

# FOLLOWING A TRAIL OF TIN CANS: ARCHIVAL ENGAGEMENT, “TIN CAN TOURISM,” AND THE INTERNET LIFE OF HISTORICAL IMAGES

BY JOSHUA COBBS YOUNGBLOOD

**ABSTRACT:** Archives routinely mount exhibits to promote collection strengths, to bring attention to newly acquired or processed collections, educational resources, and programs; and to showcase innovative research. The digitized archival objects institutions share online also enhance access to collections. Once released, those objects enter a flow of information beyond the control of the archivists who selected them. This study considers digitized images related to the historical phenomenon of “tin can tourism” to examine how archival objects, digital exhibition and contextualization, and reuse by web-based patrons inform public history discourse. By examining a digital exhibit published by the Florida Memory Program, this study looks at how the archival objects determined by curators to be worth featuring are then understood and utilized by constituents and subsequently interpreted in contexts separate from the collections in which they originated. The study also considers the relevance of social media in promoting archival collections and the role of exhibited objects in discussions by online communities apart from the curatorial oversight of the archives that made them available.

## *Introduction*

A century ago, car-loving Americans, many from the northern and midwestern states, began to use new highways, tourist camps, and their shared interest in travel to form new communities with other people from around the nation they encountered as they journeyed south. Those “tin can tourists” drove their automobiles, modified to allow for roadside camping and to carry food and supplies, down the “Dixie Highway” and other routes in search of sunshine and adventure while retaining their newly discovered freedom of mobility. Today, Internet-based self-publishing outlets and social media forums are facilitating public discourse around mutual interests in historical subjects. Archival images—often freely accessible and able to be shared and used to

create nonprofessional, albeit primary-resource–based historical interpretations—are informing new virtual communities that echo historic tourist associations.<sup>1</sup>

The Florida Memory Program released the digital photo exhibit, *Tin Can Tourism*, on its website September 20, 2011. The program intended the exhibit to encourage engagement with obscure images and other resources available through its online digital repository and to spur discussion about this historical topic explored by both museums and popular histories of the state’s tourism legacy. The online exhibit also influenced public discussion of the history of camper tourism in ways the program did not anticipate.

Digital exhibiting allows archivists to participate in the democratization of archival holdings by both making digital surrogates more readily available and by allowing users to interpret archival objects outside the control of holding institutions. By promoting digital access to high-quality surrogates, archivists determine how much description and curatorial contextualization to provide in the form of metadata and exhibition narrative. They also accept that greater digital access means a loss of control over how archival objects are used and understood. This study examines the intersection between the capacity of digital representations to enhance online access and the production of public history using digitized archival objects, often beyond curatorial control. That intersection also underscores the valuable role played by archivists, particularly those willing to share high-quality surrogates, in facilitating broadly defined historical interpretation through contextualized digital images.

In this dynamic age of social media, examples abound of decontextualized images embarking on evolutionary development away from their origins: look at any of the countless memes made from snagged images or GIFs that, once posted to Twitter, Reddit, or other sites, almost instantaneously take on lives of their own. The image-sharing, social media platform Flickr has facilitated the sharing of massive amounts of archival material with people around the world, far afield from the regular constituents served by reading rooms and remote reference services. Since the exhibit discussed here was released, the major repositories involved expanded their open-access initiatives through Flickr and other platforms. This article does not suggest a need for forensic drudgery in the interest of control. Rather, it suggests means archivists can employ to embrace their role as shepherds of digitized historic images and other representations of objects from their collections whose meanings are more malleable and subject to democratized interpretation as a consequence of successful archival advocacy. By providing robust metadata and strong narrative framing when needed, archivists can contribute their professional expertise and subject knowledge, needed now more than ever, to facilitate the well-informed and accurate use of digitized images and other archival objects by a growing and increasingly unrestrained body of users.

This study also investigates the tensions between public access and archival authority encountered by curators of unique and often undiscovered collections held by public institutions. When is it the archivist’s, librarian’s, or other curator’s responsibility to advocate for a particular subject, while adding scholarly interpretation to the presentation of that material? Or should they instead always allow larger intellectual debate and patron concerns to dictate development of outreach and access programs? In *Archives and the Public Good*, Richard Cox and David Wallace included studies of archives

and memory in an edited collection of work by archivists on the social importance of protecting and sharing public records. This topic will continue to require careful attention as electronic record keeping and record sharing evolve into the future. Writing still relatively early in the life of the Internet, before YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, Cox and Wallace advised, “The kinds of concerns raised by man about the reliability of records in electronic information systems long predate the emergence of computers, but they have existed since writing and record-keeping systems first emerged.” The historical memory of tin can tourism does not approach the significance, in terms of social justice and archival responsibility, as topics such as the Holocaust, American foreign policy secrecy, and the destruction of state records by the outgoing apartheid regime of South Africa. But images and documents available for discovery and dissemination on the Internet will inform public understanding of historical issues.<sup>2</sup> The use of tin can tourism digital surrogates examined here highlights a case when curatorial choices exercised by an archivist resulted in greater historical understanding, in addition to wider awareness, of available resources.

### *Florida’s Archival Images Online*

Florida, the historical destination of millions of car-traveling American vacationers for generations, has made a massive number of historical images available through a free, publicly funded program. Through grant funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Sciences (IMLS), the State Archives of Florida since 1997 has utilized the Florida Memory Program (FMP) to engage the citizens of the state and people around the world with photographic, archival, and historic materials collected by the state’s archives and other heritage and culture programs.<sup>3</sup> FMP seeks to make hidden collections better known and draw attention to the collections of the State Library and Archives to promote use by researchers at all levels, from elementary school students to professional scholars and government officials. Its holdings of state records, political collections, family manuscript collections, Florida-related rare books, limited-run published volumes, and other collections represent valuable and substantial bodies of records for academic researchers and lay patrons alike. The photographic collections of the State Library and Archives contain more than a million images, of which more than 200,000 are available in an easily accessible and fully searchable digital repository.<sup>4</sup>

Within the State Archives of Florida’s photographic collections, however, are images and documents more representative of curiosity or oddity than of corpuses suitable for large-scale historical or scholarly research. Some of those incorporated into the online photographic database have been included because of the interests of individual staff members and other contributors. The digital project includes other objects as a result of routine digitization efforts without thorough, or any, curatorial assessment. As a result, seemingly lone archival images and loosely related selections drawn by staff from the photographic collections are readily discoverable through FMP. Such

images are often so decontextualized or isolated as archival objects, and only occasionally happened upon through the program's discovery platform by patrons, as to represent little historical value, at least for scholarly projects. However, as public history resources, particularly those available to users in remote locations around the world through online access, seemingly isolated historical images can successfully engage people in further browsing and discovery. They can promote the collections for deeper, more dedicated research endeavors. If they are sometimes unusual or bizarre to people unfamiliar with their historical context, they can sometimes be even more effective in bringing attention to obscure subjects.

The *Tin Can Tourism* digital exhibit presents 73 images already available in the FMP photograph database in a simple, four-page design. The images are arranged thematically: "Highways in the Sun" (an introduction and overview of the history), "The Tin Can Tourists and Early Camper Culture," "The Golden Age of Camping," and "From Campers to Trailer Parks." As of March 1, 2013, the original photo exhibit hosted on the Florida Memory site had received upwards of 10,000 views in just less than two years' time. "Of those, the first page received 4,500 views with fewer views on each of the subsequent pages."<sup>5</sup> Two years later the exhibit still receives more than 600 views per month.

Some months after FMP published the digital project, the program began adding the same images to an album in its Flickr Commons project. Flickr Commons is a social media partnership between Flickr photo-sharing web company and repositories of historical photographs from around the world that allows users to access archival images from a myriad of sources, to use them freely, and even to repurpose them through commons licensing. Importantly, the partnership also allows repositories with intellectual control of the images to provide the content accompanied by appropriate description and metadata while soliciting the public to engage with images, many of which they would never otherwise utilize.<sup>6</sup>

Florida Memory was the first state archives in the United States to join the Flickr Commons project pioneered by the Library of Congress in 2008.<sup>7</sup> As of March 2013, the FMP main page on Flickr Commons had received more than 2,500 visits, and individual images had been viewed as many as 1,600 times. Florida Memory also has featured the *Tin Can Tourism* exhibit on its Twitter feed and on its Facebook page. While those numbers are not staggering, especially compared to other areas of the program's digital efforts such as folk songs that receive millions of visits annually, they mark an impressive number of uses of otherwise obscure archival materials.

Many of the images in the exhibit are from the Tin Can Tourists of the World Collection held by the State Archives of Florida. The exhibit also came to include images from the Commerce Collection, which contains thousands of images created over decades by state programs promoting tourism, industry, and other state-sponsored initiatives. A few images also originated in the general photographic reference collection maintained by the archives.

### *Tin Can Tourism: A Brief History*

The Tin Can Tourists (TCT) Association began as a loosely organized group of highway travelers at Desoto Park in Tampa, Florida, in 1919. The group grew quickly into a thriving social organization complete with fraternal rituals, camp rules, and annual events. The debate continues to this day over the origins of the group's name. As explained on the Florida Memory Program site:

Some have suggested that it refers to the campers' reliance upon canned foods. Others have asserted the name refers to the small Ford automobile of the era, the Model T or "Tin Lizzie," which was a popular and affordable automobile option among middle class Americans from which the majority of T.C.T. members came. The modified automobile driven by tin can tourists often included large metal barrels for carrying water attached on the vehicles' exteriors. The original recognition emblem of the T.C.T. was a tin can soldered to the radiator cap of a member's car.<sup>8</sup>

The brief history of the organization in the text of the exhibit goes on to say that TCT usually held a summer meeting in Michigan each year, while a winter meeting was held at a campground in Florida "in various places, including Tampa, Sarasota, Ocala, and Eustis." The meetings provided social opportunities, a venue for formal club business, and exhibits by "manufacturers of trailers, mobile homes, and camping gear." Vendor exhibiting continued when meetings resumed after a brief hiatus during World War II.



*Tin can tourist camp, Gainesville, Florida, c. 1920s. Image PR01242, Print Collections, State Archives of Florida.*

Although really a loose confederation of local and regional clubs, the association's stated aim was to provide members "with safe and clean camping areas, wholesome entertainment, and high moral values."<sup>9</sup> By the end of the 1930s, the TCT estimated membership numbers as high as 100,000 people in the United States. Over five decades, local associations began across the United States and in many other nations. Although some cities in Florida, including Tampa, and other parts of the American South expressed resistance to the influx of northern tourists, other Florida cities such as Arcadia actively recruited the tourists, establishing special camping parks for them.

Despite its rapid initial growth, by the 1960s, TCT membership was declining steadily. The TCT as it exists today acknowledges 1968 as the last year for an official convention and suggests that the association was basically nonexistent by the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> While membership in the TCT waned during the middle of the twentieth century, Florida increasingly became a center for the tourist industry. With the opening of Disney World, decades of population growth, the development of ever-more sophisticated roadside attractions, and the growth of South Florida's resort communities, tourism replaced citrus as the state's chief industry. Florida's population rapidly expanded as well, and as suburban sprawl spread throughout the state, many of the new residential areas resembled the tourist camps of years past, often largely consisting of temporary housing units.

Beginning in the late 1990s, TCT organizations experienced a resurgence around the United States and in other nations such as Australia. With a vibrant web presence, numerous annual meetings, and active outreach, TCT members now not only have thriving organizational outlets for their fascination with automobile history and leisure travel, but are also actively engaged in the public history of those interests. Internet social networking through listservs, blogs, and social media has allowed the TCT to re-emerge even more decentralized than before.

### *Literature Review and Theory*

Several recent studies note that historians and other researchers utilizing archival materials are increasingly relying on those available online.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, the librarian and archivist have an even greater responsibility to ensure that the digital resources available online faithfully represent the historical resources. Archivists and librarians endeavor to do this through best practices such as including both item- and collection-level information so that users can understand the resources contextually. Their role as arbiters of historical value is increasing, even as their professional concerns about privileging certain items or subject subareas, as well as decontextualization and metadata integrity, persist. At the same time, individuals and communities—physical and virtual—are actively engaged in shaping their own historical narratives and cultural identities through the use of readily available imaging hardware and ever-expanding options for online publishing and social media. Public, governmental, and academic libraries and archives increasingly use online exhibits and digitized collections to promote resources, many of which will be discovered at the item level. As Zhang and Mauney have written recently in "When Archival Description Meets Digital Object

Metadata,” archivists and librarians are facing a growing need to ensure that archival objects are contextualized in the expanding digital world.<sup>12</sup>

Digitized historical resources allow communities to define their own identities on the Internet. Ann Denkler, in her 2007 work, *Sustaining Identity*, argued that communities that consciously shape their cultural landscapes through historic sites and monuments are able to maintain closer ties to their histories and cultural identities.<sup>13</sup> Members of those communities make choices to promote specific aspects of their shared cultural identities. However, those foregrounded cultural identities can be contested by other, often minority, members of the communities whose identities and stories are not central to the dominant narratives, such as African Americans in communities that strongly promote the heroism of Confederates during the Civil War.

Carl Abbott, a Portland State University professor of urban history, published “How Scanners Democratize History,” a very optimistic take on the use of digital technology and discovery databases by historians—professional and amateur alike—in the American Historical Association’s *Perspectives on History*.<sup>14</sup> All practitioners of archival outreach and public history can agree on his point that readily available archival images greatly enhance the richness and accessibility of historical content, whether meant for public presentation, in lecturing, or in writing. Abbott asserted, “The availability of images is a great equalizer that smooths the disconnect between academic and popular approaches.” Abbott rightly pointed out the ease with which family and other historians can now self-publish on the Internet and generate their digital archives of personal and other materials. The democratized digital production of archival materials, in some ways similar to the legions of volunteers that have enabled the Library of Congress and other institutions to undertake large-scale scanning projects, is increasing not only the number but the diversity of objects and perspectives.

One response to Abbott’s enthusiasm, however, is that while we are experiencing a liberalization of the field of digitized historical resources, the balance of resources used and the authority of the sources remain areas of concern for archivists and other custodians committed to maintaining intellectual authority. Encouraging more people to “play in the fields of history” is a wonderful goal, but the biases created by content selection on the institutional side and by the decontextualization of materials complicates the growing number of historical narratives created by expanded public discourse. In looking at the questions of selection, representations, and interpretation, Frank Ankersmit’s distinction between historical interpretations and representation is useful. In *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation*, Ankersmit delved into a concept that every curator and host of an online exhibit of archival objects has contended with, even if less directly than he does in theorizing the role of the historian in presenting text.<sup>15</sup> Whether digital curators want to or not, they grapple with the problems that confront postmodern historiography, including institutional controls, authority, data integrity, and audience.

James Opp has studied the effect digital projects, like all archival and investigative treatments, have in augmenting the meaning of the objects. In his 2008 article, “The Colonial Legacies of the Digital Archive,” Opp argued for the need to reconnect material history with the digital surrogates. “Digital collections, despite their recent appearance and explosive growth, carry within them the fragments and shrapnel of earlier archival

transformations.”<sup>16</sup> Opp examined the vestiges of colonialism evident in photographic metadata as seen in the database that provides access to the James Lupson collection of photographs of First Nations people housed at the Glenbow Museum. The impact of digitized collections of archival materials on user experience remains an area requiring further investigation by information science analysts. As Paul Conway and Ricardo Punzalan stated in 2011, how we study user experience and consequently, “how users extract meaning from digital surrogates of photographic archives are not well understood.”<sup>17</sup> By employing the literature of visual literacy, Conway and Punzalan offered a theory dubbed “fields of vision” that provides archivists a way of measuring impact by observing user experience first-hand.

Archivists make available photographic images that have intrinsic meaning and that may be accessed and manipulated (represented and interpreted) by historians and other users. A debate persists, even decades and millions of digitized images later, over the efficacy of providing digital surrogates of objects that closely, almost exactly, represent the original objects.<sup>18</sup> The democratization of access to realistic representations of archival objects exacerbates a growing separation between the user and the actual material holdings of archives. While much of the content of the objects is accessible, the archival context is not.

Conway and Puzalan’s study looked at high-level users of digital photograph collections, focusing on the types of products they produced, the rigor of their research methods, and their affiliations. In earlier studies, Conway looked at different levels of users. The literature examining the relationships among online exhibiting, patron use and archival practice, and public history and physical exhibiting is relatively recent and scattered. Arjun Sabharwal, in “Digital Representation of Disability History,”



*House car named “Harriet” at Tin Can Tourists Association Convention, Arcadia, Florida, January 10, 1929. Image N028617, General Collection, State Archives of Florida.*



examined the thematic, structural, and semantic dimensions of developing a virtual exhibit, including how the archivists' need to reach patrons influences the selection of themes and construction.<sup>19</sup> While they are vital to outreach, virtual exhibits must address several understandings of accessibility. This point was particularly well made by Sabharwal in his description of planning and executing an exhibit on disability history. He pointed out the need for archival description to be extended to exhibits. "The practice of historical writing and archival description are not identical but are mutually informative."<sup>20</sup> This must be done so that objects can be more grounded within their virtual structures.

Measured by the guidelines set forth by Sabharwal, the FMP photographic database and generative exhibits are reasonably well established in terms of accessibility. The photographic database is an easily and intuitively used resource for which all virtually exhibited items are well connected, albeit through static structures, to their descriptive contexts. That is to say that the connections are in place until efforts such as social media distribution and release via external media loosen authority control.

Archivists must contend with the inherent "link" between digital exhibiting and advocacy. R. V. Roberto, in "A Critical Look at Online Exhibitions: When Creating One Resource Is More Effective than the Other," examined the suitability of materials chosen for online exhibiting, distinguishing between online exhibiting and educational resources or collections. Focusing on resources developed for the 2007 bicentennial of the British Empire's abolition of slavery, Roberto found that institutions developed sites for many reasons, including promoting themselves (using the opportunity offered



*Tin Can Tourists Association Convention, Arcadia, Florida, 1953. N028602, General Collection, State Archives of Florida.*

by the anniversary), exploring large or small portions of their collections, or applying political opinion or language to the larger public discussion.<sup>21</sup> Roberto concluded, not surprisingly, that “Not any original material kept in museums, archives, or library special collections will be suitable or automatically provide enough inspiration to make a good online exhibition.”

### *The Curatorial Problem*

Archivists and other custodians of digitized historical objects are actively participating in the democratization of archival resources. Communities use digitized resources to establish new identities, although they provide the resources at widely varying levels of scan quality and description. Sometimes the holding institution and practitioners with subject expertise contextualize those resources, and sometimes they do not. In the collections of the State Archives of Florida, the collecting and descriptive predilections of the previous generations are certainly in evidence. The TCT collections, like the Museum of Florida History exhibit that influenced the later FMP digital exhibit, show a romantic connection to tin can tourism and, with that, the interest of Florida agencies in preserving and promoting the state’s long history as a tourist destination. The landscape of digitized historical resources witnesses the use of greater means of shaping, and contesting, community identities. Items shared online by lay users are produced at various levels of scan quality with infinitely varied types of description. They then immediately enter a flow of exchange that very quickly can separate those items from their origins through cascading generations of duplication and repurposing. So, while the number and variety of objects is remarkable, and the options of access and dispersal are greater than ever, custodians of historical images confront a growing confusion of historical meaning, context, and archival authority.

Selecting, describing, and sharing archival images, documents, and other sources require an interpretation of the materials, as well as assignment of meaning, even as the librarian or archivist strives to use digital media to provide representations of archival objects that are as accurate as possible. This remains true even as the sophistication and output of digital archives have grown exponentially over the past decade and more.<sup>22</sup> A separation still exists between the reasons and methods for database creation and design and the actual uses and search strategies used by recipients of that work. The responsibility remains for the archivist and rare materials librarian to promote the accessibility as well as the relevance of the collections. The concern raised by dematerialization is certainly at play in the dynamics of tin can tourism images, many of which entered a stream of Internet media where the objects themselves moved farther and farther from their archival context.

The loosening of authority control takes place even as the digitized objects become more engaged in public discourse. The *Tin Can Tourism* exhibit itself is exceedingly simple, based on a nondynamic style sheet design with data copied from, and then hyperlinked to, database records. Even so, it is also a selection that is inherently biased toward certain segments of the collections represented in the photographic database, based on previous work, prior interest, and scholarly perception. Much of the success,

it turns out, depended on the effectiveness of design or the understanding of the audience. For archival institutions, exhibitions are advocacy at least in one form or another, and that reality should inform the selection and development of projects.

After hatching the initial idea for the *Tin Can Tourism* exhibit, FMP of course conducted research for curation of the exhibit in the available historical literature to supplement the available archival information. Meanwhile, FMP's curators chose objects to include content and a thematic thrust designed to correlate with a permanent physical exhibit at a sister institution, the Museum of Florida History.<sup>23</sup> Since the exhibit opened on the FMP website, the Old Florida State Capitol Museum used it as one of the bases for a temporary physical installation. Subsequently, the reformulated Tin Can Tourist Association obtained that physical exhibit, with the text and images from the initial digital project, for a touring exhibit, and the content has been the basis for other digital media treatments.

The exhibit communicates a historical thesis through images specifically chosen to appeal to a wide audience, including people without any understanding of tin can tourism as a historical concept. It also aims to speak to those very familiar with the subject, and who might be motivated by the digital exhibit to pursue deeper historical investigation. In curating the exhibit, FMP developed an underlying historical thesis: the opening of highways to southern states during the second decade of the twentieth century brought increased access to unique and obscure Florida sites while also shaping urban development and material culture among newly permanent residents of the state. The thesis guided the development of the exhibit, which was designed in part to appeal to constituents assumed to be less interested in historical nuance than in celebrating the Tin Can Tourist Association and its personal connections, recreation, or passing affinity for tourist camps and campers in Florida. FMP's staff historian served as curator and so constructed the underlying thesis for the project. The historian relied in part on kitschy and engaging images related to the lighthearted topic as a more effective means to convey historical analysis to a wide audience.



*Young tin can tourist Michael Sadler at camp, Dead Lakes, Florida, 1947. Image C006771, Department of Commerce, State Archives of Florida.*

Public archival and library institutions often charge curators with the task of making materials and cultural resources accessible and comprehensible to the lay public. This task creates the dual responsibilities of applying scholarly analysis and creating products appropriate for the wider public. Grabowski and others have shown the importance of exhibits for archives to grow their user bases and to publicize collections for researchers. Exhibits also educate researchers and the general public about the importance of an archives' collecting efforts and the social benefit of archival institutions.<sup>24</sup> Digital collections, of course, allow innumerable ways of taking on that responsibility. The FMP digital exhibit was produced in an attempt to use curious—though marginally significant—photographic and archival materials already available as digital objects to engage the public while also investigating deeper historical and cultural themes. While the positive response to a commemoration of the tin can tourists was expected, a wider engagement with the thematic arrangement of the materials was not.

Scholarly inquiry in other disciplines also influenced the thesis of the exhibit, including the work of architectural theorist Charlie Hailey and his discussion of how people express themselves by the places they occupy and shape through their occupation. In *Campsite Architecture and the Duration of Place*, Hailey focused on the evolution of spaces in Florida, which has been subject to transitory settlement for millennia.<sup>25</sup> The work is not a definitive treatment of campsite history, as Hailey is far more concerned with cultural discourse and the permeable definitions of place, community, architecture, and campsite. Hailey's historical treatment of the issues and periods touched on in his book are incomplete at times.<sup>26</sup> However, his theoretical consideration uses Florida for its setting. The connection he provides between campsites and the emergence of very real cities in modern Florida helped establish an architecture for the exhibit, so to speak. In addition, Hailey's discussion of certain cultural tensions in the state—such as the utilization of mobility in settlement development—helped inform a selection of historical representations from the digital holdings that was both appropriate for public consumption and a challenge to the public to think critically about historical issues.<sup>27</sup>

Hailey also touched on the transitory nature of settlement and the similarities it shares with virtual communities. This dual existence of campsite creation is interesting with regard to the tin can tourists, of course. Since the decline of the organization, members began to occupy virtual settlements through a growing web presence they inhabited via public memory and mutually developed popular narratives, personal stories, discussion forums, and images. Some of those images are historical, while many more document the re-creation of TCT associations and belonging through their rehabilitation of old vehicles and renewed public gatherings. The historical line, very loosely drawn from Hailey, between vacation campers and urban development and trailer communities in Florida is not represented in the histories presented by TCT members. Rather, it is a historical narrative that permits more images from the databases to provide richer historical significance. It allows those images to inhabit a more significant place in historical context even while their archival context is maintained though accompanying descriptive data.



*Hollywood on the Ocean Front, Hollywood, Florida, June 1950. Image C006771, Department of Commerce, State Archives of Florida.*

Florida has been profoundly affected by tourism and the self-identification of locales as tourist destinations not exclusively occupied by permanent residents. The absence of cultural unity is at the core of many Florida communities. Although there are Florida cities and neighborhoods with strong architectural character, from older resort locations on the Panhandle and the northeastern coast to old urban areas such as Tampa, the cultural landscape is more often characterized by evolution, impermanence, rapid development, class divisions, and spatial negotiations between tourists, residents, and itinerant laborers. Tin can tourism epitomized the transitory nature of Florida's residents and its fluid communities.

### ***Where the Digital Exhibit "Traveled" Next***

Historical interest in Florida tourism has grown in recent years. *Sunshine Paradise*, by Tracy Revels, published in 2011, looks at the long arc of tourist development in the state. In 2012, an entire panel at the annual meeting of the Florida Historical Society looked at tin can tourism. That academic interest parallels the growing public interest in the history. The availability of digitized materials, including objects from FMP, has also fueled a democratized exploration of the subject by the lay public.

A few months after the release of the TCT digital exhibit, the Florida Historic Capitol Museum included the digital exhibit and select physical prints as part of the promotion of its program *Traveling to Paradise: Tin Can Tourists on Parade*. That exhibit featured restored trailers on the capitol lawn and was presented in conjunction with an exhibit in the museum itself, *Remembering Paradise: Souvenirs of Historic Florida Attractions*.<sup>28</sup> The information in the FMP digital exhibit informed item selection for the physical exhibit, and the Capitol Museum promoted the work of the Department of State as a concurrent partnership. Interactions with the modern TCT, locally and nationally, also strongly influenced that exhibit programing.

Publicity for the Historic Capitol Museum program featured historical background provided by FMP and photographs printed for the standing exhibit. In addition to linking to the digital exhibit on the FMP with a description of its “short historical narrative” and numerous images, many of the images were used in a self-standing exhibit on the Florida Historic Capitol website. After the success of the museum programming and the publicity garnered by the featuring of tin can history by the Historic Capitol Museum, the national TCT Association informed the Florida Memory Program about plans to use the images and text originally provided through the FMP photo exhibit for a touring physical exhibit.

Furthermore, staff members at FMP have reported how other libraries supported by the State Library used the opportunity to post images on Facebook and used the *Tin Can Tourism* exhibit as content for various social media endeavors. FMP has also used the exhibit as one of many topics populating its Twitter and Facebook feeds. The digital exhibiting and social media promotion eventually led to the use of the images and text by a newspaper in the United Kingdom. The online edition of the *Daily Mail UK* published an extensive article about the tin can tourists and the images held at the archives. All of the content and images included in the online newspaper edition were taken from the digital exhibit and, for a time, usage statistics for the photo exhibit increased substantially.<sup>29</sup>

Not all repurposing of digitized archival images is so transparent or easy to trace. TCT maintains a wiki where members and other contributors can provide images and contribute to the historical narrative.<sup>30</sup> The wiki includes numerous images (largely unaccredited) from the FMP website. Many of those images were also used in the original digital exhibit. The history on the wiki is much more substantial than that provided by the FMP project and draws from user contributions and the research of site managers. Despite its breadth, much of the material is available from other sources, and nearly all is unsourced. Significant portions predate the online exhibit created by FMP. However, several of the images were lifted from the FMP photo database either before or after the program began promoting the holdings. (While the wiki managers suggest that the images are held under a Creative Commons license, the State Archives of Florida, for one, would appreciate credits.) The use of images and content on sites such as TinCanTourists.com influenced other sites to include images, usually credited back to that website, instead of to the repository with the original records.

In contrast, the Hemmings Daily website of vintage car news included the images and text from the Florida Memory Project with context provided. In fact, they were lifted directly from the original content, with credit given and quotations indicated.<sup>31</sup>

The TampaPix website, last edited in July 2009, features a more robust, independently researched history of tin can tourism, which includes images from the FMP site as well as images from Burgert Brothers photographic archives of the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library.<sup>32</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The history provided through the TCT organizations' online efforts, personal blogs and sites, and other digital representations provides factual and personal discussions of the people, places, and chronology involved. However, the relevance within a broader historical narrative is either not addressed or is obscured by disparate data. Meanwhile, the invisible chain of informational sources perpetuates unverified—however democratically generated—historical narratives. That said, the FMP exhibit itself and other online efforts by the State Library and Archives of Florida do not emphasize historical citation, as the historical information provided is so widely available. Nevertheless, a tension exists between the archival content being promoted and the unsubstantiated publications in which it has been used. The images—the actual historical objects provided—make those representations more substantial, in large part because of the authority they convey, even if the origins of that authoritative content remain unacknowledged.

Another tension for projects such *Tin Can Tourism* arises between allowing discovery of digitized collections by researchers and promoting specific items and collections through “historical representation.” Collecting and describing images for the purpose of exhibiting interrupts the process of researcher discovery. However, the prompt to access collections no doubt allows new users to further their inquiries into the available materials.

This project clearly achieved the goal of getting original content into public discourse despite the obvious concerns for control over the chain of information provided for free and promoted by a state institution. So what is the impact of the digital outreach on public understanding of the history of tin can tourism in Florida? How are the scholarly and administrative choices of archivists and digital curators influencing public understanding of—or even the creation of public interest in—historical issues? Beyond influencing the decisions made by scholarly researchers, which archivists and librarians do every day through their professional service, the creation of digital projects can spur new popular interpretations. Interested constituent groups seize upon these initiatives to push their own representations into other media that can influence the programming of nonprofit groups and voluntary associations. But that's not necessarily a bad thing.

The case of the Otho Granford Shoup photograph is interesting to reflect upon.<sup>33</sup> Considering the paucity of data associated with many archival images, much is actually known about this one. The image was taken between 1923 and 1925 in Gainesville, Florida, and, significantly, the TCT “Royal Chief” is identified by name. That data is available in the archival record provided by the FMP. Unfortunately, as the engaging image has been re-represented, that data failed to follow along. Despite available descriptive data, the image as it was repurposed on multiple websites is reduced to



*Otho Granford Shoup at Gainesville, c. 1925. Image PR01241, Print Collections, State Archives of Florida.*

merely an interesting depiction of a self-titled TCT chief. Many viewers could use context clues to discern a date range of the 1920s, but, beyond that, the independent blogs and amateur history sites where images like this one appear provide little information to encourage a deeper user experience. Revived interest in tin can tourism, spurred by objects like that image, however, will lead to further patron research. That researcher interest can occur even if the content-enriching information provided in the metadata in the original digital context does not greet a new set of users when they first encountered the object.

Archivists have to bear in mind that exhibiting, online or otherwise, represents advocacy for certain collections or intellectual perspectives. Given that responsibility, they must acknowledge that meanings that attach to archival objects they make available are largely beyond their control.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, archivists and others responsible for making unique image and text collections digitally accessible still must provide contextual environments and archival authority whenever possible to make informed historical analysis more achievable for the amazing variety of users now accessing archival objects like historical images in digital environments. They must do what they can so that those traveling objects sent out along the digital highways can find their ways home again.



**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** Joshua Youngblood is research and outreach services librarian for the Special Collections of the University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. Previously he served as archives historian for the Florida Memory Program of the State Library and Archives of Florida. Youngblood holds an MA in history from Florida State University and is a member of the Academy of Certified Archivists.

## NOTES

1. An earlier version of the paper, "Tin Can Tourism in Florida and Engaging the Public through Digital Exhibiting," was presented at the 2013 Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association Annual Conference, Washington, DC.
2. Richard J. Cox and David A. Wallace, *Archives and the Public Good: Accountability and Records in Modern Society* (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 2002), 10.
3. For more information on the Florida Memory Program and its role as a leader in digitization of special collections and archival material, see Nancy L. Maron, "Florida Folklife Collection, State Archives of Florida," part of the series, "Searching for Sustainability: Strategies from Eight Digitized Special Collections," *Ithaka S+R* (November 20, 2013).
4. Florida Memory, Division of Library and Information Services, Florida Department of State, accessed May 8, 2015, [www.FloridaMemory.com](http://www.FloridaMemory.com).
5. Google Analytics data provided by the Florida Memory Program, March 15, 2013.
6. For an in-depth discussion of archival participation in the Flickr Commons project, see Kate Theimer, *Web 2.0 Tools and Strategies for Archives and Local History Collections* (New York: Neal-Schuman Publishers, 2010), and *A Different Kind of Web: New Connections between Archives and Our Users* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2011).
7. Michelle Springer, Beth Dulabahn, Phil Michel, Barbara Natanson, David Reser, David Woodward, and Helena Zinkham, "For the Common Good: The Library of Congress Flickr Pilot Project," accessed May 8, 2015, [www.loc.gov/rr/print/flickr\\_report\\_final.pdf](http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/flickr_report_final.pdf) (October 30, 2008); Flickr, accessed May 8, 2015, <https://www.flickr.com/commons>.
8. Florida Memory, *Tin Can Tourism*, accessed March 18, 2013, [http://floridamemory.com/photographiccollection/photo\\_exhibits/tincans/](http://floridamemory.com/photographiccollection/photo_exhibits/tincans/).
9. *Ibid.*, 2.
10. For more information about the current organization of the Tin Can Tourists, see [www.TinCanTourists.com](http://www.TinCanTourists.com).
11. Robert C. Schonfeld and Jennifer Rutner, "Supporting the Changing Research Practices of Historians," *Ithaka S+R* (December 7, 2012).
12. Jane Zhang and Dayne Mauney, "When Archival Description Meets Digital Object Metadata: A Typological Study of Digital Archival Representation," *The American Archivist* 76 (Spring/Summer 2013): 174–95. See also Lina Bountouri and Manolis Gergatsoulis, "Interoperability between Archival and Bibliographic Metadata: An EAD to MODS Crosswalk," *Journal of Library Metadata* 9, nos. 1–2 (2009): 98–133.
13. Ann Denkler, *Sustaining Identity, Recapturing Heritage: Exploring Issues of Public History, Tourism, and Race in a Southern Town* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007).
14. Carl Abbott, "How Scanners Democratize History," *Perspectives on History* 50, no. 7 (2012): 45–48.
15. F. R. Ankersmit, *Meaning, Truth, and Reference in Historical Representation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012). Ankersmit uses a concept derived from "historism," "that objects cannot be studied apart from their past" (2), to distinguish between the direct reference to an object or source and its description, and subsequent representation of it in context and interpretation of the object as part of an effort to assign meaning and significance.

16. James Opp, "The Colonial Legacies of the Digital Archive: The Arnold Lupson Photographic Collection," *Archivaria*, no. 65 (Spring 2008): 3–19, 4.
17. Paul Conway and Ricardo Punzalan, "Fields of Vision: Toward a New Theory of Visual Literacy for Digitized Archival Photographs," *Archivaria*, no. 71 (2011): 63–97, 64.
18. *Ibid.*, 68–72. Conway and Punzalan describe the dilemma of digital access eroding archival context through description of the real materiality represented by digitized object, which leads always to an actual dematerialization of the photographic archives.
19. Arjun Sabharwal, "Digital Representation of Disability History: Developing a Virtual Exhibition," *Archival Issues: Journal of the Midwest Archives Conference* 34, no. 1 (2012): 7–26.
20. *Ibid.*, 3.
21. R. V. Roberto, "A Critical Look at Online Exhibitions and Online Collections: When Creating One Resource Is More Effective than the Other," *DESIDOC Journal of Library and Information Technology* 28, no. 4 (2008): 63–71. When looking at the number of projects created that year, Roberto also concluded that it suggests how deeply the anniversary affected "British consciousness, history, and identity" (69).
22. Conway and Punzalan, "Fields of Vision," 63–97, 64.
23. Nick Wynne, *Tin Can Tourists in Florida 1900–1970* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Press, 1999). See also Tracy J. Revels, *Sunshine Paradise: A History of Florida Tourism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011).
24. John J. Grabowski, "Keepers, Users, and Funders: Building an Awareness of Archival Value," *The American Archivist* 55 (1992): 464–72. Also see the selections included in Randall C. Jimerson, *American Archival Studies: Readings in Theory and Practice* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2000). On the social significance of archival outreach, see also Richard J. Cox and David A. Wallace, *Archives and the Public Good: Accountability and Records in Modern Society* (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 2002). On the utility of physical and digital exhibiting, see also Christina Zamon, *The Lone Arranger: Succeeding in a Small Repository* (Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2012).
25. Charlie Hailey, *Campsite: Architectures of Duration and Place* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008); also see Charlie Hailey, *Camps: A Guide to 21st-century Space* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 2009.
26. For instance, Hailey ascribes credit for the success of the Federal Writers Project in Florida to the famous Stetson Kennedy, instead of the unsung female head of the program, Caritta Dogget Corse.
27. Hailey, *Campsite: Architectures of Duration and Place*.
28. "Traveling to Paradise: Tin Can Tourists on Parade," press release from Florida Historic Capitol Museum, accessed March 4, 2013, [www.flhistoriccaptol.gov/news/TravelingtoParadise.pdf](http://www.flhistoriccaptol.gov/news/TravelingtoParadise.pdf).
29. Daily Mail Reporter, "On the Road: Stunning Black and White Photographs Show America's 'Tin Can Tourists' after Florida's New Roads Paved the Way for the Humble Camping Holiday," July 7, 2012, DailyMail.com, accessed December 3, 2012, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2170361/Black-white-pictures-reveal-Floridas-tin-tourists-pioneered-humble-summer-vacation-travel.html>.
30. Tin Can Tourists, "Wiki," accessed March 4, 2013, [http://www.tincantourists.com/wiki/doku.php?id=tct\\_history\\_and\\_images\\_from\\_the\\_past#.UTTSMjf\\_I3V](http://www.tincantourists.com/wiki/doku.php?id=tct_history_and_images_from_the_past#.UTTSMjf_I3V).
31. Hemmings Daily, "Archive related to 'vintage campers' tag," accessed March 4, 2013, <http://blog.hemmings.com/index.php/tag/vintage-campers/>.
32. TampaPix.com, "Tampa's Tin Can Tourists," accessed March 20, 2013, <http://www.tampapix.com/tincantourists.htm>; Hillsborough County Public Library Cooperative, "Burgert Brothers Photographic Collection," accessed May 8, 2015, <http://www.hcplc.org/hcplc/research/burgert/>.
33. The image is available to view through the Florida Memory Flickr Commons project, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/floridamemory/6684136127/in/set-72157627722129852/>.
34. Roberto, "A Critical Look at Online Exhibitions and Online Collections."