Moving from negative to positive

Working across disciplines on large photograph digitization projects
Presenters

Laura Kopp Starr, History Associates
Nancy Taylor, Presbyterian Historical Society
Natalie Shilstut, Bryn Mawr College
Barbara E. Lemmen, Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts

Moderated by Dyani Feige, Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts
Creating a Roadmap for LA County Dept. of Public Works (LADPW) Photographs
Public Works
Los Angeles County

Environmental Services
Development Services
Public Buildings
Water Resources
Emergency Management
Transportation
Our History


The County Flood Control District Centennial Celebration on August 12, 2015.

Los Angeles County Flood Control District Centennial Celebration

https://pw.lacounty.gov/prg/history/
Setting a Course

Creating a Digitization Roadmap for LADPW Photos

**MILE #1**
700k historic photos in disarray

**MILE #2**
Assessment

**MILE #3**
Processing & Digitization Pilot (13 LF)

**MILE #4**
Full digitization

**MILE #5**
Digital access to all images
CHALLENGES

- Very little documentation, order, or preservation of 610 lf (approx 700,000 photographic items).
- Useless sitting in Dept. HQ
- No inhouse expertise in how to handle

SOLUTION

Create a systematic plan for organizing, preserving, and sharing these assets with internal and external audiences.
APPROACH

- HAI archivist conducted a 5 day assessment onsite
- Created a recommendations report & roadmap

RESULTS

- Full understanding of the collection
  - 561 lf of photographic materials
  - 49 lf of papers records with context to photos
RESULTS (Cont.)

- Discovered multiple filing systems with various numerical schemas
- Poor environmental storage conditions having a real impact
RESULTS (Cont.)

Created a recommendations report with short, mid, and long term actions to:

- Ensure long term stability through range of preservation actions
- Relocate collection to location with proper environmental monitoring
- Establish intellectual control by implementing organizational schema / taxonomy rooted in best practice
- Develop finding aids
- Digitize originals and create descriptive metadata to create online collection

PROCESS & DIGITIZE TO PRESERVE & PROVIDE ACCESS
Creating a Digitization Roadmap for LADPW Photos

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Stakeholder Involvement

- LADPW, Watershed Management Division & Public Relations - Media Services
- History Associates
- O’Rorke Inc., PR Firm
- County of LA Public Library
- Center for Conservation Research at the National Museum of Natural History, Paris
PILOT PROJECT: LA County Flood Control District File Copy Prints (13 lf) - Partnership with LA County Library

Purpose
Achieve rapid results & demonstrate value to stakeholders

- **Processing & Finding Aid**
  - Portion of the most at-risk material arranged, preserved, described
  - Finding aid with container list provides metadata for digital content

- **Digitization**
  - Created a set of digital assets to be used for internal projects, community engagement, and research/outreach purposes

- **Online Collection**
  - Adds valuable collection to Library’s online holdings
  - Grants ready access to internal and external audiences to encourage engagement and investment
PILOT PROJECT: LA County Flood Control District File Copy Prints Partnership with LA County Library

Online access through Library ContentDM platform

http://history.lacountylibrary.org
Religious News Service Photographs, 1945-1982
227 cubic foot boxes
Children wear religious habits for Missions Sunday services at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City, October 24, 1948.
A group of nuns view a submarine on display at the Powerama Exhibition in Chicago, Illinois, 1955.
Inhabitants of Resurrection City, home of the Poor People's Campaign, read newspaper accounts of the capture of James Earl Ray, the accused assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., June 8, 1968.
NEH Award to Digitize Religious News Service Photos

The Presbyterian Historical Society is the proud recipient of a 2018 National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) Humanities Collections and Reference Resources grant.

Announced yesterday, the $44,000 grant award allows PHS to digitize photographs from its large Religious News Service collection and to plan for future sharing of the entire RNS collection online.
NEH Grant Proposal

Project goals

- Consult with academic historians, journalism scholars, a photo conservator, and a copyright attorney to develop a three-tier, five-point rating system to prioritize images for digitization and preservation.
- Apply the rating system to five boxes of images, one from each decade of the collection, and scan the top 500 rated images as part of a pilot project; add those images to the PHS digital archive, Pearl.
- Publicize the rating system and the pilot project results.
Photo-file contents

HANOI -- A North Vietnamese nun, Nguyen Thi Choung, looks sadly at signs of war in Hanoi. The city's workers, unlike the nun, all wear armbands. Ringed with anti-aircraft guns and missile sites, the city is on a constant alert for air raids.

Credit: Neil Heald

RELIGIOUS NEWS SERVICE PHOTO (99-12U-67-290)

HANOI

Hanoi, capital of Viet Nam and presided over by Ho Chi Minh, is surrounded by defences in the form of anti-aircraft guns and missile sites. Whether they work in the fields or at a factory lathe, all workers, male and female, carry arms. An unusual feature of protection against air attack is the individual 'fox hole.'

PICTURES SHOW: North Vietnamese Nun Nguyen Thi Choung gazed sadly about her city as she tried to weigh her vows against the emergencies of war.

G. OZAR

PP
Historical significance rating

Advisory panel

- Dr. Raymond Haberski, *U.S. Catholic history*
- Dr. Hasia Diner, *immigration and Jewish history*
- Dr. Jill Gill, *ecumenical and social justice history*
- Dr. Debra Mason, *emeritus publisher of the Religion News Service*
- Dr. Diane Winston, *Chair in Media & Religion at the University of Southern California*
RNS Advisory Panel members working on the historical significance rating scale, October 2018.
## Historical significance rating

### Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>- All of below criteria, plus high aesthetic or composition quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>- Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- More than one quality story</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Portrays an under-represented religious group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Historical significance rating

### Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3     | - One compelling story  
|       | - Action  
|       | - Portray an under-represented religious group |
| 2     | - Grounded in religion |
| 1     | - Not foregrounded in religion  
|       | - No action (ex. Church buildings)  
|       | - Show the inner workings of a denomination  
|       | - Portray the presenting of awards  
|       | - Headshots/portraits |
Documentation quality rating

Documentation scenarios

- Single version of paper caption
- Multiple (draft and final) versions of paper captions
- Related materials (clippings, brochures, etc.)
- Brief title only
- No information
Copyright considerations

Authors Guild v. Google, Inc.

Docket Number: 13-4829
Court: U.S. Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit
Judge: Leval
Opinion Date: October 16, 2015

Plaintiffs, authors of published books under copyright, filed suit against Google for copyright infringement. Google, acting without permission of rights holders, has made digital copies of tens of millions of books, including plaintiffs’, through its Library Project and its Google books project. The district court concluded that Google’s actions constituted fair use under 17 U.S.C. 107.
Documentation quality rating

Copyright information scenarios

- Credit stamped on photograph
- Credit recorded in ledger
- Credit in ledger matches credit on photograph
- Credit in ledger does not match credit on photograph
- No credit
## Documentation quality rating

### Criteria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Detailed caption provides good context for the image (name, subjects, location) / Photographer credit is clear.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Detailed caption provides good context for the image (name, subjects, location) / Photographer credit is unclear, absent, or contradictory.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Brief title or caption is present but lacks detail that would provide good context for the image. / Photographer credit is clear and there is no contradiction between credit in photo file and in ledger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>No title or caption. / Photographer credit is clear and there is no contradiction between credit in photo file and in ledger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No title or caption. / Photographer credit is unclear, absent, or contradicts credit found in ledger.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Copyright considerations: display

Snake-handlers hold revival in South.

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DISCLAIMER The purpose of this statement is to help the public understand how this item may be used. When there is a (non-standard) License or contract that covers any of the indicated uses, this statement will supersede the effects of that license or contract.

| Title          | Snake-handlers hold revival in South. |
|               | Rev. Gordon Miller holds rattlesnakes during Church of God revival service. |
| Description    | Wilson, Bill. |
| Creator        | Atlanta weekly. |
Copyright considerations: display

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Copyright considerations: Takedown notice

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A takedown request may be initiated by:

1. The individual or organization who is the copyright holder.
2. The individual or organization who is the subject of the record containing personal or confidential information.
3. A legally authorized agent representing the copyright holder or record subject.

To submit a takedown request, please fill out the Takedown Request Form. You can also download a PDF version and email the form to refdesk@history.pcusa.org or mail it to:

Rights and Reproductions
Presbyterian Historical Society
425 Lombard Street
Philadelphia, PA 19147

Upon receiving a request, the society will begin an investigation into the claim. A resolution will be communicated in writing. If an infringement or privacy violation is determined to have occurred, the item(s) in question will be taken down until the applicable intellectual property rights have expired.

https://digital.history.pcusa.org/copyrightpolicy
Caring for the photographs within large digitization projects
Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts

Preservation Services
- Surveys and plans
- Workshops & conferences

Imaging Services
- Photodocumentation of treatment
- Facsimiles

Housing & Framing Services

Conservation treatment
What a photograph conservator can contribute

Deep knowledge of photographic materials:
- Manufacture
- Materials
- Terminology
- Handling
- Preservation
- Research and Testing

Diphenylamine test for cellulose nitrate film

Images courtesy of CCAHA
What a photograph conservator can contribute

Surveys
Treatment
Preventive
Education and Training
Grant support

Courtesy of Debbie Norris
My role in the PHS Religious News Service project

1. Advise on housing and other long-term preservation issues
2. Advise on digitization workflow
3. Create a rating system for the photographic materials
4. Provide reference materials
Rating — component 1
Format and Primacy of the information

Rating — component 1
Format and Primacy of the information

Ebay.com
# Rating — component 2

## Condition and Level of Deterioration

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Image Legibility</th>
<th>Examples: in normal and transmitted light</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>No deterioration</td>
<td>Legible image</td>
<td><img src="image1.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Negative starting to shrink and become brittle</td>
<td>Legible image</td>
<td><img src="image2.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Possible yellowing</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image3.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May give off a vintage odor</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image4.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vintage smear</td>
<td>Legible image</td>
<td><img src="image5.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative begins to curl</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image6.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May show blue or pink staining</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image7.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yellowing</td>
<td></td>
<td><img src="image8.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Overall shrinkage of film base begins</td>
<td>Legible image</td>
<td><img src="image9.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Bubbles and crystalline deposits form between layers of the negative</td>
<td>Depending on the extent, the image may not be legible</td>
<td><img src="image10.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Channels form on both sides of the negative</td>
<td>Highly distorted</td>
<td><img src="image11.png" alt="Image" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Images courtesy of Barbara Lemmen / gawainweaver.com / National Park Service “Cold Storage” / NEDCC.org / Preservation Self-Assessment Program, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign / Photographic Negatives: Nature and Evolution of Processes by Maria Fernanda Valverde / NEDCC.org
Rating — component 3
Risk and Vulnerability

Image Permanence Institute  https://www.filmcare.org/optimize_collection_standalone
Priority Decision Tree

START
- Format available?
  - Negative only
    - Negative image set
  - Print only
    - Negative image set

How many prints in the envelope?
- Single print
  - Multiple prints of same image
- Multiple prints of same image
  - Pick best image
    - Condition?
      - Good condition (flat or only slightly distorted) or can be geometrized in scanner
        - Flatbed Scanner
          - Priority 1
          - Digitize with camera or send for conservation treatment
          - Priority 2
      - Unstable or blotted - cannot be safely handled
        - Neatly wrap in moist/neutral set

Information accessible?
- Yes
  - Deterioration?
    - Name - stage 1
      - Slight deterioration - stage 2 or 3
        - Priority 4
    - Print only?
      - Yes
        - Strip negative
          - Priority 5
          - Condition of print?
            - Good quality - print captures full local area of the negative
            - Poor quality - print does not capture full local area of the negative
              - START again at "How many prints in the envelope?"

Polyester or Nitrate
- Priority 1

Acetate
- Priority 2

Deterioration?
- Name - stage 1
  - Slight deterioration - stage 2 or 3
    - Priority 4
- Print only?
  - Yes
    - Strip negative
      - Priority 5
      - Condition of print?
        - Good quality - print captures full local area of the negative
        - Poor quality - print does not capture full local area of the negative
          - START again at "How many prints in the envelope?"

Priority 5

"Compare the image and time on the negative against the time on the print. If the print captures the full local area of the negative and has all of the information.

*"Compare the image and time on the negative against the time on the print. If the print captures the full local area of the negative and has all of the information."
Components 2 and 3 drove the ratings when the negatives were felt to be the primary images, due to the instability of the plastic film base.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Digitization</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Cellulose Acetate</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Slight distortion = stage 2 or 3</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Flatbed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Cellulose Acetate</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>None = stage 1</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Flatbed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cellulose Acetate</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Poor/distorted = stage 4 or higher</td>
<td>Stripping</td>
<td>Flatbed (or by outside contractor as part of treatment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Cellulose Acetate</td>
<td>Poor quality</td>
<td>Poor/distorted = stage 4 or higher</td>
<td>Stripping</td>
<td>Flatbed (or by outside contractor as part of treatment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Unstable</td>
<td>Maybe</td>
<td>Camera (if treated, flatbed scanner could be used)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Flatbed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Polyester</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Flatbed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cellulose Nitrate</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>Flatbed (in-house or by outside contractor)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Revised Priority Table

Component 1 drove the ratings once the negatives were found to be copies, because prints are much more stable and in generally good condition.
Lessons learned

- Assemble a team
- Know what each collaborator can contribute to the process
- Keep communication flowing
- Remember, it’s not about you and promoting your agenda
- Survey collection first, if possible
Q & A