

Another Look: Reprocessing Photograph Collections

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NHPRC
DOCUMENTING DEMOCRACY

PROBLEM


The Oliver F. Atkins collection is the largest photograph collection in Special Collections & Archives. The Atkins collection is used often for reference requests, exhibits, and class instruction. The Arthur E. Scott collection contains subject matter that complements the Atkins collection, particularly scenes of Washington, D.C., people and events in the 20th century. The collections were stored in a variety of ways, including in filing cabinets, acidic boxes and folders, and plastic sleeves. The assortment of storage methods and descriptive schemes resulted in an inefficient and confusing system for both staff and researchers to locate materials.

PROJECT

The project team completed surveys of the collections and chose sections with descriptions already available, although the descriptions largely lacked consistent, controlled vocabulary. The project team used a Google Docs spreadsheet to manage controlled vocabulary terms for both subject and genre access; the spreadsheet also assisted with creating metadata for EAD finding aids, MARC records, and selected digital images. The arrangement of the Atkins collection changed over the course of the project from one based on Atkins' career to one based on format then by career. This arrangement maximized the preservation and storage. The emphasis in the Scott collection on particular groups of people in Washington, D.C., made a subject arrangement preferable. Some Atkins folders presented more of a problem than initially anticipated from the collection survey. For instance the typewritten finding aid did not always correspond to the contents of the file cabinets. Some of the folders titles could not be directly transposed to the new description scheme and they required updating or rewriting. The Scott glass negatives required extensive work because they were housed in boxes either too tightly or too loosely. However, an existing handwritten inventory for the glass negatives assisted with identification.

REGISTRY: OLIVER ATKINS PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION					
Page 259					
DRAWER #	FOLDER TITLE/NUMBER	CONTENTS	FORM OF MATERIAL	OLIVER ATKINS' #	No ID #
7	Folder 272: JOHNSON, LUCI - Wedding	Various shots of Luci arriving at cathedral with LBJ; shots of wedding ceremony, reception, cake cutting, Luci & Pat posing on White House lawn (some with dogs)	color negs 3 x 5 (18)		
	Folder 273: JOHNSON, LADYBIRD - 3 & 4 w Tour of Va.	Various shots of Ladybird looking over handcraft exhibits at Peaks of Otter park area on the Blue Ridge Parkway	contact & negative	1-3818	
		Various shots of Ladybird around Peaks of Otter park - on hike with National Park officials, leaving restored cabin, making home movie, looking at hand-crafts, riding thru show line - also see, Idell going through show line at reception	contact & negative	2-3818	
		Ladybird on stone wall along Blue Ridge Parkway with peak of Sharp Top Mountain in background	contact & negative	4-3818	
		Ladybird and others in roadside picnic table along 195; various shots of Ladybird & Mrs. R.R. Humphrey and ladies of the President's cabinet at dogwood tree planting ceremonies along 95 & posing by blooming flower bed along 195	contact & negative	9-3818	





Guide to the Arthur E. Scott photograph collection, 1910-1976

Arthur E. Scott photograph C0096

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Search Finding Aid

Descriptive Summary

Repository George Mason University. Special Collections and Archives

Creator Arthur E. Scott, 1917-1976

Title Arthur E. Scott photograph collection

Date 1910-1976

Physical Characteristics 32 linear feet (43 boxes; 27 scrapbooks)

Abstract This collection contains photographs taken by Arthur E. Scott, a photojournalist and photo-historian for the U.S. Senate. It contains over 5,000 prints and negatives of United States politicians (mainly Senators), political events such as campaigns and inaugurations, and landmarks throughout the Washington, D.C. area, from the mid-1920s to the 1970s. There are also 27 scrapbooks compiled by Arthur E. Scott, primarily consisting of photographs he took of political activities in Washington, D.C. The collection also contains glass negatives from the 1910s and 1920s that were taken by other photographers.

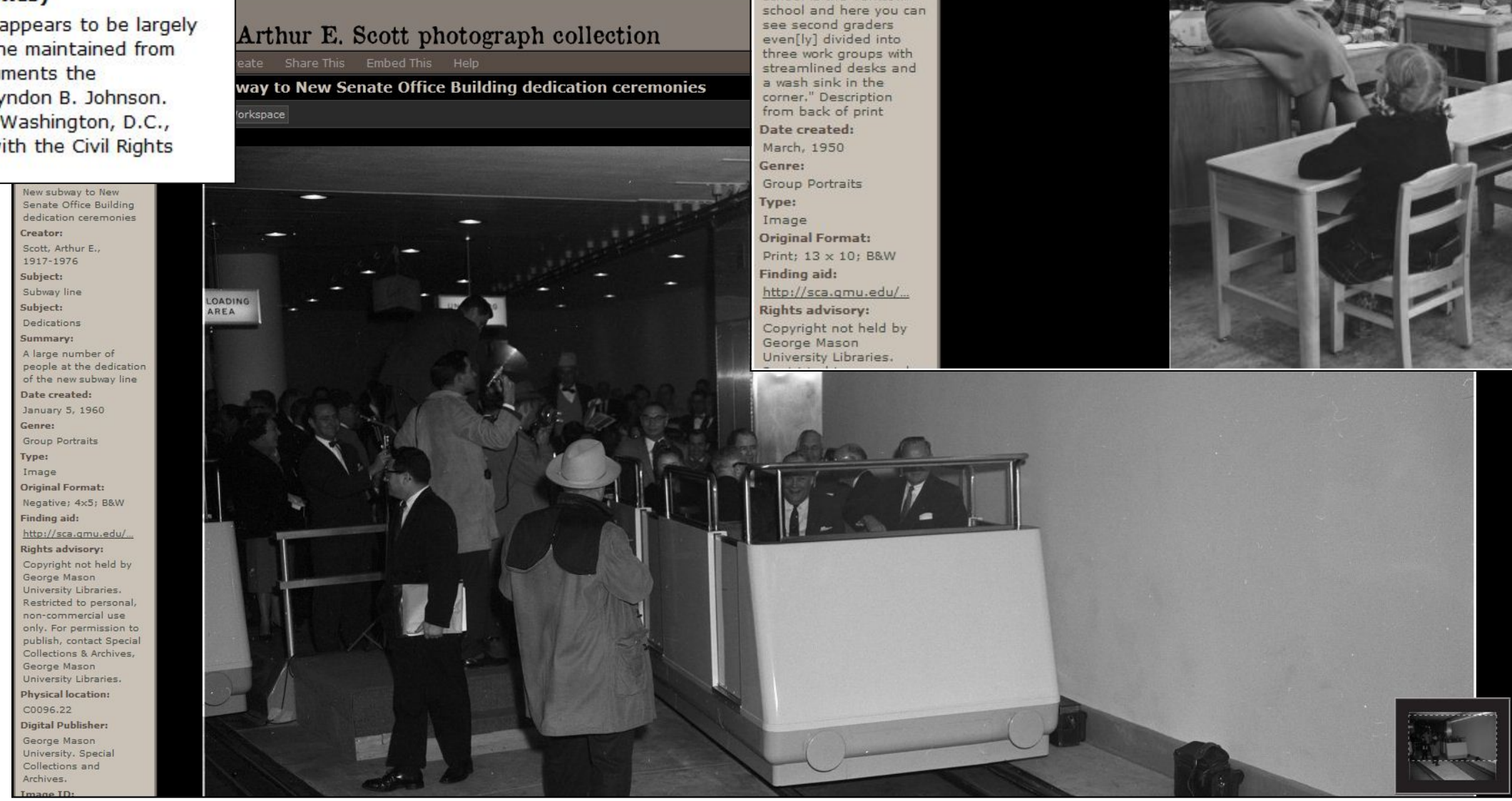
Collection number C0096

Language English

OUTCOME

- Prints and Photographs**
- Abraham Anson Papers
 - Atchison Union Depot and Railroad Company Photograph Collection
 - Oliver F. Atkins Photograph Collection
 - Bernard Brenner Brass Rubbings Collection
 - Broadus Bailey French Revolution Print Collection
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 - Leonard H. Clark Military History Collection
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 - East German Poster Collection Film Series
 - East German Poster Collection Art Exhibitions Series
 - East German Poster Collection Performing Arts Series
 - East German Poster Collection Political Series
 - Patricia England Fine Print Collection
 - Federer Theatre Project Photograph Collection
 - Mary Elise Fox Photograph Collection
 - French Communist Party Poster Collection
 - George Mason University Photograph Collection
 - George B. Holsinger Photograph Collection
 - Japanese Invasion of Manchuria Photograph Collection
 - Edith McChesney Ker Collection
 - Kuratorium Unterleibars: Deutschland Photograph Collection
 - Larkin Family Photograph Collection
 - Randolph H. Lytton Historical Postcards of Fairfax, Virginia
 - C. Harrison Mann, Jr. Map Collection
 - Dorn McGrath Fairfax County Slide Collection
 - Margaret Mead Christmas Card Collection
 - Midwest Commercial Architecture Photograph Collection
 - Vietnam Military Assistance Advisory Group Team 58 Photograph Collection
 - Northern Virginia Civil War Images Collection
 - Porgy and Bess Poster Collection
 - Jack Rotter Photograph Collection
 - Kell Sandved Nature Photograph Collection
 - Arthur E. Scott Photograph Collection
 - Southwestern United States Photograph Collection

The NHPRC grant allowed SC&A staff to process/reprocess the two collections according to proper archival standards while also using previous description efforts where appropriate. The result is that both of the collections are far more accessible to the research community both inside and outside the university than they have ever been before. By standardizing subject and genre terms, we improved the project workflow and devised procedures for processing photographs and other graphic material collections. This project also highlighted the challenges of working with 20th century collections consisting of many images with known copyright restrictions.



Notes from a Photograph Collection

Although the Oliver F. Atkins Photograph Collection contains tens of thousands of prints, negatives, and slides, there is also a small amount of paper that consist of handwritten notes, correspondence, and caption guidance forms. These documents assist with identification, such as the 1910s film photographs from December 1910 for a Saturday Evening Post story. Many images were not included in the final story, "Portrait of a Classroom," published in the April 9, 1911 issue, including the image below of a classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina.



I was able to identify the subject and location because of the detailed caption guidance forms that are filed with the photographs. The captions are what Atkins typed up for the editors at the Saturday Evening Post and describe almost every single frame of each negative strip and are very helpful for identification.

Slide number	Slide title	Slide description	Slide location
1	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina
2	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina
3	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina
4	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina
5	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina
6	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina
7	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina
8	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina
9	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina
10	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina	Classroom meeting held in Arlington, North Carolina