



Prints, Pictures and Photographs

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MOST PEOPLE will agree that the term photograph means a paper print made from a photographic negative, but it may be necessary to set up definitions for the terms print and picture. By prints we mean, in this discussion, fine arts prints (original engravings, etchings, etc., but not photographs); the term pictures may overlap the above terms and will also be used to cover all other forms of pictorial materials, such as clippings from miscellaneous printed sources. An example of each would be: photograph, an unpublished shot of a well-known politician eating watermelon; print, an etching by Rembrandt; picture, an illustration of the Taj Mahal clipped from a travel brochure.

“Picture collections” often include all three types of materials and more—charts, maps, and graphs may find their eventual resting places in the picture files because of their flat format. Indeed, the main reason for storing these pictorial materials together has been their similarity in format or shape, rather than the subject nature of the materials.

One effective stimulus to the creation of many new picture collections during recent years has been the example of the larger collections such as the excellent one directed by Romana Javitz at the New York Public Library. Business firms and publishers have found this enormous collection so helpful that they have followed suit and set up their own picture libraries.¹ Most public libraries place the picture collection in the children’s room or in the art department, but the New York Public Library has pioneered in establishing a separate department. The growing use of pictures as documentation may well lead to a general relocation of picture collections, particularly in large libraries.

The increased recognition of the photograph as documentary evidence has led to the preservation in special libraries and archives of many negatives and unique positives, and, eventually, to the detailed cataloging of such collections. A good bibliography on the cataloging

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of non-book materials can be found in the *Library Trends* issue on trends in cataloging and classification.² While many collections of a broad general nature may be filed in such a way as to make cataloging unnecessary, larger photographic collections and, especially, collections of negatives must receive cataloging and indexing as detailed as that given to books. Fine prints also require cataloging if they are to serve a useful purpose within the library or museum.

The use of microfilm images of pictorial material on the individual catalog cards themselves, introduced in the Library of Congress' Division of Prints and Photographs in 1946, has been described by Milhollen.³ The saving in time for the staff and for the searcher who no longer has to examine every picture will more than offset the loss of actual contact with the original material itself so deplored by one picture library curator.⁴ In fact, the use of a small image on the card may permit the user actually to see far more pictures than would be possible in searching the cumbersome picture files. This method has proved to be useful in libraries of publishing concerns, in the Marburg Archives, and in the Belgian Central Iconographic Archives for National Art.⁵ Punched cards and electronic sorting devices promise to revolutionize picture selection in the future, but precision is not expected to be a feature of this type of sorting, since the number of choices must necessarily be limited.

Although the catalog of a picture collection may bear close resemblance to the card catalog of a book collection, the care of picture materials is very different from that of books. Storage facilities vary, but the majority of libraries in this country and abroad now use steel vertical filing cabinets with manila folders or dry mounts for collections of mixed pictorial materials. The techniques involved in mounting pictures and prints have some affinity to the techniques used in the care of fine books. Even the necessity for binding arises occasionally, particularly with collections in special libraries such as that of the Museum of Modern Art, where similar materials can be shelved together permanently and where material is not circulated.⁶ When possible, historically important material is kept in its original unmounted condition.

Storage of prints and larger pictures is comparable to map storage. Large pieces are stored flat to avoid folding and warping, in separate oversize cabinets, which may be kept below the smaller files or stacked and used as table surfaces where material can be spread out. Indeed the standard map case equipment, with drawers for flat horizontal filing, is widely used in print collections.

The circulation of picture materials varies little from the circulation of books, except that the library usually finds it desirable to provide some kind of wrapper, folder, tube, or portfolio in which to issue the pictures to protect them from damage and from loss.⁷ Photographic copying facilities have lessened the need in some libraries for circulating delicate materials and may eventually obviate the need for lending pictures. Where pictures are freely circulated, charging systems have been set up similar to book charging systems, but simple counting of items, rather than piece by piece charging, is often considered sufficient.

Miss Javitz has pointed out three types of picture collections: (1) those for a single specific purpose within an organization such as a business or museum library, (2) those limited to pictorial units of national importance produced by a specific source, as the collection at the Library of Congress, and (3) the all-inclusive, general picture collection of the public libraries.⁸

The public library picture collection is more apt to combine broadly all types of pictures than is the special or archival library. The Chicago Public Library is now filing together its clippings and mounted pictures, according to Matilde Kelly,⁹ and it is notable that only \$300 is spent annually (1950) for clipping sources and additional reference works. Unlike art libraries which have specialized files limited to art, esthetics, and art techniques, the public library's pictures comprise a general documentary collection, the value of which is based on variety and breadth of subject organization.¹⁰ Although specific subject headings filed alphabetically seem to be the preferred arrangement in larger public library collections, the use of the Dewey and other classification systems is more popular in smaller ones, particularly in England.¹¹ There are several classification schemes published in full or in part for use in setting up a picture collection.^{4, 12-14}

The New York Public Library, on the other hand, uses 8,000 specific subject headings subdivided by region, chronology, style, type, and name. This collection is described by its director as a combined gazetteer, biographical dictionary, and general encyclopedia.¹⁰ This description can well be applied to most public library picture collections, whether recognized in the organization of the files or not.

Local history pictorial collections are often foundlings among libraries, since they may be part of a public, university, school or museum library collection. Their value is chiefly documentary, like the materials in the public library files, but their organization and preservation problems link them with the special—even the archival—library.¹⁵ For this reason it may be better to treat them separately.

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The North Carolina Department of Archives and History at Raleigh maintains such a local history picture collection consisting of (1) 20,000 negatives bequeathed by an unusually far-sighted local photographer, Albert Barden, who set up a photographic studio in Raleigh during the early part of this century, (2) about 10,000 negatives deposited by the *Raleigh News and Observer*, a newspaper still operated by the sons of Josephus Daniels, and (3) several steel cases of unique positives accumulated since 1905 by the department itself. This whole collection is numbered serially and indexed by subject, donor, and number. Much use has been made of the material by newspapers, magazines, and private citizens seeking grandpa's class picture. The availability of photographic services in the Hall of History, where the collection is located, has added to their use and cut down on the space which would be required to house both negatives and positives.

This particular local history collection is better organized than would be possible where the community is smaller and the collection of photographs more diversified. It is a small collection, however, compared with the collections of the same type in the National Archives, where one collection has more than fifty different indexes,¹⁶ and in the Library of Congress, where serial numbers are also used to locate nearly three million items. The Library of Congress indexes, which have been mentioned earlier, contain short descriptions and microfilm images of the items they identify.

While schools, colleges, and universities all use picture materials for instructional purposes, the school picture collection differs from its big cousins in that it may include pamphlets, clippings, and all other picture material in a common file. This is largely the result of the newer teaching methods utilizing all source materials toward the enrichment of the classroom activities. Frequent weeding is recommended for such collections not only to keep them up to date but because popular materials are apt to wear out quickly and need replacing more often than in large collections. Housing of the school collection is usually much the same as for public libraries.¹⁷

College and university picture collections generally contain the same materials as museum collections, especially if such collections are connected with art departments; but they differ from museum collections in their relationship to the teaching function and also in that they may include teaching materials for history, anthropology, social science or physical sciences. Picture files are apt to be scattered over the campus, with each department maintaining files according to its needs. Some large groups of materials may come into the general library when they

are believed to be too large to be handled elsewhere, or if their use is general rather than special.

The housing of university collections varies according to whether the user handles the files or whether an attendant brings him the requested material. If the latter arrangement is used, buckram boxes or wooden bins, rather than steel files, often house the collection, in which case a card index to the material would be necessary. Actually, in most college and university situations students and faculty are allowed direct access to the picture files.

Cataloging these collections is an intricate task requiring precision in cataloging technique and a knowledge of the subject field covered. When staffing is inadequate for complete cataloging, separate indexes of portraits, architects (if architecture is filed by locale), etc., are valuable aids.¹⁸ Graduate students often do the indexing and cataloging of college and university collections.

The use of fine arts photo collections in universities varies. In some institutions pictures are incidental student aids used chiefly in seminars when slides are not available, or for graduate research. North Carolina affords an example of such use: the Weil collection of about 14,000 Alinari and Anderson photographs of works of art in Italian museums is a useful study aid. Other universities with larger collections often place pictures on reserve for certain courses. At Princeton each course has an alcove where photographs of the material covered in the course are displayed.

Print rooms, like local history collection rooms, may be found in various institutions—university libraries, art departments, and museums—and they usually constitute a separate collection. At Princeton both the main library and the fine arts departments have separate print rooms. Storage is usually in buckram pamphlet boxes and, for larger prints, flat cases. Display areas are usually provided in the room, often on the outside of cabinet doors. Since prints seldom circulate, provision must be made for their use in the print room.

The preservation of prints has received much study and needs not be dealt with in this paper. Many of the techniques are passed from expert to expert, and the collection which can boast a well-trained print restorer is indeed fortunate. Needless to say, fine prints are not mounted in the same manner as other picture material but are carefully hinged to mats cut from the best quality stock available. Prints should always be matted before they are framed. Frames are kept as simple as possible and carefully sealed against dust.

Museum picture libraries have as one of their chief functions the

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preservation of a photographic record of each item in the museum. Pictorial records are often kept of each exhibition as well. The Museum of Modern Art in New York City binds its exhibition photographs in chronological order and mounts other photos of museum objects in loose-leaf binders arranged alphabetically by artist.⁸ Such collections often include photographs of objects in other museums, architectural works, etc. Extensive use is made of museum photograph collections for publicity and for the publications of the institution.

The Museum of Modern Art also maintains a general vertical file information collection. Hannah B. Muller¹⁹ reports that it contains, in manila folders housed in steel cabinets, “. . . catalogs, announcements, photographs, biographical notes, reviews, tearsheets, clippings, programs. . . . For every vertical file folder, there is a corresponding card in the catalog, bearing the appropriate name or subject designation and stamped Miscellaneous Uncataloged Material.” When the material on one artist or subject gets too bulky, catalogs and clippings are removed and mounted, bound, and treated as books, while the photographs are mounted as explained above. These are then classified and cataloged.

Special libraries in business establishments use some of the methods developed in handling large picture collections, but are apt to specialize in a particular category and to work out intricate refinements to suit specific needs. In a periodical publishing house such as the National Geographic Society the index to the magazine can serve as the index to the original photos which have been reproduced, and the latter can be filed by volume and page number. Indexes for unpublished pictures are carefully compiled. All pictures are dry-mounted, and oversize material is stored in a series of giant pigeon-holes for quickest reference.²⁰ Albums are used for material which should and can be kept together as correlated material.

The September, 1954 issue of *Special Libraries* is devoted to picture libraries and gives accounts of twelve different collections. A noticeable feature is the rate at which each library seems to be growing. This rapid increase in size has fearsome implications for the future. Special librarians may well give serious consideration to the means of condensing their collections, for example, by the use of microfilm and the accumulation of negatives rather than positives. The development of centers for pooling negatives from which positives and slides or filmstrips can be ordered is one of the possible solutions and represents a promising trend in Europe and the United States. The Marburg Archives, (Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, a part of the Kunstgeschichte

Seminar der Universitaet Marburg), has been providing this service for Europeans and Americans for many years, and the organization of Taurgo, Inc., in New York, where negatives from many different institutions have been pooled, operates as an invaluable aid.²¹

Picture collections are becoming more interested in the identification of photographers, living or dead, and their subject specialities. Local history collections have special need for information of this kind, as do larger picture magazines and collections of photos compiled by government agencies. The future may see librarians working on more and more problems of attribution, or at least preserving these facts more carefully. Finally, the use of the picture collection for publicity purposes is evident in every type of library. It speaks well for the clear-sightedness of librarians, from the school library right through to the Library of Congress, that they recognize the value of pictorial material to serve a double-duty role as historical record and institutional promotion.

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