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Visual resources online

Digital images of primary materials on public Web sites

When searching for images, the Internet is often the first and sometimes only research resource for scholars and educators, but many open-access digital image collections are part of the deep Web, keeping important visual content out of a search engine's reach. In recent years, libraries, archives, and historical societies across the United States have created rich online visual resource collections that include a wealth of subjects and media formats. Researchers now have access to millions of primary materials from any Internet-accessible computer, which would otherwise require an in-person visit to the physical collection.

These vast digital collections created by libraries, historical societies, and other specialized collections have consequently expanded the definition of a visual resources collection. Commonly associated with a format collection consisting of analog surrogates, such as slides and study prints, the definition of a visual resources collection should now be considered in a much broader context, thanks to the possibilities offered by digital technologies. In essence, a visual resources collection is a managed repository of reproductions, or surrogates, of original material for teaching and research, making digital visual resource collections an essential component of digital libraries.

This article describes selected online digital collections created by institutions across the greater United States. Rich in images for study, teaching, and other media projects, these digital collections were notable for their open-access, coverage, organization, quality of images and metadata, and ease-of-use.

Although the collections mentioned in this article may include digital images of primary materials in the public domain or allow images to be reproduced for classroom use and private study without prior permission, most require that the owning repository be properly credited. Any other uses, such as inclusion in a publication or other media project, require permission from the copyright holder and the owning repository.

Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS)

- **IMLS.** Many of the digital collections mentioned below received a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. The IMLS Digital Collections and Content database contains descriptions of the numerable digital resources developed by IMLS grantees. Through this database, it is also possible to carry out federated searching across the hundreds of digital collections that received support from IMLS. Adding "image" to the keyword search will retrieve digital images and their corresponding metadata. *Access:* <http://imlsdcc.grainger.uiuc.edu/>.

Collaborative digital collections

- **Alabama Mosaic.** Initiated by a grant from IMLS, Alabama Mosaic, the Web interface for the Cornerstone Project, features content from libraries, archives and museums from across Alabama. The project's aim is to make historical collections openly accessible

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to researchers through a public Web site. The site allows for browsing by collection name and permits searching across all collections by keyword. Collections may also be searched individually at their native site. Alabama Mosaic provides access to thousands of images. The Alabama Photographs and Picture Collection at the Alabama Department of Archives and History holds close to 5,000 images alone. *Access:* <http://www.alabamamosaic.org/>.

- **Alaska Digital Archives.** Initiated by the Rasmussen Library at the University of Alaska- Fairbanks and now joined by many other Alaskan institutions, including the Consortium Library at the University of Alaska-Anchorage and the Alaska State Library in Juneau, the Alaska Digital Archives presents more than 5,000 quality digital images of Alaska's heritage in a searchable online database. *Access:* <http://vilda.alaska.edu/index.php>.

- **Calisphere.** Developed by the University of California, Calisphere is a free online collection of more than 150,000 digitized primary materials contributed by libraries, archives, and museums from all over California. Supported by the California Digital Library, Calisphere was designed as a response to a need for quality images from educators at all levels. A digital library of multiple formats, Calisphere is a rich resource for digital images. Visitors to the Calisphere Web site may search for content by keyword, by browsing the alphabetized subject list and exploring theme collections, such as the Gold Rush Era and World War II. Lesson plans are also available for elementary and secondary schoolteachers. *Access:* <http://www.calisphere.universityofcalifornia.edu/>.

- **Library of Congress American History and Culture Collections.** Officially launched online in 1994, the Library of Congress digital collections provide access to millions of digitized photographs, manuscripts, maps, sound recordings, motion pictures, and books, as well as born digital primary materials such as Web sites. The American History and Culture Collections, also known as the American Memory Historical Collec-

tions, began as a pilot project in 1990 to provide middle school as well as high school teachers and students with digital surrogates of collection material on CD-ROM. Over the years, the collection has become a "National Digital Library" with diverse institutions from all across the United States contributing content. Rich in imagery, the collection may be searched or browsed by way of alphabetized subject lists, time periods, and geographical locations. American Memory Historical Collections features more than 100 thematic subjects ranging from advertising to maps to women's rights. *Access:* <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/index.html>.

- **Library of Congress International Collections.** The International Collections, accessible through the Library of Congress' Global Gateway provide access to content from American Memory Historical Collections as well as international visual resource collections, such as the Abdul Hamid II collection of photographs of the Ottoman Empire and the Prokudin-Gorskii collection of photographs of the Russian Empire. Additionally, Library of Congress partnered with national libraries in other countries to create the Collaborative Digital Libraries, also available through the Global Gateway. These image-plentiful collections highlight the history of the United States in relation to other nations, such as "France in America" and "The Meeting of Frontiers: Siberia, Alaska and the American West." *Access:* <http://international.loc.gov/intldl/intldlhome.html>.

- **Photomuse.** The George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film and the Institute of Creative Photography collaboratively maintain and contribute to Photomuse, a research resource for the history of photography. One of the richest photography resources on the Web, Photomuse features online exhibitions, a chronology of the evolution of photography complete with visuals and historical information, as well as an image database where visitors to the site may perform simple keyword searches or use the advanced option to target specific fields. *Access:* <http://www.photomuse.org/>.

• **University of Washington Digital Collections.** Comprised of digital content from the University of Washington Libraries, faculty, and departments as well as holdings from other partner institutions in the State of Washington, the University of Washington Digital Collections provide access to tens of thousands of digital images covering a wide variety of subjects. With an emphasis on the Pacific Northwest, the digital collections include image-heavy resources, such as the J. Willis Sayre Photographs of actors, vaudeville performers, and movie stills; the Washington Women's History Consortium Fashion Plate Collection; the Dearborn-Massar Photographs of Architecture; and the Seattle Photographs Collection. *Access:* <http://content.lib.washington.edu/index.html>.

University digital image collections

• **Duke Digital Collections.** Founded in 1995, the Duke University Libraries' Digital Collections have amassed impressive digital image holdings from various collections. Subjects cover an array of national and international subjects. While the database allows for federated keyword searching across the featured collections, other collections must be browsed by subject or through the alphabetized list of collection names. Featured collections are freely available on the Internet and include the Emergence of Advertising in America, Ration Coupons on the Home Front (1942–1945), and the 50,000 item William Gedney Photographs and Writings collection. *Access:* <http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/>.

• **Harvard University Library: A Selection of Web-Accessible Collections.** This site provides access to a list of visual resource collections that are unique to Harvard University, but reside in different repositories on the Harvard campus. Collections include, the Harvard Daguerreotype Collection, the Hedda Morrison Photographs of China, Immigration to the United States (1789–1930), Legal Portraits Online, and the Latin American Pamphlet Digital Collection. In order to search the collections' contents, each collection must be accessed separately from this page. Some collections

require that searching be performed in the Harvard University Libraries' library catalog or the Visual Information Access System (VIA), a union catalog of digital images that are either owned or licensed by Harvard. In addition to offering cross-collection searching, thumbnail images and cataloging information may be accessed by anyone with Internet access using VIA. *Access:* <http://digitalcollections.harvard.edu/>.

• **Yale University Library Digital Collections.** More than 100,000 digital images are accessible through the homepage for the Yale University Library Digital Collections. Although some subscription databases are not accessible to the public, content belonging to the collections at Yale University is searchable and viewable by the public. Visitors to the site may search for images across featured collections by using the basic or advanced search options, or they may browse collections by name, topic, medium, or by the owning repository, which include the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the Cushing/Whitney Medical Library, and the Law Library. *Access:* <http://www.library.yale.edu/libraries/digcoll.html>.

Digital image collections at public libraries and archives

• **Historical Photograph Collections at the Arizona State Archives.** The Arizona History and Archives Division of the Arizona State Archives has placed 33,000 digital images online of primary materials from the historical photograph collections. Most of the photographs available through the public online database date to before 1940 and include examples of all types of photographic processes, including tintypes, glass lantern slides, and photographic postcards. The database permits searching by subject, place, photographer, description, and date. *Access:* <http://photos.lib.az.us/index.cfm>.

• **Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Online Catalog.** A pathfinder to more than 1 million digital images, the online catalog of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division is one of the largest digital image databases in the world. Freely

accessible online, researchers may search for images representing a vast selection of subjects and primary media by keyword, by browsing lists of alphabetized subjects, or by choosing a collection and looking through individual image records. *Access:* <http://www.loc.gov/r/print/catalog.html>.

- **Los Angeles Public Library.** With more than 60,000 images online, the Los Angeles Public Library's Photo Collection Database is a noteworthy source of images for Los Angeles' cultural history. The collection features the work of many notable photographers active in the Los Angeles area over many decades. In fact, contemporary photographers have recently contributed content. Many images were cataloged by local history enthusiasts and have deep (almost narrative) descriptive metadata. Visitors to the site may search by keyword or photographer. Searches may be limited by date. The site also allows visitors to save images using the personal list option. The personal list is also a functionality of the library catalog; therefore, both images and bibliographic records will be saved to the same list. *Access:* <http://www.lapl.org/>.

- **New York Public Library Digital Gallery.** Launched in 2005, the NYPL Digital Gallery is one of the largest open-access image databases available on the Internet. Featuring more than 600,000 digital images, content covers a variety of subjects from the arts to science and technology and includes all kinds of primary materials, such as manuscripts, maps, photographs, prints, restaurant menus, sheet music covers, and much more from the special collections of the NYPL Research Libraries and the Mid-Manhattan Library Picture Collection. The Digital Gallery offers basic and advanced searches and also allows users to browse alphabetized lists of names, subjects, and libraries. As an added enhancement, users may select and store around 50 or more images for later viewing using the "selections" option. *Access:* <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/index.cfm>.

Digital image collections at historical societies

- **Indiana Historical Society.** The William Henry Smith Memorial Library at the

Indiana Historical Society has placed more than 34,000 digital images of primary materials from its collections on the society's public Web site. This extensive collection, covering topics ranging from architecture to railroads to sporting events, may be searched by clicking on the link to the online catalog and choosing the "images" option. The database allows visitors to the site to search by keyword and limit results to certain collections. *Access:* <http://opac.indianahistory.org/>.

- **Wisconsin Historical Society.** The public Web site of the Wisconsin Historical Society is a valuable visual resource for Wisconsin history. Visitors to the site may browse the 35,000 photographs captured in the Wisconsin Historical Images database or the virtual collections of the Wisconsin Historical Museum. Of special interest is the Wisconsin Historical Museum's Children's Clothing Collection where visitors may browse images of more than 2,000 articles of children's clothing dating back to the 18th century. The site also maintains a list of links to other digital resources related to Wisconsin history. *Access:* <http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/>.

Other initiatives

- **The Library of Congress Photo-stream** on Flickr. In 2007, the Library of Congress' Prints and Photographs Division contributed more than 3,000 images to Flickr, the photo-sharing social-networking Web site. The Library of Congress thus became the flagship partner for the site's project known as The Commons, which aims to increase exposure to public image collections housed at civic institutions around the world and to facilitate knowledge about the collections. Visitors to the site are free to apply social tags to the images and comment on them. As of January 2008, about 70 of the Library of Congress' images had been identified by Flickr users. Other collections will be joining The Commons project. *Access:* http://www.flickr.com/photos/Library_of_Congress. ♪