

Illuminating Our World: Sharing 25,000 Rare Archive Images

A Proposal to
The Albert M. Greenfield Foundation
from
Independence Seaport Museum

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Philadelphia, PA
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Introduction

Independence Seaport Museum seeks consideration of a two-year grant of \$310,387 to organize the Museum's image collections, digitize and share a portion of the collections, and create a new gallery, including interactive workstations, to both display the visual images and allow researchers and school children alike opportunities to explore the resources. The three initiatives would take place over a two-year time period. Once completed, the new gallery would be located at the entrance to the J. Welles Henderson Archives and Library.

The Museum's archival collections of visual materials consist of about 25,000 images, including aerial and other photographs, postcards, stereographs, lantern slides, photo albums, and ephemera depicting aspects of the Delaware Valley's maritime history, including work in 19th and 20th century shipyards, laborers working on the Delaware River, and the experiences of Philadelphians who traveled overseas as sailors, tourists, and military personnel. Visual materials collections have high research value, and the proposed project will facilitate access to these collections for humanities scholars, school children, authors, enthusiasts, and serious and casual researchers alike, thus illustrating the stories that tell the history of Philadelphia's waterfront and our regional maritime heritage.

Image Collections Highlights

Among the 25,000 images in the J. Welles Henderson Archives and Library are many rare and unusual collections. For example, the Museum is home to *Olympia*, the oldest surviving steel warship in the world and the flagship of Commodore Dewey's squadron at the 1898 Battle of Manila Bay. Among the collections are the only known photos of the battle, which were taken by reporter Joseph L. Stickney of the New York Herald. Stickney later used lantern slides of these photos in lectures about his experiences aboard *Olympia*. His slides provide an interesting look not only into America's early Navy, but also into the way war news was conveyed around the world at the turn of the 20th

century. Also in the *Olympia* collection are photographs documenting the lives of sailors at work and on leave in the Mediterranean, including photos of Venice, Istanbul, and Croatia.

The library is also very pleased to care for rare period albumen prints of the 1893 underwater photographs taken by Louis Boutan, a French zoologist who was the inventor of the first underwater camera. These earliest-known underwater photographs were collected by Pennsylvania author James Dugan. Dugan co-authored several books with Jacques-Yves Cousteau including *The Living Sea* and *World without Sun*, and the collection also includes a number of photos from Cousteau's early expeditions.

The Aero Service Corporation was a pioneer in the field of aerial photography under the direction of a World War I veteran and pilot named Virgil Kauffman. The Library owns more than 1,100 of the firm's aerial photographs of Philadelphia and surrounding areas taken in the 1920s and 1930s. The photos provide a rich visual overview of the Philadelphia region. A highlight of the collection includes photos of the SS *Morro Castle* aflame. The passenger liner caught fire on September 9, 1935, while enroute from Havana to New York, and was driven aground near Asbury Park, New Jersey. Some 137 died in the disaster, prompting many safety improvements in ship design.

The New York Shipbuilding Corporation, located (despite its name) in Camden, New Jersey, was in business from 1899 to 1967, building more than 500 ships. The company held significant government contracts during both World Wars and also built luxury ocean liners such as United States Lines ships *Manhattan* and *Washington*. The collection includes more than 7,000 photographs of shipyard workers, ships in various stages of construction, women at launching ceremonies, and trial trips. These "industrial" images dovetail well with other sets of more personal photos in our collections, many featuring snapshots of men who worked at area yards, the Philadelphia Navy Yard in particular.

Proposed Activities

The library has already placed most of its images in basic archival housing, thus stabilizing the material. However, intellectual access to the collections remains extremely limited. There is no off-site access to information about the collections, and even in-house use by staff or visitors is hampered by insufficient cataloging and indexing. In many cases, the Museum does not really know what images it possesses, and has very little information on many images that are but vaguely identified. Only through professional archival processing, using modern cataloging methods, can these valuable yet largely hidden collections become widely accessible to the public.

Tier 1: Cataloging and Indexing

To that end, the Museum's Library seeks funding to improve the public's ability to discover our images. The Library will hire a Project Archivist who will survey the 400

separate image collections and arrange them in accordance with archival principles for visual resources. While the collections are largely in good condition, any items requiring professional conservation work will be noted. The Archivist's main priority will be to create collection-level electronic catalog records, with full subject indexing. These records will then subsequently be contributed to publicly accessible catalog databases, with additional item-level access points being made available on the Seaport Museum's own website.

The library catalog and indexes produced for the photographs will hold valuable information for researchers, revealing the content of each photograph in some detail, thereby greatly improving the ability for researchers to find individual items of interest. This is where photographs with particularly rich content could really be brought into the public eye. We will use modern image indexing standards and assign subject terms and metadata to each image. This approach is crucial in finding images quickly, improving understanding of the content of the images, and helping us manage the provenance and ownership of each photo.

Tier 2: Digitization and Broader Access

We will then digitize at least 2,000 images from among the 25,000 in the in the collections and provide online access to them based on several thematic, subject, or genre arrangements – for example, shipyards, workers, and aerial photos. This approach will promote discovery of photographs that represent areas that we know are of keen interest to researchers of all types. After digitizing these initial images, staff will continue to make additional images available based on digitize-on-demand requests in concert with a regular schedule for selection based on prioritized research interest areas. Images will of course be available on our library website, but we will also share them on Flickr, a very popular image hosting website and online community platform. Flickr image-sharing has recently adopted by such institutions as The Library of Congress, Smithsonian Institution, and Geoge Eastman House. We will also encourage people to comment on pictures and ask that they add information about time, place, or context – this kind of online discussion will benefit not only the community, but also the collections themselves.

Tiers 1 and 2 will involve a number of people at the Seaport Museum. The Project Achivist will bring expertise in description and cataloging, following modern best practices for describing and providing access to our visual resources. Volunteers with specialized knowledge and years of experience in our maritime community will supplement the descriptions of the photos, which will (1) generate additional access points that will help researchers to find appropriate images, and (2) once an image is located, these expanded descriptions will provide a rich context for the content of the images. Interns from regional university programs in library science, archival studies, and museum studies will assist in the work, gaining invaluable experience (in a department that actively combines the often-disparate functions of a library, an archives, and a museum) while injecting fresh insights into how people want to find and use historic images. Finally, exisiting library staff will direct all of the efforts, keeping everyone on-task and on-schedule. The combined efforts of all of these Seaport Museum people will

ensure that our image collections will be comprehensively described and accessible to the public. And once the public is able to contribute their own comments on images, the online denizens will join forces with the Museum staff, forming a new community that harkens back to the maritime community of the region, united by our shared interests and love for the stories of Philadelphia's relationship to its rivers.

To highlight our Aero Service Collection of aerial photos, we have already begun developing a method by which historic aerial images of the Delaware Valley can be viewed as overlays on a present-day aerial view (using the free Google Earth program). The resulting resource will allow researchers and students at every level to gain a better, immediate, and specific understanding of how the region has changed over the last 75 years. (Funding will allow us to more easily move this project from its current prototype stage to full fruition.)

Tier 3: An Intimate New Gallery and Library Entrance

Finally, in an effort to make the J. Welles Henderson Archives and Library on the second floor a more visible presence inside the Seaport Museum, support is sought to build a new exhibit gallery for the visual resources that would also serve as an entrance to the Library. The gallery would include two PC workstations where routine Museum visitors could explore the digitized, online portion of the collections, as well as a large flat-screen video monitor to display a rotating series of images from the collections. A third PC workstation would be placed inside the Library for scholars and researchers.

The construction of a wall along the end of the current 3,328-square-foot Small Craft gallery would create a separate gallery for images from the Library's collections. The Library would purchase exhibit cases that are more suited to displaying archival items than the cases we have now. The walls would allow for the hanging of about 30 framed items, such as large-format photographs that will not fit in cases. A light-filtering treatment would be applied to the wall of windows at the southern end of the gallery to protect archival materials. This treatment would also be visually appealing, composed of images from the library's collections. The same visual motif would be repeated on a column in the gallery and on an inside wall of windows in the existing Library Reading Room. Bench seating along part of the wall of windows would offer patrons a place to wait before Library appointments or to reflect upon the new gallery's changing visual exhibits.

Proposed Summary Budget

While a detailed budget is attached to this proposal, the cost of the three principal initiatives herein proposed can be summarized in the following manner:

Tier 1: Cataloging and Indexing \$183,195
Tier 2: Digitization and Access \$42,244
Tier 3: New Gallery and Entrance \$84,949

TOTAL \$310,387

The costs of these initiatives over the proposed two-year time period are as follows:

Year One \$150,170

Year Two \$160,216

TOTAL \$310,387

Conclusion

Support from the Albert M. Greenfield Foundation for this three-tiered, two-year project would shed much light on the maritime worlds of our community and country by making widely available about 25,000 images in 400-odd discrete visual collections. With physical access points in the Seaport Museum, as well as on the internet, the Museum's vast hidden collections would be available to anyone, draw more people to the Museum, and would engage the widest possible audience of online researchers and browsers in aspects of history and current events that only these visual collections can illuminate.