



## *The American Archivist* Reviews

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<http://www.archivists.org/american-archivist-reviews>

### **Viewshare: Interfaces to Our Heritage**

[www.viewshare.org](http://www.viewshare.org)

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Viewshare is a free, open source application developed and maintained by the National Digital Information Infrastructure and Preservation Program at the Library of Congress (NDIIPP). The purpose of Viewshare is to enable users to enhance their digital collections by creating “unique,” “customizable,” and “dynamic” views of their collections without the need for coding skills.<sup>i</sup> Viewshare helps users create links between time, place, and data and provides the opportunity for the archivist to serve as a DJ (Jon Voss, SAA plenary 2012) by turning data and digital collections into maps, timelines, charts and galleries. A Viewshare community allows users to connect, share data, and provide suggestions and feedback. This application brings digital collections to a new level of visualization, but could be enhanced through additional views, increased opportunities for collaboration, and easier editing of data.

Viewshare was launched in October 2011 and boasts over 1700 users including archivists, librarians, scholars, museum curators, and students. The program is web-based with a drag and drop interface, and ingests data in the following formats: simple spreadsheets (CSV or Microsoft Excel files), XML MODS files, JSON data, Open Archives Initiative (OAI) end point (beta) and Content DM Database files (beta). Users can create timelines, lists, charts, galleries, and maps, which they can embed into their own websites or maintain on the Viewshare website. Data, though, cannot be edited within Viewshare and new users should allow time to experiment with and refine their data to ensure that it will display correctly within Viewshare. There is ample documentation to assist new users, including a user guide, an FAQs page, a LibGuide, an SAA webinar, blog entries on the Library of Congress’ Digital Preservation blog, *The Signal*, and a forum for questions.<sup>ii</sup> New users should also note Viewshare works best with datasets of less than 1000 objects, and may not be as useful for larger digital collections and datasets.

Voss stressed that linked data resources should connect and effectively tell the stories between documents and records, their data, and the record creators. Viewshare allows for the correlation between place, time, and objects through its map and timeline views. It also enables researchers to view commonalities in data through charts and graphs, such as scatterplots. An example is a visualization of digitized funeral records created by Jennifer Brancato of Stephen F. Austin State University. Researchers can search and browse a map of cemetery locations or view pie charts showing the race and religion of the deceased.<sup>iii</sup> Viewshare can also be a valuable classroom tool. Stephanie Y. Evans, an African-American studies professor at Clark Atlanta University, used Viewshare to enable her students to explore her research on travel memoirs of African American writers by creating a searchable map showing the places the authors visited and adding links to online

biographies of those authors. In addition, Viewshare proved to be a valuable learning tool for information science students at the University of Maryland in a course on Digital Libraries.<sup>iv</sup>

Despite its very useful features, Viewshare further assist in the creation of connections and the display of data. Developers are exploring the possibility of adding support for audio and video and more charts like heat maps, which will allow for the inclusion of more varied digital collections and data sets. The mapping features on Viewshare could also be enhanced with street and aerial views like those available on Google maps and History Pin. In addition, tools for creating infographics or the ability to combine different spreadsheets of data into one view, could help Viewshare compete with other visualization software like Visual.ly and Tableau.

Viewshare does create its own archival content community by moving past the concept of tables. Users can contact and connect with other users and share their data. On the feedback forum, they can vote for enhancements, ask questions, or suggest features. This community, though, focuses primarily on those creating the visualizations and not necessarily researchers and students who may use and explore the data, since you do need a Viewshare account to participate.

Viewshare is a growing tool and community for creators and managers of digital collections embracing the standards set forth in John Voss's 2012 SAA Plenary. It provides the ability to use visualizations without the need for advanced technological skills and allows users to connect, learn, and share. Although it could use some enhancements such as additional graphs and views, and further opportunities to create connections between researchers and the creators of the visualizations, this application is definitely worth a test drive.

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<sup>i</sup> "About Viewshare," <http://viewshare.org/about/community/>

<sup>ii</sup> A LibGuide for Viewshare was created by Camille Salas and is available at: <http://libraryschool.libguidescms.com/viewsharetutorials>. More information on the SAA webinar, "Viewshare... Learn how to use it and work with it" is available at: <http://saa.peachnewmedia.com/store/seminar/seminar.php?seminar=17896>; Digital Preservation, Library of Congress, The Signal, <http://blogs.loc.gov/digitalpreservation/>

<sup>iii</sup> Owens, Trevor, "Better Know a Viewshare," The Signal Digital Preservation, Library of Congress, Entry posted 18 April 2012. <http://blogs.loc.gov/digitalpreservation/2012/04/better-know-a-viewshare-exploring-texas-funeral-records/>; East Texas Research Center, Stephen F. Austin State University, "Cason Monk-Metcalf Funeral Directors Digital Archives and Collections," <http://digital.sfasu.edu/cdm/landingpage/collection/CasonMonk>

<sup>iv</sup> Salas, Camille, "Teaching Viewshare for Academic Work: An Interview with Moya Bailey," The Signal Digital Preservation, Library of Congress, Entry posted 9 January 2013. <http://blogs.loc.gov/digitalpreservation/2013/01/teaching-viewshare-for-academic-work-an-interview-with-moya-bailey/>; Salas, Camille, "Teaching Digital Library Creation with Viewshare," The Signal Digital Preservation, Library of Congress, Entry posted 7 December 2012. <http://blogs.loc.gov/digitalpreservation/2012/12/teaching-digital-library-creation-with-viewshare/>