

OUT OF THE ARCHIVES

A brief guide to donating to archives

2018 has been an exciting and active year for new collections at the Center. We recently began working on the Victor Hand Collection, a cache of nearly 50,000 masterful photographs that date from the early 1950s to the late 2000s. The incomparable Jim Shaughnessy Collection, which numbers approximately 90,000 images, will arrive later in the year. As the Center continues to grow, we anticipate increasing interest from potential collection donors. With that in mind, I want to provide some guidelines for donating materials to archival institutions. Read on for general recommendations as well as a detailed description of the donation process at the Center

STORY

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Collection of the Center

Initial Considerations

Before approaching an archival institution about a donation, try to answer the following questions:

What do I have? Start with reviewing the materials you would like to donate. Items do not have to be “historic” or famous for an archive to consider them worthy of permanent retention. In fact, many of the images at the Center portray everyday events and were made by relatively unknown photographers, and some of our color slides are barely a decade old. That said, know that most archives have limited space and resources; they cannot accept everything submitted for consideration. In general, archives are looking for unique, original materials and prefer not to take on copies. Additionally, printed materials that are widely available elsewhere, such as popular newspapers, commercial art prints, or magazines are usually not considered for retention. Also, a potential donation is more likely to be accepted for retention if it is comprised of a coherent body of material rather than individual items

Is it mine? Am I still using it? Next, determine whether you are ready and able to transfer both physical and intellectual ownership of your material. Most archives can only afford to invest resources in the preservation of items that they own. Consequently, as a collection donor, you will likely be required to sign over the rights to your materials via a deed of gift at the time of donation. The archive will usually expect the physical transfer of the materials to begin slightly thereafter.

Please note that archives are less likely to accept donations of uncertain copyright status. Examples of these types of materials include works created by an individual other than the donor (unless officially transferred, copyright remains with the original creator or their estate for seventy years after their death),

or works created on behalf of a larger corporation or organization. (The corporation owns the copyright rather than the original creator in these situations.)

Is this Institution a good fit? Review the archive’s Collection Management Policy to learn about donation procedures and discover whether materials fit within the institution’s collecting scope. Collection development at most institutions is centered around acquiring and preserving materials related to a specific subject, institution, geographic location, person, or community. For instance, the Center’s mission is to preserve significant images of railroading, so we would not acquire a collection of aviation or nautical photographs as they are beyond our collecting scope. In addition to reviewing the Collection Management Policy, you can inquire directly with the institution about their collecting practices. A quick, friendly chat with the institution’s archivist or curatorial staff should give you a good idea of whether retention at that particular institution is worth pursuing.

Am I prepared to donate? Before donating, make sure you can commit time and energy to the process. Donation procedures can vary in complexity by institution. At some museums and archives, getting a collection permanently retained involves strict submission standards and whole committees dedicated to reviewing submitted materials. At others, successful donation is simply a matter of getting approval from one archivist or curator.

It is important to note that regardless of their complexity, formal donation procedures should always be followed. Avoid the temptation to mail or drop off potential collection materials without first discussing them with the institution’s staff members. Archives appreciate your enthusiasm and willingness to give; however, you may create an awkward or complicated situation by making an unsolicited donation. Ultimately, archives are far less likely to permanently retain materials that arrive unexpectedly.

Once you have committed to the donation process, make sure you are financially prepared. You can help ensure that your materials receive the care they deserve by also making a financial gift or bequest to the institution. While few archives require such gifts, nearly all would gratefully welcome them. Financial gifts or bequests are usually eligible for tax deductions, and depending on the situation, your collection donation may be eligible, too. Speak with your accountant or lawyer about this before you sign the deed of gift. Note that, in most cases, photographers or artists



themselves can only deduct the cost of their materials, but their heirs can often claim a fair market value deduction for the collection. A monetary appraisal of the collection is often required and must be completed at the donor's expense prior to the formal donation. In addition, the materials must be appraised by a professional unassociated with the institution that is considering the donation. Archivists and curators are legally barred from giving tax advice or appraising the monetary value of material at their institutions.

How a submission becomes a collection

The following six steps outline how a submission becomes part of the Center's permanent collection.

1. Initial Conversation. Most donations to the Center usually start out as casual conversations between potential donors and the Center's staff or board members. If you're unsure about whether the Center would be the right home for your materials, just ask! We welcome the opportunity to discuss your collection and the donation process with you. We gather basic collection information at this time and can usually get a general sense of whether the materials would be a good fit for the Center. If it is a match, we encourage potential donors to read our Collection Management Policy and visit our website to learn

more about the donation process. If the potential collection is clearly out of our collecting scope, we suggest alternative repositories to the donor at this time.

2. Submission of Sample Materials. To formally submit a collection for consideration, a donor should send the following information to the Center's institutional email account, info@railphoto.org:

- Size of the collection: the approximate total number of photographs and the amount of physical space they occupy
- Physical format(s) included in the collection, such as slides, negatives, prints, etc.
- Range of years depicted in the collection, e.g., 1960s to 1990s
- Geographic region(s) depicted in collection
- Railroads depicted in the collection
- Details about how the collection is housed
- Details about how the collection is currently organized and documented (accurate descriptions are encouraged)
- Verification that the collection has no legal encumbrances or restrictions placed upon it, and that the works are the creation of the donor or that the donor has clear title to them
- A selection of representative images, generally thirty or so

Providing Center staff members with biographical and contextual information, donor Thomas McIlwraith was an invaluable resource during the processing of his collection. Bedecked with American flags, Chicago and North Western Railway locomotives nos. 851 and 866 lead the Milwaukee Circus Train through Madison, Wisconsin, on June 30, 1970. McIlwraith-01-028-13

3. *Collections and Acquisitions Committee Review.* When the Center receives a formal donation submission, it is my responsibility as archives manager to gather all submission materials and forward them on to the Center's Collections and Acquisitions Committee. Comprised of five professionals from the railroad and photography industries, this group reviews each submission and votes whether to recommend a different repository for the materials or bring the collection before the Center's board of directors for final approval. The Committee bases its decisions on several factors including the historic and aesthetic qualities of the collection as well as the current capacity of the Center's archival space. The amount of work that the donor has put into digitizing and organizing the collection is also considered. Collections that have already been digitized in line with archival best practices are less of a strain on the Center's resources; on the other hand, digitized collections that do not meet archival standards may require the Center to rescan the materials.

4. *Board of Directors Review.* Once the Collections and Acquisitions Committee approves the submission,

they introduce it to the entire fourteen-member board of directors. After discussing the submission, the board votes on whether to approve it for permanent retention. The collection must receive a simple majority to be approved.

5. *Deed of Gift and Physical Transfer.* When a submission is approved for retention, the donor is notified via mail; I usually send a letter of congratulations as well as a deed of gift at this time. The deed of gift is typically required of all donors and transfers physical and intellectual ownership of the collection to the Center. It is important to note that although the deed of gift transfers ownership to the Center, donors are generally allowed to retain usage rights to their collections should they so desire. Once the deed is signed, I work with the donor to plan the physical transfer of the collection. The transfer can be synchronous or sent in batches, depending on the donor's availability and preferences.

6. *Continued Donor Involvement.* At the Center, we hope that the final transfer of collection materials does not mean the end of the donor's involvement with the collection. We encourage continued engagement and consider donors' subject-expertise and knowledge of their material great assets. Donors such as Thomas McIlwraith, Alan Furler, and J. Parker Lamb have all contributed to the discovery and use of collections in various ways including providing the Center with contextual and biographical information, correcting metadata, and publicizing collection materials through social media posts and public presentations.

Railroad Heritage Visual Archive updates

At our Madison office, photography archives intern Natalie Kreck (formerly Dust) and I recently finished digitizing the 1,917 negatives in the first batch of Victor Hand's collection. This group includes images of the Erie Lackawanna Railway, the Penn Central, the New York Central Railroad, and the Pennsylvania Railroad. The second batch just arrived, and we have already begun working on it. Executive director Scott Lothes and I have also been working on publishing albums from the Donald W. Furler and Robert A. Hadley collections. Meanwhile, volunteer John Kelly has just completed updating metadata from Fred Springer's Australia images and is moving on to selections from Springer's work in Argentina.

At Lake Forest College, associate archivist Colleen O'Keefe has just returned from an exciting month abroad with the Open Palace Programme, an educational archive and museum tour of the United Kingdom. She's currently working on Flickr albums from our Fred M. Springer and Ted Rose Collections. Keep an eye on our social media accounts and website for new selections from the Furler, Hand, Lamb, McIlwraith, Rose, and Springer collections. You can view highlights and galleries from many of our collections at: www.railphoto-art.org/collections •

Recently digitized with the first batch of Victor Hand negatives, this 1962 image shows New York Central locomotive no. 260 leading a passenger train under the Henry Hudson Bridge near the Spuyten Duyvil Station in the Bronx, New York City. Hand-NYC-PC-CR-X31-019





In this Victor Hand photograph, Pennsylvania Railroad GG1 locomotive no. 4879 hauls an eastbound express reefer train through Middletown, Pennsylvania, on May 21, 1969. Hand-NYC-PC-CR-31-0221