

# OUT OF THE ARCHIVES

## What we do in the shadows

MUCH OF ARCHIVING WORK takes place in the shadows—or at least, in semi-obscurity. Less visible than exhibitions or publications, the labor of archivists—arranging, rehousing, cataloging, and digitizing collections—frequently happens in restricted-access stacks and staff-only processing rooms. Even in our most public-facing roles (those of archivists dedicated to reference and outreach duties), we are usually obscured from public view by distance (in the case of information requests sent by email or telephone) or a computer screen and the length of an information desk (during in-person interactions.) This lack of visibility is such a distinct problem in our profession that I will often joke with archivist friends that some patrons and researchers tend to assume that our work is automated, completed instantly by robots or even Keebler elves. So, in the spirit of rendering archivists and collection workers more visible, I thought it would be a good idea to use this column from time to time to introduce some of the Center's archivists and collection workers. First up is Erin Rose, the Center's recently hired reference and digital projects archivist.

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### ARTICLE

Adrienne Evans

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### PHOTOGRAPHS

Collection of the Center

#### Q&A: An interview with Erin Rose (ER)

**Adrienne Evans (AE):** *Can you share a little bit about your background(s) in photography and archival/library science?*

**ER:** I have a bachelor's degree in art with a double major in gallery and museum practices and arts management. Since my first major was based in the university's art department, we were required to take studio art classes; I had always really enjoyed photography, so I latched on to the opportunity to learn more. I ended up not only taking all four of the offered courses, I even re-took one for fun. Those classes covered everything from wet darkroom processes to editing digitized negatives in Photoshop with some photography history in between.

I decided to pursue my master's degree in library and information studies and attended UW-Madison's iSchool from 2015 to 2017 where I emphasized in archives and records management for a digital age. While I was a student, some classmates and I had the opportunity to complete a preservation assessment for the Wisconsin Center for Film and Theater Research's United Artists Corporation collection of still film negatives, which reinserted photography into my life. After graduating, I was hired on by the Center for Railroad Photography & Art as an intern and got to

work on finishing up processing for the Robert A. Hadley Collection and then completed some processing work on the Donald W. Furler Collection.

My experience at CRP&A served me well when I moved to Champaign, Illinois, for a few years. My first job was as a digital production technician for the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's Digitization Services, where I got to learn some different ways to digitize a wide variety of materials from various libraries across campus. I later moved on to a position at Illinois Heartland Library System as a metadata cataloger, and while there I got to learn a lot more about cataloging and how to describe materials in different ways for the benefit of researchers. All of these experiences have led me back to the CRP&A, which I've considered to be home for years.

**AE:** *How does working for the CRP&A compliment your personal and professional interests?*

**ER:** As mentioned in my first response, I have a love for photography, so getting to work with cameras, negatives, prints, and information about them all day is a pretty sweet gig. On top of that, my grandpa worked for the Milwaukee Road after getting back home from World War II until his retirement in 1982. My grandpa and I were always pretty close, so I've always had a strong affection for trains (it doesn't hurt that they're cool!), because they make me think of him. This job allows me to incorporate both of those interests into my professional work with metadata and cataloging. I still have to pinch myself sometimes as a reminder that this is actually my job.

**AE:** *Much of your work centers around assisting researchers and filling image requests, but you're also currently processing the David Mainey Collection. Can you share a few highlights from this work?*

**ER:** There are a few images with which I've fallen in love. Two of my favorites are:

- Mainey-14-153-005, which shows a woman with two small children at the train station. There's just something quiet and beautiful about the lighting and how intimate this shot appears.
- Mainey-14-055-009 is one that I fell in love with immediately that we ended up posting on our social media pretty quickly after I found it. The way that the crew member is bent over to talk to the boys at their level (yes, there are two boys there!) really

Opposite, above: A young woman and two children wait on a bench in Washington (D.C.) Union Station on February 10, 1958. Photograph by David Mainey, Mainey-14-15-005

Opposite, below: Valley Railroad crewmember Paul Lewis speaks with a father and his two sons at Essex, Connecticut, in front of 2-8-0 locomotive 97 on August 13, 1978. Photograph by David Mainey, Mainey-14-05-009

made me feel warm and fuzzy. Even better, after we had posted it on our Facebook page, someone commented that the trainman is Mr. Paul Lewis, who is still working as a conductor for the Essex Steam Train & Riverboat!

**AE:** *What would you like potential researchers to know about the Center's reference/image request process?*

**ER:** Specific requests tend to be the ones that make my work smoothest and most efficient. The more information I have about what a researcher is looking for, the easier (and faster!) it is for me to search through our collections to find something to fit the bill. We don't have a collections management system (CMS) in place yet, so I have to do a lot of hunting through our metadata Excel sheets and finding aids. This works, but it can be time consuming, and if a researcher just wants images of a Chesapeake & Ohio train, I will have way too many results on my hands to find anything. It helps to have a time period, location, locomotive number or train name if possible, photographer, even black-and-white versus color images. We do have a fee schedule in place for both research and image usage. If a researcher outlines what they want pretty clearly, I can usually get the research done in an amount of time that wouldn't incur a research time fee, and I feel like that would make all parties happier.

I also want them to know about our Flickr page! We put a lot of our best and most unique images up on Flickr, and I recommend that our computer-savvy researchers actually start there to see if there is anything of interest to them first. Even if there's an image that doesn't quite fit the bill, but is close, it gives me a good starting point and can even help me figure out which collections I should navigate to first, and can help lead me to what our researchers are looking for if it's in our collection.

**AE:** *Are there any upcoming CRP&A projects or initiatives you're excited about?*

**ER:** In the last question I said that we don't currently have a CMS that would make searching collections easier, but we are in the process of getting one! I'm really excited because not only will this make my job easier, it will make it easier for researchers to look around at more of our collections, too. I am also a bit of a nerd about data, so the opportunity to work on setting up our database will not only be a really fun





project for me, but it gives me the opportunity to have a hand in how we describe our materials for a broader community. I'm certainly no expert in this area, but I have a decent amount of experience and am surrounded by so many smart colleagues who are of the same mind that it's really exciting to delve deeper into the topics that will help us establish a really comprehensive CMS for our researchers.

**AE:** *The Center's annual conference "Conversations" is coming up in April. This will not only be our first in-person conference in over two years, but also your first time attending. What experiences and interactions are you looking forward to the most?*

**ER:** I'm looking forward to seeing what Conversations actually looks like. I remember hearing about this conference when I was an intern in 2017, but never really knew what to expect. I've also only had the chance to meet a few of our members and haven't met most members of the board, so the opportunity to meet these people that I've known about for years and put faces to names is really exciting for me. I have been assured that it's a lot of fun, and there are already sessions that I'm really looking forward to attending so that I can not only learn about our constituents' work for my own personal gain, but I will also hopefully be able to pick up more information that will help me understand the innumerable aspects of the railroad world that I can, in turn, apply to my everyday work.

Erin Rose, reference and digital projects archivist. Photograph by Adam von Haden



Collection	Processing Status
Jim Shaughnessy	In progress, ~30% complete
John Gruber	In progress, ~30% complete
Ronald C. Hill	In progress, ~90% complete
Jim McClellan	Complete!
David Mainey	In progress, ~60% complete
Karl Zimmermann	Next up, estimated start: 2022
John Ilman	Estimated start: 2022~2023
Stan Kistler	Estimated start: 2022~2023

**Railroad Heritage Visual Archive Updates**

At our main office in Madison, intern Abigail Guidry continues processing John Gruber's black-and-white negatives at a steady clip. Arranged chronologically, the negatives total 72,000. We started with the oldest material, which dates from 1948, and are working our way forward. Abigail is currently in 1970, and she has digitized about 18,000 negatives thus far.

Meanwhile, archives associate Natalie Krecek and intern Charlie Tonelli are concentrating their collective efforts on processing the Jim Shaughnessy Collection. Comprised of an estimated 90,000 negatives, prints, and slides, the collection is not only in need of digitization and cataloging but also rehousing, relabeling, and screening for various preservation issues. With 11,000 negatives digitized and rehoused, Natalie and Charlie are making good progress on this collection considering all of the additional work that needs to be accomplished.

Reference and digital projects archivist Erin Rose has been busy with image and research requests—she's answered more than thirty since she started in September! In addition, she's also been rehousing, relabeling, and cataloging the David Mainey Collection. Volunteers and location ID experts Larry Saltee and John Kelly continue to contribute to the Center greatly in their efforts to identify locations depicted in the Wallace Abbey and John Gruber collections.

At our archives space, contract archivist Gil Taylor finished digitizing selections from the Jim McClellan Collection at the end of last fall, and he has since created a finding aid to facilitate access to the images. We are looking forward to opening the collection up for research soon! He has already begun working on his next project, another large collection that we look forward to announcing in our next issue. Gil is currently in the initial research and survey phase of processing these materials. Stay tuned for additional updates as digitization and cataloging commence. Gil's suite partner, associate archivist Heather Sonntag, is approaching a milestone of her own; she is closing in on completing the processing of the color slides in the Ron Hill Collection.

Finally, Elrond Lawrence has joined the Center's staff on a more full-time basis in February. He is acting as our first acquisitions and marketing coordinator (see p. 8), which will have him splitting his considerable talents between spending time with collection donors and helping the Center develop and implement a comprehensive marketing strategy. •





Four GP30s lead an eastward Denver & Rio Grande Western Railroad freight train into the Moffat Tunnel at Winter Park, Colorado, on June 29, 1965. Photograph by Ron Hill, Hill-04-03-06



An eastward Great Northern freight train crosses Two Medicine River Bridge in East Glacier, Montana, August 16, 1969. Photograph by Ron Hill, Hill-10-23-28