



PEABODY MUSEUM
of ARCHAEOLOGY & ETHNOLOGY

PRESS RELEASE

Peabody Museum Completes Two-Year Scanning Project



A large collection of images has been newly uploaded to the Peabody Museum's Collections Online. Many, like the images above, had negatives but no prints. *Left:* Native American anthropologist Francis La Flesche (Omaha) demonstrates how to throw a stick in an Omaha game. PM [2004.24.961](#). *Right:* "Men posed in pipe fellowship", Omaha [no date]. PM [2004.24.708](#).

(Cambridge, May 21, 2009) The Archives department at the Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology has scanned and made available to the public online 27,000 photographic negatives, completing a two-year project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH). Visitors to the [Museum's website](#) can now explore the visual past with a simple keyword search. All the negatives appear as positive images.

“There’s a lot there,” said India Spartz, Senior Archivist. “Mostly social anthropology of the 20th century, especially the concept of observing people as ‘the other.’ It’s a theme that rides through this whole collection. You can see how the discipline evolved using photographs.” The core negative collection also includes historical views of the Peabody Museum showing early interiors and exhibits, Peabody Museum associates working in the field, Peabody Museum-sponsored expeditions in the Americas and abroad, and early anthropological and archaeological fieldwork documenting many of the objects in the Peabody’s collection.

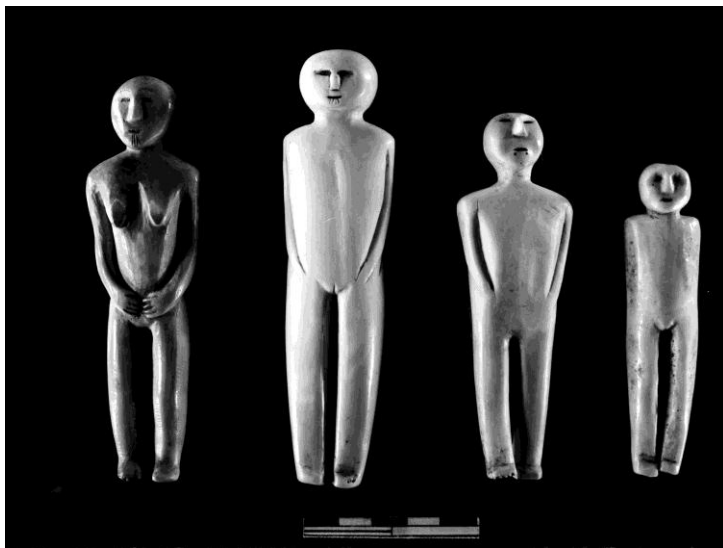
Dr. Steven LeBlanc, Peabody Museum director of collections, explained how the scanning project increased access to the images beyond the web. “Before the grant, researchers could look at photographic prints from the negatives, if we had them, but the negatives themselves were so fragile that they were restricted. Now we can offer access to all the images.” LeBlanc enthused about



Woman in the Hall of the Mosaics, Oaxaca, Mexico, 1935. Photo by Neil M. Judd. PM [2004.24.23417B](#).

the level of detail from the high-resolution scans. “No one anticipated how much valuable information these scans would yield. When you zoom in on a scan, you can see so much more than on a print. For example, prints from 19th-century glass plate negatives shot at the archaeological site of Copan [Honduras] show the ancient carvings on monuments, but without a lot of detail. On the high-resolution scans, you can actually read the glyphs on the monuments. That’s important to researchers, because the original monuments at the site have deteriorated.”

The most fragile negatives in the collection are 10,000 19th-century glass plates, many of which were shot in remote locations, processed in remote darkrooms, and hand-carried back to the Museum from afar. It is remarkable that these plates are intact today. To scan them, Boston Photo and Imaging was contracted to process the plates on site. Some of the resulting images became the center of a recent exhibition [Fragile Memories: Images of Archaeology & Community at Copan, 1891–1900](#), curated by the director of the Corpus of Maya Hieroglyphics Inscriptions, Barbara Fash.



Ivory figurines by artist Arsen E. Charles, St. Michael Island, Alaska. PM [2004.24.25754B](#)

All the images were also tagged with descriptive data such as content, creation date, and technical file information, enabling easy online searches. Spartz suggests a shortcut to access the images using the [Peabody Museum's Collections Online](#). All can be searched by Peabody Museum ID number beginning with "2004.24". Searches can be narrowed further using simple keywords. Additional

research requests can be sent to pmresrch@fas.harvard.edu or by using the Museum's [Research Request Form](#) online.

The NEH Preservation and Access grant allowed archivists to treat and re-house the negatives as they were scanned. Ninety percent of the negatives were preserved and re-housed in new storage envelopes, reducing handling, and ensuring long-term stability of these fragile images. While the majority of the core negative collection has now been scanned, more work remains. Pending future funding opportunities, the Peabody Museum hopes to continue scanning an additional 20,000 black and white

35mm polyester and nitrate-based negatives, which include images featuring Peabody Museum 20th century expeditions, activities and objects.

About the Peabody Museum

The Peabody Museum is among the oldest archaeological and ethnographic museums in the world with one of the finest collections of human cultural history found anywhere. It is home to superb materials from Africa, ancient Europe, North America, Mesoamerica, Oceania, and South America in particular. In addition to its archaeological and ethnographic holdings, the Museum's photographic archives, one of the largest of its kind, hold more than 500,000 historical photographs, dating from the mid-nineteenth century to the present and chronicling anthropology, archaeology, and world culture.

Location: *The Peabody Museum is located at 11 Divinity Avenue in Cambridge. The Museum is a short walk from the Harvard Square MBTA station.*

Hours: 9 A.M. to 5 P.M., seven days a week. The Museum is closed on Thanksgiving Day, Christmas Eve, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day. Admission is \$9 for adults, \$7 for students and seniors, \$6 for children, 3–18. Free with Harvard ID or Museum membership. The Museum is free to Massachusetts residents Sundays, 9 A.M. to noon, year round, and Wednesdays from 3 P.M. to 5 P.M. (September to May). Admission includes admission to the Harvard Museum of Natural History. For more information call 617-496-1027 or go online to: www.peabody.harvard.edu.

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