

# **The Other Side of the Computer: Spending a Summer with Digital Collections.**

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During the summer of 2010 while on sabbatical I worked on a project to create a complete catalog of all the railroad photographs of Andrew Joseph Russell. Russell photographed the building of the first transcontinental railroad in 1868 and 1869. Russell's images are scattered across the country in museums, in libraries, in private hands, and in state, university, and federal archives. Lacking the funds to travel to all these places, I spent weeks combing the internet. Ironically I had spent the previous 10 years creating digital exhibits. Now as someone on the other side of the computer I was constantly surprised at how small details could either streamline or create roadblocks for me.

I feel I can offer an interesting perspective on digital collections of photographs as both an archivist who creates these collections and as someone who uses them. The central question I'm dealing with is whether the time-intensive digital collections I used and created have inherent flaws that can readily be improved upon, or whether mass-digitization projects that stress quantity over quality provide a ready answer for both advanced users like myself as well as first-time and casual users.

## **About the author:**

*Daniel Davis* attended the University of Wyoming where he received bachelor's and master's degree in history. He has worked as a photograph archivist for over 15 years first at the American Heritage Center and then in the Special Collections Division at Utah State University.

Mr. Davis is also an adjunct instructor with the USU History Department and has published articles in the *Annals of Wyoming* and the *Utah Historical Quarterly*. His specialty is 19th Century photographers of the American West.