

Doing the History of Technology in the 21st Century

A workshop collaboration of the MIT Museum and the Hagley Museum and Library

Wednesday, October 9, 2013

10:00 am – 5:00 pm

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Cambridge, MA

Inspired by a multi-year conversation about the contemporary challenges associated with preserving and presenting the history of technology, Debbie Douglas, Head of Collections and Curator of Science and Technology for the MIT Museum, and Erik Rau, Director of Library Services for the Hagley Museum and Library, would like to invite you to participate in special workshop and behind-the-scenes museum tour on Wednesday, October 9th, just prior to the start of the 2013 Annual Meeting of the Society for the History of Technology.

The workshop and tour are free but we will collect a small fee \$20 to cover the cost of lunch and other refreshments.

Schedule:

10:00 Welcome, Introductions

10:15-10:45 Session I – Big Data and Historians: The process of collecting, managing, accessing historical sources

Since the start of the 21st century, our experiences are increasingly captured in large volumes of born-digital documents (Big Data), a concern for archivists, librarians, and historians. Meanwhile, libraries and archives are attempting to transition from their traditional role as information vaults to include a variety of new discovery, data mining, and engagement services. In the future, what will be worth collecting and preserving? What are the implications of Big Data for discovery, access, and historical research? How should the emerging answers to these questions, as well as the associated demands on services from libraries and archives, be sustained? What may be sacrificed, if anything, in the emerging knowledge ecology?

Session I: Keynote speaker: Dr. Micah Altman, Director of Research, MIT Libraries; Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Brookings Institution

10:45-11:15 Discussion

11:15-11:45 Session II Big Data History: Fashioning a useable past

The emergence of large data sets in the conduct of research has already revolutionized many of the natural sciences, but it is becoming apparent that Big Data holds out new opportunities and

challenges for historians as well. One set of questions concerns with what audiences we want to engage as well as how. What will be the most important new sites for public engagement with history? What are the roles of historians of technology in the 21st century? How will new forms of scholarly communication be evaluated in promotion and tenure decisions? Should these forms converge on, or resemble, emerging forms of public outreach? How will undergraduate teaching be affected by MOOCs and other digital history courses; what will teaching graduate students in the age of new media entail? How will we design and evaluate exhibitions? documentaries? websites? What will “best practices” in public history mean?

Session II: Keynote speaker: Professor Steven Lubar, Departments of American Studies, History, and History of Art and Architecture; Director, John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage

11:45-12:15 Discussion

12:15-1:00 Lunch – prioritizing issues for historical research in a digital age
In the spirit of the unconference format, lunch will be spent considering a few pre-circulated questions, informal discussion, and prioritizing several issues for the afternoon workshop, “Articulating the Challenges of ‘Doing’ History of Technology in the 21st Century.”

1:00-2:00 Articulating the Challenges of “Doing History of Technology in the 21st Century (Workshop)

Working with a short list of questions and issues prioritized over lunch, participants will break into working groups to discuss recommendations. The last 30 minutes will be spent on considering the group reports and considering next steps—a future plenary session, a collection of essays, new content of SHOT’s new websites, new methods of connecting to each other and with new publics are some of the possibilities.

2:00-2:15 Closing Comments

2:30-5:00 MIT Museum Tour

Including behind-the-scenes at the museum’s new off-site facility. You’ll be introduced to more than million artifacts ranging from Whirlwind and Walter Groupius’ The Architect’s Collaborative Collection to holograms and some of the original sequencing equipment from the Whitehead Institute’s Human Genome Project.)

Registration:

Registration is limited to 25-30 participants but we will keep a waiting list. If you are interested in participating, please send an email to Janet Hilyard <jhilyard@hagley.org>. We will send additional information, lunch selection request, and directions the week of September 2nd.

Please feel free to forward this announcement to interested colleagues.