



Preserving a Montana Senator's Image: The Lee Metcalf Photograph and Film Collections Project

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Abstract

One of the greatest challenges for archivists processing the papers of post-World War II U.S. congressmen is organizing, describing, and promoting their photographs. With the explosion in then-new public media forums (i.e., TV and increased newspaper publication) and cheaper, repeatable photographic processes, U.S. congressmen began taking and collecting more and more photographs for use in campaigns and public relations. The 1950s, especially, ushered in a new era of awareness by members of Congress of the power of images; the importance of documenting their work, campaigns, and constituency; and the need for still images for films, commercials, and congressional hearings.

After World War II, congressmen began to select their own images and to determine the means through which the public and the press digested the images of public officials at work. Congressmen began collecting negatives and having the same image cropped in several ways to reflect different visions or uses. This led to multiple photographic prints showing different actions, all born from a single image. This new use pattern has been little documented in the archival world, and some institutions struggle with how to identify and organize their congressional photograph collections.

Image collections from this time period present two challenges. First, little was written about the subject's life because of the newness of the congressman's service (and depending on the congressman, nothing may have been written since or the records may not be available for such publications). Republican and Democratic congressmen had different approaches to the use of their images, but all selected similar mechanisms by which to record and promote events. Second, many of the people documented in the

photographs are still alive and have different views about the work archivists are performing on the collections. Some are afraid of how images will affect their public profile; congressman's families attempt to guard the legacy of a public career through careful selection of the images they make public. These mechanisms are illustrated by the Senator Lee Metcalf Photograph and Film Collections Project.

Project Description

In 2012 the Montana Historical Society (MHS) Research Center received a Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) Cataloging Hidden Special Collections and Archives grant for the Lee Metcalf Photograph and Film Collections Project. Senator Metcalf was the longest serving acting president pro tempore of the U.S. Senate, serving from June 1963 to January 1978. He was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1953 to 1960, elected as a U.S. senator in 1961, and served until his death in January 1978. He was one of the most important Democratic senators of the mid-twentieth century. Yet little is known about him because he was a very private



person and few authors published anything about his work. At the time of Metcalf's death, MHS already had collected 302.6 linear feet of his office papers, which were donated by the senator in the 1970s. However, Metcalf left no personal papers and has no living children to share their memories. To understand his work, life, and papers more fully, his visual record needed to be properly and completely identified.

Early Project Activities

The first year of the Metcalf Project included researching, sorting, identifying, organizing, describing, and preserving the original 4,454 (3,900 after processing) photographic prints, negatives, and slides documenting Metcalf's life and work. The second year involved cleaning, preserving, researching, identifying, and rehousing the 300-plus film reels. In processing the collections, I also aimed to discover new visual materials for celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the Civil Rights Act, the Wilderness Act, the 1964 Montana Flood, and other events in which the senator had been involved. Another aim of the project was to intellectually tie this project's materials to the Lee Metcalf Papers MC 172 and other Metcalf materials held by MHS.

I spent the first six months researching, preserving, and organizing the photographic prints into groups by subject, date, and purpose. This included surveying the minimally processed MC 172 Lee Metcalf Papers, reading more than 6,000 newspaper articles on his life and work, visiting and researching online multiple archives and historical societies, and researching his use of photos and films during his congressional career. I also interviewed in person, by telephone, and by e-mail more than 55 people who were former friends, staff members, conservation activists, and state politicians with connections to Metcalf.

Results

After processing, the Lee Metcalf Photograph Collection (Lot 31) was housed in the MHS Photograph Archives. The collection is nine linear feet and comprises 3,900 images. When I began the project, I found that 25 percent to 30 percent of the images had already been identified in some fashion. However, not all the information was accurate, and there was no notation about who had identified many of the images. By the end of the project, I had identified at least two pieces of information for the photographs—subject matter, date, people, or location—for 85 percent to 90 percent of the images. The Lee Metcalf Photograph Collection currently constitutes one of the largest image collections of a twentieth-century Montana congressman.

Process

The existing arrangement of the photograph collection was based largely on the Lee Metcalf Papers' folder subjects and categories, which greatly expanded the utility of both collections in relation to one another. For example, Metcalf's papers contained two folders labeled Department of Agriculture: Forest Service, Bolle Reports (1970–1971). There were original prints of images used in the 1970 Bolle Report; therefore, I created a corresponding folder titled U.S. Senate—Congressional Projects: Department of Agriculture (Bolle Report) (1970). Such arrangement allows better coordination for researchers between the two collections. This type of organization of images and documents was the original intention of the Metcalf staff's filing system before the photographs and papers became separated over time.

I took time to research the senator's life because of his relative obscurity in the modern historical narrative. Only one book was written about him,



in 1965, and one book chapter, in 2003. Little biographical or historical material and no personal records exist. Little was known of his family history, family life, childhood, or college years. This was a significant challenge, as a number of photographs in the collection are from Metcalf's early life.

After combing through his papers, I compiled a list of people still alive who knew Metcalf. I scheduled times to talk with them about how he used photographs in his career, his personal life, and his political history. These talks and research helped narrow the research focus to themes and subject areas commonly identified in his photographs. With these subject areas identified, I discovered more information faster about the images in the collection. I found online resources that helped to identify elements of his history in Congress. I conducted informal interviews with former staff and friends, who allowed me to take notes for the project. These steps created a network of individuals who were introduced to the project, the importance of Metcalf's images, and the work of archivists to preserve history.

These interviews proved especially informative once I started working more closely with the photograph collection. For instance, among Metcalf's photographs I found a series of ten contact print sheets of various scenes from around 1972. They were not accompanied by matching photographic prints or negatives, and contained no indication of the images' purpose. I interviewed Karl Englund, son of Metcalf's long-time administrative assistant, Merrill "Brit" Englund. The son said that in 1970–1971, Metcalf and his staff started gearing up for his 1972 Senate reelection campaign. Metcalf did not like having new pictures taken of himself and in the 1960s often used photographs of himself from the 1940s and 1950s. Brit Englund, according to his son, forced

the senator to go to new places, attend events, and meet with individuals in order to have new photographs to use in the 1972 campaign. These contact sheets are the images made during those photo shoots, and they show Metcalf's markings, indicating which images he liked the most for use in the campaign. I later found those images published in newspaper campaign advertisements.

During my research I learned much about how Metcalf used his photographs for political messages, personal relations, public relations, and influencing legislation. Metcalf's office managed publication of the Montana congressional delegation's newsletter, *A Montanan's Washington Notebook*, which began as a Democrat-focused publication, started in 1956. The publication did not use large numbers of photographs until Metcalf became senator and took over the publication in 1961. Photographs were published in the newsletter from 1960 to 1977. Metcalf retained photographs he had taken on Capitol Hill in a photo file in his office for use in this newsletter. Many of the photos I worked on in the Metcalf collection were used in the newsletter.

Senator Metcalf shot a series of television films called "Report from Washington" (1963–1965)—later called "Washington Report" (1965–1967)—in which he used photographs for visual evidence related to legislation, public programs, and federally funded Montana projects on which he worked. These films help date the photographic images, and the photographs explain the subject content of Metcalf's films (which were mostly unidentified). Metcalf used those same photographs in his television campaign commercials and in published handouts and newspapers during his Senate campaigns of 1960, 1966, and 1972. Information on the senator's use of images in publications, campaigns, and television all came from records located in the Lee Metcalf Papers at MHS.

Metcalfe's papers also provided information that helped confirm the descriptions and dates of his photographs. For instance, to confirm the date of a Senate Democratic Photograph Studio negative of presidential scholars Robert Thomas and Brenda Gilmer visiting Lee Metcalfe, I checked Senator Metcalfe's daily schedules for 1963 to 1974 (see below for more information on the studio). The original Senate negative sleeve in which the negative was housed was dated March 3, 1969. I did not know if this was the date the Senate photographer's staff filed the negative, or the date the image was taken.

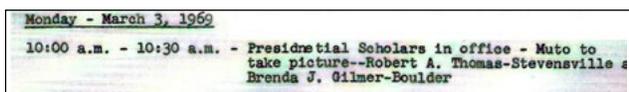


Fig. 1: Schedules, Lee Metcalfe Papers, MC 172, Box 426, Folders 2-3

I found the above notation (Figure 1) in Metcalfe's schedule, and the description and dates matched the negative's sleeve for the date of the students' visit, March 3, 1969.

Metcalfe's office regularly published photographs of the senator visiting constituents, talking with other politicians, testifying in committees, hitting the campaign trail, and attending Montana events and dedications. The *Billings Gazette*, *Kalispell Daily Inter Lake*, *Hungry Horse News*, *Helena Independent Record*, and the *Butte Montana Standard* were the newspapers that most commonly published Metcalfe's photographs. The photos, intended as visual press releases, contained captions created by Metcalfe's staff. Staff typed descriptions on carbon paper that were taped to the back of photos sent to the newspapers. Most of the time, newspapers published these captions and image descriptions word-for-word.

Online Tools and Sources

As part of my strategy for identifying Senator Metcalfe's photographs, I used various online tools, publications, and websites that provided information for matching or explaining the subject content. One such website is the [American Presidency Project](#), created and maintained by the University of California at Santa Barbara. It provides online, searchable text of presidential speeches, events attended, presidential dedications, and political party platforms. This was extremely useful when looking for subject content, the purpose of presidential visits on specific days, or special events attended by the senator. [HathiTrust](#) was very useful for locating online committee hearing transcripts, which provide lists of congressmen present, dates, staff members, and names of those testifying. I used this information to confirm the identity of photographs with notations about committee hearings, or about the people present at those hearings.

I used Wikipedia for comparative photographs of national politicians. Wikipedia provides lists by session for all U.S. congressmen. As an example, the [Wikipedia page for the 89th Congress](#) (January 3, 1965–January 3, 1967) gives names by state for all senators and representatives, provides sample photographs of the leadership, and notes mid-session replacements. Such information for congressmen is difficult to find in published histories on federal politics after the 1940s, and proved extremely useful (despite concerns about Wikipedia's reliability) in narrowing search parameters to identify specific congressmen in photographs with Metcalfe.

Other archives and presidential library digital collections are also very helpful in finding images of congressmen from different time periods, at various events, and in different styles of dress. Over the past five years, presidential



libraries have increased the number of official White House and congressional photographs of presidents hosted on their websites. There are few places—other than presidential photograph collections—where the descriptions and dates for photographs are so detailed and well documented. For congressmen who are a little more obscure than, say, Hubert H. Humphrey, presidential library photograph collections are often the only online source for finding representative images of those congressmen.

At present, large numbers of online photographs are available for presidents Harry S. Truman through Gerald R. Ford. The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum currently has one of the best online collections of presidential photographs. Although not having individual images identified, the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library and Museum's Digital Library has scanned and made available online descriptions for photographs by sets of images in contact sheets and rolls of film taken at the same time, through a monthly calendar browsing option. If you know a date for an image of a president but do not know the event or names of those in the photograph, presidential library image collections are the best bet for finding image descriptions.

With the greater availability of digitized twentieth-century newspapers via subscription databases, it is easier to find events and photographs, and to confirm information about individuals for congressional photograph collections. My greatest asset on this project was NewspaperArchive, which contains full-text, searchable, OCR (optical character recognition) newspapers dating from the 1860s to the 1990s, with summaries of search results. NewspaperArchive happened to have all but two of Montana's major newspapers.

NewspaperArchive provides chronological searching options to narrow search dates. For example, I needed to date a Metcalf photograph taken sometime in 1963. In NewspaperArchive, I limited the search dates to January 2, 1963–December 31, 1963, and used the search results to indicate whether a photograph was present (for this example, it helped me identify the image Lot 31 B16/7.01). An archivist can find photographs in the digital newspaper articles by finding in the search summaries such statements as “Metcalf visited with . . . last Wednesday” or “Metcalf shown discussing.” These terms indicate a visual element in the article, and will likely have a photograph of the topic mentioned in the search summaries. One has to use multiple subject term combinations to locate photographs or information in the database, but the results are stunning.

I also used NewspaperArchive to find period photographs of people thought to be in photographs to confirm the identity and time period. For example, in a photograph taken of the Montana delegates to the 1958 National 4-H Conference in Washington, D.C., I could not identify the 4-H students individually, but I knew their names collectively from typed copy attached to the photograph. Through newspaper searching, I stumbled upon a March 7, 1958 *Billings Gazette* article containing photographs of all four 4-H delegates. I used the newspaper photographs to match the students' faces with the students in the Metcalf image.

In 2008, the U.S. Senate Historical Office sent 962 negatives to the MHS Photograph Archives of Senator Lee Metcalf. The office had found in a U.S. Capitol building basement the negatives for dozens of senators, identified only by senator last name written on the sleeves. The office had no idea who took these negatives, and there were no descriptions. In 2008, the Senate Historical Office began repatriating the negatives to cultural heritage institutions that possessed a



senator's original papers or photograph collections. The sleeves of the negatives sent to us had notations about print sizes and dates, though it was not known if these were the dates the photograph was taken, the negative was printed, or the negative was filed. The only recorded Senate photograph studio was the Republican Party's studio operated by Arthur E. Scott. My question was simple: If the Republican Party had its own photographer(s), did the Democrats, too?

Using Senator Metcalf's papers, interviews with former staff members, and notations on and letters attached to photographs, I identified Al Muto as the photographer for some of the Senate negatives. The 1964 Democratic National Convention published record reported that beginning in the early 1960s, the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee hired Muto to take photographs of Democratic senators. President Lyndon B. Johnson had used Muto as a personal photographer since the early 1950s and continued to do so into his presidency. An internally created House lobbying bloc for liberal legislation and public policy, the Democratic Study Group (DSG) in Congress began hiring Muto after he was laid off from the Associated Press in the late 1950s and the DSG was formally incorporated in 1959. Then-U.S. Representative Metcalf, a cofounder of the DSG, began using Muto regularly in early 1961.

Muto's title in the early 1960s was "Photographer—Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee," according to notes found in Senator Metcalf's papers. There is no record of what Muto's title was through the remainder of his time as a Senate photographer. From 1962 to 1972, the Senate Democratic Photograph Studio operated in the U.S. Capitol Building. (I created this studio name to parallel the similar name later given to the Republican Senate studio.) Eventually, the

studio was operated by public funds and was no longer supported by the Democratic Campaign Committee. In 1972 the Democratic and Republican studios were combined, but the studio continued employing separate party photographers. Brothers Al and Frank Muto, long-time accomplished press photographers, were the two primary photographers in the Democratic studio until 1975.

When Metcalf's staff needed copy prints from negatives held by the Democratic studio or by Metcalf's office, they sent a letter to the Mutos or Dev O'Neill (the House Democratic photographer) requesting reprinting or resizing services, as seen in the following note from Senator Metcalf to Al Muto (Metcalf 1967): "The Democratic Study Group, of which I [Lee Metcalf] am an alumnus, would like two 8 x 10 glossies of each of the enclosed negatives. I'll appreciate a separate bill, because DSG is going to pay it." The Democratic studio kept most of the original negatives for the images they took, and sent prints to each senator per the number requested (Figures 2 and 3). By using visual markers in the photographs and the corresponding dates printed on the back of prints (dates usually marked in blue ink) created by the Senate studio, I identified and paired 368 prints with their corresponding Democratic studio negatives (Series 24 of Lot 31 Lee Metcalf Photograph Collection).

After talking with former Metcalf staff and interns, I learned the senator had specific places in his office where he liked photographs to be taken for certain occasions, or with certain people. For instance, he had a framed Native American headdress on the wall just inside the door to his personal office—a gift from a Montana tribe. He liked to have pictures taken in front of it with staff members and summer interns. If I had an unidentified photograph of a young person with

Metcalf in his office and he or she was standing in front of this framed headress, I could reasonably assume the person was a staff member or intern. This information helped limit my search for the name of the staff person in newspaper articles and Metcalf's papers.

3

No. 3/8/65

Name Senator Metcalf

Order _____

Remarks _____

Retouched _____

Order Finished _____

Recorder _____

Reorder _____

Neg # 3- 4-5x7

Neg # 1-2- 1-8x10 Matte Indignature

Fig. 2: Senate negative sleeve for images Lot 31 B16/15.01-.03. Note markings for print sizes based on the negatives

United States Senate

MEMORANDUM

Frank, *5/12/67*

Please have this neg. printed up 5x7. We will take a look at it if it is what we want we will want 10 color 35mm horizontal slides.

Thanks much

Bill
Bill Huber
Legis. Intern Metcalf

Fig. 3: Note attached to Senate negative sleeve, giving Senate Democratic Photo Studio instructions about image reproductions, May 12, 1967—here addressed to Frank Muto.

Metcalf also liked to be photographed with visiting constituents while sitting on the leather couch or armchair in his office. Again, for a photograph matching this type of scene, I narrowed my search to visiting constituents whose names appeared on Metcalf's office schedules, newspaper articles, and thank-you letters. The Senate Democratic Photograph Studio photographers also had a specific look and style of photograph for different subject matter that they preferred to use for different senators. Studying Metcalf's senate photographs taught me ways in which the Muto brothers liked to portray these public representatives. Metcalf's former staff members relayed to me that all of the Democratic senators in the 1960s they knew also had specific places in their offices for taking photographs.

A final note is necessary about the Senate Democratic Photograph Studio. Because archivists and historians have not been familiar with its operation or existence of the Democratic photographs, many archives that received negatives from the U.S. Senate Historical Office have not known who took the images. The images, therefore, remain limited for use by researchers and historians, because of questions about copyright and creator. Because the Senate Democratic Photograph Studio was paid for from public funds, all of the images taken by the photographers are in the public domain. For MHS, this means having 962 images from Metcalf's Senate negatives that can instantly be made available for publication. In other parts of Metcalf's collection, the photographs are unknown or were taken by a newspaper photographer, and are still copyrighted.

In closing, identifying and describing twentieth-century congressional image collections is becoming easier and faster, as digital content has been added online nationwide. Online resources,



such as EAD-based finding aids for other congressional photograph collections and digitized newspapers, are helping archivists better coordinate descriptive information for a congressman's photographs. A 1989 archival leaflet on processing congressional papers recommended the following for photographs: "Member's audiovisual material will probably contain duplicates which are unidentified, negatives with no matching positives, and positives with no matching negatives... Often, the identification of photographs is left to researchers due to limitations on processing resources" (Boccaccio and Carmicheal 1989).

Once considered too time-consuming to process, congressional photograph collections can now be processed using more advanced research techniques. These include capturing the memories of a congressman's office staff, using digital databases, and using visual clues in images without a great amount of labor. In our visually dominated age, it is vital that archivists identify and describe a congressman's photographs in as much detail as possible, so an institution and its users can benefit from information and content that corresponds with a congressman's use and creation of his documents.

The descriptions of a congressman's photographs are often the only record of his involvement with particular people, projects, and committees.

Using approaches similar to those employed in the Lee Metcalf Project, archivists who process congressional photograph collections no longer need face drudgery. Nor do the photographs have to be set aside for lack of information about their content. The Lee Metcalf Project serves as an example of the cultural and research value that a congressman's images can bring to the historical record, once strategies are developed with modern tools to accelerate the processing and description of congressional photographs.

References

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Websites Noted

American Presidency Project: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>

HathiTrust: <https://www.hathitrust.org>