Out of the Archives
Introduction, Organization, and Metadata

By Nichole Barnes, Jordan Radke, and Maddie Shovers

"Out of the Archives," a new column in *Railroad Heritage,* will bring to light the world of professional archiving, providing a regular forum to share selections from our collections and tips for maintaining your own photographs. Whether you are a photographer, collector, or avid fan, it is important to organize and preserve the materials you create or collect. In this introductory installment, we will tackle the basics of organization and metadata. Please let us know if there are any topics you would like to see us cover in the future.

Who we are
The Center's collections form the basis of our Railroad Heritage Visual Archive. The team in Madison, Wisconsin, consists of Jordan Radke, Archives Manager, and two graduate archival interns, Nichole Barnes and Maddie Shovers. We also partner with Lake Forest College, working with Archivist Anne Thomason and Jim Cascino, graduate student intern, 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 cannot be done without appropriately caring for and handling our materials by using archival-safe supplies and providing a controlled environment to house our collections.

Processing. Processing materials is a long, tedious, and detailed endeavor. This hard 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 makes 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 websites and many social media outlets.

Archival terms
Like railroading, archiving has its own language. Some terms used in this column appear below, as definied by the Society of American Archivists (SAA). See a full glossary of archival and records terminology at: **www2.archivists.org/glossary**

Examples of archival-safe housing materials at the Center's office in Madison, Wisconsin. Clamshell, d-ring binders with polyethylene or polypropylene pages provide light-tight storage for nearly all forms of two-dimensional media. Photograph by Jordan Radke

Provenance. Information regarding the origins, custody, and ownership of an item or collection.

Original Order. The organization and sequence of records established by the creator of the records.

Finding Aid. A tool that facilitates discovery of information within a collection of records.

Metadata. A characterization or description documenting the identification, management, nature, use, or location of information resources (data).

Digitization. The process of transforming analog material into binary electronic (digital) form, especially for storage and use in a computer.
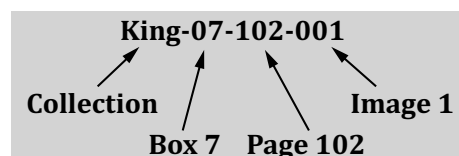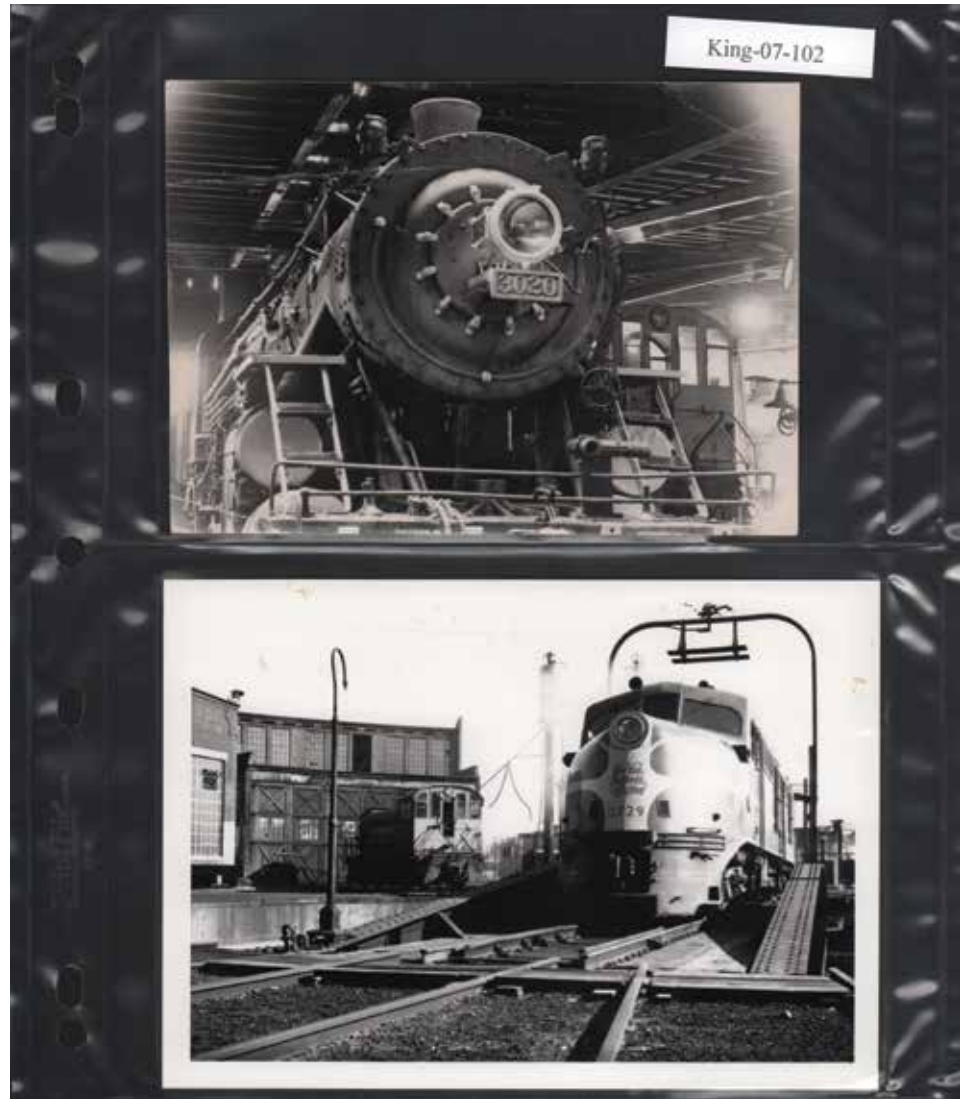
King-07-102

Preservation and Organization:
Establishing and executing a long-term plan

Organization is an essential function within any archive. Archivists use a variety of numerical or alphanumerical filing schemes to organize and identify each record in a collection. Here at the Center, we use a numerical scheme that links to each image or archival material. For example, with the Leo King Collection, which comprises roughly 14,000 images, a print might be named "King-07-102-001" (see diagram at right).

There are many ways in which you can organize your collection, as long as the scheme is cohesive throughout. When we receive a collection at the Center, we first create an inventory or collections list, which helps us to stay organized and aware of our particular holdings before creating a finding aid. Our inventories also act as reference points for any information that researchers or the public may need to retrieve. This is especially useful when we acquire a large collection that is not thoroughly organized, as the inventory can help us maintain the collection's original order and act as an index for the materials.

Producing an inventory can be as simple or as complex as you would like to make it. You could create a basic list of every item in your collection *or* you could go even further by organizing your index geographically, by railroad, or chronologically. As long as you are able to understand your organizational scheme, any method of arrangement will be successful. Though it can be time-consuming, creating a list of the photographs in your possession is a great place to start when you are archiving your own records.

You can help ensure the preservation of your personal archive by making sure that every individual negative, slide, print, or other material is stored in archival-safe housing. The key is to keep the materials in a cool, but dry location, which is why many archives have climate-controlled environments with a stable relative humidity. Because most personal archives are not outfitted in this manner, the best way to

King-07-102-001

Collection   Image 1

Box 7   Page 102

Page 102 of box 7 in the Leo King Collection. The diagram shows the numbering system the Center uses to identify materials in its collections, down to individual items. This allows for consistent numbering and identification of every item in the Center's collections.

correctly store your photographs will be to purchase archival-safe supplies, such as polyester sleeves, acid-free boxes, or slide cases. At the Center, we make sure to use sleeves that contain either polyethylene (PE) or polypropylene (PP), because these types of plastics do not interact with the film and will not transfer any ink. We *do not* use polyvinyl chloride (PVC) as that material can transfer the image to the plastic. PVC also tends to be too thick for proper long-term housing. It is also good practice to keep slides and negatives separated from prints, as their proper storage requirements are somewhat different. By utilizing the array of archival-safe housing that is available, you will be able to protect your collection for years to come, while helping to keep

your materials organized. You can use any materials that fit your specific collection needs, as long as they are archival-safe.

Other tips for storing photographs:
- Any written notation on prints should be made lightly on the back of the print with a soft, graphite pencil
- Remove any fasteners, such as paper clips, and reattach plastic fasteners only when photographs are in polyester sleeves
- Glass plate negatives, cased photographs (such as daguerreotypes), and other fragile formats require careful preservation, detached from other forms
- Do not expose photographs to direct or excessive light

N.Y.C
#8773 switching
Franklin, Ind.
14 aug '58

◇	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1	File Name (required)	Work Creator	Work Date	Work Materials	Work Description	Reporting Mark	Railroad	Work Rights
2	Johnson-01-01-001	Johnson, Perry Frank	1958-08-14	5 x 7 in black and white photo	N.Y.C. no. 8773 switching; Franklin, Ind. 14 Aug '58	NYC	New York Central	© 2015, Center for Railroad Photography and Art

Metadata:
Attaching information to your photographs

Metadata is an important component of archival organization and description. Metadata, or data about data, helps provide detailed information about items within a collection. This information, if recorded, can help identify significant features of photographs and the characteristics that make each image unique.

Within the field of archives, the main structures include administrative, structural, and descriptive metadata. Administrative metadata helps archivists manage collections by providing details regarding temporal information, sources of acquisition, and disposal schedules and methods. Structural metadata and its focus on storage and presentation reveals the relationships between various items of a single collection. Finally, descriptive metadata describes the content and form of materials and helps with the discovery of materials once they have been donated to a repository. At the Center, we use a combination of administrative, particularly dates and acquisition details, and descriptive metadata elements.

Managing Metadata

While metadata may sound like a technical term more useful to librarians and professional archivists, when broken down into a few simple categories it can be easy for photographers to manage. Metadata elements can be thought of as basic categories of information, such as date, title, creator, and location. Here are a few things to think about when creating metadata:

Who: Who created the work?

What: What are the people, events, and actions that are captured in the image? This could describe what railroad, locomotive, and cars were photographed.

When: When was the photograph made? For this field, standardization is helpful. For instance, you could input dates in Year-Month-Day, or YYYY-MM-DD format.

Where: Where is the subject of the photograph located? Here, city, state or province, and country can be included.

When processing one of the Center's newly acquired collections, we standardize what metadata categories we would like to notate. This means that for each collection, whether from Perry Frank Johnson or Leo King, the metadata elements will be the same for all materials owned by the Center. This standardization helps for present and future organization and access. For ease of use and access, we house all metadata in Excel spreadsheets with one Excel workbook per collection. The columns of each spreadsheet are then labeled according to the information the rows will hold.

For example, the first column in the Excel sheet is labeled "creator" and "Perry Frank Johnson" is inserted into each subsequent row—this takes care of the "who." Next, the spreadsheet has a column for the unique identifiers reflecting the rules of the Center's numbering system, as mentioned above. Additional columns are also marked date, city, province or state, country, title, reporting mark, railroad name, and a descriptor field, thus answering the questions "what, when, and where." Every row contains information specific to one

Most of the prints in the Center's Perry Frank Johnson Collection include extensive captions—metadata—on their backs. Digitizing metadata in a consistent format is time-consuming but enables easy searching.

photograph in the collection, making it possible for the Center to take stock of its holdings down to the item level. Today, with the prevalence of digital photography, physical photographs may not exist. Nonetheless, it is still possible to capture metadata for digital collections through programs like Adobe Bridge.

At the Center, we include a few more metadata categories that photographers may want to consider using as well, such as a descriptor field. On a spreadsheet, or designated area in another type of document, this column can be free-formatted, meaning you can add any other details or notes that will help you, archivists, and later viewers understand what is in the photograph, including captions. Keep in mind that you will also need to determine who will retain rights to your work. After doing so, a "rights and reproductions" field also may be added to your metadata structure so that it is clear with whom ownership lies. If you plan to bequeath your collection to an institution, including metadata in your records will help archivists process your materials faster. A quick processing turnaround means that your photographs will be available for users to access sooner, often in digital formats via online platforms. Faster processing also means that much less time before your collection will be preserved in archival-safe boxes and binders within a climate-controlled environment.

Processing and creating metadata takes varying amounts of time depending on the size of the collection and its scope. With the Johnson Collection, which includes more than 4,000 photographs spanning nearly two decades, the photographer wrote down key details about his photographs, including date, location, reporting mark, and engine and car numbers—making processing a relatively smooth task. The collection is an interesting example because Johnson, especially in his early works, often wrote his own critiques and insights on the lighting, subject, and quality of film on the back of the prints. This information *is* metadata and provides a special glimpse into the mind of the photographer thereby showing that metadata is not just railroad names and dates, but the details of an experience that would be lost had they not been written down.
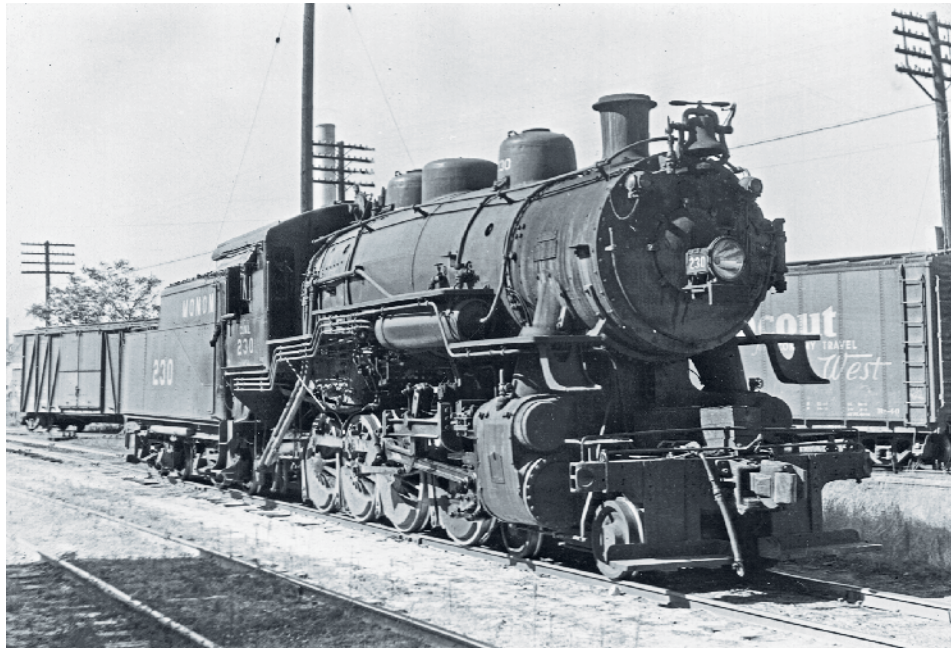
Things to remember about metadata:
- Take time to format and maintain the same metadata fields over time and across collections
- For the fields you choose, answer the "who, what, when, where" questions
- Standardize language and punctuation within each metadata category
- Remember that someone else may manage your collection someday, whether it is a family member or professional archivist, so be as clear as possible in your descriptions

Further Reading and Resources:
Gaylord Archival Supplies:
  www.gaylord.com
Print File Archival Supplies:
  www.printfile.com
Society of American Archivists (SAA):
  www2.archivists.org
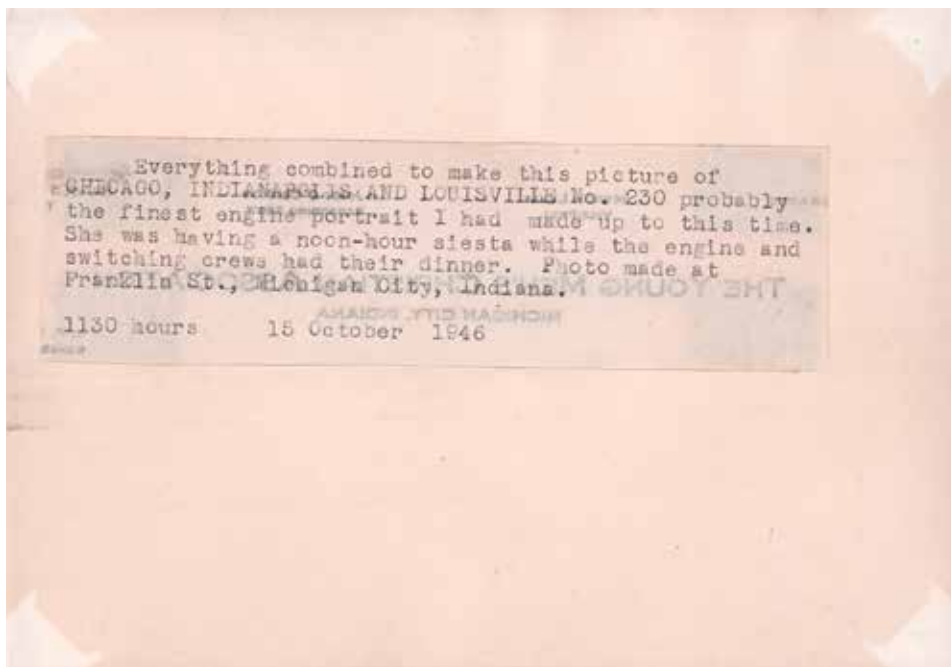National Archives Photograph Preservation:
  www.archives.gov/preservation/ holdings-maintenance/scrapbooks-photos-albums.html
Library of Congress Metadata Table:
  www.loc.gov/standards/metable.html
Metadata Standards:
  www.loc.gov/standards/

Everything combined to make this picture of CHICAGO, INDIANAPOLIS AND LOUISVILLE No. 230 probably the finest engine portrait I had made up to this time. She was having a noon-hour siesta while the engine and switching crews had their dinner. Photo made at Franklin St., Michigan City, Indiana. 1130 hours 15 October 1946

Metadata can include much more than basic facts. Perry Frank Johnson frequently included critiques of his work, both good and bad, and this sort of metadata provides a special glimpse into the mind of the photographer. The details of these experiences would be lost had they not been written down.