

Metadata and Your Family Photos

with Christopher Desmond
of the Family History Metadata Group



Maureen Taylor

Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Maureen Taylor, the Photo Detective, welcome to this afternoon's webinar, which has metadata and your family photos. The guest presenter is Christopher Desmond. I met Christopher Desmon at FGS in Pittsburgh several years ago and we had a nice conversation. And every time I see him at conferences, we talk about issues with family photographs and how to manage them. And there is a working group that he is now chairman of called the Family History Metadata Working Group. And that's what we're going to talk about today, what that group is and where things are going.

Christopher Desmond:

Well, it looks like you got a lot of people that are excited about this topic. Maureen, look at that. You're already over like 350 and that's, , that's quite impressive. Nice work. Yeah,

Maureen Taylor:

I think is pretty impressive that everyone's interested in metadata. I think five years ago, if we had said let's do a talk on metadata, everyone would have gone. What is metadata? And yeah,

Christopher Desmond:

I'm sure there's going to be a little bit of that too. On some people probably still trying to know what that is, but, , you know, we've presented a few times at roots tech on the one-on-ones on metadata and just kind of how things work. And I think it's great that we're able to get together. I think when you brought up Pittsburgh, you know, back in the day when they had live conferences, that people can go places, , that's kind of crazy since this, , this year seems like it's lasted a decade, but what's great about it is that we're able to be, I think even more efficient in being able to do things. And one of the things I'm really excited about is what we have been doing related to this working group that really is, is come together based upon a need that we all have in the industry.

Christopher Desmond:

And some people may not be aware of it, of, of what the issues are and what the, you know, potential ideas are. And this is such a neat thing where, you know, I was approached just like, you know, we approached you to help join this team, you know, a while back. And because of the mission, it has of just trying to find ways to allow meta-data to be, you know, more broadly used in the industry. So I'm happy to give you an update today of, of what that is and where we're going. So, , I think for today, Maureen, you know, what would be good is I can provide an update, which I'm going to throw, , a few slides up to go through that. So people can see what we're talking about with the metadata working group, how that works and, you know, try to keep that around 15 minutes or so. And then I already see, you have tons of questions in here and we can just go after them if you'd like,

Maureen Taylor:

Yeah, we can just riff off the questions. Sure. I like that. And by the way, for everyone in attendance, , there will be a replay of this and I'm working on trying to figure out how to get it up on my website.

Christopher Desmond:

So what we wanted to go over is at least let people know because most people probably don't even know about the family history, metadata working group, which was announced back at roots tech of gosh earlier this year. And what we also want to talk about is what is the problem in the industry with photos? Let's, let's talk about the elephant in the room, what that means. And then perhaps what is this group, this group doing to help solve that? And then we'll kind of finalize with, what does it mean to you? There's a lot of family historians that are on here that are listening, that their photos are important to them. And they're trying to understand not only what metadata is, but also what does that mean related to the future of their photos. And then we'll get into a little bit of that.

Christopher Desmond:

And I think people will then start to see and things will click of what we're trying to do and what we're hoping to do. That's going to be good for the industry and really good for the mission of having people's photos, you know, stay alive the, in the future with all the information. So let's get to the next piece, , the family history, metadata working group. So we started this in 2019. , it's a group of various companies have come together that recognize the same issue exists in the industry. So a member, some family search, Pfizer memory, web, permanent vivid pics are on the current board and, and a lot of those folks, all of those. So it's actually, we're part of the original team. And what they've set out to do is go through and say, we need to find a way if we can to put together standards related to reading and writing metadata and photos and metadata for people, if they're thinking about it, like, what is this metadata thing?

Christopher Desmond:

Just a quick one Oh one, you know, when you take a photo and especially if you have, you know, with your phones nowadays, everybody's got their phones and they can take photos with them when you take a photo and especially an example, like I have an iPhone. And when you take that photo, it's capturing tons of data points that are actually embedded inside the photo date location, sometimes, , different aspects of the camera, tons of things. And those things are called metadata. And those travel with those photos and they can be read by different other groups as they're, , uploaded up and they can be sent along. And what we want to talk about is like, well, what happens when you actually go through and try to change and edit that in different platforms? Does that go with the photo and if not, why not?

Christopher Desmond:

And what should be the thing that we look to do so that we can preserve that great hard work that everybody does relate to those photos. So we're, that's one of the things we're trying to solve. And so we're trying to enhance the value of digital metadata in dealing with a way to say, how do we develop standards so that all the different major companies and organizations can then talk about where is the proper place to embed this data? So it can be read and read by you as an individual with wherever you take your photos, but read, especially for the future for when you pass your photos along to future generations. So that information stays alive. And so that is a mission of this group. It's really a mission to really help the industry in going through and talk about the, the, what are the key areas that we find that historians use the most, and what are the ways that things are read and written to you.

Christopher Desmond:

And then is there a way we can establish something to help out? So when we get into that, here's the problem we have in the industry right now, right now, there are no standards right now. If you take a photo and try to take it out of a platform, one, you may not all that information that you might have typed in on the who, what, where, when it may just stay in that platform and never even go with the photo, but let's pretend you actually have a platform that allows that metadata to be, you know, actually injected into the photo upon exportation. Well, then you also need to make sure that wherever you bring it to that platform is actually going to read those data points. And there's a lot of companies that still don't do that. And so this is where we're giving, you know, direction and advice to where those common fields should be, so that when companies go through and help individuals like those folks on the line, , understand if they want to go and edit things, or if they add things in any other major platforms, then metadata does travel with it, especially when it is export.

Christopher Desmond:

And so the hope is that we are going to develop standards that will be adopted by the industry, not only for the genealogy industry, but even bigger than that, dealing with the Googles and the, and the Amazons and all these other major companies. Cause we actually have a ridged relationships with some other working groups that deal with photos and their, , transportability and how that could work. And so we're actually

working on a dual platform of working with genealogy, but also the bigger industry. So it's really, really cool stuff. And it has been a lot of work, but we just know this is for the better good of the industry. So here's what we're doing. We've established, , the, the working group back in August, we announced our official release of the working group at roots tech in 2020 and have a link to the press release in here.

Christopher Desmond:

, we had then different, , groups that were brought in to say, let's determine a way to develop standards. Let's identify the common areas that we want to have standards for, and let's get working groups to help vet this out and put together the recommendations of best practices of what the standards should be. So that we have a common working platform in the, , in the industry. And that turned out to be a really great, but time-intensive piece, , , Luther, , from our team, as far as the, the board was the one chairing that, and it took a lot of time, but that was really the guts of what we would spend some time working on, because if we can actually have something that's an active deliverable output from the group that actually provides suggestions, that's a winner. And so what we're actually going to be talking about today are, is what that looks like.

Christopher Desmond:

So we actually have a draft version. I'm going to preview some of that with you. We are still finalizing it and vetting it also going through and making sure it makes sense to a lot of the organizations that are part of the initiative, because not only do you want to make sure that you can provide these standards, but also can they be implemented and going through and making sure groups that already have these sort of abilities to embed metadata and photos that these things can be modified so that these standards can be embedded in the proper fields. So we'll go through that a little bit too. , today we've completed those metadata standards as far as the draft version. And then of course I wanted to, you know, put Maureen's podcast down here at as far as you know, what we're doing on the webcast.

Christopher Desmond:

It's really great to be able to socialize the good work of the team and, and what's been going on because I know people are wondering if there's anything that's going to happen at the industry. Well, this is a way we can

help communicate that we're actually going to be presenting the final standards at roots tech, , this, , one upcoming in 2021. So Luther and I will be presenting that, or also going to talk through a certification process and what that's going to look like. So companies could then become certified for the standards that we're recommending. And you're probably wondering why is that important? That's really important because then those platforms, if you're going through and you're adding your, your family information on a photo or to the right of a photo of the, you know, who's in the photo and the data was really taken, you know, where it was located and the story of it, would it be great if that information actually traveled with the photo, if it were to leave that platform, that's what we want to make sure that there's a certification process so that when a company says they implemented this, we can give them a thumbs up and say they did.

Christopher Desmond:

And then after that, we're hoping to actually come up with some additional standards related to the go-forward pieces and maybe have a version to point out because we needed to have a focused approach for this version related to what standards we wanted to have released. So this is a great shout out to the working groups that participated. So it's even broader than the original companies that were here. And Maureen, you know, you're one of the, the individuals and companies that participated in, in your, your thoughts are really, really appreciated. Not only is the photo detective, but actually the use cases that are out there related to how, how is this really going to be used by individuals? And so I just wanted to say, thank you for all these groups that have been part of the development of the actual version, one standards so far, and the hope is that we can get more organizations not only to help with the initiative, but also then get into the certification process that we plan on going through on the initiative.

Christopher Desmond:

So what did we do? What was the, what was the thing that we ended up producing? So the first version of metadata standards are going to be focusing on these key areas. Why, well, these are the areas that we found that family historians tend to care the most about, like the most common things that people are trying to do when they see an old photo and they want to actually grab that information off of it or make sure it's transferred. What are those things? So it is an alb event, objects, date, caption location, and people. We had to start somewhere. Those are the seven that made the cut. There are other ones that were being considered, but we said, let's

have a cutoff for version one. And then for version two, we can actually talk about a lot of other things when it comes to, , who, who is the, the confidentiality pieces and, and trademarking and all these other aspects that people are looking for.

Christopher Desmond:

So let's go through and what does that mean? So this slide I know is going to give people a headache, cause they're gonna look at this and saying, what is this? This is the deeper dive. And this is not for everybody out there to say, you need to know this. This is actually what we're going to be using. When we work with companies to go through say, Hey, when you guys allow on your platform, the ability to modify date or location, or the people in there, and what they, you know, a user can go in there and identify that, or edit that when you export a photo from your platform, we are providing the specific IPTC XMP fields that we recommend the mapping of the metadata to so that it can be read and viewed in, in future platforms or the individuals. And so these areas called XMP IPTC X, if this is the naming conventions that are in that, you know, when you have a photo, and I mentioned that captures in the, in the actual photo, there's an area that captures all of this data.

Christopher Desmond:

Well, this is where that can be produced. And this is open source information. So it's not locked down. This is something that passes with the photo. What we're recommending is where should those things be written to from a core standard perspective, but then when it comes to other best practices, we've added in some optional metadata standard fields that we think is also a way to go above and beyond. So this is kind of the executive smary kind of framing that we're providing for the standards. And then you can see that there's some links in here of a technical smary, as well as a normative specifications smary. And this gets into the helping, , companies and their engineers and coders understand exactly what this means. But at the end of the day, for the individuals that are listening here and as a family historian, no, that we are trying to provide these standards so that when you have information related to the things on the left, those are going to be actually docented so that they can be preserved and move with the photos.

Christopher Desmond:

And that's really what matters. And that's the reason why we are doing this. And we're working to try to create that when we talked about certification, the certification piece means that we're looking to say, if a company allows you to edit a field, a date, a location, you know, a person in the actual photo, then we, we would say, you need to be able to allow when that photo is export it from that platform, the metadata is properly tagged and brought into the standard fields that we are recommending for our standards. If you do that, you're going to get the thbs up certification. We're going to allow companies to be able to use that in their marketing saying family history, metadata, working group standards, they been certified, but there's a lot of companies that are not going to be able to implement this right away, or it would take a while.

Christopher Desmond:

So we're also having the supporter piece, which means if you're a company and you support that this is important, and you're working to perhaps actually implement this in your company's platform. Then this is the, this is the piece you can have to, and why we're doing this. It's really making sure more awareness gets out there. And actually more companies do this. Because again, that goal with kind of web that I talked about, we want to make sure that the, you know, future portability of all your photos is going to happen in the future. And this is a way to do that. So what does this mean for you? So you're listening to this and this is my last slide, by the way, because I know we had tons of questions and comments, so we have to get to those. The most important thing for folks to narrow is one, well, digitize your photos.

Christopher Desmond:

Well, okay. If you haven't done that already, how do you do that? Well, there are places to go to give you information on this. , I put in here as far as a link to one that's with memory web, which is the company I'm with, and we have a whole series called unlock the shoe box, your digital photos, it's on our website, it's free. And it gives you the best practices of the DPI, all the different things, or the ways to scan things and docent it so that you're enhancing your ability to organize them. Once you've done that, , make sure that you add your metadata to photos. If it's not there. And Maureen has a whole class on that. So you can go to her website and you can take a look at that class or what that looks like for digitizing organizing photos.

Christopher Desmond:

What this means then after you've done, that is then find out where do I stand related to the journey? Because where are your photos at? You're going to have some photos maybe in your hard drive on the cloud Dropbox, especially when you think about those major companies that you might, how is your photos in? And you've taken the time to go through and curated, add that information in there, including like Google photos and, and, , and the other providers, when you look at that and kind of go, well, what happens if I try to take that photo out, most companies do not allow the metadata to leave. Most of them don't, there are some that do. And so this is where, you know, you can help support the initiative and reach out to them and say, Hey, listen, I've got a lot of good stuff in your platform, a lot of good information.

Christopher Desmond:

I'd like you to make sure that you are helping me for my stuff, allow that stuff to travel with me. So it's not trapped inside your platform with all that good information. And so this is the, the cry we're looking for to have people be aware of. So that's the problem in the industry, but then help with the contacting them and asking them to say, allow us to have that, , portable. So Maureen, I tried to get through that in 15 minutes. I might've gone to 17 minutes. Sorry about that. But I know that there's a lot of questions. So, , how do you want to take it from here,

Maureen Taylor:

Chris? You have, as long as you need no limit, you can just keep going. Okay. , I know we had, , the links are all in the chat now. , I shared the wrong link and deleted it so apologize for that. We have 17, , questions. , the links are, are in the chat and just, , just above where you are.

Questions and Answers

Christopher Desmond:

I can hear that. So 18 votes, a two parter. What would you say are the top 10 or even five pieces of info of metadata that each photo has should strive to capture? Well, actually we went through seven today, right? So we went through the seven that we found to be the most important or most used fields. And I think those seven are going to be key for folks, but they can, of course do more. A lot of platforms will even allow the adding or modification of more than that, but those core ones of the ones that most people care

about. And that's the reason why we picked those seven B what is the best way to keep those data elements with each photo? Hmm. Well, it would be to make sure that you're using a platform that allows the, , reading editing, and then exportation of the metadata from there. And so there's a lot of different companies that do that. Maureen, you know, a bunch of them too, don't you, as far as which type of companies that, you know, allow for that to happen,

Maureen Taylor:

Do I actually recommend there's some more that I'm doing research on, but the two that I recommend are either, , Chris's company memory, web dot M E, which actually saved me big time last week when my computer crashed, , cause I had all my pictures backed up again and easily downloadable with the metadata intact. And then, , Adobe light room is the other one that, that allows you to import, , add metadata and export it so that you don't lose it. Now, whatever happens as Chris said with the platform that you're going to import it into, that's another matter.

Christopher Desmond:

, we have a Vivid-Pix.com as well. If it picks, allows you to add metadata to different aspects of their photos and file shadow, which is part of the working group, that company also allows you to add metadata and then also have an export without, so there are companies that do this, but it's not widely known of companies that do that because it is something that, , most people didn't even realize was an issue for a long time. But this is an important piece for, for a lot of companies.

The main thing I want to get out of the meeting is how do I label digital photographs? So future generations have access to the data is metadata future-proof well, that's, that's exactly the reason why this working group was put together.

Christopher Desmond:

We can't see future-proof, but we're going to try our darndest to use what we have today and this and the technology we have today. So that the metadata that is imported brought into the photos that everybody's working on, does have a chance to have a future with them. And so that's what we're trying to do. , things could change in the future. We can have different file types because if you think about it, there's JPEGs and gifs and

PDFs and all these file types. And guess what? Each of them have different constraints on what they allow to be brought in or used for fields on metadata. So that's something to be thoughtful of, but they're the key ones that are commonly used, do have those fields in there. All right. Thank you for that one. , let's take photo nber 10. I'm guessing this will be covered, but what fields of metadata are kept with the photo across all platforms, the Facebook ancestry.

. So I think what's important to note is that, you know, Facebook ancestry, my heritage, Google, they all have certain aspects of reading. They have, they will read some fields and not read others. Facebook probably reads a lot more due to the fact that they look to use that information, to help them position things for the people in the user base. And what you'll think about it is if you go into those platforms like Facebook or even the ancestry and ancestry, when you're in there and you look at a photo of a family member, you can add a ton of information in there, but when it comes to bringing it out, that's where a lot of times there's a challenge. And there's a challenge when it comes to not only Facebook and ancestry, but Google photos, the Google photos changes the way they allow the exportation of, of photos by users all the time.

Christopher Desmond:

, certain companies like ours, , do have the ability to create what's called an API so that there's a mass download button you can pick, which then actually allows you to even get metadata attached to it because of the way we do it versus you as an individual. So it's something that you want to try and look into, but I think the most important takeaway is, you know, again, assess where your stuff's at and what time you're putting into this stuff. And is it going to be okay if it stays there without that metadata going with it? Or do you want to make sure it's done somewhere else so that that's preserved in there? So sometimes we have people that will use a platform like ours, put all the metadata and then post it up. So then they're not worried about that. They're not worried about it, actually not having it.

Maureen Taylor:

Chris, we have a question in the chat about where is ancestry.com and this collaboration are they participating? What about MyHeritage?

Christopher Desmond:

We, we want to make sure that all of them are going to have some participation. So we reached out at roots tech last year to invite them to what we were doing. And I don't think those organizations had some representation during that time, but we went ahead and with that large group that you saw went ahead with our mission, starting creating standards. And now that we are getting to the release point, that's where we're going to reach back out and say, here's what we're working with. And this is going to work really well for you guys. If you choose to implement this, because the benefits to you as an organization is now you're going to read in the places that is important for you and your users. So that when a photo is brought up to, let's say my heritage, they can now grab those fields and already have them auto populated. Would that be great instead of having you to repopulate those, but then yeah, but then more importantly, when it comes to the editing and the, in their platform, making sure all of that editing travels with it, and that's going to take some development from those companies, but really it's in our opinion, that's needed. And that's why this group is coming together because of the problem in the industry and the need to make sure your, your photos stay alive.

Maureen Taylor:

Marshall wants to know if there's anything ancestry, subscribers can do to lobby them. And what about family tree maker?

Christopher Desmond:

I love it. That's what we're looking for, what we're looking for. I know that they take feedback from their customers and they're looking to make sure people are hearing things. I guarantee you, if they get enough emails about it and people asking about it, they're going to be looking around. And especially when we have a working group in this industry already brought a bunch of companies together with no other purpose, but to do something good for the industry. Our hope is that this will catch on and companies will want to implement this, or be forced to implement with the help of the people that are listening to this.

Maureen Taylor:

There's one other question in the chat before we get to the rest of the questions in the ask a question box, which is wellness, metadata work with Apple photos. Now I think these standards, I think you explained to me,

these standards are mostly right now for the genealogy companies, but you're hoping that what will have wider appeal

Christopher Desmond:

That's right. And, and one thing I think is important to realize is that when the working groups came together to analyze what would be the best fields to choose part of the research that went into that is finding the most common fields, currently large organizations like Apple photos, like Google, like Facebook would read, like, which is the date field, because there's, I think there's over 20 different metadata date fields. Okay. Well, okay. Which one do they come most commonly read? That's the one we wanted then mapped to. So that's the way we put this together. We didn't just pick things and say, Oh, that looks good. We actually did some research because part of it would be, wouldn't it be great if it already were being done and the companies didn't know it well that, yeah. So for those common date fields, such as date, such as location, those are probably the two most red, right?

Christopher Desmond:

By most, every company, especially out of genealogy, if you can map to those and have them read, that's great. Cause it gets, I get exciting when, when I use our platform and I export a photo that I dated 1940 way before digital photos, and I mapped the GPS location of that photo from 1940. And if I bring it up to Facebook or Google photos, I have to scroll down to 1940 and the date range, because that's when it says date taken to me, that's what we should be able to have happen. That's the thing that we're trying to have happened in the industry.

Maureen Taylor:

Well, I can vouch how difficult this whole process was because I was on the caption group in the caption group. It was like, well, what is the caption? What kind of caption, which standard caption what's the field, how much, you know, and it was, it was very specific. , and I think the work that the family history metadata group has done, and I just did one teeny little piece, but the group, what the group is doing will benefit all of us as genealogists. And hopefully it will extend beyond the genealogy field. Cause we have a lot of power as genealogists. We're a big, big industry. And I think other companies will start listening if we get these standards, , implemented.

Maureen Taylor:

When a JPEG is saved, it's compressed again, losing quality, every save. So when memory web or others change metadata in the JPEG, will we lose quality each time we change the metadata?

Christopher Desmond:

So I think that's a, it's a great question. And I think it also depends upon if that platform does a compression of a JPEG. And so I know from our own company's experience, if a JPEG is brought over to a platform, you can bring it over and have it compressed or not. , in ours, we do not, we actually bring the original and we store that. And as you then add, , metadata, , we go through and we add a special section that's away from the photo. The important thing is that when you export it, we bring the original photo, the original one that was brought in and only one time do we then inject that and bring it out. But that's where it gets to the implementation and how a company is going to implement these standards. So I agree. It shouldn't be a constant resaving of the photo.

Christopher Desmond:

It's more of, if you think about this, it's like a file cabinet. We have all these different files that can go in there with a, with a photo. And how do you join that at the right time? So from a user, you just want to see all your metadata on that platform, but when it's exported, you want to be sure that it's actually in the right fields and have it as a maxim quality of what it was from the original photo. And so it can be done where it's the original photo quality. So it's not compressed coming out. It just depends upon it. That platform does that.

Maureen Taylor:

Chris, do you have any knowledge of the library of Congress and metadata? I know like the library of Congress working with cataloging standards for images, I mean, early in my career, when I was a curator, we had this like print out from the library of Congress to come up with visual, a visual in which to catalog images different from books and other other media. And I know that that has evolved into the art and architecture sets Saurus and other things like that. But I actually don't know how that fits into metadata. Do you?

Christopher Desmond:

So we actually did some research on it and we have some really, really smart people that are part of the board and the different committees that, you know, they, they geek out on this research and this is what they do for a living. And so I actually peeked into it myself. Cause I'm kind of curious of what are, if there are any standards, especially when it comes to archiving. One of the, one of the debates we have as an overall team is, well, what are the archiving standards for digital photos? And we looked, we couldn't find any. And we saw all the pointing of the library of Congress in different organizations to these other working groups that had information that they put out there. And if you dive into all the working groups, they talk about the theoretical pieces of it, but nobody's produced standards.

Christopher Desmond:

Nobody's produced to say here's what we would recommend. And so that's what we were working with were saying, but you know, one of the questions that came up is like, what if yet, what if you take, like use your iPhone and you take a photo of an old photo, well, guess what it has today's date on it. You know, it's not the right date, but is it correct to overwrite the original date of the photo that was taking of the old photo or what's the archiving process for that? And that was the debate we had because of the goal to make sure metadata can be read. We allow at least from a, from a, you know, discussion draft is that you can override that field, but it's up to the provider or the actual family historian. If there's a change being made, you can document that there's lots of open source fields to do that.

Christopher Desmond:

There's even an information field and a metadata that could perhaps be used by a company if they wanted to any changes that are made, they can have the whole list from an archiving perspective, but there's no, there's not any the standard for the first piece, let alone the second. But what we've done in one of the slides I showed you is that we have recommendations that are best practices, so that if that comes up and we have people that are pure archivist, at least we get some direction of how to, so that, that can be done as well, but it's not perfect, but it's better than where we're at today.

Maureen Taylor:

I have a couple more questions here. What about the compatibility with Adobe standards for metadata?

Christopher Desmond:

So what's interesting is that we, as part of the team, look through the different platforms, including the Adobe, to make sure that if, , something was brought in, if it was brought in the same fields that, , we are mapping to, and there's a lot of good overlap. So I think Adobe already has much of this already brought in there. It also deals with though the nomenclature of what the fields are called, because you have to appreciate when you get into, let's say the IPTC, they have their complete database and they have a website and even have a test photo that has all the metadata populated, and you can bring that into platforms and see how it's read. What's interesting is that when it's read by a platforming, could it including the Adobe, Adobe is going to tell you what they call that field. And it may not be the exact name that IPTC had.

Christopher Desmond:

So that's where you then make sure you're able to breadcrumb back and knowing what fields are actually being edited. But for the most part, everybody's trying to do the right thing and call them the same fields. And so when we came up with our, , our, our, our recommended draft standards for version one, we were looking at products like that to say, what happens now, if that were to be changed, which we did. We changed that brought that into those, , platforms. And you know, what most, all of the fields were red, which was great. And the same thing when it comes to editing. So that's where almost all the fields did have a recommended standards, but there were some tweaks, even our accompany memory web, when we develop the stuff we thought we had everything under control, but after the deep research this group did on recommendations, we actually changed the way we export photos out of our own company's platform to follow the recommended standards we're recommending from the metadata working group. Why? Because it made more sense. And every company was kind of like the wild, wild West, doing their own thing to figure out what they wanted to do, but to have some, you know, all these groups that are there to work together, to come up with a recommendation, that's what made sense. So that we know what's possible. We know companies can implement this. Now it's a matter of, of hope that we are able to get this more widely used in the industry.

Christopher Desmond:

All right. When scanning old photos, is there a preferred format? Where are you now with five votes?

Maureen Taylor:

Yeah, I have it. Is there a preferred file format, JPEG, TIF, et cetera, refer best metadata flexibility. It's not really the file format that determines metadata data flexibility, but for preservation standards, you really want to scan your images at 600 to 1200 DPI as a TIFF file. Library of Congress says 1200 DPI, , full color TIFs. Even if you think they're black and white, do it as a color image. And then you can always decrease the size of the file, but you can't necessarily increase it, , and keep that quality. So that one is good for me. Oh yeah. That one got added in, , we'd already talked about Adobe standards. , metadata for photos can be added as properties for files using some applications. How useful have you found applications in our portable? Have you found the properties between different O S versions and file systems ha just experienced this kind of thing myself?

Christopher Desmond:

What do you think Maureen?

Maureen Taylor:

Well, I tried to, , you know, my computer completely had to be reset and I had been backing it up on time machine and the time machine files were in one OS operating system version and the computer was now at another one and, , it was complicated. I just said, forget it. , and then restarted a new time machine with the new O S

Christopher Desmond:

Yeah. Well, it, it can be very frustrating to, in fact, the whole reason why we started memory web was I w family historian one holiday season, he was scanning my photos. And I didn't know if there was any, you know, solution out there that allowed me to add that information. So I would, you know, take my computer, scan it in, right. Click change the, you know, title and then go through and what, you know, what areas could I change and try to overwrite those. And I got so excited. I spent hours and hours over that holiday period. And then I'm like, well, you know what? I spent all that time. I'm going to make a copy of it. So I made a copy of it as a backup. And guess what happened, Maureen? All of the hard work on the titles of saying

that who, what, where when it auto cutoff and all that information was lost in, I went nuts and I was so mad and I, and I talked to my wife about it and I said, there's gotta be a better solution.

Christopher Desmond:

And, and I was, you know, you know, thinking about it and researching it and like, you know what, let's, maybe we should just build something that does that it's so frustrating. And that's how we actually started memory, but was from the true need that we personally had of, of that process. And then the thing is you're beholden to whatever you're using related to how that gets edited and what they're showing you that gets edited. But then more importantly, what gets transferred. So that's where, what our hope is as a family history, metadata working group is that all that hard work is not lost. And that's what, that's what we're trying to make sure happens to your stuff, because nothing's more frustrating than having your, your good work go away. And it's just like, if you had your hard drive crash and you're like, I hope I have everything backed up, but if you ever have been in that situation where you lost those photos, it just takes something out of you. Right? Well,

Maureen Taylor:

It does that, that pit in your stomach, I will say that just like you, I spent a long weekend once, , using Apple photos. , this was before, before, , I used a photo organizer like I do now. And I added all the metadata to those images, thinking that it would transfer to my phone and it would transfer to my iPad. And in fact it did not, , Apple photos organizes in different ways on different that I had to redo it again. So then I went online and I tried to find these apps that would work and I had to upload, you know, add all that metadata again and it failed again and again and again, and I was so frustrated, but I think I would have this kind of industry frustration comes innovators. , and I think the family history, metadata working group is an innovative group, , thinking of solutions to these problems that we face. There's several other new things in the last couple of years that are just awesome. , I know Chris mentioned my podcast and I, I am very busy tracking down, , industry leaders to talk about some of these new innovations for everyone's so that you can then try them and see what you think. A couple of other questions here.

Christopher Desmond:

I've got one that popped up here that I want to address. So it says my heritage allows you to identify the people in the photo, throwing a rectangle around them and assigning the rectangle to a name. Is there a standard way that should be represented in the photo metadata? That's an awesome question. And it's actually something that has come out more recently from IPTC. So that functionality is, is every platform has a, their own choice on how you want to do, let's say tagging people or objects in a photo, and, you know, you can use the square approach or the star or circle. All you're doing is giving the specific coordinates of where in the photo, something resides so that it can be tagged to that's the basics of it. And so as a platform does that, , they have the ability actually to then map that into the metadata and before, , it was just being able to map, let's say the name, but IPTC came out.

Christopher Desmond:

I believe it was in November of 2019 with the ability to now have some new open source fields. So when actual, let's say coordinates within a photo are designated for a person or an object, those also can be then mapped into the metadata, which then allows it to be read and brought in by another platform that is very new. And I'm pretty certain, most companies don't have that implemented because they don't even have implement the regular metadata mapping. This one's going to be a little trickier to do, but the technology's out there, which is awesome. And so that's where there's hope that all of that hard work could be then brought in to the photos. If they were to leave a platform, like let's say my heritage.

Maureen Taylor:

So we have some more questions in the chat, but we also have some other questions here in the question and answer box. , Joan has been using Picasa for her congeniality photos in the past. Is there any way out there that is similar? And can I think the info I have entered into Picasa into a newer program? , Joan, I will tell you that Google hasn't supported the Casa for a great many years. It's a 32 bit program. If you're using Apple OOS, it no longer works. , and I don't know what you can sync that data with since it Picasso was owned by Google, perhaps there is a way to sync it with Google photos. , but that's the only solution I can think of, , for that, Chris, unless you have something to add, it hasn't been supported by a decade or more. Maybe

Christopher Desmond:

I think the number one piece of advice is to get your photos out of there so that you can then have them if by chance, that's, you're still able to export the metadata from them. And I would actually do that across the board, Maureen, if you could. Cause if there is an option to do that with whatever platforms you have, I would take advantage of it because for example, like Google, they change what you can take out all the time. You know, as you keep on changing the way we are mapping things, because all of a sudden they maybe don't allow location anymore, or they don't allow people to leave anymore. And so you don't want to lose that. So you want to make sure maybe you back it up now. So you get that in there now. And then later on, see if you can get better information or not. I just don't there's if a platform to me doesn't allow the reading, editing and exportation of metadata, I don't think I would be using them as my storage or yeah,

Maureen Taylor:

No Google photos. There, there are people who swear by Google photos, but there are issues with it. , and so I prefer to use a different program than that. , someone has digitized over 6,000 slides and wants to identify who, when, where, and have it available for the future. They are Mac in photos. I would move to a different type of photo organizer. , one that you can continue to read that metadata because Apple changes stuff all the time as well. , let's see what else we got looks to me like photos can have text and graphics added to the imagery to give context in meeting. So the metadata goes with the photos and is viewable graphically leased? Is there an easier way to do that? I'm confused about what might be easier.

Christopher Desmond:

I think it's, , a feature, you know, our company allows for the metadata actually appear on the photo. If people like, or you can have the information or write things on there. The only thing is that, that doesn't, it's not the metadata. It's actually part of the photo now, but you see the information when it's being exported. The key thing that we're talking about is having it written to the fields that are actually red. So if you actually place something on the image, a text, a name, whatever it is, that's not going to be something that can be read in less. That platform actually takes the photo and tries to do some auto, , OCR, optical character recognition of some sort to read that and then map it. But you're asking for an even bigger lift than having metadata standards begin with. , but there are platforms that allow for that.

Christopher Desmond:

We are, our users actually use that. So when they post, let's say to an ancestry or two of my heritage, it's then known what the metadata and the photo is because that platform may not be reading it, but you're showing it in the photo and there's, they're using it saying, this is not the original, but this is the one I'm posting up to that platform. So that not only can you see the photo, but you can see the metadata that person's taking the time to archive and put on the bottom of the photo for whatever that worth

Maureen Taylor:

Any plans to extend this, to things like PDFs

Christopher Desmond:

There, there, there can be some things done for that. , there, you can actually have, you know, PDFs read PDFs do have metadata fields. , it's just becomes challenging when you have PDFs, JPEGs, gifs, and all these different, , file types. And which ones are going to be longer term from a preservation perspective and an editing perspective and ones that are gonna be used more commonly because PDs people don't typically take photos and PDFs or send photos around. But I think the question, if it would be broader and saying beyond photos, if we think about docents and other things, yeah. That's where this should go next that we should be something in the future that we get into standards for all of those other things. When it comes to the digital digitization of those, we wanted to start with photos because that's the most common thing people are using and the ones that they need to have the most done for,

Maureen Taylor:

, someone wants to know, , in the windows program that allows me to add the metadata and will this data stay with my photos when I add them to family search in my heritage, et cetera, , varies on the platform.

Christopher Desmond:

Yeah. So that's actually what I was talking to my story earlier about, you know, why we started our company was I was doing that in windows. That was a right clicking and editing those fields. The good part about it is the majority of that information should stay there. However, if you make a copy of, let's say a photo and you wrote too much into, let's say the title field, there's certain amount of characters that are loud and they'll truncate that

automatically. And that's a little frustrating. So you have to make sure you pick, , fields that are going to be open source, but the good thing is they should be, , , transportable. Now the question is, do those platforms read that well, you can do tests on your own. And if it doesn't show up in the platform, it doesn't mean the metadata is not there, or didn't go there. It's whether or not that platform shows to read it. And that's the key thing

Maureen Taylor:

The family history metadata working group. There are plenty of other programs out there. There's people mentioning programs that they use out in the, in the chat. , , somebody read an article about a guy who includes all the key info in the photo name. You can do that. I recommend that people put a last name, first name and a date, but you don't actually have to do that. , with a photo organizer of some sort with metadata

Christopher Desmond:

That's, that's the issue I had. That's what happened. I did all that. And then it got truncated automatically upon.

Christopher Desmond:

That was that's when I, I don't know what item in the house broke that day, but something didn't make it. And it was very frustrating.

Maureen Taylor:

We have so many questions, Chris, I'm going to let you scroll down the bottom here of the list.

Christopher Desmond:

, I'm going to automate a lot of the personal ones about the company, and I want to get more about the, the, either the standards or the initiative,

Maureen Taylor:

This group to the Wikipedia metadata group. There you go. There's a link for you.

Christopher Desmond:

We'll go to that. Got scooped. Yeah.

Maureen Taylor:

Yeah. You better get, get a family history metadata group on there.

Christopher Desmond:

So I like this one from Marshall. I see Marshall's name popping up all over the place. So Marshall's definitely passionate about this. So that's awesome. You talk about overriding fields. That's the standard we're working on, provide a method for recording the change history. Yes. And so what we have done is that we're not requiring that because there's no specific things, even the library of Congress for that. But what we want to do is there's two different things. One, if a company wants to, they actually can have the change history of a photo and have that and put that into an open source metadata field. So for example, there's a field called information. That information field could be housed for that. But the key thing is which platform reads information or where are you going to get that? And there's different things that you can use.

Christopher Desmond:

There's a, there's a website called Jefferies that can read your metadata. IPTC you can bring it in there, but when it comes to be a user perspective, , if I were to think about the archiving myself and talking about what's the best way, a lot of times, the area of comments is used and even in the windows platform, when you're right click and there's comments, that's kind of like an open source field, but has a lot of area in there. You can type a lot of information. You yourself can put the change history. And then that way, you know, it's been done the way you want it to be done instead of reading for maybe a company to implement something, which is going to be a long way out, not only for companies to implement, maybe the metadata stands for recommending, but the change history for archiving. I, I think you've got a little while to wait, but you can do that yourself.

Maureen Taylor:

And I mean, this is all just beginning. There's a long road in front of this. I mean, this is just it's one year, not even a whole year since this whole group came together, formally at roots tech. So there's a, there's a lot of room for growth. There's a lot of room to spread the word. , we're, everybody's trying to get the word out there. , I think you've done a couple episodes on my podcast about it when it first started and then not too long ago. And now we're doing this webinar trying to spread the word. So all of you are ambassadors of the family history, metadata working group.

Christopher Desmond:

And you know, what's really great morning is I think the IQ of family historians has gone up dramatically in the last couple of years. I remember when we were, , they were asking for presentations at roots tech a few years ago, and we did something. It was called behind the metadata curtain where we're going to pull the curtain and go through and talk about like, who does this in the industry who, who reads and who doesn't read. And we graded them. Okay. And it caused a huge conflict, but guess what if it did it caused awareness and that's what was important because people one did realize that this was possible that you out meta-data would travel the photo. And then two they're like, what do you mean that my information that I have in these major companies when I type that in there that's forever, isn't it? Well, no, it wasn't. And it's not in some of those today are still not, but you need to know that because you don't want to be on the short end of that stick. When you go to say, yup, all the work is here and nobody can take it out, but actually that company doesn't stay around.

Maureen Taylor:

You really shook stuff up.

Christopher Desmond:

Well, I cry. I credit, I credit Nancy for that. More than

Maureen Taylor:

That was pretty awesome, actually. Yeah,

Christopher Desmond:

It was good fun. But you know what it was for the same reason we're doing this today, it's awareness and it's something we care about. I mean, the whole thing of this is that we care about, you know, our stuff, the stuff that other users have. I mean, how awesome is it going to be for future generations to say, gosh, you know, there was a time when all of this stuff, nothing was docented. The only, only thing people had was hard copy photos, and you flipped it over to see the information on the back and that's all you got. Well, then now, yeah. It's like what you do with it.

Maureen Taylor:

You can upload it. You can, you can change the metadata in whatever program you're using. You can collaborate with people and have them add

their details. I mean, it's amazing what digital platforms have done for a family history and family photos. I'm amazed and always learning new things. , , post session handout answering some of these questions. Robert, you just made some work for me.

Christopher Desmond:

I think Maureen though would be great to do is that we are, the amount of questions is fantastic. It's fantastic. And I think that, , in, in your, you know, in your website and your company, there's a lot of stuff, rich information that's tied to this and maybe in the show notes or however you guys want to do that, you can kind of put those links in there that people can go to, to count and gather that information. Cause I think that'd be really helpful now that know to some people, this might be their eye opening moment of metadata and that lack of transfer ability it has. And where do I go to learn more about it? Well, I know you already had a lot of good stuff on it.

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