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Welcome Newest Affiliate, Society of Architectural Historians (SAH)

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Abstract

VRA (Visual Resources Association) and SAH (Society of Architectural Historians) became affiliate organizations in 2011 in order to foster a stronger collaborative and mutually beneficial relationship between the two organizations and their members. The benefits of the affiliation are outlined. Many VRA members manage and curate architecture image collections and work closely with architectural historians, architects, urban planners, landscape architects and preservationists. Both organizations see opportunities for combining their expertise and experience to build sustainable and authoritative digital image collections that support the discipline of architectural history and related fields. Over the past five years, SAH has led innovative and trailblazing initiatives in the digital humanities, *JSAH Online*, SAHARA (SAH Architectural Resource Archive) and SAH Archipedia

Keywords

digital humanities, digital publishing, digital scholarship, architectural historians

Author Bio & Acknowledgements

Jolene de Verges is the Digital Assets/Metadata Manager & Architecture and Visual Arts Librarian at the MIT Libraries. She is incoming president of the Visual Resources Association, and currently serves on the SAHARA Editorial Executive Board

In 2011, the Visual Resources Association (VRA) and the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH)¹ formed a partnership that will provide many benefits and opportunities for each organization and its members, including a 10% discount off of individual memberships for the first year. SAH membership includes preferred access to SAH study tours and participation in SAHARA (until the end of 2012). The opportunity to post news about conferences/professional opportunities and engage in discussions on the SAH Communities site² is also a benefit of individual membership.

Founded in 1940, the mission of SAH is "to advance knowledge and understanding of the history of architecture, design, landscape, and urbanism worldwide among scholars, professionals in allied fields (including architecture, historic preservation and planning), and the interested general public." As stated recently by President Maureen Burns, "many VRA members manage architecture image collections and work with architects and architectural historians or are already collaborating with SAH. Therefore, closer ties between the two organizations could be quite beneficial." Reciprocal exchanges of news, publications, membership rosters, and web site postings are benefits at the organizational level as well as enhanced opportunities for participation in each other's annual conferences.

Over the past five years, first through its innovative, highly collaborative SAHARA³ project, followed by SAH Archipedia⁴, a dynamic publishing platform that will be launched in April, 2012, our newest affiliate organization, SAH, has emerged as a recognized leader in the growing arena of digital humanities, advancing important models of digital scholarship and inter-institutional collaboration. SAH was recently nominated by the *Chronicle of Higher Education* as a "Top Technology Innovator for 2012"⁵ in the category of publishing for its work to "transform humanities publishing with online tools."

SAHARA, SAH's architectural resource archive of high-quality images and QTVR panoramas with clear copyright for use in research and teaching, is advancing architectural history scholarship by transforming how scholars work with library and information professionals on every aspect of collection-building, from basic descriptive metadata and image specifications to rights, editorial workflows and collection development. The project introduced the concept of collaborative editorial review of submissions. Some VRA members might remember the SAH Image Exchange, led by Jeff Cohen, that preceded SAHARA. SAH turned to members of VRA to serve as collaborators, recognizing that our community has been involved in laying the groundwork necessary to successfully support a shared repository. During the first

¹ <http://www.sah.org/>

² <http://www.sahcommunities.groupsie.com>

³ <http://saharaonline.org/>

⁴ <http://www.sah.org/index.php?submenu=Publications&src=gendocs&ref=SAH%20Archipedia&category=Publications>

⁵ <http://chronicle.com/article/Tech-Innovators/130926>

year of the SAHARA project, SAH partnered with ARTstor⁶ to develop a cataloging tool for individual scholars and institutions to upload their images and describe them using a template for metadata based on VRACore 4.0. SAH president Dianne Harris notes in a brief essay, “Learned Society 2.0”, published on the HASTAC (Humanities, Arts, Science, and Technology Advanced Collaboratory) blog that “in creating this tool, SAH forged a new model of collaboration between scholars and librarians; it created a new form of peer-reviewed, digital scholarly publication; and it created a useful resource for its members. The new model encouraged SAH members and librarians at multiple institutions to participate, furthering the collaborative aspects of collection building.”

SAHARA collection growth has been steady, reaching the 40,000 image mark in 2011. To keep up with the growth, in 2012, the SAHARA collection will be migrated to the Shared Shelf platform in ARTstor.

SAHARA has been funded through a generous grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation⁷. VRA member and past president Ann Whiteside served as the SAHARA Project Director from 2008-2011, and along with several other VRA members who curate architecture image collections within libraries and departments, provided metadata expertise throughout the implementation process. More information about SAHARA can be found online at the SAHARA website.

SAH has partnered with the University of Virginia Press to build SAH Archipedia, an interactive, media-rich online encyclopedia of American architecture. The first phase of the project has been funded by a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities⁸, and will deliver an online resource of more than 50,000 building histories, photographs, maps and essays from the peer-reviewed Buildings of the United States book series⁹ edited and published by SAH. SAH will deliver this content in two ways, first as a free online encyclopedia, SAH Archipedia Classic Buildings, which will contain 100 of each state’s most representative buildings and second as SAH Archipedia, a richer, fuller edition that will link to other scholarly resources available through subscription. Both editions of SAH Archipedia will be launched in April, 2012. Further information can be found online at the SAH Archipedia website.

SAH has been such an innovator in terms of collaborative digital image projects demonstrating the two organizations similar goals and the interesting areas of overlap in our work. Their print projects have also inspired VRA. For example, VRA’s Publishing Advisory Group¹⁰ consulted

⁶ <http://www.artstor.org/>

⁷ <http://www.mellon.org/>

⁸ <http://www.neh.gov/>

⁹ <http://www.sah.org/index.php?submenu=Publications&src=gendocs&ref=BUS&category=Publications>

¹⁰ <http://www.vraweb.org/organization/committees/pag/index.html>

with David Browlee, the Editor of the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*¹¹ who transitioned their journal to an electronic format, when exploring the options for the *VRA Bulletin* to follow suit. This mutually supportive collaboration with SAH should greatly increase VRA's ability to share information and facilitate participation in activities and events sponsored by this partner organization and vice versa. It is an exciting prospect to develop closer ties between the two organizations. Please welcome VRA's newest affiliate organization, SAH.

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¹¹ <http://www.sah.org/index.php?submenu=Publications&src=gendocs&ref=JSAH&category=Publications>