

# OUT OF THE ARCHIVES

## Every month is Archives Month

AS I WRITE THIS introduction on a chilly, late October morning, it is currently the end of American Archives Month. I realize this event will no longer be timely as *Railroad Heritage* hits your mailboxes in December, but let's not worry too much about that. Considering the Center's mission, shouldn't every month be Archives Month? Headed up by the Society of American Archivists, Archives Month is a nationwide effort to celebrate archival materials and the profession. Much of the activity surrounding the event is focused on promoting "hidden" collections that archivists have made publicly visible or accessible through their cataloging and digitization work. In addition, institutions also use this time to further demystify archives for the general public by spotlighting archival careers and some of the people who pursue them.

It is in this spirit I would like to introduce one of our newest collections staff members, Abigail Guidry. Regular readers of this column will likely be familiar with Abigail; she's been with us as an intern tirelessly working on the Gruber Collection since the summer of 2021. Her progress on the collection has been extraordinary; Abigail started digitizing Gruber's negatives from 1962 at the beginning of her internship and is now working on his 1993 images. This fall, she graduated from her internship to become our first archives and administrative assistant. In this full-time position, Abigail has continued her good work with the Gruber Collection and provided us with some much-needed assistance with administrative and development tasks. Read on to learn more about Abigail.

### Q&A: An Interview with Abigail Guidry (AG)

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

**AG:** I graduated at the end of August in Library Science from UW-Madison. I've worked with a few collections with different types of items, including a poster collection at an on-campus library and a photo and manuscript collection at Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin. Before coming to school here, I lived in Louisiana where I was the music librarian for the band program at my university. I've been working with the Gruber Collection since I started as an intern in June of last year, and this collection has taught me a lot about processing photographs. While I'm not new to photography and photography archives, I am still quite new to trains as subjects.

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

**AG:** I started as an amateur photographer when I was in early elementary school, and my dad started teaching me how to use a digital camera. I usually use my phone camera for projects now (both because of the nature of my projects and the ease of carrying my phone), although I do still take out the DSLR for event photography.

My professional interests include promoting access to items, mainly through digitization and cataloging, which are two of my primary tasks at the Center. Processing and cataloging photographs is particularly interesting to me not only because of the unique documentary and artistic potential of photography, but because providing access to them can often be complicated because they aren't textual.

**AE:** *Thus far, the Center's collections staff have digitized nearly 40,000 images from the John Gruber Collection, and you're chiefly responsible for much of this progress. That's some speedy work! Can you share your secret, or at least, a bit of your methodology?*

**AG:** I choose negatives for digitization by scanning the sheet of negatives and inverting that image to use as a contact sheet. By looking at a full sheet at a time, I can spot any duplicates and accidental shots. The negatives themselves are fed through a negative holder, which I line up under the camera. Because the negative holder is heavy enough to stay in place as I feed strips of negatives through it, I'm able to move much faster than I would be with collections not made up of 35mm film, since it takes much longer when having to line up each negative or slide individually. Plus, Bonnie Gruber [John's widow] did such a wonderful job pre-processing this collection, that I don't have to spend time arranging the collection. Also, I'm always really excited to see what the next image is, so I'm highly motivated to work quickly!

My favorite part of the process is that after I make sure each image is appropriately focused, usually by enlarging parts of the image to see whether the grain is visible, I get to take some time to look more at the content of the images so that I can create any metadata that wasn't already noted on the folder, make sure the noted location and rail line are accurate, and pull the particularly good shots for various projects and for sharing with others in the office. The processing

### ARTICLE

Adrienne Evans

### PHOTOGRAPHS

Collection of the Center  
or as noted

In gratitude: All of us at the CRP&A extend our great thanks to the National Railway Historical Society for their funding to support our work on the John Gruber Collection, to the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society for their grant to assist with the research that goes into our collections, and to the Elizabeth Morse Genuis Charitable Trust, whose transformational giving has enabled significant expansion and upgrading of our archives and archiving efforts.





Richard Gibbon, Curator of Engineering of the National Railway Museum in York, England, interacts with a young rail enthusiast at the California State Railroad Museum on May 11, 1991. Gruber-10-040-065



room is a great place to share dog photos [a frequent Gruber subject] with my colleagues!

**AE:** *What are some of your favorite images or subjects in the John Gruber Collection?*

**AG:** It's difficult to narrow down a list of favorite—anything in this collection, because I am constantly finding more things to get excited about. What stands out the most to me about John's photography is how focused he was on the people around him, including both railfans and rail workers. I'm also always impressed with the way he photographs events, like the opening of Amtrak service in Wisconsin Dells or the circus unloading their tiger cage wagons in Madison. There are, of course, really striking wide angle photographs of trains and crowds. But the scenes that John focuses on with smaller groups of people draw me in the most. I often feel that I am standing beside, and even visiting with, his subjects as they go about their work or their railfanning. As someone who came in not really knowing what railfans were about, I've grown to appreciate the trains as well as the people around them. This collection really grasps how special it is to work with and be around trains, and his treatment of human subjects has really inspired me to learn more about those trains, since that's what the people are there for. John's work is a great place to do that.

**AE:** *In December, you'll present images from the John Gruber Collection alongside John's son, Dick Gruber, as part of an online CRP&A members-only program. What aspect of the program are you most looking forward to?*

**AG:** I'm really looking forward to hearing Dick's perspective about some of the photographs I've been digitizing. Also, I'd like to hear what it was like for him to tag along on some of his dad's photography projects. Earlier on in the collection, I found images of Dick (even as a baby!) accompanying John on various trips. Now that I'm further along with processing the collection, I've found images of him as an adult working at the Mid-Continent Railway Museum and even some of him taking photographs himself. It'll really be a treat to be able to talk with someone with such an intimate connection to the collection.

**AE:** *The Center's collections team formed the Cataloging Working Group last year to create a cataloging standard and migrate our images to Odyssey, the Center's new Collections*

*Management System (CMS). You've been an integral member since the group's formation, enabling you to flex some of your cataloging muscles. What's been your biggest takeaway from this work?*

**AG:** Most of the cataloging work I've done outside of the Center has been solo work, so it's been great to be able to work on a team for this project—especially since there are so many decisions to make and aspects to consider. It's been really fun building our own cataloging standard, because we only have to do so with our collections and users in mind, whereas most existing standards are meant to be able to serve a wide range of institutions and items. Working so closely with my colleagues on this project has also helped me get a sense of where their strengths are and how we can support each other in other projects.

**AE:** *Since becoming the Center's Archives and Administrative Assistant at the end of the summer, you've taken on a lot of duties regarding the Center's mailings and membership. Is there anything you'd like folks to know about being a CRP&A member?*

**AG:** We recently started hosting members-only online events, and we have really exciting plans for the future of these events! Of course, I'll be taking part in the upcoming presentation of John Gruber images with Dick Gruber. But I'm also really looking forward to seeing presentations from colleagues in the future.

**AE:** *What upcoming CRP&A events, projects, or initiatives are you most excited about?*

**AG:** I'm really excited for when we can open our CMS for public use! We've been working really hard to get it ready, and I can't wait to start uploading images to share with people. Of course, there's still a lot of work to be done before that can happen, but it will make searching and viewing our holdings much easier for users.

### **Railroad Heritage Visual Archive Updates**

At our office in Madison, archives and administrative assistant Abigail Guidry is making strides with John Gruber's black-and-white negatives. We have digitized nearly 40,000 negatives from the collection thus far. Meanwhile, archives associate Natalie Krecek continues her good work with the Jim Shaughnessy Collection as she digitizes, catalogs, rehouses, and screens the materials for preservation issues. Natalie has moved





Left: Amtrak's *Empire Builder* commences service at Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin, on June 10, 1989. Gruber-09-253-016

Below: Dick Gruber working on a Mid-Continent Railway Museum train pulled by Saginaw Timber Company Locomotive No. 2 circa September 23, 1986 in North Freedom, Wisconsin. Gruber-09-170-035







Above: The circus train from Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin, passes through Madison on the Chicago & North Western on its way to Milwaukee on July 10, 1985. Gruber-09-124-054

Right: Processing status of the collections our archivists are currently and soon to be working on—always with more to come!

Collection	Processing Status
Jim Shaughnessy	In progress, ~34% complete
John Gruber	In progress, ~35% complete
Ronald C. Hill	Images on-site complete
David Mainey	In progress, ~90% complete for images on-site
Henry Posner III	In progress, ~30% complete for images on-site
Richard Steinheimer / Shirley Burman Steinheimer	Preliminary surveys complete; processsing commenced in November 2022
John Illman	In progress, ~40% complete
Stan Kistler	Estimated start: 2023
Karl Zimmermann	Estimated start: 2023





on from Shaughnessy's Delaware & Hudson series and is now processing images of the Maine Central Railway. Erin Rose, reference and digital projects archivist, has been splitting her processing time between the David Mainey and the John Illman collections. A new batch of Mainey's negatives arrived at the end of September, so Erin took a break from the Illman Collection and has almost completely processed this latest batch from Mainey.

At our archives space, archives associate Gil Taylor (formerly contract archivist—congrats on the new position, Gil!) continues his work on the Henry Posner III Collection. Since our last update, Gil has processed images of rail operations in Finland, France, Georgia,

Germany, and Great Britain. He has just begun working on a series of Posner's Guatemala slides, which makes up the largest portion of images in the collection. Associate archivist Heather Sonntag has spent the last few months surveying the roughly 30,000 Richard Steinheimer color slides, and she began making selections for digitization in November. Finally, I have taken on the task of processing black-and-white prints in the Steinheimer Collection and am currently in the processing of surveying them for arranging and rehousing. I try to spend one day each week on this project, and I really enjoy being able to do some processing work of my own again—especially on Stein's gorgeous prints. •

Mount Washington Cog  
Railway 6 throws smoke across  
the face of its namesake New  
Hampshire mountain on July  
26, 1990. Gruber-10-017-048