ABOUT THE WWW-VL: UNITED STATES HISTORY NETWORK

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Background

The World-Wide Web Virtual Library's History Index began operations in March of 1993 as HNSource (See: Kansas History Gateway), a lynx-based information server established by Dr. Lynn H. Nelson, History Professor Emeritus, University of Kansas. In September of 1993, at the invitation of Arthur Secret, who had been assigned by W3C.org the task of developing a World-Wide Web index, HTTP functions were added to HNSource, which then assumed the additional identity of The History Index, the first of the World-Wide Web Virtual Library's index sites. For several years, this site was maintained as a single megapage, with categories being thrown off as separate files only when it was necessary to keep the Index from becoming larger than 275 Kb. As the number of History-related sites increased, it became more difficult to maintain satisfactory coverage, to stay abreast of changed addresses and non-operative URLs, and to keep an optimum balance between broad coverage and an effective level of selectivity. The establishment of an integrated and international network of indexes appeared to be the best solution to these problems, and several maintainers of major gateways outside of WWW-VL joined to lay the foundations for such a network. After extensive discussion within this group, a set of common standards for network sites was established, and the group began bringing their individual sites into conformity with those standards.

Organization and Operation

The Central Catalogue of the Network was located at the University of Kansas until April 2004, and is now located at the European University Institute. Its main mailbox is at serge.
The Central Catalogue provides direct links to network sites through its index and maintains a large number of files of pointers for countries, periods, and subject for which there is not yet a member site. Network sites will increasingly supplement their own indexes by linking to appropriate sections of other member sites. The United States History Index is part of the Central Catalogue. Its main mailbox is at kansasheritage@sbcglobal.net

The History Network collectively and its member sites individually, are members of WWW-VL, and each maintainer of a network site is a virtual librarian of WWW-VL. All maintainers are therefore equal, and decisions are reached through discussion and mutual agreement, although this does not preclude the possibility that the members may choose a more formal organization in the future. The History Network intends to decide what sites and maintainers it will integrate and to endorse the acceptance by WWW-VL of those sites and individuals it invites to participate. Beyond that, the members of the Network hope to govern their own activities, but to adhere to the standards of WWW-VL and to participate in that organization as actively and as fully as possible. It is our hope that WWW-VL as a whole will adopt the organization being developed by the History Network and become federal in structure with the History Network only one of a number of cooperating networks.

Invitation to Volunteer Maintainers

In order to provide users with a useful facility, the History Network will have to grow, and it can do so only if new volunteers will join us, either bringing their pre-existing site, or creating a new one, to be integrated into the Network. Such sites may consist of indexes for countries, eras, or topics already listed on the Central Catalogue or new ones to be added to the Central Catalogue's listings. In addition, some sites already participating cover extensive areas, and a new member might, with the agreement first of the site operator and secondly of the members of the History Network as a whole, undertake to maintain a site to cover some part of the site already in operation.

Volunteers must realize, however, that the History Network is, and will remain, unfunded. The WWW-VL council will be working to develop facilities and acquire support for WWW-VL as a whole, and some room can be found to host new sites, but the History Network will not, as an organization, be seeking funds nor accepting advertisements with the possible exception of a discreet pointer to the sponsor of a site. In spite of being unfunded, it is important that, however the owner might arrange it, sites integrated into the network be as stable, permanent, and well-maintained as possible.
General Purpose

Although the Network will be serving the general public, maintainers should attempt to establish standards of coverage and selectivity that will make their sites effective tools for practicing historians wishing to work on-line. In order to accomplish this, each maintainer should be familiar with the needs of scholars and instructors in the area for which he or she is providing the necessary pointers. It should also be noted in this regard that the work of the members of the History Network will be justified only in the numbers and quality of users accessing it, and that only uniform excellence will gain the Network the reputation necessary to draw such a body of users.

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