

Mapping Concord: Google Maps and the 19th-Century Concord Digital Archive

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Abstract

The 19th Century Concord Digital Archive implemented a scholarly map interface that draws on current open source technologies. The archive includes interlinked literary texts, maps, census materials, town reports, broadsides, and period newspaper clippings. These texts are technologically designed to reference and interact with each other. However, the archive does not seek merely to present a set of texts for study. Instead, it tests an initial map interface to the textual data. When we are able to view satellite photos of the topography and quickly find a physical description related to the topography in an essay, what new information might be revealed? When we explore a place visually and then link to the text, what new conclusions might scholars draw?

Poster Abstract

The 19th Century Concord Digital Archive is implementing a scholarly map interface that draws on current open source technologies. The archive includes interlinked literary texts, maps, census materials, town reports, broadsides, and period newspaper clippings. These texts are technologically designed to reference and interact with each other. However, the archive does not seek merely to present a set of texts for study. Instead, we are testing an initial map interface to the textual data. The 19th Century Concord Digital Archive is currently in the first phase of testing a Google map conversion user interface that represents spatial information of Concord, MA (homes, ponds, cemeteries, etc.) visually (VR 360 “walkable images”) and textually (connected related data from documents and database). The ability to zoom in and out, obtain contemporary satellite images, locate particular buildings and view VR 360 images that lead to textual data in a visual interface creates a new form of data interface in digital humanities studies. The initial Concord Archive map interface utilizes Google map manipulations to produce an interactive map that allows users to locate a particular Concord site. The maps that serve as one user interface also influence the way that a scholar will deal with textual materials included in the archive. While we know the reasons for using TEI/XML markup for digital texts, following a standardized metadata structure for texts is beneficial in visual integration. Names and locations are encoded with a key that refers to a database table in which the editor provides name and place variants, and, for places, GIS longitude and latitude points. We've added other materials that scholars might find helpful, such as complete town census records transcribed into database tables for ease of use; then scholars can work through large numbers of documents, all editorially marked, searching for particular references to people and places, quickly and accurately. And, the possibilities of visual searches focused by the encoding practice allows scholars multiple possibilities of manipulating and comparing a large body of geographically related texts. Texts will be linked to the maps and users will be able locate materials that are related to the particular sites visualized on the map — a merger of text and visual, of technology rethinking the way in which we work with texts. When we are able to view satellite photos of the topography and quickly find a physical description related to the topography in an essay, what new information might be revealed? When we explore a place visually and then link to the text, what new conclusions might scholars draw?

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