

**THE PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVIST IS DEAD.
LONG LIVE THE PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVIST!**

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January 2019 marks the 180th coming out party of photography. Photographic archivists around the world are entrusted with millions upon millions of photographs, negatives, and transparencies that visually document our human experience. Photography's traditional forms range from daguerreotypes to snapshots. If we conceptualize the photographic world as a monarchy, the ruling kings and queens have been rooted in physical formats ranging from daguerreotypes and wet collodion processes through gelatin silver black-and-white and dye coupler photographs. To date, the knowledge base and role of the photographic archivist has been deeply rooted in the preservation, access, and use of traditional photographic formats.

The dawn of the 21st century is the period when digital photography blossomed and supplanted film-based photography. King Digital's reign, however, has not lead to the emergence of the digital photographic archivist. Around 2003 when CMOS sensor technology first matched the resolution of 35mm film, and the sales revenue from digital cameras exceeded that of film cameras, photographic archivists should have declared, "The Photographic Archivist is dead. Long live the Photographic Archivist!" Alas, we did not—for we did not envision what was to come. We did not recognize fully what the unfolding developments in a rapidly evolving industry meant to us as archivists, thus we could not rise to the challenges those developments presented. In general, photographic archivists did not know enough about the medium of digital photography—or for that matter, even knew what we needed to know. We needed to teach ourselves first.

Nearly two decades of the current photographic kingdom have passed, yet many photographic archivists remain hesitant to grapple with the realities of collecting, preserving, and understanding digital photography. There have been very few options for photographic archivist to call upon to educate themselves, and there is a wide range of topics to learn. In the realm of digital photography, while I have seen eagerness to learn, I have not found the same willingness to explore, examine, resolve, and then share findings about what we need to know with digital photography as has been the case with "analog" photography.

Archives whose custody we maintain will continue to receive traditional photography collections, and they will continue to present challenges. As photographic archivists, however, we need to shift our attention from collections made in decades past to digital photography being made today. If we are going to be true to our profession, we need to focus our efforts on our photographic future, which is now. The medium's largest impact on the photographic archivist today is the fragile, short life of the digital record. We need to be actively engaged with photographers working now. We need to know their workflows, techniques, and naming conventions. We also face digital photographers' lack of consistent standards and practices, especially as they transitioned from film to digital—changing cameras, file types, formats, and ever-growing file sizes. We also need to acquire now the collections we wish to have in the future so that we may ingested them into preservation storage environments. Storing computer files on a server with automatic back-up is not preservation.

We need to draw upon our strengths: we understand the medium of photography generally, and we are visually literate. We need to add to those skills the knowledge of what distinguishes digital photographs from other electronic records, and how to utilize that knowledge to help researchers discover, understand, and utilize that knowledge. But maybe more importantly we need to ask a deeper question: Do we need to change how we think about ourselves—either as

specialized photographic archivists or more generalist archivists—to understand the essence of born-digital photographic collections? I believe the answer is yes: we have to be willing to break loose from our affection for the materiality of traditional photography. Yes, artists and amateurs still make prints, but the vast majority of digital images will never be tangible.

Material clues about the nature of traditional photographic formats reside in physical characteristics that drive preservation and storage. Our understanding of the digital image now resides in embedded metadata. We have needed to know the effects of preservation storage supplies and environments on various types of photographic formats; we now need to align with people who understand data preservation. The tools we use for preservation data storage are not the tools of the photographic conservator nor the vendors that manufacture preservation supplies. We now need to be conversant in electronic records management. The most pressing question that needs to be answered is how to deal with the large quantity of images digital photographers produce. We desperately need tools to enable us to understand quickly large groups of images to make archival appraisal decisions, to locate duplicates and variants, and to assist with arrangement and description.

Today's photographic archivists need to build on our understanding of the differences between visual and textual records, which are rooted in photographic processes and formats, and visual literacy. We need to learn how to utilize embedded metadata. We also need to understand the lifecycle of digital photographs and how it relates to metadata and photographers' workflows, then apply that to pre-acquisition discussions with photographers. We then need to ingest their photographs into safe digital repositories built exclusively for preservation storage. We also need to design image viewing tools that enable archivists and researchers to access and utilize digital photographs, both as individual, freestanding images but also within the context of a collection's provenance.