

## HISTORY OF SAH IMAGE EXCHANGE



Litho: Owen, *Hints on Public Architecture*, 1849

The SAH Image Exchange was begun in 1996 by the SAH Electronic Media Committee with a set of electronic images meant to be used by university professors and independent scholars for teaching basic survey courses in U.S. architecture. In 1998 another set of images was put online to provide illustrations for survey courses in world architecture. In both cases, the choice of sites illustrated was drawn from a tabulated concordance of the images in several survey text books.

Ultimately, this concordance process identified approximately 230 sites illustrated in multiple U.S. survey texts and approximately 480 in the world survey. Most sites are represented in the SAH Image Exchange by two to eight images, totaling about 1200 digital images in the U.S. project, and more than 2400 in the world survey. The total number of images in these two online resources is approximately 4000. For the past ten years, the SAH Image Exchange, has been available on the open Web, with no password and only a stipulation that images may not be reused without permission. Those who wished to use the images for non-pedagogical purposes were directed back to the contributors of the images.

A high proportion of those 4000 images were gathered in the first few years as scans from slides loaned for that purpose. Other images, already digitized, were contributed by similar projects, including those posted by the University of Washington, Boston College, Bluffton College, and Minneapolis College of Art & Design. And others, especially plans, were scanned from out-of-copyright publications. More recently the SAH Image Exchange has been receiving images taken with digital cameras.

Server space has been contributed informally by Bryn Mawr College, where the two websites are among the sites most visited from outside the campus. Statistics from Bryn Mawr indicate that the Image Exchange is visited by between 17,000 and 25,000 visitors per month, or between 200,000 and 300,000 visitors annually.

The original Image Exchange site was built using html rather than a database-driven system and, as a result, updates and additions are difficult and time-consuming to make. The prospect of converting the SAH Image Exchange into a database-driven system has been discussed over the past few years. Such a system would place all the cataloging data and images in a presentation-neutral structure that can then allow complex, fielded searches. Material could be reconfigured according to different filters, different interface designs, and feature sets. All of these features would be independent of the underlying content, to allow easy integration of new data and images and the exchange of content with other projects.

To our knowledge, the SAH Image Exchange is the richest image collection on the open Web that is geared especially toward teaching surveys, representing most building sites with a range of complementary images, including plans. Within ten years, the SAH Image Exchange has become an important tool for those who teach the history of architecture using digital images. However, we also recognize the disadvantages of the current version: uploading of new images is time consuming and not easily done, the information that accompanies the images is usually limited to a few words, the images are searchable only to a very limited degree and the size of the images is too small for use in publication. At the same time, the use of digital resources in teaching is growing at a fast rate. Microsoft's PowerPoint, or other similarly sophisticated programs for teaching with multiple images, captions, music clips and a variety of other media, have become the new standard. For those reasons, SAH is investigating creating the SAH Architecture Resources Archive (SAH ARA). For an archive of meeting notes and information about the creation of the Image Exchange, please contact the SAH office at [info@sah.org](mailto:info@sah.org)