

Standard Oil (New Jersey) Collection Processing and Digitization Project

The Project

UofL Photographic Archives' Standard Oil (New Jersey) contains approximately 500,000 items in various formats, representing the role of oil in everyday life in the United States and at Standard Oil sites throughout the world in the years during and immediately following the Second World War. Roy E. Stryker, who had led the federally-funded Farm Security Administration photo-documentary project during the Depression era, hired a team of eleven renowned documentary photographers to produce this socio-geographical portrait of the times at the behest of the oil company. Subjects include United States social conditions between 1943 and 1952, oil production and distribution, industrial workers, homes and families, religious life, recreation, highways, river transportation, bus travel in the United States, and American automobile culture. Many of these subjects remain relevant to contemporary viewers as well as providing a window on the past. Researchers from around the world have contacted UofL about this collection ever since we received it as a gift from Roy Stryker in the 1960s, and the iconic images have appeared in numerous publications.

There has been strong internal and external interest in digitizing this collection, which is the largest and most valuable in our Photographic Archives. However, questions of copyright ownership (due to a lack of paperwork explaining who owned the rights to the images—the company, Stryker, or the individual photographers) and the sheer scope of the effort have prevented us from embarking on this project. We would need to:

- Clarify and address copyright issues, with the help of a copyright researcher (possibly a graduate assistant from the Law School?).
- Process the collection and produce a finding aid as an interim step to providing broader awareness of and access to this prized holding and to organize and preserve the collection in preparation for digitization (minimum of one FTE processing archivist for one year?).
- Produce and store high-resolution scans of the images (would need personnel plus equipment and space for them to work, and high-capacity server storage).
- Produce item-level metadata for the digital images, which can then be uploaded into the CONTENTdm digital media management software and browsed and searched on our freely-available Digital Collections website (<http://digital.library.louisville.edu>).

The first two steps are necessary preconditions for the subsequent steps. The digitization steps could be ongoing over the course of many years, with portions of the collection published online in stages, but none of it can happen until the collection has undergone copyright clearance and archival processing.

Benefits

- Ensure the long-term preservation of a historically significant body of material
- Provide worldwide access to that body of material
- Associate UofL and donor support funding with the preservation of and access to an internationally treasured collection.

Cost

An initial investment of \$100,000 would provide funding for personnel and supplies for the crucial first two stages. The digitization effort will require an additional substantial investment (several million dollars), which could be spread out over many years.

How to Get Involved

Outright donors, individuals, groups, companies and others may work together to create collaborative support. If you are interested in learning more about this opportunity, please contact Cheryl Crane with the University of Louisville at 502-852-3523 or cheryl.crane@louisville.edu.