



CHOOSING A DIGITAL ARCHIVE OR EXHIBIT PLATFORM FOR YOUR PROJECT

A workshop in the “Digital Humanist’s Help Desk” series

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Follow along with links at: bit.ly/4dUuAEj

OVERVIEW

Many options exist for creating digital archives and digital exhibits for your research in the humanities. This session will guide participants through the pros and cons of various free and paid digital archive and exhibit tools and platforms like WordPress, Omeka, Exhibit, CollectionBuilder, ArcGIS Storymaps, Quire, and Wax. Special attention will be paid to evaluating your own source material, needs, and priorities to find the best tool for you and your project.

Learning goals:

- *Identify what kind of humanities data and source material you have (or want) to create a digital project that emulates an archive or exhibit.*
- *Evaluate your resources and constraints relevant to choosing a tool.*
- *Apply this knowledge to planning to create your own projects using the most appropriate tool(s) for your needs.*

HUMANITIES RESEARCH DATA

What does data look like in the humanities?

correspondence
estate inventory
shipping manifest
diary or journal
financial ledger
photograph
drawing or other work of visual art
burial, birth, or wedding record
newspaper
property record or deed
tax list
notebook
memorandum
telegram
speech
material culture item
genealogy
recipe or menu
film, novel, or other cultural artifact

directory
logbook
blueprints
built structure
price list
advertisement
legislation
government proceedings
transcript
interview
autobiography
schematic or plan
diagram or chart
land survey or map
polling results
census
audio or video recording
publication

... and more!

RESOURCE MAPPING

What resources and limitations do you need to keep in mind as you choose a tool?

EXERCISE: RESOURCE MAPPING

I have more of...

I have less of...

Funding

Time

People/Labor

Training or comfort using new tech tools

Access to tools or data

Readiness of source material

Permission to use source material

NEEDS & PRIORITIES

What are your top 3 priorities?

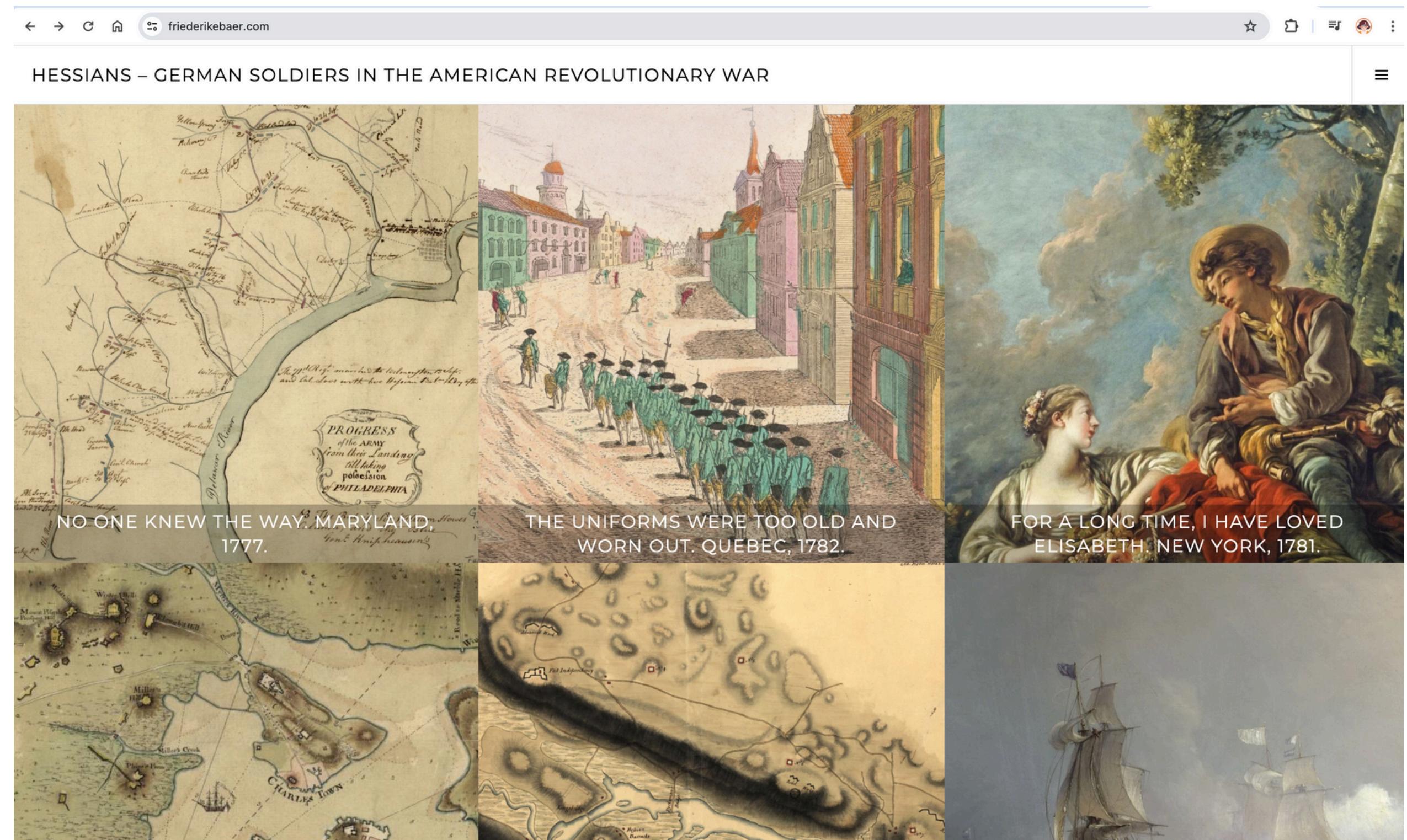
ROUND ROBIN

What materials are you working with? What are your ideas for creating an archive or exhibit with them?

PLATFORM ROUNDUP

WORDPRESS

Example: Hessians - German Soldiers in the American Revolutionary War



WORDPRESS

Pros

- Free (with many paid plugin and template options)
- Easy to learn and use
- If you're a Penn community member, you may be able to work with Domains at Penn (<https://domains.library.upenn.edu/>) for installation!

Cons

- Needs frequent software updates which might cause conflicts if you use plugins or extensions
- WordPress is, at heart, a blogging platform, so you may need to force it to display the way you would like
- Difficult to export in other formats for preservation

Use this tool if

you...

- Need something up and running fast, but may not prioritize longevity
- Want to incorporate a blog or essay accompaniment feature
- Are eligible for a Domains at Penn account

OMEKA

Example: Histories of the National Mall

The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the homepage of the "Histories of the National Mall" Omeka site at mallhistory.org. The page features a green header bar with the URL. Below the header is a logo consisting of a stylized building facade in green and blue, with the text "HISTORIES OF THE NATIONAL MALL" in white. A search bar with a green "Search" button is positioned above a main content area. The content area is divided into several sections: "Discover" (with a map of the National Mall), "Explorations" (with a historical photograph of a landscape), "People" (with a historical photograph of a group of people), and "Past Events" (with a historical photograph of people outdoors). At the bottom, there is a call-to-action section with the text "Uncover the Many Histories of the National Mall" and "Explore historical maps, discover stories you never knew, find people and historical events". A "FEATURED EXPLORATION" section highlights a "Scavenger Hunt: World War II Memorial" with a "Read More" button.

OMEKA

Pros

- Best for exhibits where the goal is cataloging and archiving items related to a broader collection
- Great for collecting and displaying community-sourced content (especially with plugins like Scripto)
- If you're a Penn community member, you may be able to work with Domains at Penn (<https://domains.library.upenn.edu/>) for installation!

Cons

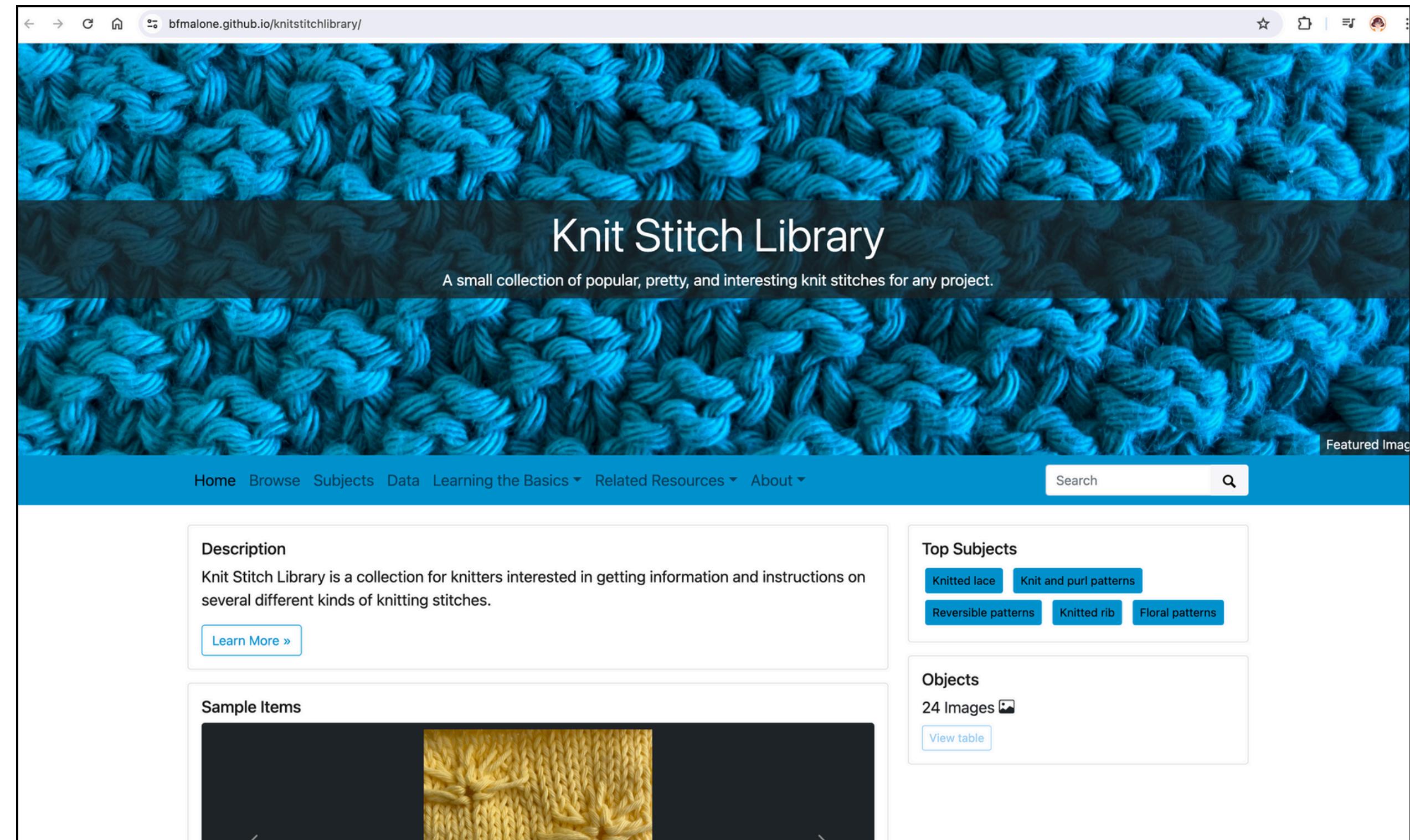
- The central organizing feature is your items' metadata, which keeps things standardized but requires a lot of up front data entry
- Fewer aesthetic customization options
- Advanced functionality requires (often community-created) plugins which may not be frequently updated

Use this tool if you...

- Have items that are already "cataloged" or want to do it as you go
- Prioritize an archive over an exhibit
- Are eligible for a Domains at Penn account

COLLECTIONBUILDER

Example: Knit Stitch Library



The screenshot shows a website for a "Knit Stitch Library". The header features a large, close-up image of blue knitted fabric. Below the header, the title "Knit Stitch Library" is displayed in white text, along with a subtitle: "A small collection of popular, pretty, and interesting knit stitches for any project." A "Featured Image" is visible on the right side of the header. The navigation bar at the top includes links for Home, Browse, Subjects, Data, Learning the Basics, Related Resources, and About. A search bar is located in the top right corner. The main content area contains a "Description" section with text about the library and a "Learn More" button. There is also a "Sample Items" section showing a yellow knitted pattern. To the right, there are sections for "Top Subjects" (Knitted lace, Knit and purl patterns, Reversible patterns, Knitted rib, Floral patterns) and "Objects" (24 Images). The overall design is clean and organized, utilizing a blue and white color scheme.

COLLECTIONBUILDER

Pros

- Free!
- Supports lots of file types including audio, video, and image formats
- Easy to connect items based on their attributes
- Great documentation and tutorials

Cons

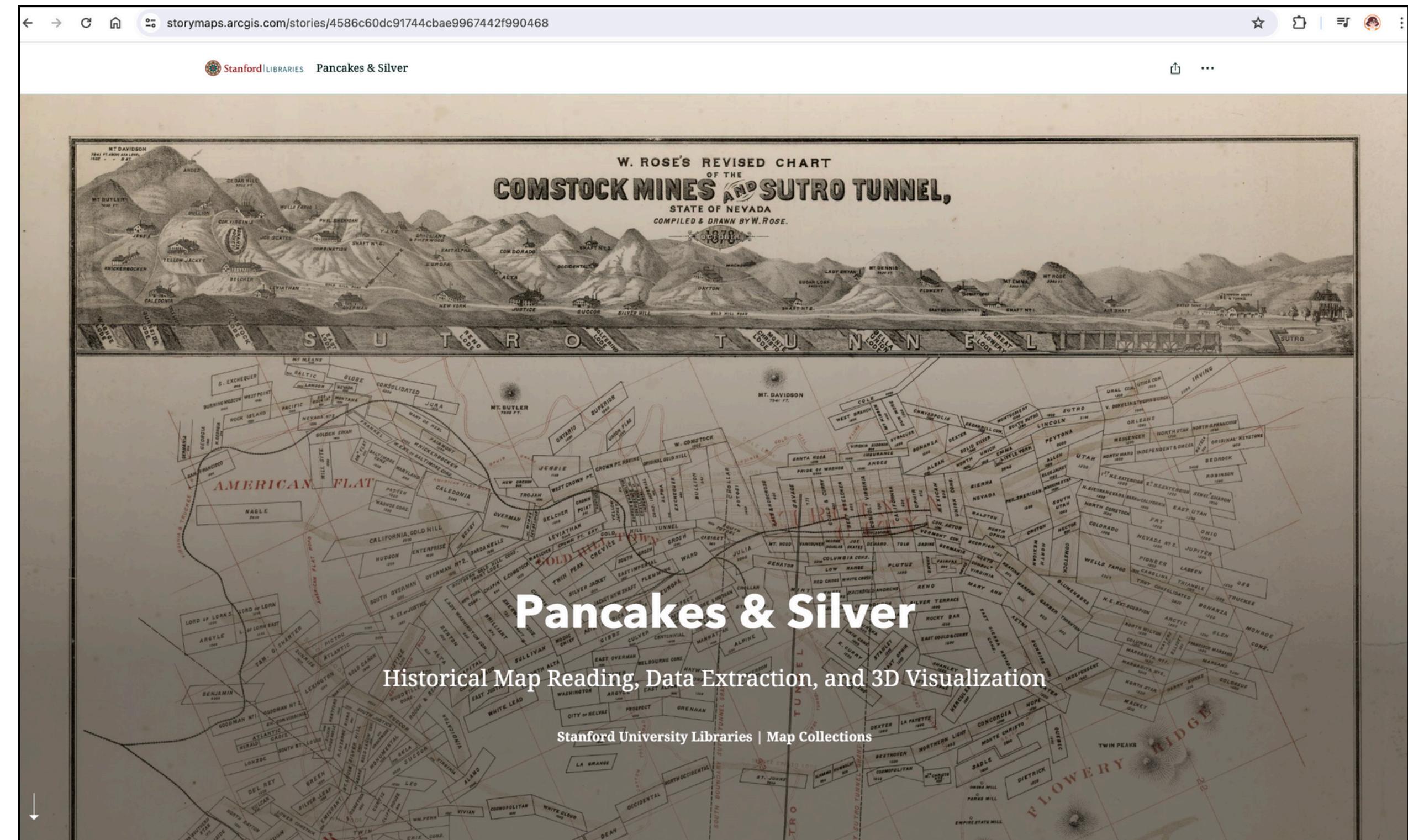
- Requires self web hosting
- Some technical set-up is required at various stages of the creation and maintenance process

Use this tool if you...

- Have a number of different media types to incorporate
- Have items that are already “cataloged” or want to do it as you go
- Want to showcase connections between your items

ARCGIS STORYMAPS

Example: Pancakes & Silver:
Historical Map Reading, Data
Extraction, and 3D
Visualization



ARCGIS STORYMAPS

Pros

- Aesthetically pleasing
- Easy to use
- If you're a Penn community member, you can get free access

Cons

- Requires an expensive subscription, like the one offered by Penn
- Difficult to export and take with you if you leave Penn
- Less desirable for archive-forward projects

Use this tool if

you...

- Want to emphasize storytelling or a narrative flow
- Want something that looks sharp with minimal effort
- Won't need to make updates after you leave Penn and lose access to the free account

QUIRE

Example: The Techniques of Roman-Period Glassblowing

The Techniques of Roman-Period Glassblowing

William Gudenrath

In Jerusalem, sometime about 40 B.C., it was discovered that molten glass could be inflated. To make this phenomenon useful and practical, manufacturing processes had to be invented. This occurred during a rapid expansion of the Roman Empire that eventually included the entire Mediterranean Basin and extended to the far eastern coast: present-day Israel. Through an extensive trade of goods and the widespread movement of people and know-how, glassblowing found its way to the Italian peninsula. It took root and developed quickly. Glassblowing spread to become—then, as now—the predominant method of making glass vessels.



QUIRE

Pros

- Free and open source
- Advanced multimedia support
- Easy to convert to traditional print publication formats (like EPUBs or PDFs)

Cons

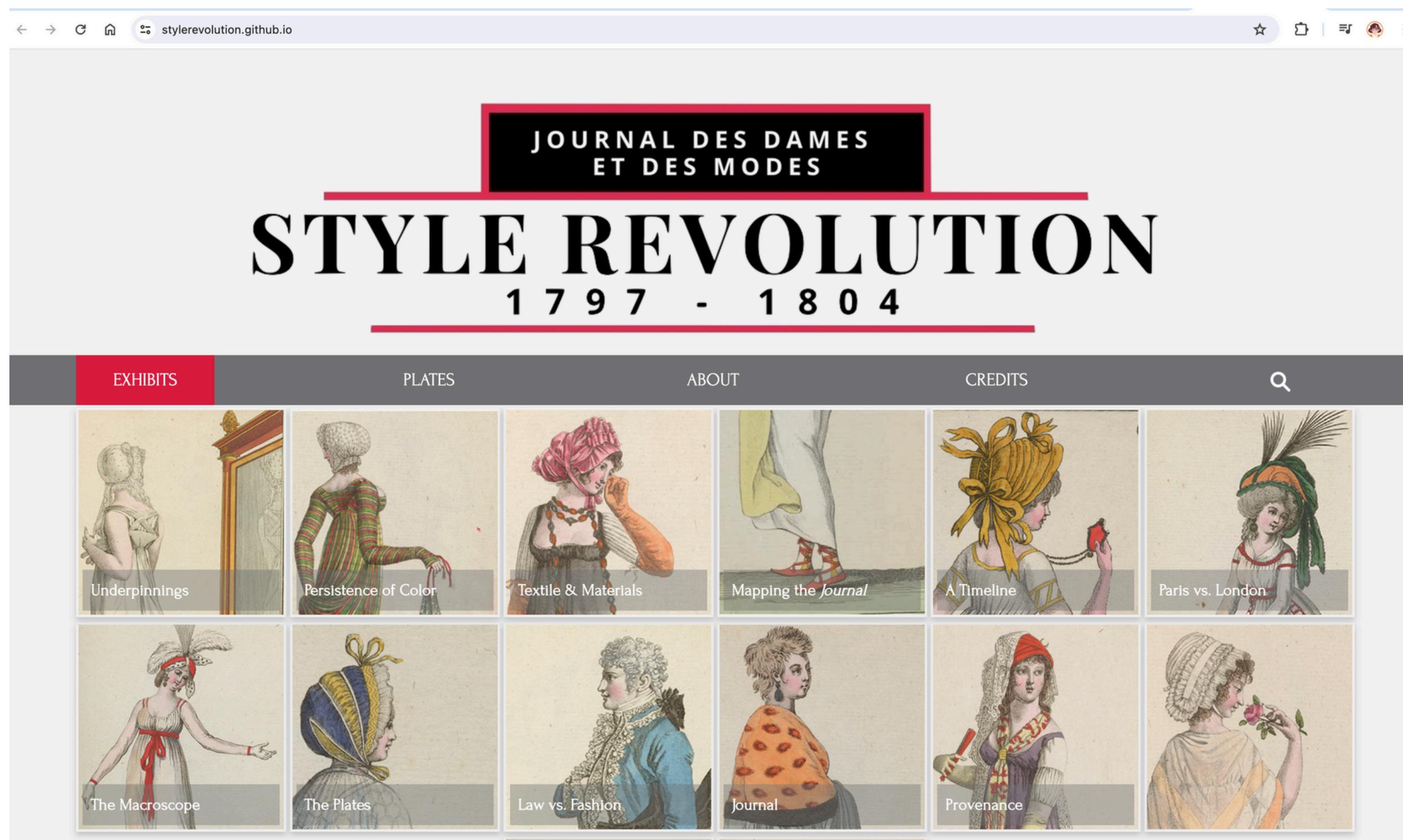
- Technical skill is required to set up and maintain sites
- Customization of design can be complicated
- Requires self web hosting

*Use this tool if
you...*

- May want to make your project available in different formats for different audiences
- Have a budget or time to learn how to use the system

WAX

Example: Style Revolution:
1797-1804



WAX

Pros

- Supports high-quality image- or text-based exhibitions
- Easy to export files for preservation
- Incorporates “minicomp” principles which can reduce the amount of maintenance required

Cons

- Requires self web hosting
- Technical skill is required to set up and maintain sites
- Customization of design can be complicated

***Use this tool if
you...***

- Have a budget or time to learn how to use the system
- Will not need to update the project frequently upon publication

QUESTIONS
 &
COMMENTS
