

Research in the Use of Geographic Information Software in Archives

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Abstract: Geographic information system (GIS) software has become more useful and popular in the commercial sector and various academic disciplines. The software ranges from sophisticated applications supporting high-level research (e.g. [ArcGIS](#)) to relatively simple mapping tools such as [Historypin](#). Archival records, like other information resources, have spatial contexts that can be illuminating to archivists and users of archives. Typically, place based information about records is presented in a purely textual way in archival description applications. Geographic names are commonly standardized and identified in archival catalogues alongside other access points.

My research will explore the extent to which geographic information layers could prove useful to archives and their patrons, especially when associated with archival discovery systems. Such layers could enhance patron access to archival descriptions and digital objects. At present, there are some archival description or digitization portals that take advantage of mapping layers (e.g. see [Mapping our Anzacs](#)), or tools such as [Historypin](#) that are used for promoting visual resources such as photographs.

I have begun the process of reviewing any existing plans, projects, and tools that are immediately obvious through literature review, archives website examination, and discussions with archives software developers. Later this year and early next, I plan to actively seek out detailed information and opinions through surveys and interviews with archival officials in North America.

What I plan to do at the SAA research forum is present very preliminary results of the above noted review and, more importantly, to obtain ideas from researchers about the focus and value of this ongoing research.

About the author:

Tom Belton has an MA in Public History from the University of Waterloo. He has been an archivist since 1988, and a Certified Archivist since 2005. Until 2001, he worked at the Archives of Ontario in a variety of roles culminating with responsibility for court records and assisting with archives descriptive software implementation.

Between 2001 and 2004, after a brief stint as a records management officer, he travelled Ontario as a roving Archives Advisor for the provincial Archives Association. Since 2005, he has worked at Western University Archives in London, Ontario, with varying responsibilities including archives software administration and coordination of archives instruction. As an academic archivist, he also engages in research and scholarship.

Tom has worked on a number of different research projects over the years, most of them loosely connected to the ideas of geographic place and jurisdiction in archives. His most recent major work was an article entitled "Custody, Control, and Confusion: Legal, Historical, and Territorial Aspects of Court Records in Ontario", published in *Archivaria* 69. His abiding interest in the intersection of archives, place, and technology, has led him to the study of the use of geographic information in archives resource discovery systems.