Match That Photo! Embracing Analog Methods to Enhance Digital Collections

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The Situation

Problem
- How to handle enhancing digital collections with little to no initial metadata
- Specifically: correcting/creating metadata for the Stonebraker Photograph Collection, over 550 items

The Collection
- William Stonebraker took photographs in Central Idaho’s remote Salmon River and what later became the Frank Church-River of No Return areas between 1900 and 1931.
- Images include the Stonebraker Ranch/homestead in the Chamberlain Basin, his businesses (dude ranch, pack train and dogsled operations, mining, big game hunting) as well as wildlife, scenic views, and early aircraft operation.

Major Issues
- “Both computer screens are too little to sort images.”
- “I know I’ve seen a similar photo before.”
- “This location looks familiar.”

DIY Analog Cards

Creating the Cards
- Printed 35 images per page using jpeg files, including the identifier number, and sliced all images in one hour.

Mix and Match
- Spread all the cards out on a table.
- Invited student workers to examine the cards and to identify patterns and trends such as people, locations, and activities.
- Scrap paper used to write down themes and trends that developed naturally, which changed as we went along.
- Piles could be pushed around as cards were analyzed.
- Cards could be swapped out as new themes emerged/collapsed.

Results

Increased Access and Discoverability
- Use of controlled vocabularies (AAT, TGM, LCSH) allow for subject tag cloud for visual access
- Learning background of collection, Stonebraker, allowed for greater discovery of images by geographic location (many isolated areas in Idaho)

Enhanced Metadata Tells a Better Story
- Rich descriptions provide a compelling narrative for archival collection that lacks background information.
- Discovered Stonebraker was one of the original Idaho homesteaders in this area who constructed a major trail during Idaho’s last mining boom.

Enhanced Metadata Grabs a Larger Audience
- High-level of outreach and engagement with university, community, and state
- Garnished attention of interviews by local TV station nightly news and Boise State Public Radio
- Outreach with USFS to gain additional descriptive metadata

Inspiration: Original Memory Card Game

The Game
- Players take turns trying to pair up matching images lying face down, requiring concentration to remember where cards are located.
- Takes players awhile to learn where cards are located; experience frustration and vindication.
- Instead of struggling on the computer, move this project to a cheap, easy, analog (paper) based solution to improve speed and accuracy of metadata.

Card Sorting Also Helped
- Determine as many geographic locations as possible
- Load individual images into the online Map Room (based on Google Maps, Google Fusion Tables, and lat/long plots)

Visual Literacy Skills
- Students gained ACRL visual literacy skills (interpret and analyze images for contextual information; conduct research for source reliability)
- Students compared notes and talked through determining information from clues.