

## LIS526 – Gabor Por – Digitization Assignment – 5/18/2007

The League of Nations Photo Archive is at <http://www.indiana.edu/~league/>. The League existed between 1919 and 1946. After World War II the United Nations took over its role in global politics. The League's documents are in the [League of Nation Archives](#) (established in 1957), which is hosted by the [United Nations Office at Geneva](#) (Switzerland). The digitization project was a co-production of the Indiana University's [Center for the Study of Global Change](#), the United Nations Library, and the [Indiana University Libraries](#). It was supported by U.S. Department of Education International Studies Title VI funds.

The scanning of the photographs was done in the summers 2000 and 2001. The project was led by librarian Robert Goehlert and included librarians and graduate students and. They scanned altogether 1366 photographs. The site states that the project is finished. I find it hard to believe, however that there are no more pictures in the archives. Therefore I have to conclude that this is just a representative selection of what is available in the archives.

The images presented online are clustered into these categories: Personalities, Assemblies, Councils, Commissions and Committees, Conferences, Secretariat, Delegations, Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ), International Labor Organization (ILO), and Various. Each of the first six of these categories include over a hundred pictures, while the second six has less than a hundred each. All categories are organized chronologically, except the Delegations (arranged alphabetically by countries) and Secretariat (arranged by section.) This arrangement makes the browsing of the archive usable. When browsing 12 of the thumbnail of the photos are shown on each screen within each category are shows. The wider side of each thumbnail picture is 120 pixels, which makes this display usable for most window sizes. Clicking on them takes the user to the detailed view, including all the metadata for any given image. The cross referencing tables, e.g. Assemblies arranged by date, offer additional functionality.

The collection (to be more specific the files' metadata) is also keyword searchable. However the search engine does not use word stemming. On the plus side, though, the search results include the thumbnails, making it easy to decide whether one is interested in the picture or not. Overall I found the navigation excellent. Both browsing and searching is fast and accurate, there are no unnecessary clicks in the system.

Two kinds of technical details are provided. On one hand the process of the scanning was documented itself, including what scanner was used and what were its specific settings. On the other hand a Microsoft Excel sheet was provided for each of the 12 categories containing metadata related to those images. The metadata includes date of scanning, text from index card, file name, text from the back of the photograph, and folder name. I presume this last one refers to the physical folder in the archive.

The website's Resources section paints a basic overview of the League. The [Research Guide](#), [Bibliography](#) and [Other Sites](#) subsections are all well-written and well-researched pages. My favorite was however the [Timeline](#), where the major events for each year of the League's existence is summarized in a clear table format. This would be the primary source I would recommend to anybody to get an overview of this organization. There are for more pages that are linked only from the [Introduction](#) page. None of these contain photos that the team behind the project scanned, but they included them to make the website a more complete and valuable resource. These are: "The Illustrated Album of the League of Nations," "The League of Nations: A Pictorial Survey," "The Aims, Methods and Activity of the League of Nations," and an organization chart from 1931.

The website is hosted by the Indiana University. However, I didn't find any reference about the details of this arrangement. For example there is no mention how long they are committed to do so. The website was last updated in October 2002, so they have been hosting it for about five years. The copyright information is clearly attributed to the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) Library, and visitors' comments are sent to its librarian.

The site's color scheme (brown and blue) complements the feelings emanating from the photographs. It is pleasant on the eye and provokes harmonious associations to see old black and white photographs (with which most people would associate a yellowish tone) on a brown background. The material culture of this bygone era is fascinating for me: what kind of objects they had, in what kind of setting is a topic worthy to explore.

The website provides insight for the layperson (i.e. non-historians, like me) into the life of an organization that once had huge power in the world. For the historians, I presume, this is a resource that could be researched and analyzed from many different angles. Therefore it can be a valuable tool for them. I would strongly recommend this site to anybody who is interested in history and/or old photographs.

### **Sources:**

Goehlert, R. "League of Nations Photo Archive." INUIa Notes. 1 May. 2007  
< <http://www.iu.edu/~inula/notes/v17/no1/league.html> >

"League of Nations archival Web site preserves history of first half of 20th century." IU Home Pages. 1 May 2007  
< <http://homepages.indiana.edu/091903/text/league.html> >