
By Allison DeArcangelis, Analú María López, and Ricky Punzalan

Photographic Memories

Digitization is a step toward removing barriers to ethnographic collection from the Philippines.

Cree-Métis writer and librarian Jessie Loyer once wrote: “The singular joy of collecting means that there are specific parameters [directing] the growth of the collection. Collections must be necessarily bounded. We cannot collect everything; a robust collection development policy helps focus the collection and make it relevant. Yet these boundaries obscure silences: the way we have collected, and subsequently, the way we have catalogued, illuminate these genealogies of a singular white man’s joy.”

The collections related to Indigenous peoples of the Americas at the Newberry began with the collection of Edward E. Ayer, a white collector who became fascinated with the histories of Mexico and of Indigenous peoples of the Americas while stationed in Arizona during the U.S. Civil War. After the war, Ayer became a lumber magnate, providing ties for the railroads as they expanded west and displaced Indigenous peoples. He used some of his wealth to amass major collections of books, manuscripts, and artifacts focused on Indigenous peoples of the Americas and their interactions with settler-colonists.



Photograph of Edward E. Ayer at California Redwoods, 1910.



Baptism of forty-five Moro people by a Jesuit priest on the banks of the Hijo River, District of Davao, Mindanao.



Left to right: Mr. Seale, Mr. Frost, Dean Worcester, Governor Johnson, and Mr. Zinn, at Lockwood's hemp plantation.



Dean Worcester pictured near Manoayan, 1910.

To complement his extensive collection of American Indian and Indigenous studies manuscripts documenting the early contacts of Europeans with Native peoples of the Americas, Ayer began buying materials related to the Philippines and the Hawaiian Islands in 1898. His decision in collecting Philippine and later Hawaiian materials is closely tied to U.S. imperialism. Indeed, 1898 is not only the year the United States annexed the independent state of Hawaii, it is also the year the Spanish-American War ended, which resulted in Spain ceding its longstanding colony of the Philippines to the United States.

Ayer was in Venice, Italy, on May 1, 1898, when the Battle of Manila made headlines around the world. Soon after settling into his hotel, he sat down and wrote letters to his numerous agents in Europe, South America, the United States, and other parts of North America, requesting that they send him lists of everything they had to sell about the Philippine Islands, whether printed or in manuscript.

He promised in his letters that he would return home within thirty days and would send them large orders. He was honest enough to admit that if someone had asked him two days before the occupation of the island by the United States where the Philippine Islands were, he would have replied, "In the Pacific Ocean." As far as he knew, there had never been a particular demand for books about the Philippine Islands until May 1898.

Initially, the core of the collection of Philippine materials consisted of items previously owned by the Compañía General de Tabacos in their Barcelona library, which Ayer obtained through the efforts of Madrid bookseller Pedro Vindel, although purchases and gifts over the years have substantially expanded the holdings. The Philippine collection at the Newberry provides materials related to Philippine and American history, the late Spanish period in the Philippines, Filipino Nationalism and Revolution, Philippine-American War

(1899–1902) and U.S. government relations, Philippine linguistics, and finally travel literature and maps of the islands. Also included are five volumes of documents from 1578 to 1792 on Philippine history and politics, transcribed by Ventura del Arco in the Real Academia de la Historia in Madrid between 1859 and 1865. Finally, nearly eight thousand early twentieth-century ethnographic photographs documenting Indigenous people of the Philippines created by Dean C. Worcester are also held within the collection.

From the time Ayer began to collect material on the Philippine Islands, he had sought the advice of Worcester, an American zoologist, public official, and writer on the Philippines. A good many years after the Philippines had come into U.S. possession, Ayer visited the islands with Worcester. One day Worcester was showing Ayer his photographs of Indigenous Filipinos. Ayer looked at one or two hundred of these pictures and asked how many there were in total. Worcester had amassed thousands of photographs of Indigenous peoples, representing a total of thirty-six linguistic groups.

This information prompted Ayer to ask, “What will you charge to make me a copy of each one of your eight thousand photographs, say six inches square, with a little written sketch of each one of the linguistic groups beginning with the Tagalog Nation? I should want the account to cover six or seven typewritten pages descriptive of the various linguistic groups, their habitat, how they differ from the nomads, etc., etc. Then I should want you to take the first photograph you have of the Tagalogs and mark it ‘Number 1, Series I, Tagalog’ and describe it. The next oldest photograph would be ‘Number 2,’ and so on through all the photographs you have of the Tagalog Nation. What I should desire would be to have you indicate how each group differs from other linguistic groups, with a description of each race, and a long list of photographs to illustrate each group, by individual examples. What will you charge me to do that with eight thousand photographs?”

Worcester charged Ayer \$4,000. And this is how the Philippine photographs came into Ayer’s possession—and eventually the Newberry’s.

It’s important to note that Worcester’s fascination with the Philippines was coupled with his fascination and commitment to the relatively new technology of photography. During his time in the region, he and his employees in the Interior Department’s Bureau of Non-Christian Tribes took thousands of photographs. A passionate imperialist, Worcester used many of his photographs in public lectures and popular articles supporting the colonial mission and America’s responsibilities to “civilize” the Indigenous peoples of the Philippines. Others sought to be scientific records, framed through troubling nineteenth-century racial classifications and evolutionary paradigms. Nonetheless, the photographs provide an invaluable archive of



Igorot people dancing in Caoyan, Province of Lepanto.



A group of Ibaloi men and women carrying rice, with women's baskets in the foreground and a man's -chuggi- with a hat hanging upon it in the background, in Baguio, Province of Benguet.

the history of American colonialism; the colonial history of early anthropology; and of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century history, communities, and individuals of the Philippines.

Today these images are of wide interest to descendant communities and scholars alike, but not until recently have they become digitized so they may be available from most anywhere in the world. It is therefore not a surprise that Filipino scholars from the Philippines and diaspora frequent the Newberry Library. Ricky Punzalan, Associate Professor of Information and Co-Director of ReConnect/ReCollect: Reparative Connections to Philippine Collections at the University of Michigan, was one of the many scholars who consulted the Worcester photos. While working on his dissertation research in the summer of 2010, he spent over a month at the Newberry comparing the Worcester prints with the digitized glass plate negatives from the University of Michigan’s Museum of Anthropological Archaeology collection. This painstaking process inspired him to advocate for the digitization of

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An old Ilocano man named Lucio, who served as a mail carrier for Emilio Aguinaldo while the latter was in hiding.



The queen of Tay-Tay.



The sergeant of Emilio Aguinaldo's bodyguard, who accompanied Dean Worcester and Governor George Curry.



The proprietor of a portable restaurant, Manila.



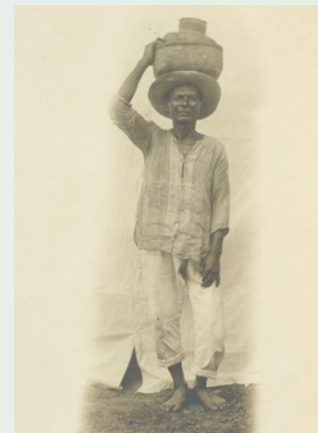
A Kabayan Igorot girl teaching at Daklan, Province of Benguet.



A pair of Tagalog musicians with drums in La Mesa, Province of Bulacan.



A Visayan woman in Cuyo, Province of Palawan.



An itinerant vino vendor of the city of Manila .

the Worcester prints (and their accompanying five-volume index) at the library. If a U.S.-based scholar like Ricky struggles to access and use the photographs, imagine the barriers for communities in the Philippines.

More serious plans to digitize the thousands of Worcester images started at a serendipitous encounter at a packed conference session in 2019. When Ricky and Analú María López, the Newberry's Ayer Librarian and Assistant Curator of American Indian and Indigenous Studies, first met while attending the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums (ATALM) conference, the two expressed a mutual desire to ensure that the Worcester photographs become more accessible to the descendant Filipino Indigenous source communities they document. Two years later, Ricky came ready with sufficient discretionary research funds to cover the digitization.

One way to assess a good digitization project is by the relationships it creates, and those relationships can take years to cultivate.

Ricky's journey with the prints at the library as a doctoral student has allowed him to pursue his more recent, community-based projects as a professor and to begin consolidating all the Worcester photographs dispersed in various institutions. But this story of an evolving relationship with the collection is also about Analú and the Newberry's desire to provide community access through digital surrogacy and openness to collaborate with Filipino scholars to realize this.

Efforts to make the physical collection easier to navigate began in 2018, when the original five-volume index created by Worcester was transformed into an online finding aid. This work, which also included editing inappropriate and offensive language, made it easier for researchers to parse the photos in the collection. That is when the Newberry's Digital Initiatives and Services team stepped in. Over the course of six months in 2024, Digitization Technician Leo Godoy digitized the photo collection. But the effort didn't end there. Once digitized, these photographs needed context and metadata to help

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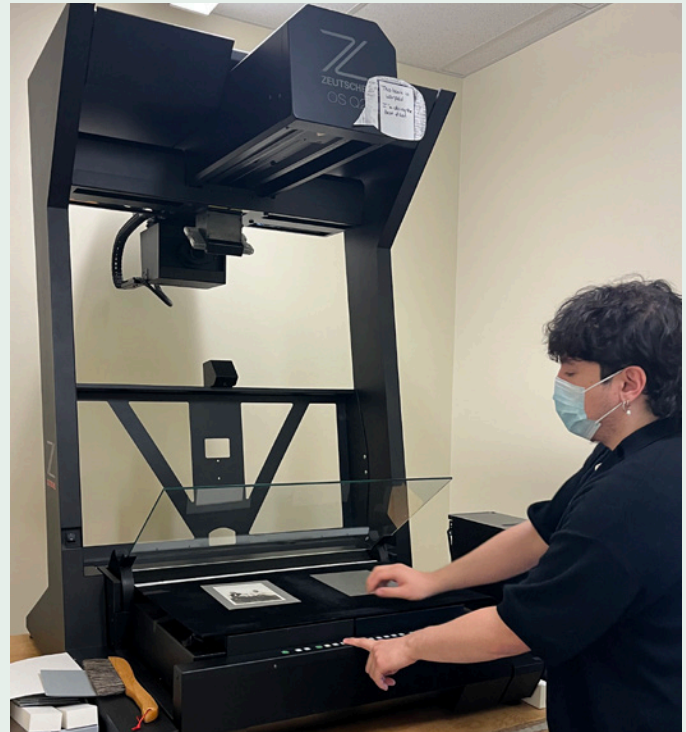
them become discoverable when dropped into the pool of eighty thousand other digital objects in the Newberry's Digital Collections.

This finding aid was crucial to simplifying the creation of metadata for discovery in the Newberry's Digital Collections. Once the images were uploaded to the library's central digital asset management system, staff used software to extract and repurpose the original finding aid data. This process was semi-automatic, as once the data had been extracted it required a few rounds of massaging to make descriptions uniform and increase searchability.

For example, while finding aid descriptors like "half-length view" and "side-view" can help guide someone to the proper photograph offline, these descriptions can become redundant in a digital collection and were shortened to simply describe the person or image depicted. The photograph metadata now includes the updated names of the Indigenous groups that the photograph depicts, rather than applying all the group names to all photographs. This also included updating some of the names of the groups, as even since 2018 there has been changes to terms. Along the way, some photographs that had been "missing" from the physical collection were discovered and added back into the finding aid, making them accessible both digitally and physically.

Digitization efforts must aspire to begin and end in better relationships. At a moment when a vast number of institutions are reflecting on the ethics of colonial holdings, it is crucial that the Newberry define what it means to enact shared stewardship and reparative approaches to collections care, representation, and access. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to this, thus it will require community consultation and relationship building. The digitization of the Philippine photographs will allow scholars like Ricky to help the library facilitate community access and consultations that are otherwise impossible due to resource constraints, limited cultural knowledge, and geographic distance. It is important to emphasize that many communities across the globe still lack robust digital infrastructures. The assumption that putting collections online makes them accessible to all people around the globe is a fallacy. In the case of the Ayer Collection, items and knowledge often reside thousands of miles away from the communities from which they originated. Direct community consultation, collaboration, and relationship building are crucial components to increasing access. The Newberry has worked with Indigenous people as visitors, researchers, advisors, and consultants for generations, and recognizes that more work is needed to remove structural barriers to its collections for members of their communities. The effort to digitize the Worcester images—an effort that is a true collaboration—is another step in this important direction. 📌

View the photos of the Dean C. Worcester Collection at collections.newberry.org.



The Newberry's Leo Godoy digitized photographs of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century communities and individuals of the Philippines.

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