Tacoma Then and Again: Project Prospectus and Vision

Introduction

During Spring Quarter 2017, I am collaborating with Huatong Sun’s TCOM 480 Advanced Web Design Course to develop website prototypes for the next phase of the Tacoma Then and Again. This document was prepared to provide students some context for the prototypes and some sense of how they develop fit into the overall plan for this project.

As we collaborate on this project, I am guided by these research questions:

- How can digital collections engage and educate new audiences through participatory projects?
- How might these projects lead to design innovations for digital collections?

Overall Project Vision

During the next phase of Tacoma Then and Again, I would like to create a platform that enables citizen photographers to participate in a city-wide rephotography project.

It will feature an interactive, geographically-referenced collection of historical photographs of Tacoma. Curated specifically for this project from regional collections, these images will illustrate the dramatic cultural and environmental changes that Tacoma has seen since its founding in 1864.

Photographers will be able to find images by keyword searching, browsing thematic groups, or locating them in a map of the city and surrounding area. Once they’ve identified an image and potential site for rephotographing, they will be able to easily upload submissions, tagging photographs so that they can be easily associated with the original photograph.

The new photographs will then be selected and gathered in a searchable collection that unites the historical with the new images.

Scope of Class Project

During the class, I would like to request that class groups create prototypes for the initial website that citizen photographers will explore and interact with. Imagine this website as the one that launches the project with a site of geographically referenced images. Its primary user groups will be:

- Amateur and professional photographers who want to participate in the project.
- Curious residents of Tacoma and surrounding area who might view the site at home or out in on the city streets, some of whom may be inspired to recreate photographs.
- Students in high schools and universities that use the project in assignments.
• Journalists from local media wanting to find out information about the project quickly and easily.

**What I don’t expect you do on the prototypes:**

• Map or otherwise geographically reference images: Creating a responsive, interactive map with images will require significant amount of work to first identify and design the platform, then to geo-reference the images to correct locations. Therefore, I have created a sample map with a small selection of images, which is available here:

http://guides.lib.uw.edu/tacoma/tcom420/sample_map

In designing your site, you may embed this map rather than create your own. If you are curious about other options, I would encourage you to look at the HistoryPin or similar website to see how other sites have geo-referenced images.

• Selecting/curating large sets of images: It will take a significant amount of work to identify the best images for the project. Many of the photographs will likely be selected not just for quality but also time period, theme, and location in the city. I envision that a grant-funded position might do some of the preliminary preparation of the images. Yet if you do identify specific images that are of interest to you, please consider using them in your prototypes.

• Design the final digital collection: The design of the final digital collection webpages will be determined by the platform used for gathering and disseminating the images. Since the class is focusing on the first phase, I don’t expect you to do any actual rephotography (unless you really, really want to) or try design for the new images.

**What I do expect you to do on the prototypes:**

• Consider how participants might find out about events and other ways to get involved: Part of this project will be to offer trainings, presentations, walking tours, and other events that will prepare people for the project.

• Determine best ways that participants might learn about rephotography and local history: Many of the photographers will be new to rephotography, so a part of the website could provide tutorials and instructions on how reshoot photographs. Also, one of the goals of this project will be to engage people from all age groups in the history of Tacoma. Depending on how the images are grouped, each of these sections could have introductory text provides brief historical context.

• Suggest ideas for how to organize photographs thematically: Imagine how various users will approach images and provide some ideas for how users might encounter images.

• Optional: offer opportunities for people to upload their own rephotographed images: Individuals may personal or family photographs that they may wish to reshoot. Where and how would these be incorporated in the site?