



DHPS | NY

DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE
& PRESERVATION SERVICES
FOR NEW YORK

Thanks for joining us! Today's presentation will begin shortly.

*If you have questions or want to report any technical issues,
contact us at info@dhpsny.org or (215) 545- 0613 ext. 334*



PHOTOGRAPHS IN THE ARCHIVE:

Arranging and
Describing Visual
Materials

Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York is a five-year initiative to deliver collections-related training, preservation surveys, archival assessments, and other services to the historical records community in New York.



New
York State
Library



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DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE
& PRESERVATION SERVICES

FOR NEW YORK

Website: dhpsny.org



*New York State
Archives*

CONSERVATION
CENTER

for art & historic artifacts



Amanda Murray

DHPSNY Preservation Specialist

Preservation surveys and
archival needs assessments

Educational programs and
technical information

Background in archives and
photographic preservation and
collections management



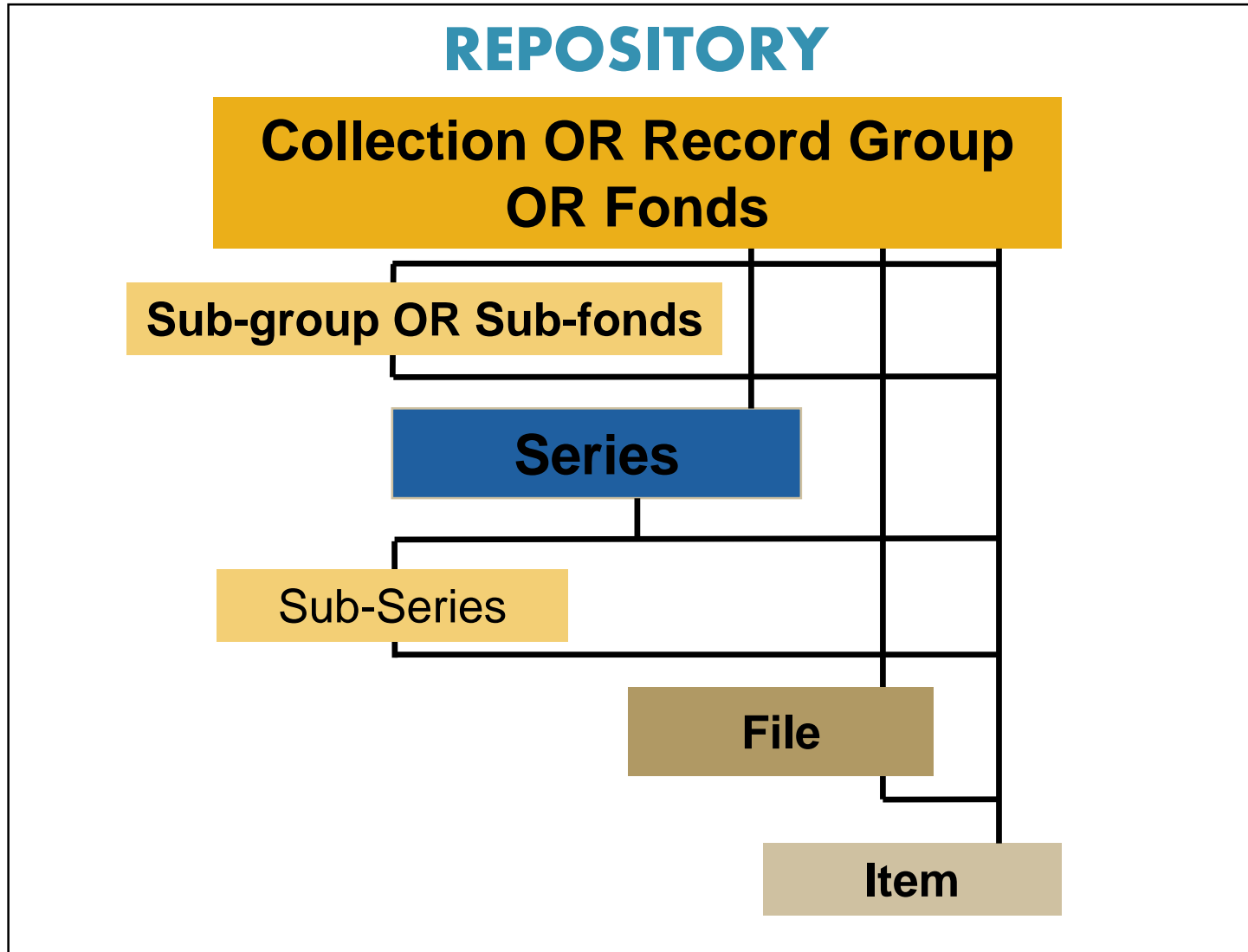
Goals of Processing



- **Intellectual control** – Creation of tools that enable researchers to locate relevant materials.
- **Physical control** - Establishment and tracking of locations for collection materials.

Both physical and intellectual control allow us to provide access and aid in the security of collections. These goals are achieved through processing activities, including arrangement, housing and description.

Levels of Arrangement



Arrangement

- Original order or imposed order
 - Creator (photographer, printer, publisher)
 - Subject
 - Format (negatives, postcards, slides)

- Considerations for arrangement
 - What is the importance of the materials?
 - Why were materials collected?
 - Are materials part of a larger collection?
 - What arrangement will best enable access?

Handling Photographs

- Use nitrile gloves
- Always hold with two hands and keep fingers off emulsion surfaces
- Have a clear workspace to shift materials
- Use support boards for moving oversize or fragile materials
- Remove dangling jewelry and tie back long hair
- Ensure that eraser bits and pencil dust don't stick to photos
- Write on enclosures before inserting materials
- Do not write on the back of photographs unless adding an identifying number

Housing Photographs



- Acid-free
- Lignin-free
- Buffered (use unbuffered for cyanotypes and blueprints)
- Passes the Photographic Activity Test (PAT)

Describing Photographs



- **Process** –method by which a photograph was made (gelatin silver print, daguerreotype, cyanotype)
- **Format** – method of presentation (stereoview, postcard, carte-de-visite)

Elements of Description

- Title
- Creator
- Date
- Extent
- Scope and Content
- System of Arrangement
- Access Conditions
- Physical Access Conditions
- Language of Materials
- Subject / Work types / geographic locations



Levels of Description

- Item-level vs group level
- Considerations
 - Institutional mission
 - User needs
 - Staff time, resources, and expertise
 - Information available
 - Research value
 - Intellectual, artistic, and physical characteristics



A word or phrase by which the material being described is known or can be identified; can be devised or formal.

Visual materials often lend themselves to descriptive (devised) titles. It is good practice to include a note to affirm when the title is from the object.

Title

For visual materials, this will most often be the date of creation; can be formatted as a single, bulk or inclusive dates.

Date

Identify the corporate bodies, persons and families associated with the creation of the materials.

Union List of Artist Names (Getty) or Library of Congress Name Authority File

Creator

Indicates the extent and the physical nature of the materials being described.

This can be noted in linear feet, or more often with visual materials as the number of items. The numeric portion of this entry is followed by the material type (i.e.. 100 photographs).

Extent

Information about the nature of the materials and activities reflected; object is to enable users to judge potential relevance.

**Scope
and
Content**

Describe the current organization of the collection.

This is where we can note whether materials are in original order or if the order was imposed by the archivist.

**System
of
Arrangement**

Restrictions due to the nature of the information in the materials being described; imposed by the donor, repository or regulatory requirements.

Physical conditions affecting the use of the materials.

These include limitations due to offsite/cold storage, condition of the materials, or a requirement to use copies instead of originals for preservation reasons.

Identifies the language(s), script(s), and symbol systems employed; particularly as they may affect its use.

This will usually be done at a collection level. For visual materials this can often be derived from captions or subtitles. If none of these are present, enter as “no linguistic content”.

**Access
Conditions**

**Physical
Access
Conditions**

**Language
of the
Materials**

Documenting subjects described by visual information in the image.

Library of Congress Subject Headings (LCSH),
Thesaurus for Graphic Materials (TGM I)

Documenting processes, materials, and techniques used in the creation of the object. Can also include formats.

Art and Architecture Thesaurus (AAT), Thesaurus for
Graphic Materials (TGM II)

Documenting locations depicted in the image.

Thesaurus of Geographic Names (Getty), Geographic
Names Information System (GNIS)

Subject

**Work
Types**

Location

Group-level description

Title: Travel views of Italy

Creator: Unknown

Date: 1890s

Extent: 34 lantern slides: 8.4 x 8.4 cm each

Scope and Content: A set of lantern slides depicting travel views of Italian landmarks. Individual titles are included on each slide.

System of Arrangement: Slides are in the original series order as marked.

Access Conditions: None

Physical Access Conditions: Use digital surrogates for these materials first before handling; glass has broken edges.

Language of Materials: Captions in Italian, English, and German.

Subject: travel views | monuments | architecture

Work Types: lantern slides | gelatin silver transparencies

Geographic Location: Genoa, Italy | Milan, Italy



Item-level description

Title: George Smith postcard

Creator: Unknown

Date: 1905

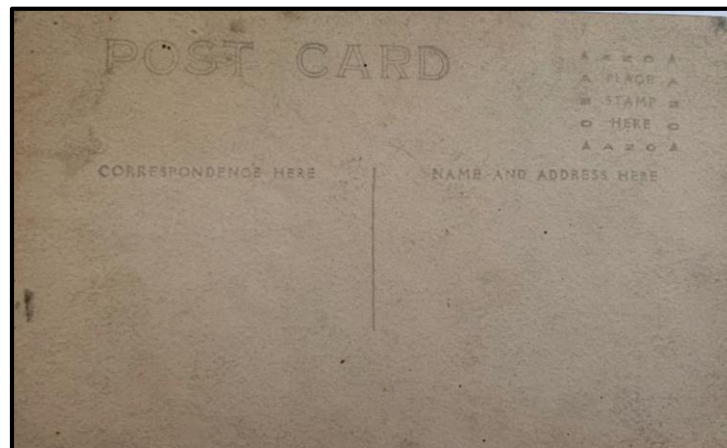
Extent: 1 postcard: 5.5 x 3.5 inches

Scope and Content: Photographic postcard of a portrait of Jane Smith's son George at eight months of age. Postcard unaddressed.

Language of Materials: English

Subject: infants | Smith, George

Work Types: gelatin silver prints | postcards | studio portraits



Documentation

- Processing Manual - Provides clarity and consistency
- Document future preservation projects
- Note conservation concerns



Resources

- *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*. Society of American Archivists. <https://saa-ts-dacs.github.io/>
- *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)*. Association of College and Research Libraries, Rare Books and Manuscripts Section. <http://rbms.info/dcrm/dcrmg/>.
- Ritzenthaler, Mary Lynn and Diane Vogt-O'Connor. *Photographs: Archival Care and Management*. Society of American Archivists: Chicago, 2006. (Chapters 5 & 6)
- *Graphics Atlas*. Image Permanence Institute. <http://www.graphicsatlas.org/>
- *Storing Your Photographic Collection: A Guide to Choosing the Proper Materials for Long-Term Storage*. Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts <https://ccaha.org/resources/storing-your-photographic-collection-guide-choosing-proper-materials-long-term-storage>
- DHPSNY Webinars <http://www.dhpsny.org/webinars>



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Questions?

Amanda Murray, Preservation Specialist
amurray@dhpsny.org or (215) 545-0613 ext. 337

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