

Photographs in a Business Setting: Atlantic Richfield Company

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WE ALL KNOW OF COLLECTIONS that have grown too big for one person to provide adequate service based on personal knowledge of their contents. In the late 1970s the Photography Collection of the Atlantic Richfield Company (ARCO) reached that point. The company had grown, through a series of mergers and the important oil discoveries on Alaska's North Slope, to become the 10th largest U.S. corporation. This growth, combined with a high-profile public relations strategy, greatly increased the demand for the use of photographs. Unfortunately, in many cases, they were used once and never found again. If they were filed, they were arranged in chronological order with only a one-line log for access. In effect, there was no subject access.

ARCO recognized that the situation was neither cost-effective nor tolerable, and decided to do something about it. The objective was to fill photographic needs promptly and to reuse material when possible, reducing the unit cost of

photography. At the same time, provision was made to maintain a consistent visual record of company facilities and activities for current and future use. The resulting ARCO Photography Collection is located at the company's corporate headquarters in Los Angeles. It is part of the Department of Photography and Audio Visual Services, a unit of the Public Relations Department. Historical photographs are housed in the recently established Corporate Archives.

Now photographs are made in response to a specific request such as an annual report, a brochure, a slide presentation, or a press release. Subject matter mirrors the company's diverse activities: research and development and the exploration, drilling, mining, transporting, refining, manufacturing, and marketing of such commodities as oil, gas, chemicals, coal, minerals, aluminum, and products manufactured from them, as well as of alternative energy sources, chiefly photovoltaics. ARCO's involvement in the com-

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munities in which it does business generates photographs illustrating sports programs for youth, dance companies, volunteer service by employees, and other such people-oriented endeavors.

Photographs are taken by staff photographers in formats ranging from 35mm to 8x10 negatives and transparencies, in color and in black and white. The size of the Photography Collection is estimated at several hundred thousand images. Each working day new material is photographed and enters the collection. Prints or duplicate slides are made to suit the needs of the original request; negatives and original transparencies are retained in the file for reuse and form part of the record of ARCO's business, industrial, and community activities. The photographs are filed chronologically—in the order they are created—using a numerical notation system consisting of a year, assignment number, roll number, and frame number. This notation is similar to others used by many professional photographers and has been in use at ARCO since the early 1950s. Each image thus has a unique number, which is applied to each copy generated from the original photograph. This permits reference to the filed original so that additional copies can be made while preserving the quality of the product used by clients.

One of the major objectives of the Photography Collection is to be able to ascertain quickly whether or not a photograph of a requested subject exists in the collection. If it does, a copy is provided to the client as rapidly as possible. If it does not, the subject must either be photographed or obtained from another source. Response time from initial request to delivery of the print or duplicate transparency is frequently 24 hours, in-

cluding time in the processing laboratory. Being able to respond this quickly supports a policy of allowing *only* copies to leave the collection—a difficult task in a setting where there is often heavy pressure to release originals because of tight deadlines.

Because we make no attempt to organize or classify the photographs by subject, subject access must be by other means. To meet the need, we began an on-line computerized catalog to the collection in 1979. This was the first systematic attempt to provide subject access to the chronological file. In cooperation with the Corporate Systems Department at ARCO and Cibbarelli and Associates, a library consulting firm, the Department of Photography and Audio Visual Services decided to adopt the IBM software package known as STAIRS (Storage and Information Retrieval System/Virtual Storage) to create a catalog or data base known as PMIS (Photographic Management Information System). STAIRS is well adapted to textual manipulation and has been used in other bibliographic applications.¹ At ARCO, we input cataloging information in batches, while access is on-line, via an IBM cathode ray tube (CRT) terminal, which is connected to a mainframe computer at ARCO's Los Angeles Data Center.

A description of a group of photographs rather than an individual image comprises an entry in the catalog. A team of catalogers from Cibbarelli and Associates cataloged pre-1978 photography using one entry or document for each assignment. Cibbarelli also cataloged photographs from 1978, but in greater detail, and prepared the cataloging manual.

Currently the cataloger fills in a load sheet for each roll of film (as in Figure

¹William Poor, "STAIRS: A Storage and Retrieval System Applied in Online Cataloging," *Special Libraries* (January 1982): 52-62.

PHOTOGRAPHIC SERVICES PMIS DATA ENTRY

DOCUMENT INPUT NUMBER:	PMS 0 0 0 0 0 0 2586	INITIALS	HS
CALL NUMBER	100 81-0021-002		
TITLE	150 Y R A C C # R L # DELAWARE		
DATE	200 01/00/81		
TIME	250 DAY		
CONDITION	300 OUTDOOR		
PHOTOGRAPHER	350 CLARK, W F		
ABSTRACT	400 AERIAL VIEWS OF DELAWARE A1 WILDCAT DRILLING SITE AND SURROUNDING TERRAIN, MUCH WATER AND SWAMPY LAND		
USES	450		
PUBLICATIONS	500 QUARTERLY REPORT, MARCH 1981		
IMPRINT	550 35MM COLOR SLIDES, 4X5 B&W INTERNEGATIVES		
CONTENT TYPE	600 AERIALS		
SUBJECTS	650 LOUISIANA; DRILLING SITES, ARCO OIL AND GAS COMPANY; EXPLORATION		

Figure 1

1). A completed batch of load sheets is sent to a keypunching firm to be converted into tape. A printout of the tape is produced for editing, and the cataloger makes corrections directly on the CRT using TSO (Time Sharing Option), an editing package. When all desired changes and corrections have been made, the corrected tape is merged into the existing entries to update the catalog. The additional entries are then available for on-line searching as part of the complete catalog. In the future we hope to catalog directly on the CRT, eliminating load sheets entirely.

STAIRS allows searching on any word that appears anywhere in the data base, in any field, or in any document. This feature allows a user who is minimally acquainted with the system to make a successful search using ordinary

English applied in Boolean logic.² Other functions such as BROWSE, SORT, and SELECT allow manipulation of citations to further refine results and to display them on the CRT and on printed hard copy (as in Figures 2 and 3).

The only controlled vocabulary is in the subjects field, where terms from a thesaurus constructed by using petroleum industry glossaries are employed. The terms are generally nontechnical and fairly broad, reflecting the nature of the photographs and the type of inquiries received.

The greatest difficulty in cataloging is getting information about the photographs. Photographers generally assign a title to their work at the time they submit film for processing. They are encouraged to provide notes as well. Fortunately, company writers are also

²STAIRS Terminal User's Guide. White Plains, New York: IBM (1977). (Publication #5320-5787-0.)

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R0102 ENTER DATA BASE NAME pmis
R0201 ENTER ONE OF THE FOLLOWING COMMANDS:
..BROWSE ..SEARCH ..SELECT ..EXEC ..RANK ..HELP ..CHANGE ..OFF
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Figure 2

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AQUARIUS - SEARCH MODE - BEGIN YOUR QUERY AFTER THE STATEMENT NUMBER
00003 louisiana and exploration and color
LOUISIANA                45 OCCURRENCES          34 DOCUMENTS
EXPLORATION              17 OCCURRENCES          17 DOCUMENTS
COLOR                   3059 OCCURRENCES       1940 DOCUMENTS
RESULT                   9 OCCURRENCE           9 DOCUMENTS

PMS000002586 DOCUMENT=      2 OF      9      PAGE =      1 OF      1
CALL-NUMBER
      81-0021-002
TITLE      DELACROIX
DATE       01/00/81
TIME       DAY
CONDITION  OUTDOOR
PHOTOGRAPHER
      CLARK, WF
ABSTRACT   AERIAL VIEWS OF DELACROIX A1 WILDCAT DRILLING SITE AND
      SURROUNDING TERRAIN, MUCH WATER AND SWAMPY LAND
PUBLICATIONS
      QUARTERLY REPORT, MARCH 1981
IMPRINT    35MM COLOR SLIDES, 4X5 B&W INTERNEGATIVES
CONTENT-TYPE
      AERIALS
SUBJECTS   LOUISIANA; DRILLING SITES; ARCO OIL AND GAS COMPANY;
      EXPLORATION
      END OF DOCUMENT
```

Figure 3

generous in sharing notes and rough texts for the projects illustrated by the photographs. Nevertheless, creating precise verbal descriptions for things that are essentially nonverbal continues to be a problem.

In using STAIRS and PMIS, the computer provides a list of citations that refer to groups of photographs. From the list we assemble the photographs that are likely to meet the client's needs. The client then selects the photographs appropriate for his project, using a light table and a lupe. The originals are then sent to the laboratory for reproduction in the form, size, and quantity requested by the client.

Because ARCO is decentralized, both geographically and in its organization, providing photographic services to locations other than Los Angeles requires greater efforts. Staff photographers often must travel to sites in the field to document facilities and activities. Travel expenses, staff time, and film stock can be saved if existing photographs can be reused. To let prospective clients know what is available, we publish a bimonthly newsletter, *New Photography*, which contains listings of photographic subjects in the collection, as well as notices of pending visits of staff photographers to field locations. *New Photography* is sent to all Public Relations personnel,

past clients of the Photography Collection, heads of ARCO operating companies, and editors of company publications.

Many clients from field locations simply call and describe their needs, leaving selection of individual photographs to the staff of the Photography Collection. Others request color photocopies of slides or duplicate contact sheets. The client selects from these and calls in the file numbers to the

Photography Collection. Duplicates are made and are sent by company mail.

In the future the system may be enhanced by the addition of image call-up, probably by means of videodisc. Discs containing thousands of images could be distributed to field locations and viewed on television screens. If access to the PMIS database is also extended to these same locations, long-distance clients would have access to both the descriptions and a reference image.

Photographs in the Business Archives: A Sampler

Photographs are among the most intriguing of archival records. They often contain valuable historical data and are capable of eliciting basic human responses in the viewer. Photographs are highly complex structures, with their own history of technological change and development. Although visual images are pervasive in our culture, archivists, in general, have not been trained to evaluate photographs nor to consider them from the perspective of historical content or as historical artifacts.

Under its new program, Administration of Photographic Collections, SAA will begin a series of activities to train archivists to organize and manage photographic holdings. Through a series of regional workshops, such topics as iden-

tification, appraisal, collecting policies, arrangement and description, preservation, legal issues, and use will be addressed. A photographic consultant service will assist institutions in developing specific programs to evaluate and administer photographic collections. As an outgrowth of these two phases of the program, a manual on the care and management of archival photographs will be published at the end of the project.

The Administration of Photographic Collections program is a two-year project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities under the SAA Basic Archival Conservation Program II. For further information, contact Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, Program Director, at SAA headquarters, 330 S. Wells Street, Suite 810, Chicago, IL 60606. Telephone (312-922-0140).



View of the corner of Broad and Wall Street, with the New York Stock Exchange, 1923. New York Stock Exchange Archives.



Louisville, Kentucky, bottling plant, c. 1907. Coca-Cola Archives.



Shanghai branch vault, c. 1936. Courtesy Chase Manhattan Archives.