The Role of Photographic Archives in Research Libraries

Stephen J. Fletcher
Photographic Archivist
North Carolina Collection
Quinkan Rock Art, near Laura Australia
15,000 to 30,000 years old
photograph by Michael Gardner, wikipedia.com
"If I could tell the story in words, I wouldn't need to lug a camera."

– Lewis Hine, photographer
National Child labor Committee
“... photographs are evidence not only of what's there but of what an individual sees, not just a record but an evaluation of the world.”

– Susan Sontag
“Photographs help you with your remembering”

–Sam, age 7
Values

- artifactual
- associational
- informational
- intrinsic (originals)
- usage (initial and subsequent)
Negative as Primary Research Material
The negative is comparable to the composer's score and the print to its performance. Each performance differs in subtle ways.

– Ansel Adams (1902–1984)
Moonrise, Hernadez, New Mexico 1941

Thursday, September 5, 13
Crop
The Critic, 1943

— Weegee
The Critic, 1943

— Weegee

Thursday, September 5, 13
Retouch
The Moonshiner’s Country, negative
The Moonshiner’s Country, after retouching
“Migrant Mother”

"Destitute peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children. February 1936."

–negative held by The Library of Congress
“Migrant Mother”

"Destitute peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children. February 1936."

—positive version of negative held by The Library of Congress
“Migrant Mother”

"Destitute peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children. February 1936."

–mounted print held by The Library of Congress
“Migrant Mother”

"Destitute peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children. February 1936."

–mounted print held by The Library of Congress
“Migrant Mother”

"Destitute peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children. February 1936."

—positive version of RETOUCHEDED negative held by The Library of
“Migrant Mother”

"Destitute peapickers in California; a 32 year old mother of seven children. February 1936."

—positive version of RETOUCHED negative held by The Library of
“Migrant Mother”

• The original nitrate negative for "Migrant Mother" was retouched in the 1930s to erase the thumb holding a tent pole in lower right hand corner.

• File print made before the thumb was retouched.
Alter
© Ken Light, John Kerry preparing to speak at an antiwar rally in Mineola, New York, 1970 (left); Owen Franken, Jane Fonda at a Vietnam War protest in Miami Beach, Florida, 1972 (middle) and composite of two photographs with fake “AP Photo” credit (right).
Crop of original photo (Photo by Larry Downing, Reuters)

Final cover image, with woman deleted
© Brian Walski/Los Angeles Times. British soldier directing Iraqi civilians to take cover from Iraqi fire on the outskirts of Basra, Iraq, 2003. Photographs on the left made moments apart, then composited to create the image on the right that ran on the cover of the March 31, 2001 issue.
"I've always said that the negative is the score, and the print the performance. I want it to be possible for people in the future to perform my negatives. After all, when I was playing the piano, I was playing the music of people who had been dead for quite a few hundred years, and who had never heard the sounds of my modern piano—they had written for the harpsichord, the clavichord. I actually feel that in the next few years—it won't be very long—the electronic image is really going to be the medium in photography."

— Ansel Adams, 1979