

OUT OF THE ARCHIVES

IMAGE REQUESTS

ARTICLE

Gil Taylor and
Adrienne Evans

LAST SUMMER, WE CONDUCTED a collecting program survey to better understand how our members view the archive's recent growth and feel about a potential shift in our acquisition practices. Members' answers to survey questions were incredibly helpful (Thanks to everybody who responded!), but didn't necessarily surprise any of us. What were unexpected, and arguably more revealing, were some of the comments in the general feedback area at the end of the survey. A couple of responses included suggestions like, "You guys should really consider letting the public use your images."

Here's the thing that we may need to center a little more in our public messaging: we already do that, and we do a lot of it! The Center's holdings have been available for public research and use since the time of John Gruber. Our images have been used for countless publications (beyond the Center's own magazine and books), documentaries, exhibitions, scholarly research and dissertations, rail trail signage, references for model train builders, interior design projects, and even album cover art. In the last fiscal year alone, we've logged 125 contact reports related to requests for image usage. Further, we have a full-time staff member who's specifically dedicated to filling image requests for the public (in addition to

working on recent additions to the archive); reference and processing archivist Gil Taylor. He is also our guest author for this edition of OTA. Read on for some Gil's insights into preservation and access, as well as his tips on requesting images, and a few examples of his favorite requests.

—Introduction by Adrienne Evans

Philosophy, tips, and tricks

While the public often thinks of archives as institutions of preservation—bastions protecting records for posterity—they have another equally (if not more) important role that is often forgotten: wellsprings of information. As archivists we hope to be seen as guides rather than guardians. We never seek to squirrel away our collections, to keep them carefully locked away in climate-controlled facilities never to be seen again. Instead, we seek to make these holdings as open, accessible, and discoverable as possible. We seek to ensure that our photographs—or records of any kind—are preserved in a manner that is just as (if not more) enduring than their ephemeral physical forms: their continued and collective use.

Accordingly, here at the Center for Railroad Photography & Art, we are equally dedicated to both the preservation and accessibility of our collections. As the Center's reference archivist, I take particular pride in my role assisting our members, the railroading community at large, and the general public with the discovery and use of our images. While this facilitation—enabling the proliferation of images beyond our walls here in Madison—makes up a large portion of our institutional lifeblood, and while these grand philosophical ideals underpin our mission, as always, the devil is in the details.

I hope to shed some light on these details, elucidating both the back and front ends of discovering, accessing, and utilizing the photographs within our collections. In many ways, our process here at the Center begins and ends with our online collections portal, Odyssey (<https://railphoto.historyit.com>). Every photograph that comes to us is processed through its framework, within which our metadata schema defines the descriptive facets that are ultimately used to search for our images. The collections portal serves as my starting point when I field requests for images, and it is the perfect place to begin your own search, too. However, while we are regularly adding more images to Odyssey, we have digitized tens of thousands more photographs than currently appear

Metro-North hosted an open house at their shops in Harmon, New York, on October 12, 2024, and utilized several photographs from CRP&A collections on interpretative panels. Those included Bill Botkin's 1962 photograph of a New York Central freight train in Harmon, below (BotkinW-10-WT-3), and on the panel at lower right. It stood next to Metro-North's New York Central heritage locomotive 211. Poster and photograph by Emily Moser, manager interactive development, Metro-North Railroad.





New York Central, #211

First appearing in the late 1940s on the famed 20th Century Limited passenger train from Grand Central to Chicago, the classic New York Central "Lightning Stripes" scheme is revived.

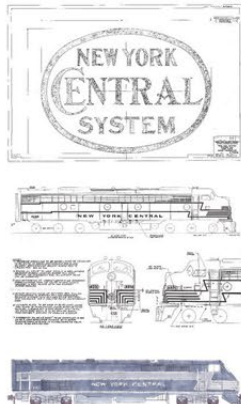
With ties to both New York State and New York City's oldest railroads, the New York Central is Metro-North's most significant predecessor railroad. Its main line stretched from New York to Chicago and was known as the "Water Level Route" due to its trackage paralleling both the Hudson River and the Great Lakes. The New York Central also operated

additional routes serving Illinois, Indiana, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Ontario, Pennsylvania and Quebec.

Formed by Cornelius Vanderbilt in 1869 by merging several existing railroads together, the New York Central and Hudson River Railroad (later renamed the New York Central in 1914) was one of the notable railroads of the northeast United States, operating out of its jewel in New York City, Grand Central. It established the station here at Croton-on-Hudson, and the shops at Harmon, which served as an important point for train equipment to be inspected and repaired, and for steam locomotives to be changed for electrics.

◀ A New York Central freight sports the lightning stripes scheme at Statens on February 7, 1942. Photograph by William Beckin, Center for Railroad Photography & Art.

The first drawing of Metro-North's New York Central heritage scheme by Andy Fletcher.



◀ In order to create designs that are as historically accurate as possible, Metro-North consulted with the New York Central System Historical Society and was able to reference original drawings for the herald logo and lightning stripes. Colors were matched against the observation car Hickory Creek with the assistance of the United Railroad Historical Society.

The New York Central is often remembered for its luxurious 20th Century Limited train, frequented by the rich and famous which literally rolled a red carpet out along Grand Central's Track 34 to greet its Chicago-bound passengers. One of the finest trains to ever operate in the United States, the 20th Century Limited was later led by an engine with the same lightning stripes design found on Metro-North's heritage locomotive 211.



▲ The New York Central heritage locomotive passes by Saugerties Park after departing Croton-Harmon station.



▲ The conversion of #211 is in mid-process. The old look of the locomotive can be seen underneath the wrap that is being applied in strips.

◀ Metro-North Maintenance of Equipment employees hold up the New York Central herald logo before it is installed on the front of the locomotive.



there. Part of my job as reference archivist is to dig through our internal storage to help you find images that are not yet posted to Odyssey. Whether you're looking for images there yourself or asking me for help, knowing just what to search for, or knowing what to ask for when your own search is exhausted, can make all the difference.

The key to all of this is our metadata, sourced from the original photographers' notes and refined as we process collections and images. As readers may know, the Center deals in voluminous quantities of images, and ensuring these collections do not sit idle and untouched within an ever-growing backlog, we seek a balance between making things discoverable and making things perfect.

To process photographs and create metadata, we made a strategic decision to try and make our images broadly accessible to the general public. We add as much specific railroad information as we can, but the core of our metadata schema relies on more general descriptive terms such as geographic locations and dates—in many cases, the only information provided by the photographer. In part, this is because we value and rely on your knowledge as railroad experts. We hope to strengthen this relationship as we utilize your deep knowledge of railroading to augment, amend, or otherwise improve our image metadata. There is, in fact, a “suggested edits” form located under

Two more panels from Metro-North's Harmon open house, which include two images from the Jim Shaughnessy Collection. Panels and photograph by Emily Moser, manager interactive development, Metro-North Railroad.

the *Feedback* tab in Odyssey. Please use it to submit metadata corrections or additions.

Keeping this in mind, while all our searches and requests begin with at least one specific element, the more specificity you provide, the better. With almost every image request I have fulfilled, there is more information beneath the surface of the original request that not only make finding the right images easier, but often leads me to images I may not have come to otherwise. Although it may be perfectly clear to many that a particular locomotive would have led a particular train through a particular station on a particular date, this is not always apparent from our metadata, or to members of our staff. There is almost no such thing as too much accompanying information with an image request! Likewise, relating the full story of your interest and nature of your request can provide a lot of clarity that will help us find what you want more easily...and more completely. For example:

While you could ask: *“Do you have any photos of trains in Pennsylvania?”*

A more productive request would be more specific. Such as: *“I came across a Henry Posner III photograph of a train at Pittsburgh Union Station in 1971. What other black-and-white photographs do you have of Penn Central passenger trains in the early 1970s? I'm working on a book about the emergence of Amtrak.”*

Or, you may be tempted to ask: *“Can I use this Jim Shaughnessy image?”*

But I'll be able to get you your images faster if you provide me with more details, like this: *“I found this Jim Shaughnessy image of a steam locomotive (I've attached a thumbnail with the image identifier to this email), and I was hoping to receive a higher resolution version so I can use it for model reference. Do you have any more images of this engine? I know that it ran through Burlington, Vermont, frequently in the 1950s.”*

Overall, we field requests for myriad purposes and look forward to helping whether you are looking for images for a book project, a presentation, or simply to have printed for your home office or bedroom. To give a better idea of the various ways our collections find use, some of my favorite requests over the past year have included images for trailhead signs, for informational posters at Metro-North's Harmon Shops,





Washington State Parks manages 250 miles of trail on the former Milwaukee Road. For their trailhead sign at Malden, they used a photograph from our John Bjorklund Collection, Bjorklund-67-10-06, showing a Milwaukee Road freight train at Malden in 1978.

PALOUSE TO CASCADES STATE PARK TRAIL

MALDEN TRAILHEAD



Administration:
 Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

- Park Manager contact
(509) 337-6457 / (509) 646-9218
- Emergency contact: 911

Rules and Regulations

- Please stay on the trail.
- Respect private property.
- No motorized vehicles allowed.
- Hunting is prohibited on State Parks property.
- No overnight camping, fires, or fireworks.
- Pets must be leashed and under control.
- Pack it in—Pack it out.

Nearest services:
 Eastbound - Rosalia, 10 miles.

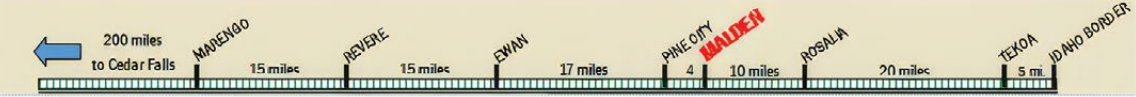
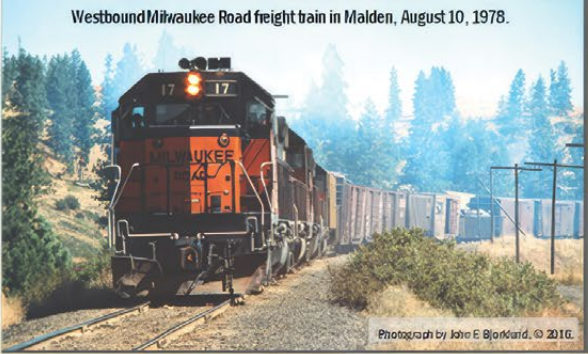
Kiosk provided by
 The John Wayne Pioneer Wagons and Riders
 (JohnWayneTrailRide.com)

Funding contribution from the
 Friends of the Tekoa Trestle

For more maps and information about the trail, go to PabusetoCascadesTrailMaps.com

Welcome to the Palouse to Cascades State Park Trail!

This linear Washington State Park follows the historic route of the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad, or the "Milwaukee Road", from the Idaho border to Cedar Falls in the western foothills of the Cascades. Washington State Parks currently manages approximately 250 miles of trail within this corridor. From the rolling hills of the Palouse, to the Cascades' evergreen forests, over high trestles and through dark tunnels, the Palouse to Cascades Trail highlights the variety of Washington's scenic landscape.





Above and opposite: Google Earth map files, created by Doug Spurling, utilize Jim Shaughnessy's 1962 photographs from Mexico to recreate the Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México station in Amecameca, Mexico, and overlay its location in the modern layout and geography of the city. Spurling located and inserted Shaughnessy's images onto the exact locations and vantage points from which they were originally shot.

and even for GIS mapping of historical rail lines in Mexico. So, no matter how esoteric or niche your intended use may be, don't hesitate to reach out!

Although there is nearly no limit to what sorts of requests we can fulfill, we do not have the luxury of infinite time and resources, so it is important to note that requests for commercial use are applied to a fee schedule, and that beyond a complementary hour of research, fees may also apply for our services, the specifics of which can be found on our website under the *Collections* tab. Likewise, the use of our images requires you to sign an image usage agreement, which helps us keep track of the frequency and specific use of our images.

This is all to say that here at the Center one of the strongest foundations for the preservation of our images, in my opinion, falls not within the physical walls of our archives, but in their distribution and use in the world at large. This dispersion of our holdings ensures that they continue to exist within the public eye and public knowledge, that they continue to have new lives beyond the confines of archival containers and hard drives. If preservation and use, those two sides of the proverbial archival coin, are often at odds, they just as often create a reciprocity that belies their inherent contradiction. It is within this contradiction, to me, that the Center focuses its mission and finds its

Collection	Processing Status
Jim Shaughnessy	Negatives 90% complete; slides TBD
John Gruber	Negatives complete; slides to commence in 2025
Henry Posner III	Processing complete
Steinheimer / Burman	In progress, ~35% complete
Karl Zimmermann	20% of images onsite complete
Stan Kistler	Just started; initial survey underway
Keith Bryant	Estimated start: 2025

purpose, acting not only as a repository, but also as a conduit through which our collections can reach you, our members, and the general public.

Railroad Heritage Visual Archive Updates

At our Monroe Street office in Madison, processing archivist Natalie Krecek nears the completion of her work on Jim Shaughnessy's negatives. She's currently halfway through Shaughnessy's Vermont Railway images. In addition, Natalie's been putting the finishing touches on a finding aid for the Victor Hand Collection. That's a big accomplishment—Victor's collection documents rail subjects in fifty-three countries!

Meanwhile, at the archives, Gil Taylor recently finished processing Henry Posner III's black-and-white negatives, and he has just posted the highlights to Odyssey. His next project will be the Stan Kistler Collection, where he has just begun his initial research and collection survey. Also, Gil continues to fill image and research requests as part of his reference duties. He worked on twenty-three unique image requests in September alone.

This fall, associate archivist Heather Sonntag has taken a brief break from processing the Steinheimer-Burman Collection to prepare selections from the Ron Hill Collection for Odyssey. Stay tuned to our social media channels for more news about that. As this issue went to press in late November, Heather was making a long-overdue trip to visit Shirley Burman-Steinheimer in Sacramento. I've heard some Donner Pass adventures are in order for the two of them!

Former digital projects coordinator Martin Kaehle left his full-time post with the Center in August to pursue his PhD at UW-Madison's i-School. Martin remains on staff with us part-time, balancing his work at the Center with his academic commitments. During his work hours, Martin continues digitizing and cataloging the Karl Zimmermann Collection. Martin has recently begun working closely with Karl to fill metadata gaps in the collection.

In September, we brought on Jordan Craig as the Center's new digital projects coordinator. With more than a decade of experience in managing multimedia collections and metadata across archives, libraries, and museum settings, Jordan brings a vast amount of experience and passion to the role. She holds a B.A. degree in History & History of Science, Medicine, and Technology; a Certificate in Studio Art; and an M.A. in Library & Information Studies from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Welcome aboard, Jordan! •

