



Recent Publications

BOOK REVIEWS

O'Connor, Diane Vogt. *Guide to Photographic Collections at the Smithsonian Institution*. Vol. I, National Museum of American History. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989. 351p. alk. paper, \$29.95 (ISBN 0-87474-927-1). LC 89-600116.

The 150th anniversary of photography has seen the publication of numerous books celebrating the medium and its technical and artistic progress. It is fitting that a guide to a large and important group of still photograph collections at the National Museum of American History, themselves portions of one of the world's largest photographic collections housed at the Smithsonian Institution, joins this body of celebratory books, adding not only to our understanding of these collections, but facilitating access to them for a wide variety of researchers.

In itself, the task of adequately describing the photographic collections of the National Museum of American History (NMAH) would seem a daunting one. The photographic collections of this single major museum of the Smithsonian Institution comprise by themselves more than one million images in a wide variety of formats and photographic processes. These images are spread across some 473 individually identified collections, located in twenty-four custodial divisions or offices, and multiple physical locations in this one museum of a still-larger institution. Further, photonegatives are not held in the physical custody of these divisions within NMAH, but are kept by the Smithsonian's central Office of Printing and Photo-

graphic Services, which also provides photoduplication services.

Understanding and gaining access to such enormous and broadly based collections could seem a formidable task to any researcher, even in a less complex institutional context. Happily, Diane Vogt O'Connor and the talented team who assisted her have greatly facilitated these tasks in a guide that is a model of organizational clarity, and proper and useful description. Success on these counts alone would be notable enough. But this book also offers helpful cross-indexes that illuminate relationships within the collections, and attractive and clear typography and layout that make use a genuine pleasure. A forty-nine page illustration section exhibits a well-selected sampling of images from various collections.

The author has wisely grouped the descriptions of each collection under the NMAH division responsible for the collection, such as the Division of Engineering and Industry. At the start of each division's listing are the division's address, telephone, hours of service, contact person and title; general statements of its collections' scope and focus; the photographic processes and formats represented; access, usage, and publication policies; as well as a brief but helpful listing of other nonphotographic materials held by that division.

Each photographic collection within the division is then listed in order by a unique alphanumeric coding system that parallels the alphabetical order of the collections' full titles. For each collection, the inclusive

dates of the photographs, origin of the collection, physical description, subjects, arrangement, caption data availability, finding aid availability, and restrictions are all briefly and clearly described. The book's introduction further outlines the content of these fields, and gives general information on access and photoduplication services.

Given the broad scope and sheer size of these collections, the data in these fields is necessarily concise. Yet neither clarity nor informativeness suffers, for the author describes each collection with a consistent style, and uses a carefully controlled vocabulary effectively. This provides a comfortable consistency of descriptive form that makes usage of the guide easy, and immediately highlights features of each collection, rather than obscuring them.

A particularly successful use of controlled vocabulary is in the description of photographic processes. Various processes both commonplace and contemporary, and exotic and historic, are described with precision, using terminology that has increasingly become standard, in part through the development of the MARC-VM format, which was used as the basis for the surveys conducted within NMAH for the development of the guide.

The book concludes with three indexes: a creators index, which lists the photographers or entities that produced or assembled the images in each collection; a forms and processes index, which locates examples of physically distinct types of photographs (such as albumen photoprints, or collodion wet plate photonegatives); and a subject index, created using Library of Congress topical terms for graphical materials. The subject index is useful, since images related to certain subjects may reside in various collections located in separate NMAH divisions. The forms and processes index will be especially appreciated by anyone having an interest in the development of photographic technique. The more exotic variant processes (such as the bromoil process variant of the ubiquitous silver gelatin photoprint) are clearly noted. Widely used processes are not used as index terms except for general headings, or to establish headings for the

variant processes. Indexing is keyed in all three indexes to collection number, not page. This only slightly impairs the usefulness of the indexes.

This book will lead a researcher into an acquaintance with a splendid array of photographic treasures. From the images created by noted photographers such as Matthew Brady, Eugene Atget, Andre Kertesz, and Richard Avedon in the Division of Photographic History; to the 11,300 images in the Warshaw Collection of Business Americana in NMAH's Archives Center; to the Pullman Company Negative Collection in the Division of Transportation, the researcher becomes acquainted with a vast and heretofore virtually unknown resource of great artistic, technical, and informational value. This first volume of a planned five-part set admirably succeeds as a guide to this photographic treasure trove. Researchers can look forward to the other four volumes to do the same for the photographic collections housed in the Smithsonian Institution's other museums and facilities.—*Mark J. Cedeck, John W. Barriger III National Railroad Library, St. Louis Mercantile Library Association.*

Wiegand, Wayne A. *"An Active Instrument for Propaganda": The American Public Library during World War I.* (Beta Phi Mu Monograph, No. 1) New York: Greenwood, 1989. 193p. \$39.95 (ISBN 0-313-26702-2). LC 88-38489.

Wayne Wiegand's *"An Active Instrument for Propaganda": The American Public Library During World War I* marks the beginning of the Beta Phi Mu's (the International Library Science Honor Society) new series of monographs. In his wisdom combined with thorough research, Wiegand demonstrates in this study the involvement of American public library community during World War I. His detailed introduction covers an overview of the history of the public library prior to World War I. Also covered in the introduction, without going in broader detail, are topics such as the founding of the American Library Association (ALA) in 1876, the public libraries' adoption of the Dewey Decimal Classification, the publication of the