

Pixels to Purpose: Transforming a Rights & Reproductions Department to Support a Sustainable Digital Collection

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Abstract: As with most underfunded cultural institutions, particularly in our present economic climate, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's (HSP) staff members often are required to perform the duties of two or more employees—sometimes even of two or more departments. Such is the case with HSP's Rights & Reproductions (R&R) Department, which recently has evolved from exclusively fulfilling image reproduction orders and licensing image usage rights, to additionally managing a rapidly growing, sustainable digital surrogate collection.

Having transitioned from film photography to digital imaging in 2006, the R&R department did not initially regard the amassing digital files as having much potential beyond fulfilling individual reproduction requests. This has posed the biggest challenge in developing a sustainable digital collection, as approximately 3,000 legacy digital images were scattered among a number of network folders and employee hard drives—all exhibiting sparse metadata and inconsistent image quality, file names, and file formats. In greater depth, my poster details the steps taken to assess HSP's legacy digital collection, uncovering the true extent of its size and systematically determining what is usable. What makes this assessment unique is the need to strike a balance between what is “appropriate” quality for continuing to fulfill ongoing R&R orders (likewise continuing to generate a much-needed revenue stream) and what is “ideal” quality for building a sustainable digital collection. My research into archival-quality digital image standards, HSP's own R&R order statistics, as well as print, web, and exhibit image quality requirements are reflected in this poster. Also described are the next steps necessary to further develop and sustain HSP's growing digital collection.

About the author:

Dana M. Lamparello is the Digital Collections Archivist at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. A graduate of the University of Texas at Austin's School of Information, Dana holds an MSIS with an archives and museum studies concentration, as well as a certificate of advanced study in preservation administration of library and archival materials. Her professional experience includes work with digital collections at the Art Institute of Chicago's Ryerson & Burnham Archives and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Among her areas of interest are the description, organization, and preservation of digital objects in cultural institutions—particularly that of digital art media; Assemblage art and artists; and personal collections as material culture.