In Focus: Flickr and the Library of Congress – Transcript of audio

Please stand by for realtime captions.

Good afternoon. Welcome to the webinar, In Focus: Flickr and the Library of Congress. Our speaker is Hanna Soltys, reference librarian at the Library of Congress, prints and photographs division. Hanna has worked in the prints and photographs division since 2018. In addition to typical reference and reading room studies, Hanna manages the division of Instagram offerings, Flickr, and splash accounts. Hanna, take it away.

In queue, and good afternoon everyone. Thank you for joining us. As Kathy mentioned, I managed the Flickr account and provide Instagram offerings on behalf of the prints and photographs division each week. I am very plugged into different types of ways to get our images and collection materials out to people that might not necessarily be in the D.C. area, coming to see us. I have been with the library for about four years, now. I work mainly in the reading room, providing reference services for researchers on-site, as well as off-site. Today, I want to walk through the Flickr Commons history, and what that group means. Go to the Library of Congress Flickr account, and the type of work that we have been doing on the platform. Then I will go into a little detail about the prints and photographs decision division, if you have not heard of this division here at the library. Then, I will go through how to find visual materials in the division, to help with any types of projects or research guides or other types of materials that you might be putting together and then we will do a little Q&A at the end. So, are Flickr Commons history, like many archives and libraries, we wanted to try social media and participatory website so that we could reach new audiences and increase the discovery and use of our collections. We also wanted to become more approachable. The sheer size of our collections can be unintentionally offputting, and our challenges included limited institutional resources to describe our collections, competition for the attention of an online community, as well as a technical infrastructure that does not easily allow users to comment, share, and interact with content. Taking all of that into consideration, we met with George Oates, who was at Flickr at the time, back in 2007. She is still with them today, and recently came back. In 2007, we were trying to figure out what this community space could look like. George was inspired to create the Commons known as the Flickr Commons with a larger purpose. She opened up this Commons to other cultural heritage institutions, giving them the opportunity to share archival photographs, all without known copyright restriction. The Flickr Commons launched in 2008, and that was the first foray for the Library of Congress into the Flickr community. Today, there are over 100 members in the Commons. Institutions can apply to become a member of the Commons group. You can see a listing in this screenshot that I have provided. To give you an idea of the different types of organizations that are participating, it is international in scope, the different types of members. Since 2008, we have noticed that there are many kinds of visual materials that people are now sharing. Things well be on photographs. We are seeing posters, historical prints, as well as postcards. It has been exciting to see the way that the community has built itself, as well as the different types of offerings that we are seeing, today. So, why did we join Flickr? So, we set out to upload images that did not have a lot of descriptive data in the hopes that a community of crowdsourcing could help us connect some dots, as well as make our online records and made the data stronger. In 2008, crowdsourcing was not really a hot word that was being used. Today, we have tons of different crowdsourcing platforms, but at the time, we were depending on flicker Flickr to gather those discussions that were happening, those debates that were happening, between --

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Hanna, we have lost your audio. Hanna let me know this was happening to her earlier on a call, two. Hanna, can you chat in the chat box if you can hear us talking?

It's a great resource to find images that you are trying to see what you can use in published pieces, or in various social media post, for example. It's a great resource to come to, to find relevant items. Things that people are writing, you do not have to have an account to view any of these items. You do have to have an account to comment on the items. Things that people are commenting include people's names that are in the image, occupations, life and death dates, they might identify a ship, for example, if the images are all from a particular ship voyage, with that ship name wedge. Was. They provided context of what is going on in the picture and we can then take the stories to try to figure out what types of keywords would be most useful in our online records that we have for these images. Often times, these images arrive with zero insight as to what is happening. You will find that we sometimes have images that just say no caption, and we don't have any additional information in the online record. This is a great way for us to kind of try and build up the metadata on those types of records. We have also been starting a push for creating albums. We previously had been uploading from the George Fant them Bain collection, which is a very big news photojournalism collection that we have from the early 1900s. People were constantly commenting on, you know, different types of people that were in the images, and we have pivoted to start to incorporate other types of collections. By using our album, thematic topics, we are able to pull images from a variety of collections, all under his civic type a specific type of theme. We are usually posting these types of albums once a month. We do post every week, so we do still post from our John Margulies Brookside archive, photographs, once a week. We do an album and we usually do some type of mystery image, to spur a little bit of competition and gaming, to try and get people to identify what is going on in images. We also have started, after noticing a shift on Instagram, you have to log in now, so you have to have an account to view material there, we have been repurchasing post that we are putting on there, and dropping them into Flickr so you don't have to have an account on Flickr to view those items. We have a team, here, internally, in the prints and photographs division that is coming up with our album offerings, as well as moderating. We rotate who is moderating and keeping track of the different types of comments that are coming across. Obviously, any online world, sometimes you have to deal with spam or disruptive comments. By having assign moderators, we are able to keep better tabs on those types of potentially harmful comments that we receive. Beginning in September, 2020, we launched a new portion of our Flickr account , called the COVID-19 American experiences. This was a group of people could upload their own images, pertaining to the COVID-19 American experience, and we would then select images, photo curators, here in the division, go through the ones that are uploaded to the group and then we decide on one stat to the library's collection. This was a great tool that we were able to use in an acquisition setting. We have two different galleries that people's photos are falling into that are being select did. One is right restricted photos and we have one with creative Commons restriction on them. We have over 3000 images that have been submitted to the group since then, and we have selected about 600 items that will be part of the library's collection moving forward. In March, 2019, there was another Library of Congress Flickr account created called the Library of Congress life, events and architecture account. This is a separate account that is run by the office of communications, which is where the library staff photographer is located. It is often, you know, things that are happening in and around the library. Recent uploads have been the Gershwin prize, that we hosted, for Lionel Richie, as well as the cherry blossoms that you are seeing, here. The images on this account do not appear in the library catalog. On the main library Flickr account, which is the one that I am speaking on, those images all appear in the library catalog it's another way for us to get those images out. The ones on this account do not appear in any kind of uniform way on the library's web sight. This is a different oddity for this account, versus the other one. As I said, we have over 40,000 images online. Again, all our time back to the Library of Congress catalog

page. Metadata is catalog records that we have been able to update, based on comments that we have received. We have edited over 15,000 records, of the 40,000 images that we have uploaded, which is pretty wild. You can see the comments, followers, the views, which are all stat that we are continually capturing, each and every month. So I am now going to pivot, for a quick second, office Flickr and talk about the prints and photographs division as a whole. The items that you are seeing in Flickr are in Mears temple of what you can find in the prints and photographs online catalog. The division is part of the special collections directorate, and we have staff members that include curators, reference librarians, such as myself, technicians, archivist, catalogers, as well as digital specialist. We are the largest collection of visual materials in the library. You can find visual items in other divisions, but this is the largest collection of them. We have over 16 million items. About 95% of the collection is described in the prints and photographs online catalog, and just over 1.25 million are digitized. Of the 1.25 million that are digitized, 40,000 of them are appearing in Flickr. There is still plenty of Flickr uploading that we need to continue to do to help get more and more of these images out there. The different types of format that we have, we will go through examples. It is everything from photographs to negatives, to historical prints, as well as cartoon drawings, and engineering drawings. This is an example of a contact sheet, on the left-hand side, and on the right, we have a color transparency. These items are both from architecture archives that we have, and are kind of an example of the different types of format that you are seeing. For negatives and transparencies, we do not create physical prints from them. We are just scanning the negative as it is. One thing that I really enjoy about the collection is being able to connect some dots in between different format. On the left, we see the charcoal drawing that Victor offered Lundy did for the New York world's fair exhibition structure, and on the right, we see a color transparency of the actual drawing as it was seen at the world's fair. As I mentioned, we have various types of historical prints, including lithographs and other graphic art material, as well as more fun different types of illustration prints. This is from the cover of the illustrated detective magazine, from window prices archive. Most of the items in that are interiors of movie theaters or restaurants, so it's more environmental drawing. It was fun to find some of these off the beaten path items, in his archive. In addition, we have cartoon drawings, here on the left, we have Betty Boop, a step-by-step way to draw her, from our collection of character and cartoon drawings. On the right, we have an inkjet print from 2017 that was highlighting the hot topic of harassment in Hollywood. We try and show the different types of time periods that we are: from, as well as obviously, trying to continue to build with more recent types of visual materials. Two very popular collections are the look magazine photograph collection, which if you're familiar with life magazine, look magazine was in a similar vein. On the left, we have a color transparency from that collection featuring Nat King Cole. The look magazine photograph includes published photographs from the magazine and the unpublished images that were taken as part of various look jobs and look assignment stories. On the right, we have a negative from our firm security administration office of war and information. This is a very well used collection, mainly because it is rights free. It was a government project, so there are no copyright restrictions on it. It documented life in America, from the 1930s through the 1940s. Famous images from this include the migrant mother dustbowl image. Another popular collection is the WPA poster project. On the left-hand side, we see one, here, telling us it's time to go back to work and back to school. This collection, because it was a government project, is also free to use. The collection has been digitized in its entirety. They are great, high-resolution scans that we have that are up and available. On the right-hand side, we have some baseball cards from our Benjamin K Edwards collection. All of the baseball cards dating the late 1800s, early 1900s. These have been scanned, as well, in high-resolution and are available to download, no rights restrictions on them, given the year that they were created. This one in particular I have always liked because it is double-sided and when you fold the man throwing the ball at the shoulders, the man we see on the right, Moore, comes down and takes his legs, and then you have two different players on one card. Other resources, aside from the prints and photographs online catalog, that I encourage you

to check out, would be the picture this blog. This is the blog that we write on weekly, topics include things like researcher stories, newly digitized or described collections, new guides, online resources that we have, and then we have some behind the items as well. The serious post are a great way to find topics that might be of interest to you. I particularly like the double take, where one of our reference specialist does some visual literacy in investigating to identify where certain buildings might be, or where they were, or where they still are today, based on some imagery. I encourage you to check those out, as well. The prints and photographs reading room webpage has a plethora of information. I am not going to go through everything, but I would draw your attention, on the left-hand side, there are list of images on top popular topics, as well as collection guides and finding aids. What is really important is the right and researching information. The library of congress does not grant or deny permission but we do provide you with all of the information we have on particular collections, or photographers. That is a great place, if you're trying to find right information, to click through. On the right-hand side, we have the ask a librarian, the virtual reference that we provide. There, you are writing any question and it gets routed to a librarian on staff and then we work with you to determine the answer, or book you an appointment to come in. We, like many other institutions, over the past couple of years, has been ramping up with our online research guide. We have way more than 10, today, despite this screenshot, here. You can search by titles or by subjects. The guides will tell you how to search and provide you with some collections temples and are also going to identify some related resources, as well as at that library. These are being made by various divisions in the library. Prints and photographs is one division that is supplying these research guide. If we do not have one on a particular topic, another division might have one that would be of use. So, finding visual materials in prints and photographs and I've talked a lot about the prints and photographs online catalog. This is the homepage, LOC.gov\pictures. You can search LOC.gov, the prints and photographs online catalog has a few other searching components of the larger website does not have. The prints and photographs online catalog will only search for materials in our divisions holdings, whereas LOC.gov is searching across the entire library. We do offer some collection overviews, and there are different types of information that you can find in these collection overviews. These have been moving into our research guides, so we are not actively creating these on the prints and photographs online catalog anymore. We are doing them more so on the resource guide site. Here, you can see that we are providing background and scope and we provide bibliographies. We will maybe do some profiles on a particular photographer and we talk about digitization of items. There are links to rights and restrictions and there are all different types of information that you can find in those collection overviews, providing you a great way to get started on your research. Also from this page, you can click to see what is digitized. This is telling me that everything in the Civil War negatives has been digitized, so I am able to view all of those at once. You can also search directly in the collection, versus searching on the homepage where you are searching across everything. On the left-hand side, you can also browse -- might be linked on specific records. Here, when you see numbers in parentheses, that is telling you how many images we have that are tagged with that particular subject heading. After you do a search, you will find this page, that is a great way to filter down for images. Larger image available anywhere means that one of two things. There could be copyright restrictions, some photographers let us show their images and let anyone download them from anywhere, but they still retain the copyright, and there are all of the images that are no known restrictions, that will appear larger, available anywhere, so you can download from anywhere. The image is only available at the library is -- okay. Okay. Sorry. The larger image available only at the library means that you have to be connected to the library's wireless network, and that is just because either we have not viewed the right on the item, so it's a protection, in case there are issues with copyright, or if an image is protected by copywriting, it will not show at full resolution so you won't be able to download it from your home or workplace. Not digitized is a great way to get items, if you plan on visiting the reading room. This way, you can really focus in on the types of material that you can only get while you are here on site. One

thing to look out for when you are doing your searches are things that we call lots. They are groups of images. Here, I can see, okay, this is a lot, it is telling you there are nine photo prints in it. I can click that mail and see what types of images have been digitized. On the flip, when I am searching and I see only one image, but I see it is from a group, I am more likely to find more items in that group, though they are probably not digitized. I would then want to request that particular lot when I come on-site in the reading room. Some things to look out for, because again, not everything is digitized and available. As you are going through, if you are finding access advisers that are served by appointment only, that requires getting in touch with us, which you can do via the ask a librarian service. You can also click the hyperlink there, that will take you to a form to fill out the materials that you want to see. This is mainly because, unprocessed material is sometimes stored off-site. We want to make sure we can have all of that material for you when you come, or we also need to sometimes prepare materials for reading room service because they are unprocessed. There might be some type of housing or numbering that we need to do, prior to being able to serve it to you in the reading room. We also have material that requires special handling. Again, checking out that access advisory will let you know if some and that you are interested in seeing is something that requires an appointment, or maybe we do not serve it, and then you are supposed to use the digital items, or often times, things will be on microfilm that you will use. If you find this, and the item, you need to see the original, we do make exceptions. You just have to provide reasoning as to needing the original item. Lastly, when you are going through these items, if you are interested in obtaining copies, you can click through the tab to see if something is not digitized, it will often tell you that you can contact duplication services to receive a digital scan of an item. We do provide courtesy copies. If you are interested in an item that is not digitized and you do not have a trip planned to the D.C. area, you can get in touch with us the ask a librarian and we can provide you with courtesy copies. We do those free of charge, up to 15 items, for researchers each year. Again, it is something to be aware of, if you are working on projects. I, myself, have worked with many different types of museums that are curious what holdings we have. Creating low resolution courtesy copies is enough for those purposes. And, if you are trying to find free to use images, I have encourage you to check out the following resources, first being if you add no known restrictions to your search string, the system will only return items that have that type of right advisory. That means you'll be able to download items, as well as use them as you wish. The library also creates a free to use and reuse sets, which are uploaded monthly on the LOC.gov site. They include materials from the prints and photographs to division, as well as other special collections. So, visual materials in the music room, or the performing arts room, from the American Folklife Center, materials from all over, to create those free to use and reuse sets. I have also linked, and it will be in the handout as well, the Library of Congress Flickr page, as well as the Unsplash account . The images that you are seeing on those platforms are rights free, so images that you can readily download. Images appearing there have links back into the catalog. You can download the highest resolution that we have available. Again, going through and looking at the copyright guidance that is available on the prints and photographs reading room, webpage, if you come up with any types of questions. With that, if anyone has any questions, I am happy to answer, both on the library's Flickr work , as well as finding images in the collection, or if you have any general prints and photographs division collection questions, I am happy to answer those, as well.

We have not seen any questions come in, yet, but please feel free to put any questions for Hanna into the chat, everyone. Any questions, any comments about the Library of Congress Flickr, prints and photographs, and how you use them? Is library of Congress Flickr page and the comments that you mentioned separate accounts?

They are not separate accounts. I think it's easy to picture the Flickr Commons as more of the community, and then, the library account is just one of the community members within the Flickr Commons. Then you will see other cultural institutions, as other accounts, with in the Flickr Commons. There are two separate webpages. There is the LOC Flickr page, which would be kind of like our profile page that you can view photos and albums, then there is the Flickr Commons page , which is in the handout that I sent over to Kathy, that you are able to search directly within the Commons. You can search with keywords, for various images. I see, someone has asked, is there an overlap between LOC Flickr and Unsplash. There definitely would be. Our Unsplash page uses most of our free to use and reuse sets, that is where the catalyst for creating the different galleries that you are going to see on our Unsplash page, you will also find on the library's free to use site. More often than not, you might find images scattered among, but I would not say that, albums you are seeing on the library Flickr page you will see on the Unsplash page. There is a little bit of overlap.

Hanna, I have a question for you. What is happening with the Carol Highsmith collection? I know there was, the images had copyrighted her collection.

The Carol Highsmith archive that we have, we are continually adding to it. She is going around the country, taking images, and we are putting them up into the prints and photographs online catalog. Pertaining to Getty, we can control how people use or resell images, so often times, you might find, especially photos by Carol Highsmith, as well as from the Farm security administration collection, you will see those images appearing on third-party sites that charge right rights. We can't tell people how to use our image and we can tell people to say, no you can't do that, yes you can do this. Sometimes you might find people charging for particular images, but you can download them for free from the library's website.

Okay, so they can't restrict --

Kathy you're in the middle of a question and you went on mute.

These private entities cannot prevent users from downloading these photographs from your site.

They can because we can't tell them what they can and can't do. That is what you do see, and often times people will write in saying did you know so-and-so is selling this image, and it's free on your website, and that is because in people download from us, we can't tell them how they can or can't use something.

I misstated that. I was saying that, the things that are available on your site, Getty and these others, can't prevent you from giving them out for free.

Correct, yes. Sometimes they will be sided back to the library, but not always paid if you find images on the sites, sometimes you might be able to find them in other locations. You don't have to pay those fees then. I will say, as a teaser, coming up, we do have, on our Flickr, we are about to launch another mystery set. I think it is from our Harrison Ewing collection of no caption images. We usually do about 15 or 20 of them, and they tend to be pretty popular in the sense that people are trying to guess what it is. We did one recently with, can you name this invention or invention instrument, and then we are able to directly go in and upload all of our records for ease of accessibility on those. We did a project, in November, with the war resettlement agency photos that we had, of Japanese internment camps, and we were able to identify people in the images, thanks to community users. It has been pretty great, the

amount of response we have gotten from the community and how we can make our records a little bit stronger. Some of the asks, when people offer information on unknown origin or individuals, how do you verify the information? We often go back and ask for like, links or, how someone is determining that that is a particular person or particular information nugget. That is on the role of the moderator for the week, whoever is monitoring all of the activity. That is something we are doing. If we are not 100% certain, if somebody says oh, this is so and so, but we can't really tell, we will often use the word like, possibly or likely. In the Allman record, if we choose to use that information.

Are there any more questions for Hanna? When you put the survey, could you do that one more time? It's kind of up.

Absolutely, it's there in the chat now.

Okay, thanks. All right. We would appreciate it if you would take a moment to fill out the survey. There are only a few questions, and it's helpful to both us and the presenters. I would like to say thank you to Hanna for putting this presentation together, and everybody, have a great day.

Great, thank you. [Event concluded]