



Reconciling the past and the future: Why WAML 2018 Conference was illuminating to me

... by Sarah Zhang

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As an immigrant new to North America and a librarian new to this profession, I find myself torn between two draws: I hope to connect myself with the larger historical context that has shaped me, and to deploy this consciousness in exploring the cultural/social landscape I now inhabit. Meanwhile, I'm drawn to GIS and data related technologies such as web-based mapping tools and computing methodologies, which stem from my background in Remote Sensing and quantitative analysis. Sometimes I feel like I will have to choose one way or the other; there is no middle path because one is forward-thinking, scientific whereas the other is reflective, humanist. To my delight, the WAML 2018 conference revealed a glimmer of hope for reconciling the two seemingly opposing forces.

I came to realize historical maps are an effective device for researching and unpacking hidden histories, and it is revolutionary technologies that made this device reach a broadest possible audience. This understanding started to form when I was researching on David Rumsey, the legendary figure whom everybody knows but I for the first time heard about when chatting with the conference attendees. It got further strengthened by a few talks at the conference; I was fascinated with the unbounded, creative uses of historical maps, and on another dimension, the efforts librarians put into enhancing the organization, discovery, access, and interaction of maps. It eventually dawned on me that the fact that some librarians hold the title of GIS/Map librarian may reflect the varying complexity—which links to the battling struggle in my mind as I mentioned—that their jobs entail.

The technological forefront also excited me. I was particularly inspired by Phil White's presentation on the intersection of data science and GIS librarianship. It's eye-opening to see how a functional understanding of the Python language can not only help with data collection, transformation, and manipulation, but also with data reference. I'm now more motivated to learn about this tool and apply it to my work.



Aside from the sessions, getting to know the community was absolutely the highlight. I've never seen a professional association as closely knit as WAML and all the members are open-minded, friendly, and eager to help. It's a community of which I'm grateful to become a member. Despite the double foreignness I possess, one thing I share with the community members is the enthusiasm for GIS/maps. For those of you who are interested in knowing how I strive to mobilize my novice mind paired with passion, you are welcome to read my article newly published in BCLA Perspectives^[1], a story about reaching out to an unknown audience for GIS.

Many thanks to Susan Powell, the scholarship committee and the community!

^[1] Sarah Zhang, "Reaching Out to the Unknown: Empowering the Public with GIS," *BCLA Perspectives*, no. 3(2018),

<https://bclaconnect.ca/perspectives/2018/11/21/empowering-with-gis/>

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