CATALOGING OF HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS IN SMALL TO MEDIUM-SIZED ARCHIVAL OPERATIONS

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Photographs often pose very difficult cataloging problems for archives, museums, and libraries. Problems exist with diverse sizes, unidentified photographs, large collections that cannot be easily classified or arranged, and preservation of fragile or deteriorating prints or negatives. Cataloging historical photographs attracts much attention because yesterday's indifference to their value is being replaced by the realization that photographs provide a visual record of the past and present. This article presents the guidelines for cataloging and arranging historical photographs that have been developed by the Center for Archival Collections at Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio.

The Center for Archival Collections collects, preserves, and makes accessible primary source documents which relate to Northwest Ohio history, Great Lakes shipping, and Bowling Green State University. Current holdings include over 10,000 linear feet of public records, manuscripts, newspapers, and secondary sources about these subjects. In addition, the Center also houses approximately 1500 linear feet of photographic materials, such as prints, negatives, glass plate negatives, ambrotypes, daguerreotypes, tintypes, and lantern slides. The responsibility both to preserve and retrieve these visual records led the Center to develop guidelines for their cataloging.

At the Center, large photograph collections, such as the I.I. Freyman collection of glass plate negatives of Northwest Ohio or the Utah Gospel Mission collection, are processed using standard archival methods, producing inventories and registers. Loose pho-
toographs received as minor parts of manuscript collections may be transferred to the general photograph files when the curator of manuscripts determines that their preservation or use would be better served by the relocation. Any transfer of a photograph from the main body of a manuscript collection is noted both in the manuscript register and on the cataloging record.

A majority of the photographs received do not come in as part of collections, but rather as single items. These photographs often have a very uncertain provenance. For this type of image, individual item cataloging is ideal for effecting their greatest use. Many of the completely unidentified photographs are still very valuable for the examples of clothing, hats, toys, and activities that they exhibit. Bowling Green State University has active academic programs in popular culture, American studies, and American culture for which images illustrating the most mundane objects or activities are useful. Individual cataloging sometimes is done for particular photographs that remain in collections, when they are of use in a way that might not be evident from the scope of the collections, such as log cabin interiors in the Utah Gospel Mission collection. Any copy negative or print made from a photograph in a collection is cataloged as well.

Prior to the decision to professionally catalog the historical photographs housed at the Center, photographs were grouped in folders according to geographic locations with a few relevant subdivisions, such as street scenes, industry, and churches. This system provided limited access to the photographs, but a search under each geographic designation was necessary to locate topical material, such as pictures of farm life, oil wells, or electric railway cars. This consumed much staff time and entailed frequent handling of the photographs. As patron requests for photographs on particular subjects increased, the need for a better method of retrieval was obvious. In 1980, almost 2000 copy prints and negatives were produced for patrons by the Center's darkroom operation. To improve service to those patrons requiring subject access, it was decided to develop more detailed procedures.

In setting up a new cataloging procedure a portion of the previous organizational system was retained. This involved initial description of the item at the time it came into the Center, often with the donor providing the information. This data is penciled lightly on the back of the print or on the acid-free envelope in which the negative is placed (Figs. 1a & 2a). The Center employs a rubber stamp for organizing this information, using archivaly acceptable manuscript marking ink supplied to the Center by the Preservation Office of the Library of Congress. The stamp was used under the old system of arrangement and was retained primarily for economic reasons. A
CATALOGING HISTORICAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Stamp can be designed to suit the needs of any institution. The categories on the Center's stamp include:

SUBJECT:
DATE:
CITY-STATE:
COUNTY:
SOURCE:
NEGATIVE:
PHOTOGRAPHER:

Access to the individually cataloged photographs is achieved through a card catalog (Figs. 1b & 2b). The option of affixing a contact print of the negative to the catalog card was rejected as too costly both in photographic materials and in the time it required of the Center's limited darkroom staff.

CATALOGING

Center guidelines for the descriptive cataloging of photographs are based on Chapter 8 of the Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, second edition (AACR2). While there are some shortcomings to AACR2 and Chapter 8 on "Graphic Materials," there will probably never be any system that can satisfy everyone or meet the needs of each situation without some modification. A committee chaired by Elisabeth Betz at the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress has prepared Rules for Cataloging Graphic Materials, based on AACR2 Chapter 8. The preliminary draft of this manual has been circulated for review, and a final version is currently in preparation by Betz. This manual presents some of the modifications which the Library of Congress and others felt were necessary to mold AACR2 to their specific needs. Not all institutions might need the detailed analysis that the Library of Congress wants, but AACR2 is a good starting point for in-house adaptations. The Center for Archival Collections has been fortunate in experiencing very few catalog integration problems since AACR2 was adopted for use in March 1979, at the same time professional cataloging began. All material cataloged at the Center is done using AACR2. Catalog records for secondary source works and manuscripts are also entered into the OCLC bibliographic data base. The following is a general guide to the Center's practice with the relevant AACR2 rules cited in parenthesis by number. More detailed examples and explanations can be found in AACR2.

Title

Since most photographs lack a formal title, one must be supplied by the cataloger (1.1B7 and 8.1B2). The title should be brief, descrip-
Figure 1

Courtesy of Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University.
**SUBJECT:** Three young girls sewing cloth strips for rag rugs

**DATE:** ca. 1898

**CITY-STATE:** Tiffin, Ohio

**COUNTY:** Seneca

**SOURCE:** Fern Parks Kingseed

**NEGATIVE:** I-691

**PHOTOGRAPHER:** Matilda Staib Parks

*Figure 1a.*

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**Photo**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1981</th>
<th>[Three young girls sewing cloth strips for rag rugs] [picture] - [ca. 1898].</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>1 photographic print: b&amp;w; 13 x 18 cm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1 negative (copy): b&amp;w; 4 x 6 cm. (fr.8)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Neg.**

| 1-691 | Individuals in photo identified on negative envelope. |

Photograph attributed to Matilda Staib Parks.

1. Children's clothing—19th century (Late)—Pictorial works. 2. Rugs—19th century (Late)—Pictorial works. 3. Cottage industries—Ohio—Tiffin—19th century (Late)—Pictorial works. I. Parks, Matilda Staib.

*Figure 1b.*
Figure 2

Courtesy of Center for Archival Collections, Bowling Green State University.
Figure 2a.

Photo 1982 [Grocery store in Bays, Ohio, with the proprietor seated on kegs] [picture] - [190-?].
16 1 photographic print: b&w; 21 x 26 cm.
2 1 negative (copy): b&w; 4 x 6 cm. (fr.2)

Neg. 1-903 Donated by Beverly Miner.
Bays, Ohio was a town of the Wood County oil boom era.

1. Bays (Ohio)--Description--20th century (Early)--Views. 2. Grocery trade--Ohio--Bays--20th century (Early)--Pictorial works.
I. Miner, Beverly.

Figure 2b.
tive, and avoid beginning with generic terms, such as "portrait" or "photograph." A patron should be able to get a fair idea of what the photograph shows from this title. Supplied titles are placed in brackets. The title is followed by the general material designation "[picture]" (1.1C).

Statement of responsibility

In the few cases in which the name of the photographer appears on the emulsion side of the item, it is used as the statement of responsibility and as the main entry. By definition in AACR2, the statement of responsibility is transcribed from the photograph and relates to the person or body responsible for its content. Through experience we have found that the information appearing on the back of photographs cannot always be relied upon as being totally accurate; therefore, it is not used by us as the statement of responsibility. Since most of the photographs in the Center's collection are by unknown or attributed photographers, there is often no data in this position (1.1F2). Any information on an attributed photographer may be used to construct a note, with an added entry made, as with the photograph attributed to Matilda Staib Parks (Fig. 1b).

Publication, production, distribution, etc.

The publication information, comparable to the imprint for published material, is limited to the date of creation for the material (8.4A2 and 8.4F2). When no exact date is known an approximate date should be supplied (1.4F7).

Physical description

In recording the physical description, the Center uses the option of substituting more specific photographic terms than those in the list given in AACR2 to record the number of units of an item (8.5B1). The Center adapted the following authority list of specific material designations from the International Museum of Photography's Conventions for Cataloging Photographs. These terms include ambrotype, daguerreotype, pannotype, tintype, negative, photographic print, postcard, and stereograph. The specific material designation for negatives may be qualified by technique or material, i.e., negative (glass) or negative (copy).

If both a negative and print exist for a photograph the Center uses two physical description areas on one cataloging record, instead of making two separate cataloging records. While this practice is an exception to AACR2 procedures, it expedites the cataloging of prints and negatives of the same image. It also reduces the number of cards that need to be generated to provide access to these duplicate images. Because the photograph catalog at the Center currently extends to ten standard 3" x 5" card catalog drawers, saving space is a
concern. When describing prints and negatives that contain similar views of the same image, or those that constitute unified collections, the prints and negatives are cataloged as multipart items. For the dimensions the height by the width in centimeters is recorded, rounded off to the next whole centimeter (8.5D1). At the Center we include the negative frame number on copy negatives as part of the negative's physical description, rather than as a note, in order to meet the needs of our darkroom staff.

Notes

The note area (8.5B) includes information not given in the main body of the cataloging record, i.e., attributed photographers, names of donators or collections, other features of the physical description, and any summary of content that may aid the patron. Added entries may be created as needed for names of photographers, donators, or collections (Fig. 2b).

SUBJECT ANALYSIS

Subject analysis of photographs is extremely important for retrieval purposes. It also serves a conservation function in minimizing unnecessary handling of the photograph, although this is not of primary consideration. Since Library of Congress Subject Headings is used at the Center for all subject analysis of books, maps, manuscripts, and pamphlet materials, it was desirable to maintain consistency with subject analysis of photographs. Not only does this system make the various card catalogs easier for patrons to use, but at such time as the Center goes into any type of computer system the general uniformity will make conversion easier.

The Library of Congress headings are used with only slight modification to meet special problems, such as refining time subdivisions. The Center modifies chronological subdivisions such as “19th century” and “20th century” by dividing the century into thirds, for example, “Children’s clothing—19th century (Late)—Pictorial works” (Fig. 1b). “20th century (Early)” is used for photographs from 1900-1933, “20th century (Mid)” for 1934-1965, and “20th century (Late)” for 1966-1999.

Photographs exhibiting good, clear examples of format, clothing, buildings, occupations, transportation, and social life receive subject analysis for those topics, with period subdivision if possible. “Women—Employment—19th century (Late)” would be used for a photograph showing women at work in 1896. Some of the specific material designations used in the physical description may also be used as subject headings.

The locale of the photograph is often a useful access point. Geographic headings are subdivided according to the list of subdivisions
under place names found in the introduction to the Library of Congress Subject Headings, eighth edition, i.e., “Bowling Green (Ohio)—Streets—Main Street—20th century (Early)—Pictorial works.”

Due to time and space limitations individual personal name access is not provided for group portraits with more than four persons in the group or for persons who are identified only by first name. This information may be listed separately on the back of the print or on the negative envelope, with a note in the cataloging record indicating that this is the case (Fig. 1b). Photographs of a family group receive a heading for the family name, i.e., “Jones family.”

CLASSIFICATION/ACCESS

The system used to retrieve prints or negatives at the Center for Archival Collections is basically an access system, with no classification involved. Prints and negatives have separate numbering systems tailored to their respective storage requirements. Any access system should be geared to an institution’s own needs and limitations.

As initial cataloging is done, every effort is made to place both the print and the negative “call number” on the cataloging record. For a print, the first line of the call number is preceded by the collection designation “Photo”; for a negative, the call number is preceded by “Neg.” If either the print or negative is unavailable at the time of cataloging, space for the call number and physical description is left blank, in the event that the missing negative or print becomes available at some later time.

Negatives are numbered from 1 to 999, prefixed by a series number which acts as a control device to prevent the access number from becoming unmanageable in the limited space on the left side of the card. The smaller numbers are also easier for the patrons to copy correctly. Numbers are assigned to each film negative, whether they are 35mm, 120mm or even 4 x 5 sizes, so that negatives in an envelope will have consecutive numbers, i.e., 1-691, 1-692. From four to six negatives, but not more than ten, are stored in one acid-free envelope. The negatives are also protected from each other by placing each one in clear plastic negative preservers, on which the “call number” is marked. Glass plate negatives are assigned an alphabetic series prefix different from the film negatives because of their unique storage problems, i.e., A-211.

Photographic prints are assigned numbers based on their file location. Prints are kept in acid-free folders, with no more than ten prints to a folder. Each folder is assigned a number consisting of the year in which it was cataloged, followed by a consecutively assigned number based on the number of folders done during the year, for
example 1982/16 would mean the sixteenth folder cataloged during 1982. Each print in the folder is given a number from 1 to 10, with the entire "call number" penciled lightly on the verso of the print. Thus, a print with the number 1982/16/2 would indicate that it is located in the sixteenth folder cataloged during 1982 and is the second print in that folder. This system allows for rapid retrieval and refiling of photographs as well as serving as a crude inventory control. As with negatives, prints that contain similar views of the same image, or unified collections, are accessed as multipart items, i.e., 1981/3/4-8. Although not always economically feasible, it is suggested that a buffer sheet of acid-free paper be placed between each print. In the case of rare or fragile prints, it may be desirable to put only one print in a folder, although sleeving or mounting are other options.

CONCLUSION

With AACR2 cataloging rules available for formats ranging from books and manuscripts to artifacts and graphic materials, a small to medium-sized institution with various forms of materials can have a detailed, uniform, and comprehensible catalog using the same descriptive system for all its holdings. At the Center all of the cards for books and manuscripts are interfiled in one catalog, with photographic holdings represented in a separate file. The Center's in-house access system, designed to meet the needs of its patrons and staff, illustrates one method of dealing with diverse photograph formats and content and making them available in a single system. When the final version of the Betz Library of Congress manual is available the Center may adopt some of its suggestions, for example that dealing with recording sizes in centimeters to the nearest millimeter.

The above guidelines for cataloging a photograph collection require a substantial investment in time and resources. During the period from September 1980 to June 1981 a half-time cataloger at the Center was able to catalog over 1100 photographic items. If photographs of historic value are not described thoroughly and made accessible, however, the collection would hardly be worth the effort to maintain.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


