

**HistoryPin**[www.historypin.com](http://www.historypin.com)*Reviewed by Abigail Nye, Reference and Instruction Archivist, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee*

HistoryPin is a free social media platform that allows users to pin content to Google maps. Developed by a non-profit, We Are What We Do, HistoryPin bills itself as a “global community collaborating around history.”<sup>1</sup> HistoryPin is designed to take advantage of open, linked data to present historical material in new ways. With 53,471 users and 1,590 institutions involved, the platform is small but powerful. HistoryPin also is available as a free app for iOS, Android, and Windows phones.

Since one of HistoryPin’s aims is “to get as many people as possible taking part in the history of their family, streets, country and world,”<sup>2</sup> the HistoryPin user interface is impressively easy to use. Users can explore worldwide content by browsing the main map interface or searching by date and keyword.

For the archivist, the main focus of HistoryPin is the channel, or user profile. The user logs in via Google, Facebook, or Twitter to customize the look and feel of the channel and upload content. HistoryPin accepts JPGs or PNGs for images and asks users to pull content from YouTube or Vimeo for audio and video files.<sup>3</sup> Where Google Street View is available, users can overlay historical photographs and compare them with the contemporary location. HistoryPin allows users to become fans of other channels and provides basic statistics on content views and channel fans.

The HistoryPin app is designed primarily for end users. The app allows users to explore collections or snap and upload a picture of an old photograph or a current moment in history. One of the most exciting app features allows individuals to take a “repeat” photograph. Once the user has selected a historic photograph of interest, a simple click on “take a HistoryPin repeat” opens the camera and overlays the old photograph for easy alignment. The user can increase or decrease the opacity of the old photograph to snap the modern replica. The user can also explore random content by simply shaking their device. While the app provides engaging features for the casual user, it is not designed to support more administrative functions, decreasing its usefulness for the archivist interested in maintaining a channel, bulk uploading content, or inputting detailed

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<sup>1</sup>HistoryPin home page, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.historypin.com/>

<sup>2</sup>What kind of content can I add to HistoryPin?,” accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.historypin.com/faq/#title3>

<sup>3</sup>“What are HistoryPin’s long-term aims?,” accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.historypin.com/faq/#title6>

metadata.

HistoryPin's strengths as an archives tool are threefold. First, HistoryPin's commitment to archives and other cultural institutions means that it provides an archives-friendly content ownership policy and robust metadata fields for archives to provide information about their uploaded content. Second, HistoryPin's website features an entire section devoted to libraries, archives, and museums.<sup>4</sup> Archivists can find resources for classroom instruction, guides and video tutorials, and FAQs geared towards information professionals. Third, the inviting user interface creates an engaging experience and supports archival access and outreach goals.

Obscurity is HistoryPin's main weakness. The power of social media springs from a strong user base; heavy promotion will likely be necessary to engage a substantial archives user community. Archivists who want to leverage the power of a more popular social media network may consider Pinterest or Flickr's map features, though Pinterest's content ownership policy may make some archivists wary of uploading content.

HistoryPin provides a venue for archivists to engage their user communities in crowdsourcing archives. With its geospatial focus, HistoryPin allows users to view content across archival collections, revolutionizing the discovery process. Archivists have progressed far enough into the world of linked data and mashups that the question is not "should archivists participate?" but "how can every archivist participate?" HistoryPin brings the DJ into the archives by enabling archivists and their user communities to mashup photographs, videos, audio clips, descriptive text, and map data.<sup>5</sup> Not every archives has the resources to mount a large-scale project, but HistoryPin's accessible interface and reasonable price point (read: free) make it possible for anyone—archivists or volunteers or students—to participate.

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<sup>4</sup> Libraries, Archives, and Museums Homepage, accessed April 4, 2014, <http://www.historypin.com/community/lams>

<sup>5</sup> Jon Voss, Plenary Session, (presentation, Society of American Archivists Annual Conference, San Diego, CA, August 6–11, 2012).