Hello, I’m Larissa Glasser from The Arnold Arboretum Horticultural Library of Harvard University in Jamaica Plain, a neighborhood of Boston. I’ll provide a quick overview of our imaging project with the Digital Commonwealth, for which we digitized over 550 images of historic trees and landscapes of New England, photographed by Ernest Henry Wilson.
Wilson was one of the foremost plant explorers of the twentieth century. Starting in the 1900s, he conducted many expeditions to eastern Asia and collected thousands of plant specimens for the Arnold Arboretum, many of which were non-native species. He is also recognized as a great photographer. Arboretum Director Charles Sprague Sargent provided Wilson with a large format Sanderson whole-plate field camera for Wilson's expeditions. This model camera was highly regarded for its ability to capture broad perspectives with great detail. Wilson returned with thousands of images which can be viewed on our website. Although he perhaps is best known for his expeditions and writing, Wilson’s photograph collection of New England Trees had not been widely seen, nor even known of.
During the mid-1920s, Wilson began to photograph what he considered to be noteworthy trees throughout New England. Again using his Sanderson camera, he captured hundreds of images of various tree species in their natural habitat. These digital images are reproduced from the original glass plate negatives, which though fragile, retain a stunning amount of detail and contrast after nearly a century. Available for the first time, the photographs provide literal snapshots of early 20th century New England landscapes and architecture.
[CLICK] During the mid-1920s, Wilson began to photograph what he considered to be noteworthy trees throughout New England. Again using his Sanderson camera, he captured hundreds of images of various tree species in their natural habitat. [CLICK-CLICK] These digital images are reproduced from the original glass plate negatives, [CLICK] which though fragile, retain a stunning amount of detail and contrast after nearly a century. [CLICK-CLICK] Available for the first time, the photographs provide literal snapshots of early 20th century New England landscapes and architecture. [CLICK]
During the mid-1920s, Wilson began to photograph what he considered to be noteworthy trees throughout New England. Again using his Sanderson camera, he captured hundreds of images of various tree species in their natural habitat. These digital images are reproduced from the original glass plate negatives, which though fragile, retain a stunning amount of detail and contrast after nearly a century. Available for the first time, the photographs provide literal snapshots of early 20th century New England landscapes and architecture.
The advantages to digitization are obvious: ongoing preservation and universal access. Until last year, access to Wilson’s footage of New England trees was limited to viewing prints mounted on acidic board. The original glass plate negatives were housed in filing cabinets, and not so browser-friendly. Now not only have we digitized the photographs from the original glass negatives, we can also offer access to them online.
The advantages to digitization are obvious: ongoing preservation and universal access. Until last year, access to Wilson’s footage of New England trees was limited to viewing prints mounted on acidic board. The original glass plate negatives were housed in filing cabinets, and not so browser-friendly. Now not only have we digitized the photographs from the original glass negatives, we can also offer access to them online.
The advantages to digitization are obvious: ongoing preservation and universal access. Until last year, access to Wilson’s footage of New England trees was limited to viewing prints mounted on acidic board. The original glass plate negatives were housed in filing cabinets, and not so browser-friendly. Now not only have we digitized the photographs from the original glass negatives, we can also offer access to them online.
Also consider the improvement in image quality. Here is a before and after comparison.
Also consider the improvement in image quality. Here is a before and after comparison.
Our inventory and metadata of the glass plates was not born-digital. Typewritten sheets were transcribed into a spreadsheet by library interns. This preparatory phase allowed us the flexibility of treating each plate as a unique item: recording taxonomy, dates, locations, condition of each plate, and even recording historical metadata from library resources.
Our inventory and metadata of the glass plates was not born-digital. Typewritten sheets were transcribed into a spreadsheet by library interns. This preparatory phase allowed us the flexibility of treating each plate as a unique item: recording taxonomy, dates, locations, condition of each plate, and even recording historical metadata from library resources.
[CLICK] Our dataset begun, it was time to prepare plates for transfer to Digital Commonwealth. Our facilities manager, who happens to be a remarkably skilled carpenter, constructed reinforced boxes which offered easy handling, [CLICK] and a degree of protection for negatives during transport.
Our dataset begun, it was time to prepare plates for transfer to Digital Commonwealth. Our facilities manager, who happens to be a remarkably skilled carpenter, constructed reinforced boxes which offered easy handling, and a degree of protection for negatives during transport.
To generate buzz about the project, we were able to repurpose some of our metadata, research, and images into our “Library Leaves” blog. In a series of posts titled, “Trees and their Biographies” we include historical information about noteworthy pines, elms, and oak trees.
[CLICK] To generate buzz about the project, we were able to repurpose some of our metadata, research, and images into our “Library Leaves” blog. [CLICK] In a series of posts titled, “Trees and their Biographies” we include historical information about [CLICK] noteworthy pines, [CLICK] elms, and [CLICK] oak trees.
[CLICK] To generate buzz about the project, we were able to repurpose some of our metadata, research, and images into our “Library Leaves” blog. [CLICK] In a series of posts titled, “Trees and their Biographies” we include historical information about [CLICK] noteworthy pines, [CLICK] elms, and [CLICK] oak trees.
[CLICK] To generate buzz about the project, we were able to repurpose some of our metadata, research, and images into our “Library Leaves” blog. [CLICK] In a series of posts titled, “Trees and their Biographies” we include historical information about [CLICK] noteworthy pines, [CLICK] elms, and [CLICK] oak trees.
Currently we are working with various technologies in Wordpress which allow us to display digitized images and their historical information simultaneously.
Our website is easy to find. We are at arboretum.harvard.edu, but if you google “Arnold Arboretum” you can find the Library at the top navigation. You can also follow us on Twitter @AAhortlib, for updates in real time. Thank you for listening.