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Describing Historical Images: Improving Access to Digital Collections with Local Subjects

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CLEMSON LIBRARIES

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CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

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Metadata and Monographic Resources Team

THE PROJECT

This project created and applied a controlled vocabulary of local subject headings to items in the Clemson University Historical Images Online. Because of their visual nature and importance to Clemson history, the images needed enhanced description to provide additional access points.

Decisions were often user-informed based on researcher questions fielded by Clemson University Libraries' Special Collections and Archives.

Controlled vocabulary of local subjects are managed in CollectiveAccess. Historical research on new subjects is conducted using archival collections (yearbooks, catalogs, meeting minutes, student newspapers) and found sources are documented in subject record.

CHALLENGES

1. Library of Congress Authorities not sufficient for local researcher needs - few local names, events, and topics.
2. Existing local subjects not controlled, leading to inconsistencies.
3. Unwieldy local subject faceted list could overwhelm researchers.
4. Minimal guidelines on how to create, format, and apply local subjects.

Who or what is important enough to receive a local subject?

How broad or narrow should they be?

When do you apply narrow local subject vs. broad LC Authorities?

EXAMPLES

Personal Names

TITLE
Mess Hall staff preparing food

COLLECTIONS
Clemson University Historical Images

DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION
Interior shot of Mess Hall staff members cutting and preparing meat in the kitchen. Tom Littlejohn, long time staff member and namesake of the Tom Littlejohn apartments for Clemson's African American staff, looks on. On back: [Mess Hall Kitchen and Staff]; [Tom Littlejohn (far right facing camera]

LOCATIONS
Barracks No. 1 (Historical), Pickens County, South Carolina (34.67968,-82.83795) 📍

TOPICS
College buildings
Lost architecture
Restaurants
Kitchens
Littlejohn, Tom
Mess Hall [Barracks No. 1 (Clemson, S.C.)]

http://purl.clemson.edu/424C0D0731385A7C1C484D669338D997

Questions of Chronology

TITLE
Main Building

COLLECTIONS
Clemson University Historical Images

DATES
Date Created 1923

DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION
On back: [Tillman Hall] [Main Building] [1923]

LOCATIONS
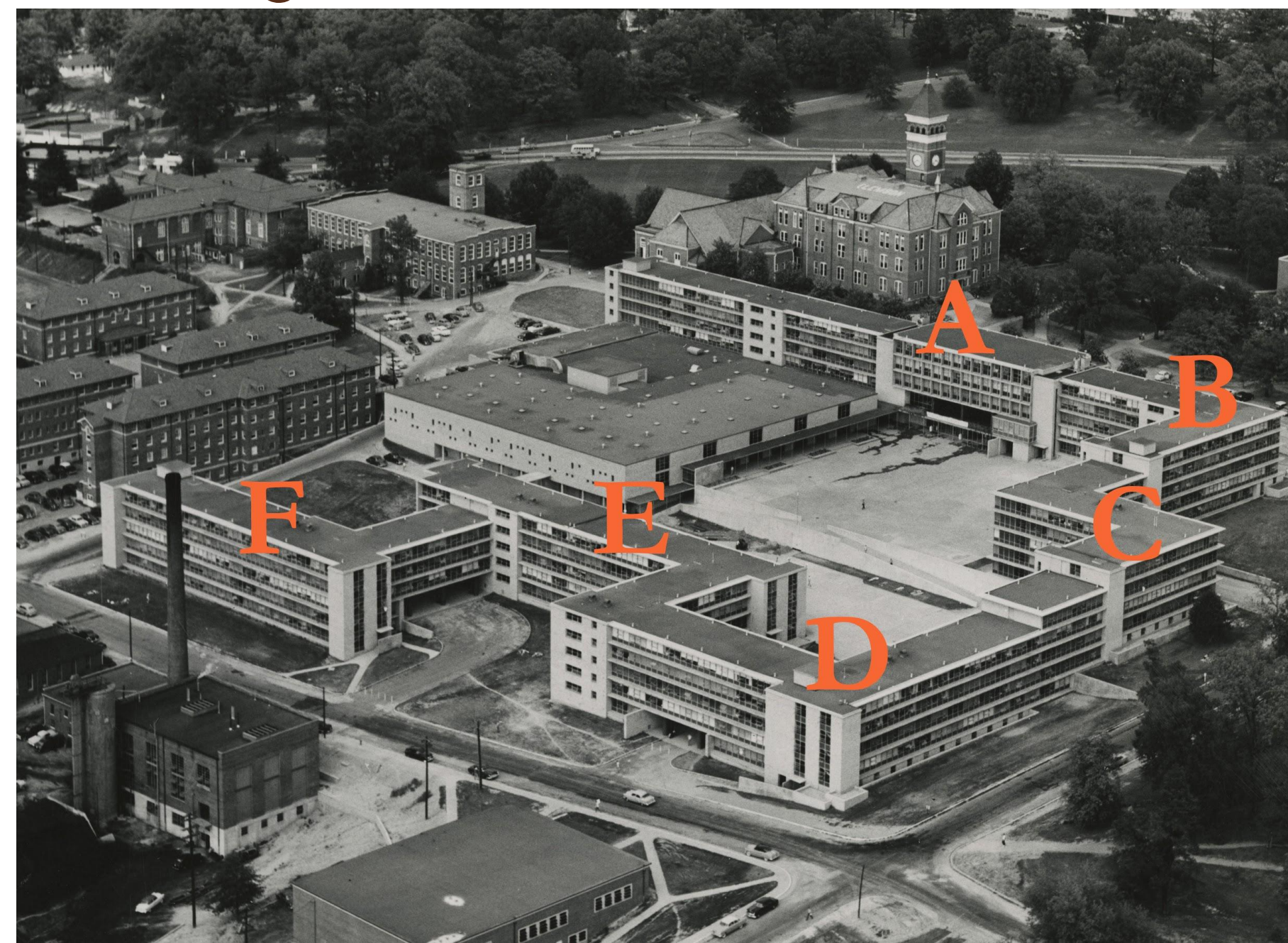Tillman Hall, Pickens County, South Carolina (34.6801,-82.83737) 📍

TOPICS
College buildings
Main Building [Clemson, S.C.]

http://purl.clemson.edu/1C395F741F3858905209FCFD5E61F90C

Building Confusion

TITLE
Aerial view of Johnstone Hall

COLLECTIONS
Clemson University Historical Images

DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION
Language English
UA100_001549; On Back: [Johnstone Hall] [Tillman Hall] [Godfrey Hall] [c1954]; Aerial View of Campus

LOCATIONS
Johnstone Hall, Pickens County, South Carolina (34.68022,-82.83799) 📍

TOPICS
College buildings
Dormitories
College campuses
Johnstone Hall [Clemson, S.C.]

http://purl.clemson.edu/5C9A7EE9348484DzB7604717576D3DD72

CONCLUSION

Solutions

1. Normalized existing local subject headings - deduplicated, fixed inconsistencies, deleted/broadened certain terms.
2. Implemented controlled vocabulary of local subject headings.
3. Created more detailed guidelines to standardize formatting and provide criteria for creating local subjects.
4. Relied on cataloger judgment, experience, and knowledge of collection to create/apply subjects.
5. Formatting subjects follows RDA to prepare for future global sharing via NACO.

Continuing Challenges

➢ Relating historic names to current names of buildings and departments.

How do we find all images of a building by a single term?

➢ Defining broadness of local subjects on case-by-case basis but also within and

How can a local subject serve all digital collections?

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