Photographs, Archives and Guidelines

Annotated Bibliography

Keith LeJeune

INFO 561-900

Professor Susan E. Davis
As with many subjects within the archival discipline, there are varying opinions on how photographs should be processed, handled, preserved and used. In my opinion, there can never be enough discussion on how to deal with photographs in archives. Besides their enormous informational value, photographs often have extremely personal and sentimental value that cannot be understated and should not be undervalued. Photography can show in a single picture what it takes pages to describe. In today’s information rich environment, photos have taken on an even larger role. They are ubiquitous and archivists of all skill levels must learn how make the best decisions where photos are concerned.

In this annotated bibliography, I have attempted to show the variety and complexity that photographs bring to archives. These sources are directed a various skill and experience levels that archivists possess. Some of the sources will illustrate success stories in creating photographic archives while others will show that photos come in a variety of formats with different purposes. I have included sources that provide guidance to archivists when handling, processing for selection and applying description. As well, there are sources to help when creating digital copies or storing personal photos at home. There is no single right answer when it comes to photographic archives; what it comes down to is being educated and doing what is best for your collections.


**Annotation**: I found this article interesting because it highlights a type of photography that is often overlooked. Aerial photography requires fidelity greater than that of other types of photos, guidelines for reproduction of aerial photos can be found in the NARA Guidelines for Digitizing
Archival Materials. The NARA guidelines are listed further down in this bibliography. Booth describes the measures that the state of Illinois took to create a digital archive when the State Geological Survey discovered that many of the original negatives had been destroyed because of deterioration and combustion concerns. This article is important because it demonstrates that archivists can find themselves dealing with many different types of photography and that description is essential for aerial photos. Without proper description, these photos would be rendered useless to researchers.


Annotation: I found this interesting article on the SAA’s website under the Lesbian and Gay Archives Roundtable. In the article the author warns, “Do not do anything to an item which you cannot safely and totally undo.” I think this is a very important reminder, especially when working with photographs. The rest of the article goes on to describe the different types of photographic materials that archivists may encounter when working with photos. It describes some of the hazards and cautions that archivists should take when they come across these materials. It gives basic recommendations on how photos should be stored and arranged in collections. This article would be a good source for inexperienced archivists.


Annotation: This article is written from a purely archival standpoint. Its focus is on providing a procedure for archivists to follow during the process of selecting photographs for archives and for developing appraisal criteria for photographs. The author suggests a list of criteria for
archivist to consider such as subject, accompanying documentation, uniqueness/originality of information and accessibility. Each criterion is then explained thoroughly to give the reader a better understanding of how the criteria should be judged. The author also discusses whether photographs should be housed with or separate from textual files. He recommends they be kept separate but linked through documentation. This article is very informative, and would be a useful source for archivists at any level of experience.


**Annotation**: While this article is not specifically about the selection, preservation or appraisal of photographs, it discusses how powerful of a tool photographs can be. The Florida Memory Project is a collaboration of photographs, films, documents and recordings from several collections, archives and historical societies. It clearly demonstrates the immense value of a multimedia collection. The project attracted users from across the spectrum; teachers have used the collection in their middle school classrooms, the Oprah Winfrey show used images from the collection in a program, it was even consulted for protocol for a governor lying in state. The efforts to complete a photographic collection can be tremendous, but his is a great example of a successful project for any archivist. The Florida Memory Project can be viewed through this link [http://www.floridamemory.com/](http://www.floridamemory.com/).

Annotation: This is a webpage from the National Archives website and explains some best practices for storing photos to ensure long-term survival. While this webpage is directed at individuals managing their personal photo collections, it is a good example of how archivists are being proactive. By providing recommendations on using acid-free materials and locating spaces in the home where temperatures are mostly constant, archivists are helping individuals preserve photos that may one day be included in an archival collection. Archivists never know where the collections will come from and what they will include. If archives can provide guidelines and best practices for individuals to use at home, they may be able to help improve the state of a future collection.


Annotation: This source was located at the NARA website. It provides information on processing photographs and other digital materials for access purposes and not for preservation purposes. Although there is no single source of standards in the archival industry, NARA and the SAA are often referred to for guidelines. The authors clearly state that the intent of the document is to inform and not prescribe a particular method for all cases. It provides recommendations on cropping, settings and resolutions needed for different types of photographs. This document is very technical in nature, but is essential for any archivists endeavoring to establish or maintain a photographic collection.

Annotation: Among the many issues archivists face in dealing with photographs is description. Schwartz’s article is interesting because it challenges the way archivist think about descriptive standards and apply them to non-textual collections. The author states that because of the archival worldview, photographic collections are often marginalized through the application of description. Because of this, she advocates using bibliographic standards when applying description to photographic archives. Schwartz believes that it is essential for archivists to be educated in photography. As we saw in other articles this quarter, Schwartz is advocating Archivists improve their visual literacy. I think the author frames a good argument and Archivists at any level could garner information from this article.


Annotation: Archives and libraries both house photographic collections and can learn a great deal from one another by studying the other’s successes and failures. I included this article as another example of a successful project dealing with photographs. This article discusses the Digital Forsyth Project undertaken by three libraries in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. After some discussion, the libraries realized that they had collections of photographs that shared significant similarities. Through a collaborative effort, they successfully applied for a grant and worked together to develop the project. This article serves as a good example of what can be accomplished through planning and collaborative efforts. It would be a good source for a novice looking for information on digitization projects. The project can be viewed at the following web address: http://www.digitalforsyth.org/.
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Signature Karman Keith LeJeune
Date March 8, 2011