

The Photographic Laboratory

Jean Grant

One of the Oriental Institute's most valuable treasures is not on display in the Museum, nor can most of it be found in our publications. It is our enormous photographic archives. Photographs contain information that cannot be communicated in the written word; many of our photographs contain information that could never be recovered if lost. The photographs document the sequential operations of archeology, in which upper layers must be destroyed to reveal lower ones; they preserve views of sites and customs of the Near East long vanished into the twentieth century; they make possible the study in Chicago of objects housed in other institutions around the world; and often they are the sole remaining record of artifacts, particularly clay tablets, that have deteriorated since their discovery into little more

than piles of dust and pebbles. And, in fact, much of this information is in danger of being lost.

The reason is outmoded technology. The glass-plate and nitrate-film negatives used when the Institute began collecting photographs are no longer satisfactory. Glass breaks; nitrates decompose, not only disintegrating themselves, but also exuding fumes that affect nearby film. Some darkroom work was done in the field under less than ideal conditions, producing less than satisfactory results. Some 20,000 negatives are affected by these and other considerations. They can be saved, but only if work begins very soon. On the one hand, people—volunteers, for now—are needed to help. But on the other hand, very little can be done with our photographic laboratory equipped as it is.

Most of our equipment was purchased between twenty and forty years ago. While it continues to function, it does so neither very well nor very efficiently. Some equipment, such as that necessary for water filtration and temperature control, we have never had. The conservation of our negative archive cannot begin until some new apparatus is acquired. This priceless scholarly resource must be preserved. Here is what the photo lab needs:

Stainless steel darkroom sink	\$864.00
Photo mounting press	293.00
Drum dryer	610.00
Print washer	600.00
Water filtration and temperature control units	
Small darkroom, 3 needed	296.00 each
Large darkroom, 3 needed	296.00 each
5" × 7" view camera	595.00
Revolving 4" × 5" back	
for above camera	135.00
Lenses: 150 mm.	343.00
Lenses: 210 mm.	494.00
Lenses: 9 ½"	585.00
Lenses: 14"	763.00