

Historic Aerial Images and Maps Committee

Meeting Maryland State Archives Annapolis, MD August 18, 2011

MINUTES

Attendance

The names and contact information for the 16 people who attended the meeting are as follows:

Name	Organization	Phone	E-mail
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Introductions

Everyone present introduced him- or herself.

Findings from the Survey Monkey survey

At the TUGIS 2011 conference in March, Larry Swift and Tim Baker gave a presentation, *Scanning and Preserving Maryland Historic Aerial Photos*, that summarized the work of the Committee to date, including the results of the Survey Monkey survey conducted earlier this year. Larry began the meeting by quickly reviewing the presentation. One finding of the survey was that “a lot of people have a lot of stuff, and a lot of it needs preservation.” He envisions the next step as being the development of a directory – a searchable database, based initially on the survey, of available aerial photography and the agencies or organizations that hold it. Roger Barlow suggested that the Committee contact the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), which is in the process of preserving its own aerial photographs.

Developments since the last meeting

- a. Lamere Hennessee reported that the Maryland Geological Survey (MGS) has been awarded a one-year grant (July 2011-June 2012) from the USGS's National Geological and Geophysical Data Preservation Program (NGGDPP) to document each of the photographs in its collection of 9"x9" black-and-white air photos flown in the 1930s and 1950s. One of the fields to be provided as metadata to the NGGDPP is "geographic coordinates." MGS proposed to scan and roughly georeference all of the index maps associated with photos of the two eras, and then assign a latitude and longitude to the NE corner of each photograph. However, the Survey can probably modify the proposed scope of work to bring it into closer alignment with procedures and specifications developed by the Committee, if those are adopted quickly. Lamere has been discussing the matter with Larry and Tim Palmer of the Maryland Environmental Service (MES).
- b. Tim Palmer demonstrated a GIS system that MES developed for the Maryland Port Administration to store and display not only aerial photos, flown frequently over its dredged material containment sites, but also reports associated with those sites. The project could serve as a template for a Maryland-wide application. The question arose as to how such an application would be preserved and who would be responsible for preserving it. Mike Shean outlined the steps required: (1) preserve the hardcopy source, (2) scan the source and preserve the scanned image, (3) georeference/rectify the scanned image, and (4) display the image in a web application.
- c. Tim Baker remarked that although the Maryland State Archives (MSA) is interested in both preservation and public access, the two can be regarded as separate matters. And that, with respect to the air photos, MSA need not do it all. For example, MSA could be directly responsible for preservation of the original photos and their digital counterparts, and partner with others to provide public access to scanned images. Under this scenario, MSA would accession a set of photographs, with some level of description – what it is and where it came from – with a link to retrieve the electronic versions. At present, providing public access to material based on a spatial context exceeds MSA staff training.

Where do we go from here?

Larry recommended that, as a next step, the Committee begin working on an inventory of historical air photographs and sources, starting with the Survey Monkey survey. This will involve deciding on what we are going to collect, how to catalog it, and how to serve it up. To that end, he suggested that a smaller group of Committee members meet to tackle those questions. Possibilities to consider include evaluating both Ramona and federal metadata as inventory tools. Ramona is geared toward contemporary GIS data sets and would have to be tweaked to work with historical images; the project manager has indicated that he is willing to modify the tool for that purpose. The inventory would have to be expandable – able to accommodate other sources of air photos. And the Committee needs to decide on a form/format (e.g., searchable database) in which to store the information.

The first things to be done, before holders of aerial photos can provide detailed documentation about the items in their collections, is to develop a template that lays out the specific information to be captured. Also, the Committee must decide on the scope of the effort. That is, which of the following are to be documented: aerial photos, satellite imagery, maps drawn to certain standards, LIDAR-collected imagery? At some point, there is a need for a transition plan, from photos, etc., still in use, to transferring no-longer-used photos to an archive for permanent preservation. One way to think about this is as a life cycle management plan for the photos. To that end, some of the questions that must be answered include: What will we keep? Which form/format offers the greatest longevity/usefulness?

A subcommittee made up of interested Committee members will meet to begin developing a document laying out some of these ideas and decision points. Initially, we will focus on historical 9"x9" aerial photos and expand from there.

Many counties have already done a lot of work in this area. They are already following certain standards (e.g., digitizing negatives instead of paper products; scanning at a high (standard) resolution). Counties might be willing to supply MSA with their digital products.

The Committee viewed some of the websites that currently serve air photos and critiqued what they saw. The Howard County website,

<http://gis.howardcountymd.gov/GAerialPhoto/GAerialPhoto.asp?>,

was popular for the following reasons: the website allows users to start with the year of photography; it provides brief metadata and bibliographic information, allowing users to learn something about the imagery before viewing it; a thumbnail image of the county offers a quick, easy-to-decipher indication of the extent of coverage, supplemented by the actual percentage of county coverage.

Action Items

All Committee members

- Provide Larry with a list of fields included in existing air photo collection inventories used by your organization/agency

Larry Swift

- Follow-up on Roger Barlow's suggestion of contacting USGS
- Convene a subcommittee meeting in Baltimore (at MGS) to begin developing a draft outline of the work to be undertaken by the Committee, including a template of the information required to document an air photo collection