

Out of the Archives

Introducing the Center's redesigned website

By **Jordan Radke**

This column brings to light the world of professional archiving, providing a regular forum to share selections from the Center's collections and tips for maintaining your own materials. Whether you are a photographer, collector, or avid fan, it is important to organize and preserve the materials you create or collect. In this special fourth edition, we are proud to announce the redesign of the Center's website: www.railphoto-art.org. We will introduce the website's new features and cover the changes made in order to improve user experience and provide more content. Please get in touch with Jordan Radke, jordan@railphoto-art.org, if there are any topics you would like us to cover in the future.

Who we are

The Center's collections, comprising some 200,000 photographs, form the basis of our Railroad Heritage Visual Archive. The team in Madison, Wisconsin, consists of Jordan Radke, archives manager, graduate archival intern Maddie Shovers, intern Aviva Gellman, and volunteer John Kelly. We are pleased to announce that Elizabeth Tappy and Phillip Windsor from the University of Wisconsin-Madison will be joining us for the summer 2016 as graduate archival interns. We also partner with Lake Forest College, working with Anne Thomason, archivist, along with graduate archival intern Colleen O'Keefe, to process and maintain Center materials housed in the college's Archives & Special Collections in the Donnelley and Lee Library. Scott Lothes, Center president and executive director, and the Collections & Acquisitions Committee of the board of directors provide oversight.

What we do

In keeping with the Center's mission of preserving and presenting significant images of railroading, with the Railroad Heritage Visual Archive we seek to securely house collections and make their contents accessible. We adhere to established archival

principles to ensure safety and accuracy. Our work as archivists includes:

Preservation. One of the Center's main objectives is properly preserving our collections. This includes appropriately caring for and handling our materials by using archival-safe supplies, and providing a controlled environment where our collections are housed.

Processing. Processing materials is a long, tedious, and detailed endeavor. Organizing a collection appropriately sets up the rest of the processing work that includes any digitization and metadata entry. This work is essential to the long-term care and future accessibility of a collection.

Arrangement and Description. To maintain quick and easy retrieval of our materials, we organize every collection down to its individual items, if possible, given the time and resources available to us.

Accessibility. Finally, the Center will make sure that users have access to our processed collections. We create detailed finding aids to describe each collection and its contents and share images electronically through our website and many social media outlets.

Railroad Heritage Visual Archive updates

In our Madison office, Jordan Radke has completed digitizing more than two-thirds of the John F. Bjorklund Collection. Maddie Shovers has finished processing and metadata work on our small collections and will begin processing work on the Perry Frank Johnson Collection. John Kelly has finished re-housing prints in the Oestreich Collection and will begin inventory and metadata entry. We are excited to announce the recent acquisition of materials by photographer Robert Witbeck, which comes to us from his daughter, Parsons Clark. Brian Solomon, author of many railroad books, put Clark in touch with us after using several of her father's photographs in his publications. Witbeck photographed all over the country during the late steam era, and his dramatic and well-composed images are a significant addition to our collections. We

look forward to sharing his work with you in the coming months. At Lake Forest College, Colleen O'Keefe is continuing to work on metadata entry and scanning for the Wallace W. Abbey Collection. Photographs from these collections and more can be viewed at www.railphoto-art.org (continue reading for more details on our redesigned website), while selections are posted weekly to our social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, and Flickr.

Redesigned website: www.railphoto-art.org

After months of discussions, planning, and careful execution, the Center launched our redesigned website this spring. As we continue to acquire and process more collections, and as web technology continues to evolve, we believed it was the right time for a major update. As part of the redesign, we are also unveiling an updated logo, designed by Davidson Ward, that makes use of our abbreviation, CRP&A. Through this updating process we have restructured every webpage for a cleaner, wider, and more readable look. Navigating will be simpler as we take advantage of patterns that should allow users to feel familiar with every page they visit. For those interested in viewing the images from our collections, we have already added several new galleries and are working to make more available each month. The redesigned website is also optimized for use on most mobile devices including tablets and smartphones. We hope this redesign excites you, our current audience, while making it easier for new audience to understand and see what we do at the Center.

Cleaner appearance

The redesigned website is noticeably different from the get-go. Our old website was optimized for computer monitors from five years ago, with only minimal thought to mobile devices. By implementing a new website theme, widening every webpage, and enlarging images on the screen, we provide a bigger, cleaner look on today's devices. Our homepage now features a timed slideshow of our most recent news



and updates. Above that slideshow is a reorganized menu bar for quick navigation throughout the site. The menu bar freezes to the top of the screen and remains constant on every page so users can find the content they are looking for more easily, with fewer clicks and less scrolling. Also at the top of every page is the search bar and links to our social media accounts.

To offer users a sense of familiarity, we have set up certain patterns throughout our redesigned website. Some of our featured pages are now integrated with tabs. This condenses multiple pages into one, limiting the amount trudging from one page to the next. Most pages implement columns that clearly divide text from images and allow for a more legible layout. The last main pattern we used is browsing with thumbnail galleries, most prominent on our image-based pages, like *Collections*, *Conferences*, and *Awards*. The thumbnail galleries allow you to quickly scroll through many images to find those of greatest interest. By expanding upon what was in place with a visually stimulating and welcoming interface, we hope the redesigned website will help distinguish the Center as a leader in preserving and presenting railroad photography and art.



Direct navigating

Navigating around any website should be hassle-free. One of the intents of redesigning the Center's website was to streamline navigation. We have done this by combining several webpages into one universal page through tabs, updating bad or lost links, and overall reorganizing of several pages. We have updated our menu bar across the top and limited the number of drop-down options. The seven tabs in the navigation bar consist of the following: *About Us*,

Comparison of the Center's redesigned website, www.railphoto-art.org, above, with the previous version, below. The new version is optimized for today's wider-format, higher-resolution monitors, while also offering a mobile version for easy use on tablets, smartphones, and other devices.

Collections, Conferences, Exhibitions, Awards, Publications, and Join and Support Us.

The *About Us* page features additional information with condensed tabs featuring the Center's historical background, our board of directors and officers, the Center's



full-time staff, links to additional resources, and our contact information. The *Collections* page also contains an overview page with condensed tabs explaining our Railroad Heritage Visual Archive, how to donate collections to the Center, our archival processing phases, and digital versions of previous "Out of the Archives" columns. Other main pages such as *Conferences* and *Awards* differ by offering a more visual way of navigating with thumbnail gallery browsing linked to images hosted on the Center's Flickr account. The *Publications* page remains similar as before, where users can purchase back issues of Railroad Heritage along with the Center's books. We are also updating the *Join and Support Us* page with a tab-based layout to provide all of the information needed to register or renew a membership, make additional gifts, and support the Center's new endowment (read more about that on p. 6).



Explore more of our collections

The Center would be nowhere without its superb collections of photography and art. Redesigning and adding to our *Collections* page was the driving force behind the website redesign. Under our *Collections* page, users will find information and selected images from the Center's holdings including the collections of Wallace W. Abbey, John F. Bjorklund, Leo King, J. Parker Lamb, Hal Lewis, Glenn A. Oestreich, and Fred M. Springer. More collections and additional images will be added when available in the future including the collections of Perry Frank Johnson, Ken

Three screenshots of our redesigned homepage.

Top: First page for the J. Parker Lamb Collection, which includes tabs for his biography, collection highlights, and browsing of the collection. Most text-heavy pages utilize this two-column format.

Middle: Image-based pages feature thumbnail gallery browsing, as seen here for the previous award winners.

Bottom: Enlarged version of a photograph from the Lamb Collection.



Burbach, Robert Witbeck, and our small collections.

Each collection page features, when available, tabs that include a photographer biography, selected highlights from the collection, thumbnail gallery browsing of images, and a PDF of the collection finding aid (which can be downloaded and/or printed). While viewing most thumbnails throughout the website, you can click on the thumbnail to bring up the enlarged gallery view. From there, you can move to the previous or next image in the set of thumbnails, start a timed slideshow of all the images in the gallery, see any additional metadata about each image, and share the image via several social media outlets. All of our thumbnail gallery images are linked to our Flickr account, where you can find additional albums of collections, conferences, award winners, and other relatable content from the Center.

A note about the metadata attached to our images: information is based on what the photographer provided, and given a wide variety of factors, occasionally it may be incorrect or incomplete. Please send email to jordan@railphoto-art.org with any corrections, and allow up to a week for changes. Given the number of outstanding photographs in our collections, we wish to share as many of them with you as possible, and rely on your great expertise to help us find and fix any errors. Thank you in advance for your assistance!

Share and explore anywhere

The Center intends for exploring and sharing our content to be as easy as possible. As always, you can access our social media accounts on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Flickr. Social media icons are visible on every webpage either in the top right corner or below the Center's logo on certain mobile devices. Viewing the Center's collections, news, and updates is easier than ever now. Our redesigned website is optimized so that any computer, tablet, smartphone, or mobile device with a browser can access our content. The interface may differ from

format to format, but all of the content is available. Mobile devices may display a collapsible navigation layout that opens up the menu bar. The new tab-based pages have similar collapsible features that make use of the smaller screen size of mobile devices. Explore what the Center has to offer on the go and feel free to let us know of any questions, comments, or concerns regarding our website.

Overview of the redesigned website

Cleaner look:

- Less clutter and clicking, more content and readability
- Enhanced visual experience on every page

Convenient navigation:

- Menu bar highlights where to go
- Patterns help with familiarity (condensed tab-based pages, text and image columns, and thumbnail gallery browsing)

Collections are key and now feature:

- Photographer bios
- Highlights
- Browsing for additional selections
- Downloadable/printable finding aids

Explore our core aspects just as before:

- About Us
- Collections
- Conferences
- Exhibitions
- Awards
- Publications
- Join and Support Us

Explore anywhere and share with anyone:

- Use on any smartphone or tablet browser to access content
- One click away from Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Flickr
- Gallery images allow social media sharing across platforms

Three views of the mobile version of our site.

Top: Homepage view on smartphone browser. Users tap "Menu" to access the navigation bar.

Middle: Mobile browsers display a condensed version of the tabs used on many pages.

Bottom: Enlarged view of a photograph from the Springer Collection, including title and caption.

