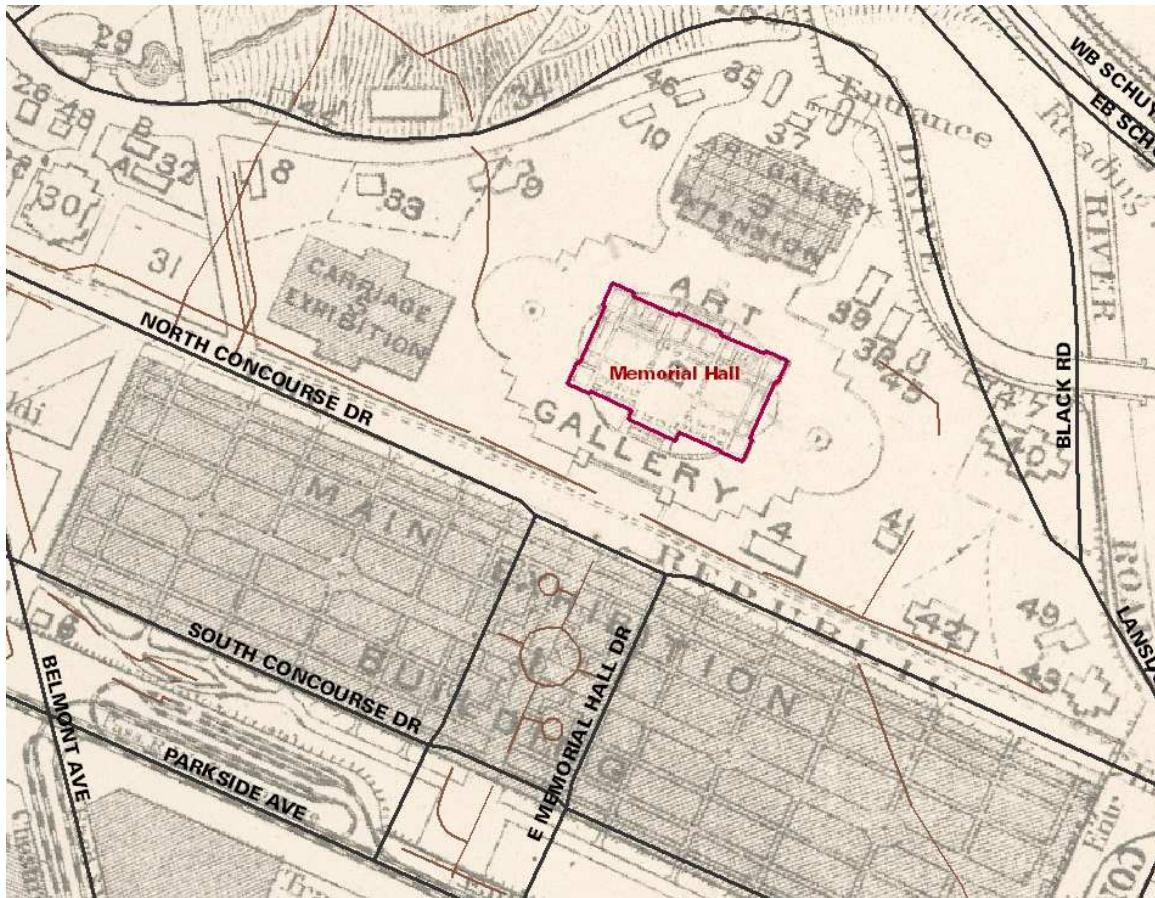


Image 3: The georeferenced Centennial map. The red outline identifies Memorial Hall, a building that still exists in Fairmount Park, while the black lines and labels are the current roads.

To ensure that the system geocoded a large number of images, the team also created a list of synonyms for each building name. While the metadata for one photo referred to Main Exhibition Hall, other photos called it Main Building, Main Hall, or simply M.B. Compiling a list of synonyms dramatically reduced the number of images that the system was unable to geocode. After the automated geocoding process, the *PhillyHistory.org* team reviewed the remaining images without a location and manually geocoded them as necessary. The public could then search the images by simply entering a building name in the address box. The geocoding data was also provided to the Free Library for use in future projects.

In addition to linking these datasets and creating a place name alias system, the *PhillyHistory.org* team also developed several features to encourage greater public participation on the site. The project team hoped that cross-linking these historic collections would increase accessibility and use of the collections and wished to provide users with opportunities for sharing their research and feedback.

To encourage public feedback, the *PhillyHistory.org* team created a feedback feature visible on each page of the site. Users can submit inquiries, suggestions, or general feedback. All responses are stored in the database where they can be reviewed and responded to by site administrators.

The project team also created a public commenting feature that enabled visitors to leave comments about an image and respond to other comments. Comments are not moderated although users must

agree to the terms of use before posting, and a report abuse button enables users to notify administrators of potentially inappropriate commenting. The comments are threaded to physically show the relationship between the notes and allow users to respond to a specific statement. Users can also sign up for an RSS feed or email alerts to be notified when additional comments are published about an asset.

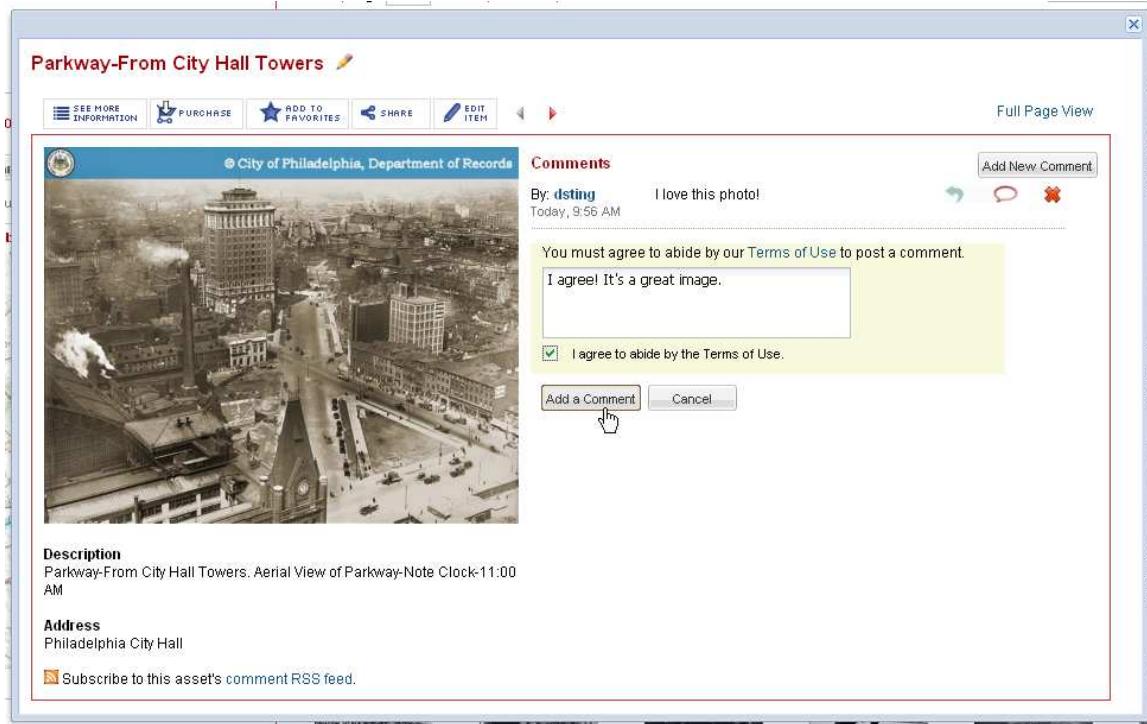


Image 4: Public commenting feature available on *PhillyHistory.org*.

In conjunction with the public commenting system, the project team created publicly visible user profile pages. When users register with the site, the system automatically creates a profile page that lists their user name. Users can also choose to share additional information on their page including their favorite photos, bookmarked searches, their location, and a description of themselves and their research interests. Any comments they leave on an image are also displayed on their profile page. Although the initial grant application called for the creation of a feature where users could register research projects, the *PhillyHistory.org* team felt that profile pages where users could list their research interests was a more flexible system that enabled the group to gauge user interest before committing to a more formal system.

The screenshot shows a user profile page for 'User Profile' on PhillyHistory.org. The top navigation bar includes links for Home, Search, Blog, Featured Photos, Behind-The-Scenes, Newsletter, Links, About, Assets, and Options. The profile section displays the user's name 'dsting', location 'Philadelphia, PA', and a list of bookmarks. The bookmarks include 'Nineteenth Century Photographs', 'South Philadelphia 1950s', 'Photos of Delaware River', 'West Poplar Neighborhood', 'West Powelton Neighborhood', 'Germantown Avenue', 'Pretzels', 'Zoo', '12th and Market', '12th and Callowhill', and 'Reading Terminal'. A comments section shows two entries from 'Hopper, De Wolf, Costumed for Freedom Pageant' dated 12/2/2009 at 1:56 PM and 1:52 PM. Below the comments is a grid of historical photographs labeled 'Favorites'.

Image 5: Public profile page.

The Department of Records and Free Library of Philadelphia undertook a number of efforts to promote the addition of the Free Library images to *PhillyHistory.org*. Marketing funds were available as part of the grant award and the marketing plan included both activities that required funding and others that were more low-cost, online efforts. The *PhillyHistory.org* team distributed a press release and contacted several local bloggers. An e-card announcing the new collections was sent to 2,922 *PhillyHistory.org* users and other friends of the project with 1,213 recipients (41.5%) opening the card, resulting in a 63.5% spike in unique visitors. Bookmarks promoting the new collections were printed and distributed to all fifty-three Free Library of Philadelphia branches and the Parkway Central Library. The bookmarks were also placed at cultural institutions and tourist destinations throughout Philadelphia, distributed at conferences, and included in a mailing to 27,000 City of Philadelphia employees. A special discount offer on print sales was sent to registered *PhillyHistory.org* users as well as 2,000 members of the Free Library Foundation, and Lyrasis, a regional membership organization for libraries, announced the collaboration in the e-newsletter sent to their members.

Online marketing efforts included regular promotion of the new images on the Free Library's Twitter and Facebook accounts as well as the personal Twitter accounts of members of the project team. Blog posts announcing the new collaboration were posted by both the Free Library and *PhillyHistory.org*, and the Department of Records arranged for the creation of a series of blog entries on the Centennial. Those blog entries can be viewed at <http://www.phillyhistory.org/blog/>.

Azavea, the software company who provided technology support for the project, presented sessions at the Handheld Librarian Online Conference II on February 18, 2010 and at the Museums and the Web 2010 conference on April 16, 2010 that included information about the collaborative project with the

Free Library of Philadelphia. Several conference attendees were interested in hearing more about the project as a model for collaboration.

## B. Accomplishments

The Department of Records outlined three critical tasks to pursue as part of the *Advancing Knowledge* grant – linkages of datasets to facilitate improved access, addition of geocoding data to Free Library datasets, and addition of new access tools.

In terms of public access, the project was a complete success. 1,752 images from the Free Library of Philadelphia are now available on *PhillyHistory.org* and can be searched by geographic location. For the first time, these images are accessible via mobile technology, can be purchased as prints or photo gifts, are visible in Google Earth, and can be shared with other users through a variety of social media tools. Each asset on *PhillyHistory.org* is also linked to the image record on the Free Library website, encouraging visitors to learn more about additional historic resources.

As a result of geocoding efforts, 1,523 of the 1,752 images were geocoded and are now searchable by geographic criteria such as address, intersection, neighborhood, and map extent. While the 172 images from the Historical Images of Philadelphia collection had previously been geocoded by the Free Library, the Centennial Exhibition collection had not been geocoded due to changes in the Fairmount Park area where the exhibition was held and the necessity of creating a place-name alias system. After the creation of such a system, the *PhillyHistory.org* team was able to geocode 1,351 additional images. Those images are now available via geographic search criteria and are more easily accessible via mobile technology. The geographic coordinates were also provided to the Free Library for use in future projects.

The project resulted in the creation of several new access tools. The Free Library photographs can be downloaded as a KML file and viewed in Google Earth. When available, the record for an image includes a link to view the location where that photo was taken in Google Street View, providing visitors with the ability to compare a historic photo to the current location. *PhillyHistory.org* users can also create bookmarked searches and sign up to receive an RSS feed, GeoRSS feed, or email alerts when new images are added to a collection. Finally, the photographs are accessible via the *PhillyHistory.org* mobile application, which is available via cell phone or other internet enabled portable device. A separate *PhillyHistory.org* smart phone web site also enables users to view the photographs via iPhone, Android, or other smart phones.

In addition to the above tasks, the Department of Records also stated that the project would increase the Free Library's ability to take advantage of the *PhillyHistory.org* ecommerce system. Images can be purchased as prints (both framed and unframed) or photo gifts (such as mugs, puzzles, or greeting cards). These museum quality products are provided through a partnership with Pictopia, a photo printing company that provides services to many museums and newspapers. The Free Library receives the proceeds from the sale of their images and also retains the right to respond to all licensing requests. Since the images have been made available on *PhillyHistory.org*, users have purchased several prints and a number of licensing requests have been forward to Free Library of Philadelphia staff members.

## C. Audiences

As a publicly accessible website, *PhillyHistory.org* is available to anyone with an internet connection. All resources on the website are free to use and registration is not required. Users can choose to create a free account in order to save their favorite photos, bookmark searches, submit error reports and scan requests, and comment on images. As of October 2010, *PhillyHistory.org* has 5,861 registered users. Of those 5,861 users, 4,420 are from Pennsylvania and 462 are from New Jersey. While the majority of registered users are from the greater Philadelphia region, the website regularly receives visitors from across the country and around the world. According to Google Analytics, *PhillyHistory.org* received web traffic from 111 countries and territories from January through September 2010 with the greatest number of international visitors coming from Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia.

*PhillyHistory.org* is used by a variety of audiences. In a survey of 198 *PhillyHistory.org* users conducted as part of this project, 159 individuals identified themselves as a "Philadelphia enthusiast" and 146 users selected the option for "generally interested in history and old photographs." In addition, 50 individuals stated they were historians or researchers and 49 people described themselves as genealogists. A number of respondents also selected artist, photographer, student, and teacher as the categories that best described them as a *PhillyHistory.org* user. From this information, combined with feedback received via email, *PhillyHistory.org* appears to attract a wide cross-section of the public from those who use the site for academic or personal research to those who see it as an artistic or historical resource.

The addition of the Free Library images did not cause a noticeable increase in visitors to the website over the course of a month although individual days did show spikes in traffic. When the Free Library images were added to *PhillyHistory.org* in April 2010, the website received 13,979 unique visitors and 36,874 total visits, numbers consistent with the preceding months and the web traffic in April 2009. Several marketing activities conducted as part of this project, however, caused traffic to increase dramatically. After sending an e-card to *PhillyHistory.org* users announcing the addition of the Free Library collections, the site received 1,933 unique visitors on April 28 and 1,919 unique visitors on April 29, respectively a 63.5% and 60.3% increase compared to the same days the previous week. In addition, 210 individuals created accounts on *PhillyHistory.org* in April 2010.

While the project did not dramatically increase the number of visitors to *PhillyHistory.org*, it did assist in keeping traffic at a consistent level. Due to budget reductions, the Department of Records had been unable to digitize additional images since July 2009. The placement of the Free Library photographs on *PhillyHistory.org* helped maintain public interest in the site at a time when it could have lagged due to lack of new material.

One of the tasks outlined in the original grant application consisted of creating linking systems to connect the Free Library image on *PhillyHistory.org* with the metadata records on the Free Library website (see Section A for further details). These links were intended to encourage audiences to learn more about resources available at other institutions and provide access to additional information about the image. Each Free Library photograph on *PhillyHistory.org* is linked to its original catalog record in the Free Library of Philadelphia system, thus expanding the audience with access to the image to users of both websites.

## D. Evaluation

The *PhillyHistory.org* team conducted both formative and summative evaluations of the project. At the onset of the project, the *PhillyHistory.org* team met with the Free Library of Philadelphia to discuss expectations and ideas for the project. The group also conducted a user survey to gather public feedback on *PhillyHistory.org*. The survey was sent to 2,906 individuals with 926 recipients opening the email. Of those 926 opens, 198 individuals completed the user survey, for a 6.81% completion rate overall or a 21.38% completion rate among those who opened the survey email.

*PhillyHistory.org* users were surveyed on number of issues including which new features they would consider as valuable additions to the website. Of four available options, 88% of respondents agreed that the addition of photograph collections from other institutions would be “very useful” and 36.2% of users stated that registered research projects on the site would be very useful. These responses showed public support for the Department of Records’ initiatives to add the Free Library images and create additional spaces for users to communicate with each other. A survey of history scholars in the Philadelphia area found that many professors utilize *PhillyHistory.org* for both working with their students as well as their own personal research. Several individuals spoke of the number of resources available on the site and its accessibility as its greatest strengths. The project team has endeavored to build on those identified strengths through this project.

The summative evaluation included a user survey sent as part of the *PhillyHistory.org* e-newsletter in August 2010. The inclusion of the survey in the quarterly newsletter drew a smaller response rate with twenty-two users completing the survey. All of the respondents, however, were complimentary of the project with 71.4% stating that the addition of the Free Library of Philadelphia collections was “very useful” and 28.6% finding the addition “useful.” Every user responded positively or affirmatively to the question of whether *PhillyHistory.org* should pursue collaborations to make more images available via the website. One respondent commented, “I don’t always agree that more is better, but with the quality of your website and some oversight of collections, I think the more photos you can get your hands on, the better.” The summative evaluation matched the formative evaluation in indicating public support for the linking of historic resources from various organizations.

As part of the grant application, the Department of Records identified five main areas for evaluation.

1. **Increase in Number of Images Accessible via *PhillyHistory.org*:** The collaboration with the Free Library resulted in the addition of 1,752 images to *PhillyHistory.org*.
2. **Increased Number of Web Site Hits:** *PhillyHistory.org* did not see an overall monthly increase in visitors but did experience several large spikes in web traffic during promotional parts of the project. Statistics are available in Section C.
3. **Number of Unduplicated Users Accessing the Collections:** *PhillyHistory.org* experienced a dramatic surge of registered users from July 2009 to June 2010. In that time, membership increased 85.5%. There are currently 5,861 registered users.
4. **Number of Gecoded Entries:** 1,351 images from the Centennial Exhibition collection are now geocoded after the creation of a place-name alias system.
5. **Number of Registered Research Projects:** The *PhillyHistory.org* team created public profile pages where users could provide information about their research interests. Unfortunately, few users seem to be taking advantage of this feature.

## *User Responses*

Public feedback is gathered via the online feedback feature, email, and user surveys. Comments received since the rollout of the Free Library images have included:

- “Thank you for all you do to make this a great site. I will be coming back over and over as I find more things,”
- “Fantastic endeavor by the city and everyone involved,”
- “Just keep adding those photos! I have to limit myself to logging on only once or twice a month because I get carried away for hours on your site! Thank you for all your good work.”

## *Strengths*

An evaluation of the project reveals a number of strengths specifically in the areas of increased access, especially geographic access, to collections; focus on reaching goals outlined for the project; and the development of future collaborations.

The public overwhelmingly supports the addition of more images to *PhillyHistory.org* and the ability to search those images by geographic criteria. The collaborative project with the Free Library of Philadelphia helped to introduce new audiences to a remarkable collection of images that were previously unknown. After the creation of a place name alias system, images of the Centennial Exhibition can now be searched by geographic criteria for the first time. The images are also accessible in new ways including download to Google Earth, through comparison of the historic photograph with its present day location in Google Street View, and via mobile technology. The Department of Records will build on this increased access during 2010 and 2011 through the augmented reality features they will develop as part of an NEH Digital Humanities Start-Up Grant.

Over the two year time span of the grant, the Department of Records and the Free Library were able to concentrate on reaching the goals outlined in the original grant application and succeeded in accomplishing all of the tasks outlined in the original proposal. However, with delays in the bid and contracting process at the City as well as the relatively large number of individuals involved in the project, communication between the different parties was challenging. After a successful kickoff meeting with the Free Library in autumn 2009, a clear set of timelines, responsibilities and deliverables were agreed on by all participants. However, other staff responsibilities at the Free Library as well as ongoing municipal budget cuts resulted in delays in providing materials necessary to implement the changes to the system. Despite these challenges, the group was able to develop several new public participation features (commenting, feedback system, public profile page), create a data loader for integrating two metadata systems, create a place name alias system for geocoding assets from the Centennial collection, gather feedback from users and local scholars, enable ecommerce for the Free Library images, implement a marketing plan, and create a collaborative model that can be utilized for future partnerships.

Indeed, perhaps one of the greatest unintended strengths of the project was the interest it prompted in pursuing future collaborations. During the spring and summer of 2010, the Department of Records received inquiries from two other organizations, the Library Company of Philadelphia and the City of Philadelphia Office of the City Representative, regarding the inclusion of their images on *PhillyHistory.org*. The interest expressed by the Library Company is a direct result of information they received regarding the addition of the Free Library images.

The Department of Records believes that the current project provided valuable experience in the areas of technology development, project management, marketing efforts, and public participation. Based on this experience, future collaborations have proceeded more rapidly and efficiently as the groundwork and infrastructure has already been developed through the Free Library partnership supported by this grant. In short, the capacity of the project to support collaborations with other organizations has grown over the course of the project.

## *Challenges*

As part of an honest evaluation of the project, the Department of Records recognizes that the collaboration faced several challenges. These challenges occurred mainly in two areas - communication between organizations and public participation.

Any collaboration relies strongly on communication between organizations. When each organization has several individuals working on a project, however, it can be difficult to ensure that communication happens in a timely and effective manner. This project involved a number of individuals from the Department of Records, the Free Library of Philadelphia, and Azavea, the software company who developed *PhillyHistory.org*. Despite a successful kickoff meeting with the Free Library in which a clear set of timelines, responsibilities and deliverables were agreed on by all participants, communication between these organizations was often delayed as the group questioned who should respond to an email or telephone call. Often, several people who received an email would assume that another individual had responded, thus delaying activity while the initial question remained unanswered. In addition, despite clear deadlines by which to complete certain tasks, a more solid commitment to a schedule, which factored in time for communication delays and staff time for other projects, would have helped the project progress more efficiently. For subsequent collaborations, the Department of Records has worked with new partner organizations to designate a single point of contact. These individuals handle the communication between organizations, forwarding a question to the appropriate person within their organization as necessary.

The initial grant application strongly emphasized the importance of increasing public access to these historical collections and creating new opportunities for the public to interact with the collections and share personal historical research projects with other users. While public access is not an issue (see Section C), public participation beyond searching and viewing the images has proven to be a challenge. The *PhillyHistory* project already had some important ways in which people could contribute to the project, including a mechanism for requesting scans of photographs and a system for making corrections to the metadata. These systems have avid users and have been an important source of public input to improving the database. To encourage additional public participation, the Department of Records created a public commenting system and publicly visible user profile pages where users can share information about their research interests. These features are described in more detail in Section A.

Although intended to provide a space for the public to interact with the collections and perhaps create an online community, public use of the commenting system and profile pages has been extremely low. Between December 2009 and October 2010, the public contributed only 53 comments, and very few people have customized their public profile pages. This issue is not unique to the *PhillyHistory* project. In conversations with individuals working on other culture and humanities projects, several people have commented that users often do not use public participation features as much as expected. We also know from research into consumer behavior on commercial web sites that a combination of a large

critical mass of users and a culture around contribution of comments is essential to making user-generated content a success. The *PhillyHistory.org* experience has led the *PhillyHistory.org* team to theorize that people choose to invest time and energy in a few social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, or Digg and are less inclined to become part of an additional community that appears to have few members. While *PhillyHistory.org* receives few comments in the new system, users regularly post *PhillyHistory* photos and links on Facebook and Twitter. Facebook users have recently grown to become the fifth largest source of web traffic referrals to *PhillyHistory.org*.

Despite the limited use of the commenting system and profile pages, users continue to support the idea of more public participation on the site. In a user survey conducted in January 2010, 36.2% of respondents thought a place for registered research projects on *PhillyHistory.org* would be “very useful” while 26.5% of users thought it would be “useful.” The Department of Records will continue to investigate methods for successfully encouraging information sharing and collaboration between members of the *PhillyHistory* community.

## **E. Continuation of the Project**

The images from the Free Library of Philadelphia will remain part of the *PhillyHistory.org* database. Although the system includes the ability to remove the images should that be necessary, neither the Free Library nor the Department of Records views that as likely to occur. The images require no further maintenance other than responding to user error reports or requests to license or purchase prints of the images. As part of the collaboration, the Department of Records and Free Library agreed that the Department of Records would remain the contact person for all print sales, even those that contain images from the Free Library. The Free Library will receive the proceeds from print sales of images from their collections. Any requests to license Free Library images, however, will be forwarded to the individuals who handle rights and reproductions at the Free Library. User submitted error reports regarding metadata for Free Library images will also be forwarded to Library staff. This arrangement ensures that the Free Library can maintain its metadata and license images in line with current policies while enabling them to utilize the revenue system already in place for the *PhillyHistory.org* project.

The Department of Records and the Free Library hope that this project will lead to further collaborations in the future as resources become available. Additional photo or map collections can now be more easily added to *PhillyHistory.org* in order to utilize the user access and participation tools available on the site. The data parsing and loading work completed as a result of this grant should dramatically shorten the development time necessary for converting and loading metadata from an external content management system into *PhillyHistory.org*.

## **F. Long Term Impact**

Perhaps the greatest long term impact of the project has been the support it garnered for collaborative efforts between the Department of Records and other organizations. With the funding provided by this grant, the Department of Records was able to create the infrastructure to easily and efficiently add images from other collections in an effort to link historical resources throughout the greater Philadelphia region. In user surveys as well as feedback left on *PhillyHistory.org* and in email, the public

has continuously called for the addition of more photographs to the site. When asked about the development of new features for *PhillyHistory.org*, 88% of users stated that the addition of photograph collections from other institutions would be a very useful addition to the site. As a direct consequence of marketing the collaboration with the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Department of Records has received several inquiries from other special collections and libraries regarding the pursuit of additional collaborative projects, with the hope of building on the work that has been done through this grant.

After reading about the Free Library images on *PhillyHistory.org* in a press release that was sent in April 2010, the Library Company of Philadelphia contacted the Department of Records regarding a possible collaboration. An independent research library founded in 1731 by Benjamin Franklin, the Library Company contains many resources on American society and culture in the 17<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their collections include rare books, manuscripts, ephemera, broadsides, and a large collection of photographs from the late 1800s. In August 2010, 225 photographs from three of the Library Company's collections were added to *PhillyHistory.org*. The images depict street scenes and life in Philadelphia in the late 1800s and greatly increased the number of 19<sup>th</sup> century resources available on *PhillyHistory.org*. Based on the processes developed through the addition of the Free Library collections, the images were added in a timely and efficient fashion. The photographs are now available to be searched by geographic criteria, viewed in Google Earth, and accessed via mobile smart phones. As with the Free Library images, the metadata for each photograph includes a hyperlink that leads to the original catalog record on the Library Company website where users can view more information about the image. If resources allow, additional collections from the Library Company will be added to *PhillyHistory.org* in 2011.

Images from the collection of the Office of the City Representative, the City of Philadelphia department responsible for developing and promoting special events throughout Philadelphia, were also added to *PhillyHistory.org* in 2010. The Office of the City Representative recently surveyed their historic photo archive containing images of events and festivities in the city dating back to the 1950s. The collection, estimated at 65-70 cubic feet, has been transferred to the Philadelphia City Archives, where processing and digitization efforts began in summer 2010. These images of events, including Queen Elizabeth's visit to Independence Hall to commemorate the Bicentennial in 1976, various Mummers Parades, and festivals throughout the city, will complement the current place-based images of houses, streets, and construction projects available on *PhillyHistory.org*. The addition of images from the 1970s and 1980s will also increase the usefulness of *PhillyHistory.org* as a resource for recent history research. The Department of Records has applied for a grant to assist with digitizing this collection and will pursue other funding opportunities as they become available.

Based on the public response to the addition of the Free Library images, as well as the support of other organizations such as the Library Company and the Office of the City Representative, the Department of Records is currently investigating the possibility of forming a partnership with local historical societies throughout the region to assist with making their collections available on *PhillyHistory.org*. This initiative would create further links between critical historical resources across the greater Philadelphia area and provide the public with more opportunities to access and share these resources.

## G. Grant Products

This project resulted in the addition of 1,752 historical images from the collections of the Free Library of Philadelphia to the *PhillyHistory.org* website. The photographs can be viewed at <http://www.phillyhistory.org/freelibrary>. An announcement regarding the collections is available in the *PhillyHistory.org* blog - <http://www.phillyhistory.org/blog/index.php/2010/04/historic-images-from-the-free-library-of-philadelphia-now-available-on-phillyhistory-org/>.

As part of the project, the Department of Records created a public commenting system and publicly visible user profile pages to encourage participation in the site. An example of the commenting system is available as part of the data for this image of Dickinson Square in 1910 - <http://www.phillyhistory.org/PhotoArchive/Detail.aspx?AssetId=6324>. An example of a user profile page is available at <http://www.phillyhistory.org/PhotoArchive/Profile.aspx?user=dsting>.