Practitioners Report

New Apps for Curating the City

Cleveland Historical, a mobile software application for iPhone and Android devices, is an example of the new tools available to urban historians for engaging their communities.

Here at Cleveland State University, we are using this free "app" (available at app.clevelandhistorical.org) to curate Cleveland, working collaboratively with students, teachers, and the community to interpret the history of the Northeast Ohio region. In this effort, *Cleveland Historical* is a vehicle for organizing, connecting, and exploring primary sources, including historic and current photographs, oral history audio clips, archival film footage and short documentary films.

Built by the Center for Public History + Digital Humanities (CPHDH) in the Cleveland State University Department of History, *Cleveland Historical* features over 140 location-based stories, each with brief narrative text. In addition, *Cleveland Historical* offers meta-interpretation through historical "tours" that interpret the city through common themes, chronologies, or geographies. The application was built on Omeka, an open source digital archival management tool developed by the Center for History and New Media (CHNM) at George Mason University.

A recipient of a National Council for Public History honorable mention as an outstanding public history project, *Cleveland Historical* draws upon best practices from several distinct disciplines including oral history, public history, and digital humanities. The more than 600 oral history interviews collected over a decade that comprise the Cleveland Regional Oral History Collection form the primary-source documentary spine of *Cleveland Historical.*

The application also incorporates best practices in interactive design and archival standards. CPHDH is extending this effort further by launching *Cleveland Historical Version 2,* built in direct response to feedback from users including undergraduates, teachers, and community members. The new version provides users with social media functionality (Twitter, Facebook), enhanced historical tours features, and a parallel website, and is available on both Android and iOS platforms.

Cleveland Historical emerged from a decade-long process during which we explored how urban public historians could interpret place in the digital age, specifically how they could curate a city. Emphasizing collaboration and use of existing resources, and drawing upon the interactive rhetoric of web 2.0, we developed a series of systematic, cumulative public history programs over a period of several years.

This work culminated in 2009, when CPHDH rolled out the Euclid Corridor History Project, nineteen street-located touch-screen history kiosks sited along Cleveland's central street and rapid transit line. With over 1,000 individual and institutional collaborators and federal arts funding, as well as the collaboration of the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit Authority and of Cleveland Public Art, the project interpreted Cleveland through stories of people, places, and moments, using audio from oral history interviews, archival images, and textual descriptions.

Drawing on resources developed through its oral history initiatives and the Euclid Project, as well as its early experimental use of the Omeka archival platform, the Center challenged itself to build a standards-based mobile publish-

Nielson estimates 50 percent of Americans will use smartphones to access the Internet by the end of 2011

ing tool for reimagining Cleveland's history. The Center sought to create a tool which would embrace the full portability of mobile devices and the full physical-

ity of the city, one which could potentially be shared and generalized beyond Cleveland. *Cleveland Historical* was born.

*T*he Euclid Corridor History Project had come online as mobile technologies were beginning to change how users access digital information, prompting us to confront the interpretive challenges being posed by this mobile revolution.

The scale of the change is enormous. The Pew Internet and American Life Project estimates that 40 percent of Americans now use smartphones to access the Internet; Nielson estimates that this number will exceed 50 percent by the end of 2011. By 2015 fully more than 1.4 billion people worldwide will engage the Internet primarily through mobile devices.

The number of apps distributed worldwide in 2011 is expected to reach 17.7 billion

Pew also notes that accompanying this rise in use of mobile devices has been explosive growth of mobile software applications and the "rise of apps culture." In 2009, 3.5 billion apps were distributed worldwide; in 2010 the number soared to 8.2 billion, and in 2011 the number of apps distributed worldwide is expected to more than double to 17.7 billion.

The unprecedented saturation of mobile devices and software apps presents exciting new opportunities for urban historians, cultural institutions, and educators. Economic and technical matters pose perhaps the greatest constraint on humanists' ability to respond to the change.

Industry leaders estimate that the average mobile app costs $35,000 to build and requires increasingly specialized technical expertise. Once new apps are developed there is also a need for training, staff resource development, and maintenance of the rich humanities content in mobile settings. Responses to the 2011 Museums & Mobile Survey confirm the nature of the problem, reporting that the prime barriers to adoption are cost of implementation, keeping content up-to-date, and technical development issues.

The average mobile app costs $35,000 to build

In light of the challenges facing scholars and museums, CPHDH is currently transforming *Cleveland Historical* into a broader open-source project, one that could enable scholars or museums to curate the history of any city or town in the world. The Center envisions that this broad initiative, tentatively called the *Mobile Historical Project*, will address these challenges by offering an innovative, open-source, standards-based, low-cost mobile tool suitable to organizations of all sizes and budgets, while at the same time providing training materials, guides, and models that embody best practices for humanities curating in mobile environments.

Cleveland's Euclid Avenue, 1928. Photo courtesy of Center for Public History + Digital Humanities

To date, CPHDH has begun to explore the process of scaling in cooperation with CHNM and urban and public historians at other universities and institutions across the nation, and even internationally.

Practitioners Report, *continued*

Cleveland Historical is transforming into a broader project : an innovative, open-source, low-cost mobile tool

The project also emphasizes digital storytelling as a dynamic activity involving significant collaborative work between institutions, communities, individuals, and scholars. This model demands that institutions curate their materials in conjunction with their audiences, and build community through interactive exchanges. Social media integration and Omeka's multiplatform interoperability underscore this social curatorial process. Thus, this project offers both a technological and humanistic infrastructure for collaborative curation in mobile environments, one that accentuates the physical dynamism of cities.

To learn more about the project, download or view it on the web at clevelandhistorical.org; review student-created multimedia stories on CPHDH's YouTube Channel, www.youtube.com/user/csudigitalhumanities; and find the latest information and updates at the Center's homepage, csudigitalhumanities.org. Contact the Center with comments and questions at csudigitalhumanities@gmail.com or on Twitter at @cphdh .

Mark Tebeau
Associate Professor of History and CPHDH Co-Director
Mark Souther
Associate Professor of History and CPHDH Co-Director
Erin Bell
CPHDH Project Coordinator and Technology Director

UHA Awards, *continued*

UHA Best Dissertation Award, 2009

The award for best dissertation goes to **Andrew R. Highsmith** for "Demolition Means Progress: Race, Class, and the Deconstruction of the American Dream in Flint, Michigan," completed at the University of Michigan. This dissertation uses an impressive array of primary and secondary sources to examine the decline of Flint, Michigan following World War II. In a clear and engaging narrative, the author explains the root causes of decline in one of America's iconic Rustbelt cities. Highsmith emphasizes the role of government, especially local, in causing Flint's problems. One area the author emphasizes is race relations. His research indicates that the idea of northern cities suffering from *de facto* segregation was not the case in Flint, where civic officials went to great lengths to discourage integration. Once integration began, authorities did nothing to discourage real estate agents from using the issue to convince white residents to move to the suburbs. Along the same lines, Flint's leaders made weak efforts at annexing surrounding territories and virtually no effort to diversify the local economy. As Highsmith shows, these moves left Flint with a high concentration of poor or working-class residents highly dependent on a volatile industry for work. When foreign competition in automaking began in earnest in the 1970s, Flint's position became untenable. Unable to sustain itself, the once proud city become a poster child for post-industrial urban decay. Using a convincing body of evidence, Highsmith has created a clear and engaging narrative. His conclusions represent a major contribution to American urban history.

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