OUT OF THE ARCHIVES
New research and usage policies

ARTICLE

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Collection of the Center

THE CENTER FOR Railroad Photography & Art prides itself on both the preservation of significant images of railroad history and culture as well as the ability to disseminate these images to the public. Providing well-researched visual material for publications, exhibitions, study, personal enjoyment, and other uses is an integral part of our mission, and we love interacting with passionate railfans and scholars.

As we have grown rapidly over the last few years in just about every aspect, so has the demand for our images. In July of 2018, we began tracking statistics for image and reference requests to better understand how much time we allocate to providing these services. According to our stats, we've supplied images for approximately 120 unique requests, which have taken up about 240 hours of staff time. These numbers do not include: unsuccessful requests (in which we were not able to locate images or information); inquiries we receive via social media; and image retrieval and research we execute to support our own or/and institutional partners' programming. In addition, we also typically answer a number of inquiries requesting advice or resources regarding preservation or digital asset management; our current statistics do not reflect these types of interactions.

While our usage statistics may seem small in the grand scheme of annual staff time allocations, image requests do require careful time management to balance our other day-to-day work—especially the ongoing processing of several large collections. It is impossible to predict the timing of image requests and inquiries, and to best serve our users, we try to respond as soon as possible. We anticipate that the frequency of requests will only continue to increase as we reach new audiences and make more collections available. In the interest of managing staff time and better serving our users, we have elected to adopt a standardized usage fee schedule for commercial patrons as well as research fees for more complicated and time-consuming image requests for all patrons.

New standardized usage fees
Effective January 1, 2021, the Center will implement a new, standardized fee schedule for for-profit image usage. Personal and non-profit usage will remain free of charge. In the past, we have quoted commercial usage fees on a case-by-case basis, which has proven time-consuming and not always consistent. We hope to address these issues by making a standardized usage fee schedule available on our website for all prospective commercial users to review in advance.

In preparing our usage fee schedule, we surveyed the usage and permissions policies of twenty-eight different collecting institutions of various sizes located throughout the United States. Unsurprisingly, we found that usage fees and policies can vary widely by institution. Some archives opt for lenient policies that have characteristics of an open access usage model (open access is a movement that is currently gaining favor with and wider adoption amongst information professionals). In this type of usage system, non-profits can use images for free and commercial users, if they are charged at all, pay fees based on a simplified, inexpensive fee structure. The reasoning behind this type of policy is three-fold: it promotes wider access to and usage of collections materials (which is beneficial to a diverse set of image users as well as the archive's outreach efforts); it simplifies staff workflows surrounding image requests; and it acknowledges the ineffectiveness of strict policies to completely control image use in the digital era. CRP&A is somewhat of a partial early-adopter of this model; we do not charge for personal and non-profit use; and this will remain the same in the new fee schedule.

On the other end of the spectrum, several of the archives we surveyed maintain more traditional usage policies. Fee schedules for commercial image use at three large, well-known institutions are quite detailed and can range up to $1,500 per image (for usage in a feature film). These higher usage fees may be based on a number of factors such as the prestige of the institution, their holdings, and their users; restrictive donor agreements; the politics of their governing board or parent institution; and funding or staffing issues (some institutions depend highly on usage fees as an additional stream of income).

In devising our fees, we have aimed to strike a balance between a completely open access model and one with high fees. We intend for the new fee schedule to both promote wide usage of our images amongst commercial endeavors with restricted budgets while acknowledging that creative intellectual property has financial value. The new schedule includes prices for most of the typical usage categories we encounter at the Center, and it ranges from $15 per photo for usage in small print periodicals to $450 per image for international promotional campaigns. The complete schedule is available under the "Photogragh Usage" tab on our website: www.railphoto-art.org/collections

Baltimore & Ohio 2-10-2 steam locomotive no. 6103 with an eastbound coal train at Hyndman, Pennsylvania, on August, 13, 1953. Photograph by David T. Mainey, Mainey-01-02-003

Research fees

Also on January 1, 2021, the Center will begin charging modest hourly research fees to be implemented after a certain threshold staff time has been reached for requests made via distance. These requests include inquiries made via telephone, email, and social media; they account for the vast majority of our image and reference requests, and they can become quite time-consuming for both parties when complicated or open-ended.

To prepare a fee schedule for research assistance, we completed a survey similar to the one we conducted regarding image usage. Practices differ by institution, but generally speaking, all of the institutions included in the survey limit the amount of staff time they devote to providing services to distance patrons, and if they do offer additional staff time, they require patrons to pay by the hour. According to the survey, the amount of time that archives typically allocate to assisting distance researchers free-of-charge ranges

from fifteen minutes to one hour (one outlier is Drexel University, which offers free research assistance up to two hours). A few of the institutions we surveyed do not offer additional assistance once staff reach this threshold and suggest that distance patrons hire an assistant to undertake in-person research in their stead. Institutions that do offer additional research assistance typically charge hourly rates between $20 to $65 per hour. Several offer discounts in hourly rates for supporting members.

In devising the appropriate hourly fees to charge CRP&A's patrons, we opted to make the first hour complimentary for all patrons, the second hour a reduced price from the hourly rate, and subsequent hours similar to the lower end of the hourly rates we encountered in our survey. (See table below for rates.) We have kept rates low for a few reasons. First, our users hail from various locations in the United States as well as the international community; in-person research is not practical for most of them—and not really possible during the pandemic. Second, we currently do not have a digital collections platform that provides users with robust search capabilities or subject indexing. Some image requests can only be answered by staff members with institutional knowledge that's currently inaccessible to the public. I also want to note that the fee schedule includes benefits and discounts for CRP&A members. This aspect of the schedule is meant to thank individuals who actively support our efforts and incentivize non-members to join our community

It is my hope that charging research fees will encourage users to consult our online resources as well as consider the nature of their request before coming to us for assistance. I should clarify that under the new research fee structure, straightforward requests such as image retrieval by call number and basic collection inquiries will remain free-of-charge for all patrons; it typically takes us less than an hour to pull images

CRP&A Research Fee Schedule	
First hour of research	Complimentary
Second hour of research	Non-members: $15 Members: Complimentary
Additional hours (up to six)	Non-members: $25 per hour Members: $15 per hour

by call number or consult a finding aid. I also want to note that in-person research will remain free-of-charge under the new research fee structure. Once the pandemic ends, we will again make our collections available to the public for independent research (under the supervision of a staff member) by appointment.

Railroad Heritage Visual Archive updates
Despite the continuing pandemic and the associated capacity restrictions, work at the Center is chugging along at a brisk pace. At our Madison office, Archives Assistant Angel Tang has recently completed rehousing the first batch of David Mainey negatives to arrive at the Center. She is now working on digitizing the photographs of Center co-founder John Gruber. With more than 100,000 photographs, the Gruber Collection is among the Center's largest holdings, and processing it will definitely be a long-term project. We look forward to bringing you the results of Angel's efforts over the coming months.

Meanwhile, Archives Associate Natalie Krecek and intern Wesley Sonheim are double-teaming processing the Jim Shaughnessy Collection. Working through the collection alphabetically, Natalie is currently digitizing images of railroads that start with "C" while Wes is about to start on "D." Shaughnessy's images are some our most-requested items, and thanks to Natalie and Wes, we've begun to be able to start filling a few of the many research inquiries that have filtered in since we announced the acquisition of the collection.

Volunteer John Kelly has returned to his work with the Glenn Oestreich Collection. John was identifying the locations of Oestreich's Wisconsin images when the pandemic began. Much of John's work now has to be completed from home, which is a little unconventional for archival institutions. However, these are unconventional times, and we are doing our best to adjust to these changing circumstances. Either way, we are very happy to have John back on board.

Finally, I have been coordinating our processing work; helping select our exciting, new collections management system (more on that to come in the next few months!); assisting with updating our acquisitions policies; filling image requests; and working with potential collection donors. In addition, the next few months will see our physical holdings continue to grow with the arrival of additional materials from Donald Furler, David Mainey, Ron Hill, and more (to be announced…they're a surprise). Stay tuned to our Facebook, Instagram, and email blasts for updates. •