Introduction
Following a proposal to the 7th International Geographic Congress (Berlin 1895), for the development of an international agreement on nomenclature and terminology for sub-oceanic features, the Congress nominated and tasked a Commission with the preparation of a series of bathymetric ocean charts. Eight leading scientists of the day were appointed to the Commission, which set about producing the first edition of the GEBCO chart series.

Since that important first step, the Principality of Monaco has played an important role in supporting the GEBCO project. In the spring of 1903, work started on assembling the data required to produce the first charts. The hydrographic services of all the maritime nations were invited to provide any data that they had in the form of charts or logs. Significant contributions were made by the British Admiralty, the Ministry of the Imperial Navy of Berlin, the Coast and Geodetic Survey of the United States, the French Hydrographic Service and various undersea cable laying companies.

On the 11th of January 1904, Prince Albert I presented drafts of the entire set of the GEBCO first edition charts to a session of the Académie des sciences de Paris. They were well received and widely commented on in both the French press and abroad. Later that year, the charts were presented to the 8th International Geographical Congress held in Washington, D.C.

Following the death of Prince Albert in 1922, the Government of Monaco invited the International Hydrographic Bureau (IHB) to take over the production of the GEBCO charts. Since that time, the IHB has maintained a repository of the five successive series in its archives and in 2015, it undertook to digitally scan these charts. A snapshot of the scanned GEBCO charts is presented here.

Conclusion
When presenting the 1st Edition to the 6th International Geographical Congress held in Washington, D.C., Professor Thoulet’s prophetic words (copied below) reflect the spirit of this great enterprise:

“The work is finished. In the name of His Serene Highness Prince Albert I of Monaco, I have the honour and, I dare say, the pride to submit this before the Congress. Here then is everything which is known today about the relief of the ocean floor.

For many years to come, mariners, telegraphists, engineers, oceanographers and scientists will continue their soundings, for now we must proceed to fill in the details; no point of any sea on the globe will escape our investigations. The incessant and untiring efforts of succeeding generations are the glory of mankind. In one century – in two centuries – this is the chart our great-great-great-grandchildren will use; perfected but not changed.”

More about GEBCO – (http://www.gebco.net)