



Digitally Archiving Post-War Japan

Vayeira Moshe, Annika Culver Ph.D
FSU College of History



Abstract

During the Allied Occupation of Japan (1945-1952), social elites from American society lived amongst Japan's former ruling class and worked with them in establishing the new democratic Japanese government. Oliver L. Austin Jr. (1903-1988), an ornithologist working for the Natural Resources Section (NRS), and his family joined this group of Americans to assume this responsibility. During his family's time in Japan, Austin and his wife Elizabeth took over 1000 photographs of various places and events in Japan which reveal post-war Japanese society and natural settings. Austin's personal diary also reveals a microcosm of American perceptions and reactions to Japanese ways of life. The Austin I. Oliver Photographic Collection thus serves as a public digital archive for scholars and the general public interested in postwar Japan. However, the massive collection of images remains incomplete insofar as not every image is fully captioned or contains information on when and where it was taken. Some slides were damaged over time. So, the continual process of digital archiving, of discovering links between photographs, diary entries, and academic journals to discover their relevance, must be undertaken to complete this digital archive for future scholarly work on this critical period of Japanese American history and US-Japan relations. Researchers from Japan, including the independent scholar Noriko Sakoh and ornithological scientist Hiraoka Takashi, have assisted in the project, and especially, have found and catalogued remote locations like Hokkaidō and Torishima. The collection allows for unique interdisciplinary work on digital humanities to continue as the images continue to divulge messages from the past.

Methods

The process of Digital Archiving is the acquisition, cataloging/identification, storage, and preservation of data. Utilizing the Oliver L. Austin Jr. Photographic collection as an already acquired, ongoing project of archival research, my role in this project has followed the steps of cataloging/identification and the preservation of data as images. My process of archival work begins in identifying the Who, What, When, Where, and Why of each photo. This is done through consulting Austin's diary or letters, 'location sleuths' in Japan, Ms. Noriko Sakoh's research, and lateral searching of obituaries, tourist catalogues, Google Street View, and released government documentation. Following this process of identification, I then catalogue all information in the OMEKA research database while submitting my findings to my research mentor, Professor Annika A. Culver. This cataloging process typically follows a round of revisions to formalize any informal speech and correct any mistakes I may have made during this process. My role in preserving this data lies in adding Austin's diary entries or observations from his personal letters to relevant photos to ensure that these images center the photographer's perspective. I am maintaining the photographs' authenticity, refraining from any additions of modern sensibilities, or abstracting Austin's perspective, which occasionally differs from contemporary views.



Boat to Seven Izu Islands

Austin and the Tokyo-Kanagawa Military Government (m.g) Team spend three weeks upon the major islands. Austin spends his time birding. Below is the personal journal entry of Oliver L Austin, Jr., collected by Noriko Sakoh:

"I saw four more [Plumed Egrets] and collected another on Kozushima on 4 May 1947 (鳥学会誌 伊豆七島・オーストン) The coxwain [sic] put the skiff over for me, and sculled me ashore at once, as the weather was too good to miss, and I did not want to wait nother [sic] two hours while the m.g. team had breakfast before going ashore. Found a youngster to carry my bag, and took off over the hills." - Oliver L. Austin, Jr.'s Journal, collected by Noriko Sakoh.



The Thousand Samurai Procession

This is a photo of a Shinto festival held at the Nikkō Shrine following World War II. At these festivals, Shinto followers prayed for the peace of the world and the happiness of all people. The Reitaisai (Grand Festival) is held on May 17 and 18. On May 17, there is a ceremony held at the shrine in the presence of the current head of the Tokugawa family, Sanshikai officials, and other dignitaries and guests. This photo displays The Procession of 1,000 Samurai. This includes over 1,200 attendants, who are divided into 53 categories, including warriors who escort portable shrines to the Otabi-sho (Sojourn Hall). The ceremony concludes when the procession returns to the Toshogu Shrine.



Shimokitazawa shopping street

The Shimokitazawa shopping street of Tokyo had not been firebombed during World War II and quickly transformed into a commercial sector following WWII when Oliver took this photo. A black market established itself, providing basic need items, like food and clothing. The Shimokitazawa markets would become a center of Japanese counterculture in the 60s.



Results

As this research project contains over 1000 images, and new images are still being added as they are recovered, this is a continual process of archival retrieval. During this process, I have archived 150 images in part or in entirety. I have also taken the role of an editor to make corrections, discovered 'image chains' and collated and contextualized processes such as the Seven Islands of Izu image set. The 150 images that I have contributed to are available for further research by scholars worldwide, including Ms. Noriko Sakoh, who is creating a photobook for a general audience which will eventually be published by the Tokyo-based Japanese press Kōbunsha.



Ryuseinotaki (Shooting Star Falls)

One of two twin waterfalls in the Daisetsuzan National Park, founded in 1934. The Mountains from which this waterfalls is sometimes called "The Playground of the Gods" Captured 1948.09



References

Cheng, Johnny. "Ginga & Ryusei Falls - Hokkaido's Married Couple Waterfalls." World of Waterfalls, January 14, 2024. <https://www.world-of-waterfalls.com/waterfalls/asia-ginga-waterfall-and-ryusei-waterfall/>.
Culver, Annika, ed. "The Oliver L. Austin Images." The Oliver L. Austin Photographic Collection, 2015. <https://austin.as.fsu.edu/about>.
Dayman, Lucy. "The Story of Shimokitazawa." GaijinPot Blog, January 17, 2020. <https://blog.gaijinpot.com/shimokitazawa-tokyos-coolest-neighborhood/>.
Government of Japan. "Daisetsuzan National Park." Daisetsuzan National Park. Accessed February 28, 2024. <https://www.env.go.jp/en/nature/nps/park/daisetsu/index.html>.
Hattori, Keiro. "共同研究 1 経済のグローバル化にともなう地方の問題に関する研究 Shimokitazawa — The Study of Organically Developed Shopping District in Tokyo—," n.d.