

"A love letter and wish list from a photographic historian"

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1. Personal story about doing research in late 1970s at photographic archives of University of Louisville and how working in Roy Stryker's personal archives hooked me on becoming a historian. The power of primary documents vs. today's digital world.
2. Current project, working with Pam Spaulding on McGarvey project. her desire to leave all her work to U of L archives_ Our back-and-forth emails about hoping somebody in the future will find and use her materials, plus my interview transcripts.
3. My methodology; a synthesis of contact sheets, prints, memos, field captions, correspondence, publications, etc.

Two horror stories

1. Mathew Brady's plates. Heavily in debt after Civil War. Took many years of negotiations before Library of Congress bought his plates. In meantime, many of them were bought as scrap, the emulsions were scrapped off and they were used to glass greenhouses.
2. Berenice Abbot and Atget's work. According to legend, she found it on the street waiting to be carted away by the trash collectors.

Recommendations

1. Begin to cultivate relationships with important photographers in your region.
2. Photography is a business, and the stock is valuable. With some high profile photographers, their stock gets bought up by corporations like Corbis, but for many that's not the case. And even w/Corbis it's just electronic reproduction rights. There are bodies of work that need to be preserved.
3. This is even more serious for agencies and local photography businesses. When they go out of business, it's quite likely that their archives may be discarded. Libraries should build relationships in advance so these things don't slip through the cracks.
4. In collecting, you want not just the images, but everything: negatives, work prints, journals, correspondence, business records, installation views of exhibitions. To are historians everything is important and useful.
5. Creative Center for Photography. University of Arizona at Tucson. Arrange with photographic artists before their death to acquire their photographic estates.
6. Many newspapers will be going out of business because of the upheaval in the media world. Many others will be discarding their silver-based photography as an anachronism in this digital age.