



An Introduction to Primary Sources: Photographs in the Archives

TARGET GRADE RANGE: 6-12

OVERVIEW

By looking closely at photographs from several moments in Savannah's history, students will learn the basic tools for analyzing photographic images using description and reflection in order to improve visual literacy, as well as to identify the strengths and weaknesses of using photographs as a historical tool. Students will create a brief story, journal entry, or art piece reflecting on the subjects of the photographs.

What is a Primary Source?

A primary source is a first-hand, original account or record about a person, place, object, or an event. Oral histories, objects, photographs, and documents such as newspapers, census records, diaries, and journals are primary sources. Secondary sources are accounts, records, or evidence derived from original or primary sources. Textbooks are secondary sources.

Objectives:

After completing this learning activity, students will be able to:

- Describe the subjects of photographs and place them in a historical context
- Understand the value of photographs as historical records

Time Required: 1 hour

Topic/s: Social Studies, Art, Creative Writing

Standards:

- The student understands the visual arts in relation to history and culture (National Standard 4).
- VA6.RE.1 VA7.RE.1 VA8.RE.1 Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world. a. Identify how the issues of time, place, and culture are reflected in selected works of art. b. Interpret works of art considering themes, ideas, moods, and/or intentions. c. Define where and how we encounter images in our daily lives and how images influence our view of the world.
- VA6.CN.3 VA7.CN.3 VA8.CN.3 Utilize a variety of resources to understand how artistic learning extends beyond the walls of the classroom. a. Recognize the presence and meaning of visual art in the community. b. Explore the connection between personal artistic creation and one's relationship to local and global learning communities. c. Make interdisciplinary connections, expanding upon and applying art skills and knowledge to enhance other areas of learning.
- VAHSDR.RE.1 Reflect on the context of personal works of art in relation to community, culture, and the world. a. Consider the influences on works of art from a wide range of contemporary and traditional art through discussion and/or written response. b. Investigate and discuss how the issues of time, place, and/or culture are reflected in works of art
- VAHSDR.RE.3 Engage in the process of art criticism to make meaning and increase visual literacy. a. Formulate written and/or oral response to works of art through various approaches.



Materials:

Materials may be original or reproduction, at the discretion of the Archivist and Municipal Archives Director.

- “Photographs: Introduction to Photographs” handout, from *Engaging Students with Primary Sources*, developed by the Smithsonian National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center, in partnership with Thinkfinity, page 24 (available online at: <https://historyexplorer.si.edu/sites/default/files/PrimarySources.pdf>)
- “Photographs: Strengths and Limitations: handout, from *Engaging Students with Primary Sources*, developed by the Smithsonian National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center, in partnership with Thinkfinity, page 25 (available online at: <https://historyexplorer.si.edu/sites/default/files/PrimarySources.pdf>)
- Photograph Analysis Worksheets (1 per student per station)
 - “Analyze a Photograph” handout, developed by the National Archives and Records Administration (available online at: https://www.archives.gov/files/education/lessons/worksheets/photo_analysis_worksheet.pdf)
 - “Tips for Reading Photographs” handout, from *Engaging Students with Primary Sources*, developed by the Smithsonian National Museum of American History Kenneth E. Behring Center, in partnership with Thinkfinity, pages 26-28 (available online at: <https://historyexplorer.si.edu/sites/default/files/PrimarySources.pdf>)
- 5 – 10 photographs from the Municipal Archives
 - Teachers conducting the program in the classroom may use the Sample Photographs Packet provided or identify photographs from the Municipal Archives Online Digital Image Catalog at www.savannahga.gov/DigitalCollections. Municipal Archives staff can provide additional images on-demand based on subject needs, as available.
- Paper, pencils, markers to create reflective responses



PROGRAM:

Introduction: (10-15 minutes total)

- Introduction to concepts of archives and archival work, and the City of Savannah Municipal Archives
- Introduction to photographs
- Talk through the process of analyzing a picture together for the first station

Rotating Stations: (30 minutes)

- Break students into 5-10 groups (depending on the number of students – groups should be between 3-5 students) and assign them a station to start. Each station will take 10 minutes, then rotate to the next station.
- Have a photograph that students can pick up, hold, pass around etc. Have the Photograph Analysis Worksheets available at the station.
- Have students closely analyze the picture, describing what the occasion is, what the perspective is, who or what is pictured, how they think the subjects feel, what they are wearing, what we can learn from the image, etc.
- After 7-10 minutes, switch to a new station, repeat the process 3-4 times. Depending on the size of the group, there may need to be a period where the students can go around and look at each of the remaining pictures briefly.

Creative Reflection (15 minutes)*:

Have students decide on a favorite image and create a reflective response to it.

Examples:

- A journal entry written as if you were a subject of the photo writing about the day the photo was taken
- Write a newspaper article about the event (who, what, when, where, why)
- A drawing of a detail of the photograph that catches your attention
- A drawing of what happened right before or right after the photograph was taken

Have students stand by the photograph they choose and ask for volunteers to share their reflection.

**Alternatively, teachers may assign this as a take-away reflection or journaling assignment.*

Archives Alive!

Photographs in the Archives

An Introduction to Archives and Reading Photographs

In today's program we will...

Learn about what Archives are

Use photographs from the Archives
to learn about reading and interpreting them

Handle original archival materials safely



What does the word Archive mean?

Archive ar·chive | \ 'är-,kīv \ *noun*

Definition

- 1:** The records created by people and organizations as they lived and worked. An archival collection is a unique body of information, created at a particular time by a particular organization or individual as the result of a particular activity
- 2:** a place in which public records or historical materials (such as documents) are preserved
- 3:** The organization responsible for preserving or making available archival materials

Types of Archives



Historical Societies



Government Archives



Community Archives



Corporate Archives



Religious Archives

...and so many more!

Digital Collections



COLLECTION
10th-16th Century
Liturgical Chants

The acquisition of medieval liturgical chant manuscripts that trace the history of music notation as it evolved over



COLLECTION
Aaron Copland
Collection

The first release of the online collection contains approximately 1,000 items that yield a total of about 5,000 images

Digital Archives

Introduction to the Archives

The City of Savannah Municipal Archives:

- Collects, manages, preserves, and makes accessible records documenting the City of Savannah's history
- Administers the records management program and the City Records Center to increase the efficiency of City agencies
- Shares the City's history with City employees, citizens and visitors through outreach activities

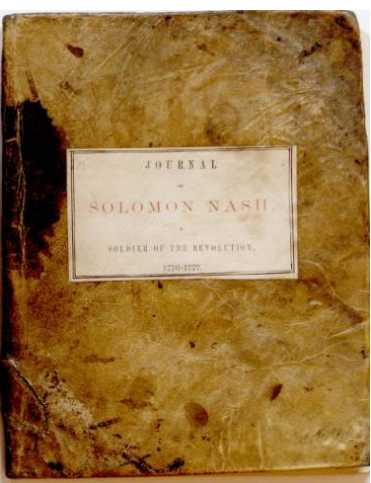


Introduction to the City of Savannah Collections

Overall Collections reflect:

- City of Savannah incorporation date of 1789
 - Colonial-era records are not held here.
- City of Savannah corporate limits
 - Think corporate limits for the time period being researched, not modern limits.
- City of Savannah government functions
 - Very few personal papers are held here, with the largest exception being the W. W. Law Collection.

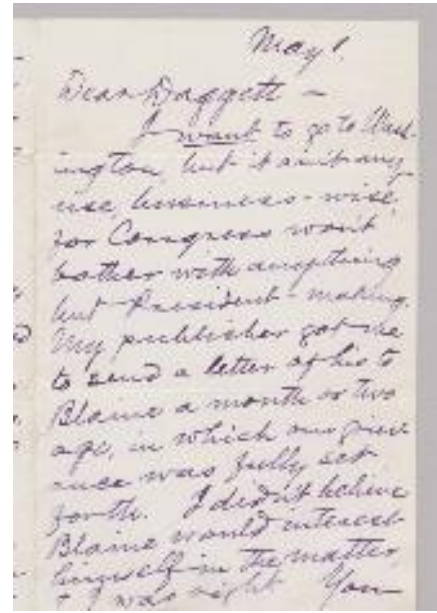




Archival collections can contain just about anything that was created or saved by a person or organization



WayBack Machine





Primary Sources

Materials that provide **direct** evidence, **first-hand** testimony, or an **eyewitness** account of a topic or event.

They can be published or unpublished items in any format, including handwritten letters, images, sound, or objects.

A Picture is worth a thousand words...



- *Photographs give visual information about a time, place, person or event*
- *They help us learn about clothes, hairstyles, and the way buildings looked in the past*
- *They are records of events that you don't have to be able to read to understand*
- *They may appear true, but the photographer can make choices about what to include in the picture that changes how we understand the subject.*

Learning about Photographs...

Strengths

- + Visual records of a moment in time
- + Convey many details about people, places, objects, and events
- + Convey information about everyday life and behavior that is best communicated in visual terms (hair and clothing styles, interior design)
- + Sometimes provide evidence of attitude
- + Important to the study of people who did not leave many written records
- + Can stimulate the personal involvement of the viewer
- + Do not require fluency in a particular language to understand
- + Can be used to stimulate the memory of people

Learning about Photographs...

Limitations

- Not a complete or objective source: the image that serves as the lasting record does not equate directly with the reality of the event itself
- Relationship of the photographer to those being photographed often difficult to determine
- Reflect the bias or perspective of the photographer including choices about:
 - what is included in the frame of the camera
 - the moment in time recorded in the photograph
 - the subject matter that the person present at the event thought was important to record
 - whether or not to manipulate the people or objects in the picture
- People, place, date, and the name of the photographer are often not identified.
- The emotions and thoughts of those involved often are not evident.
- Information from this kind of source is often suggestive rather than definitive. Photographs must be studied in conjunction with other evidence. One must look at many photographs and/or other source materials such as documents and oral histories to determine if the information is unusual or part of a larger pattern.

How to Read a Photograph

- ***What is the subject of the picture?***
 - The subject is the person, place, event, or thing that the photograph is showing
- ***Look at how the subject is presented. Is it shown with any special objects or in a special way that tells us something about it?***
 - Portraits are pictures of people. Sometimes people are photographed with things that are special to them to tell us about their life.
- ***Is the picture black and white or in color?***
 - This can tell you how old the picture is, if it is a snapshot or an artistic photo, or something about what the artist is trying to tell us.
- ***Perspective is the angle at which the photograph is taken.***
 - Images can be taken from the front, side, back, aerial (from the air), close up or far away.

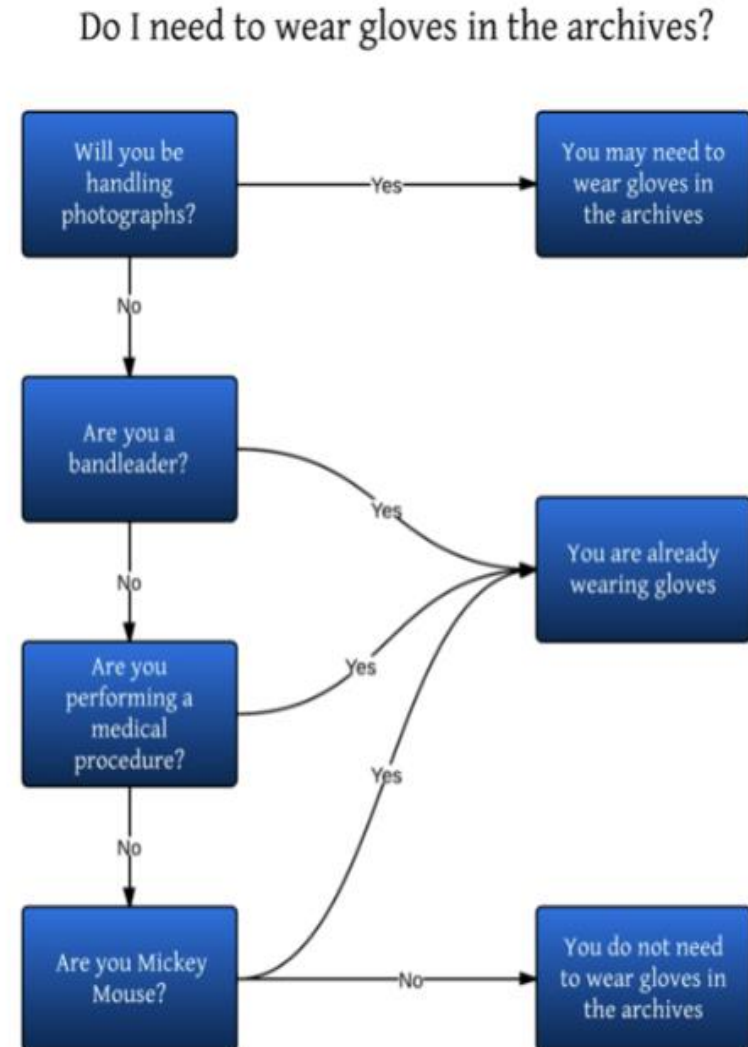
**Think about WHY the photographer made these choices
and what they say about the subject they are presenting**

What are some things that you
or your family take pictures of?

Handling Records:

- Pencils only
- Be very careful when turning pages
- Do not pick up original archival materials
- Do not lean or write on archival materials
- Keep papers and pencils far away from original documents

Mistreatment of original documents will result in being removed from the exercise



Photographs

Introduction to Photographs

Photographs provide us with images of past events. Today, historians study the content and the meaning of these visual images to locate information about a particular topic, time, or event. Photographs can convey countless details about life. For historians and for us, “A picture is worth a thousand words.”

Photographers have the ability to manipulate, intentionally or unintentionally, the record of the event. It is the photographer—and the camera’s frame—that defines the picture’s content.

Historians who study the everyday lives of anonymous people find photographs are an invaluable source. Sometimes photographs are the only means of reconstructing the material world and behavior of people who did not leave many written records.

Yet, photographs, like other primary sources, must be studied carefully and critically. While they appear to be the most objective and accurate of all primary sources, they MAY not be. Photographs are the product of many variables, including, the photographer’s intention, the user’s need, the viewer’s interpretation and the equipment’s technical abilities.

Photographers have the ability to manipulate, intentionally or unintentionally, the record of the event. It is the photographer—and the camera’s frame—that defines the picture’s content. Thus, the photographer chooses what will be in the picture, what will be left out, and what the emphasis will be.

The first steps in using photographs as a primary source are to identify the subject and content of the photograph, and the contextual information that may not be in the photograph, such as learning about the photographer. What was the photographer’s intention? Was the photographer hired for a specific purpose? Was the photographer a partial or seemingly impartial observer, an insider or an outsider?

Like all other primary sources, photographs must be studied in conjunction with other evidence. One must look at many photographs, related documents, and oral histories to determine if a photograph’s information is unusual or part of a larger pattern.

Photographs: Strengths and Limitations

Primary Source

Photographs: Visual records obtained through photography

Strengths

- + Visual records of a moment in time
- + Convey many details about people, places, objects, and events
- + Convey information about everyday life and behavior that is best communicated in visual terms (hair and clothing styles, interior design)
- + Sometimes provide evidence of attitude
- + Important to the study of people who did not leave many written records
- + Can stimulate the personal involvement of the viewer
- + Do not require fluency in a particular language to understand
- + Can be used to stimulate the memory of people

Limitations

- Not a complete or objective source: the image that serves as the lasting record does not equate directly with the reality of the event itself
- Relationship of the photographer to those being photographed often difficult to determine
- Reflect the bias or perspective of the photographer including choices about:
 - what is included in the frame of the camera
 - the moment in time recorded in the photograph
 - the subject matter that the person present at the event thought was important to record
 - whether or not to manipulate the people or objects in the picture
- People, place, date, and the name of the photographer are often not identified.
- The emotions and thoughts of those involved often are not evident.
- Information from this kind of source is often suggestive rather than definitive. Photographs must be studied in conjunction with other evidence. One must look at many photographs and/or other source materials such as documents and oral histories to determine if the information is unusual or part of a larger pattern.



Tips for Reading Photographs

1 of 3

Use this guide to help you analyze photographs. Answer as many of the questions as you can using evidence from the photograph. Write your answers to as many questions as possible based on what you see and what you may already know.

First Impressions

What are your first impressions?

Take a closer look . . . make sure to examine the whole photograph.

Make a list of any people in the photograph.

What is happening in the photograph?

Make a list of any activities you see going on in the photograph.

Make a list of any objects in the photograph.

Make a list of any animals in the photograph.



Tips for Reading Photographs

2 of 3

Looking More Closely

Are there any captions? A date? Location? Names of people?

What kind of clothing is being worn?

Is there any lettering on signs or buildings?

What time of year is pictured? Time of day? Cite your evidence.

Where was the photograph taken? Cite your evidence.

Thinking Further

If people are in the photograph, what do you think is their relationship to one another?

Can you speculate on a relationship of the people pictured and someone who is not in the picture?



Tips for Reading Photographs

3 of 3

What do you think happened just before the picture was taken?

What do you think happened just after the photograph was taken?

Who do you think took the photograph? Why?

What does this photograph suggest to you? Describe your reaction in a statement.

What questions do you have about the photograph? How could you try to answer them?

What is the one thing that you would remember most about this photograph? Why?

What questions do you have about the photograph that you cannot answer through analyzing it? Where could you go next to answer these questions?



Analyze a Photograph

Meet the photo.

Quickly scan the photo. What do you notice first?

Type of photo (check all that apply):

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|--|
| ☐ Portrait | ☐ Landscape | ☐ Aerial/Satellite | ☐ Action | ☐ Architectural |
| ☐ Event | ☐ Family | ☐ Panoramic | ☐ Posed | ☐ Candid |
| ☐ Documentary | ☐ Selfie | ☐ Other | | |

Is there a caption? ☐ yes ☐ no

Observe its parts.

List the people, objects and activities you see.

PEOPLE	OBJECTS	ACTIVITIES

Write one sentence summarizing this photo.

Try to make sense of it.

Answer as best you can. The caption, if available, may help.

Who took this photo?

Where is it from?

When is it from?

What was happening at the time in history this photo was taken?

Why was it taken? List evidence from the photo or your knowledge about the photographer that led you to your conclusion.

Use it as historical evidence.

What did you find out from this photo that you might not learn anywhere else?

What other documents, photos, or historical evidence are you going to use to help you understand this event or topic?





An Introduction to Primary Sources: Photographs in the Archives

Sample Photographs Packet

INSTRUCTOR'S IMAGE LIST

Image 1

Andrea Burgstiner and Shriners at Shrine Bowl Game, November 1969

Record Series 0120-006, City Manager's Office Photographs, Box 0120-006-1, Folder 24, Item 2

Image 2

City employees participating in health fair, October 1994

Record Series 0123-045, Public Information Office Photographs, Box 0123-045-5, Folder 63, Item 13

Image 3

Savannah building slated for preservation, no date

Record Series 0123-045, Public Information Office Photographs, Box 0123-045-5, Folder 65, Item 13

Image 4

"Savannah, GA, View North from DeSoto Hotel."

Postcard published by J. S. Oppenheimer Cigar Company of Savannah depicting a bird's-eye view of the city, 1898

Record Series 1121-057, V. & J. Duncan Postcard Collection, Item 9

Image 5

Broughton Street after a snow, circa 1914

Record Series 1121-057, V. & J. Duncan Postcard Collection, Item 49

Image 6

Westley Wallace "W. W." Law, President of the King-Tisdell Cottage Foundation, receiving the

Governor's Award from Governor Joe Frank Harris, April 1989

Photograph is signed by Governor Harris

Record Series 1121-1000, W. W. Law Photograph Collection, Item 165

Image 7

First grade students at Massie Elementary School reciting the pledge of allegiance, September 1967

Record Series 1121-1000, W. W. Law Photograph Collection, Item 739

Image 8

Savannah Light Infantry, Co. D, 1st Infantry (Colored), Captain H. N. Walton, Commanding, January 1, 1901, photograph by Wilson, taken in front of the U. S. Custom House

Record Series 1121-1000, W. W. Law Photograph Collection, Item 1742

Image 9

"Welcome Home Day" parade for returning World War I soldiers, March 4, 1919

Record Series 1121-057, V. & J. Duncan Postcard Collection, Item 347

Image 10

Stereograph card of a bird's-eye view painting of Savannah. This is a reproduction of J. W. Hill's 1855 painting of Savannah made from a view looking south on Bull Street from the City Exchange. The stereograph card is circa 1867-1885.

Record Series 1121-069, Girvin Family Collection of Savannah Stereographs, Item 43

Image 11

Stereograph card of a photograph of Forsyth Park Fountain, circa 1870-1888, photograph by Wilson & Havens

Record Series 1121-069, Girvin Family Collection of Savannah Stereographs, Item 14

Image 12

Portrait of an unidentified woman, circa 1880-1890, photograph by J. N. Wilson

Record Series 1121-1000, W. W. Law Photograph Collection, Item 1691

Image 13

Unidentified family portrait, no date

Record Series 1121-1000, W. W. Law Photograph Collection, Item 1700



Image 1



Image 2



Image 3

SAVANNAH, GA

View North from De Soto Hotel,

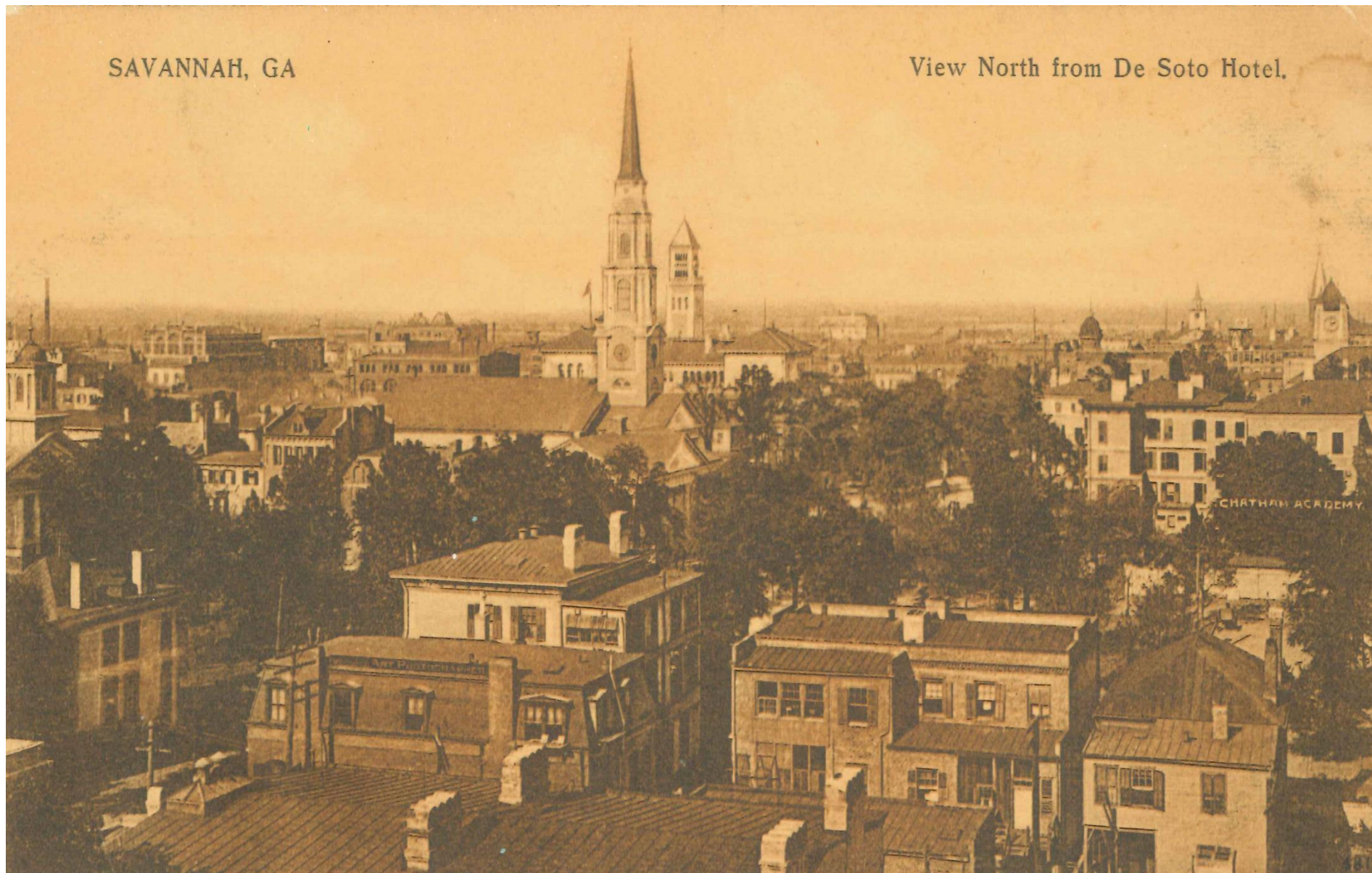


Image 4



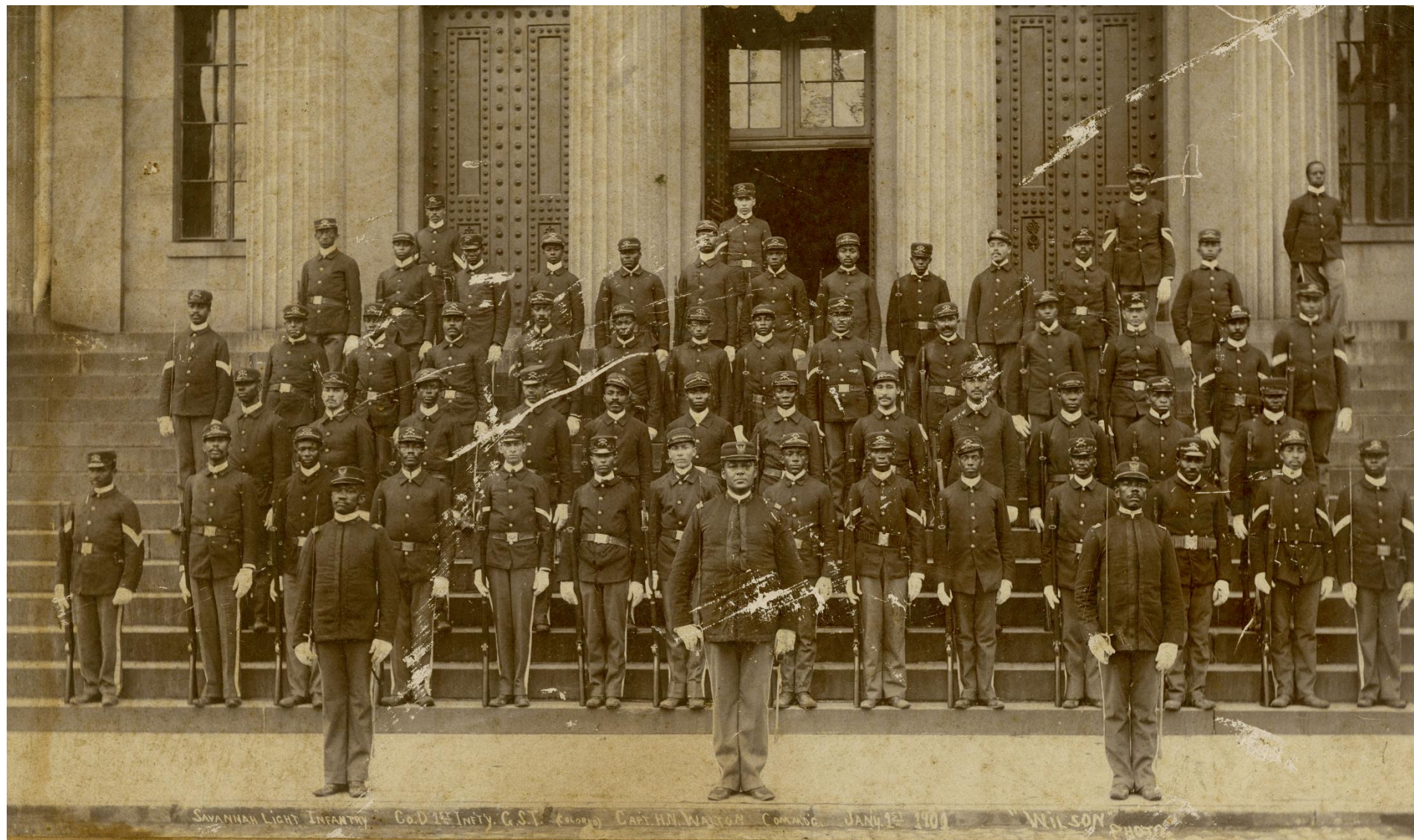
Image 5



Image 6



Image 7



SAVANNAH LIGHT INFANTRY Co. D 1st INF. C.S.T. (Colored) CAPT. H.N. WATSON COMD'G. JAN. 1st 1901 "WILSON" PHOTO

Image 8



Image 9

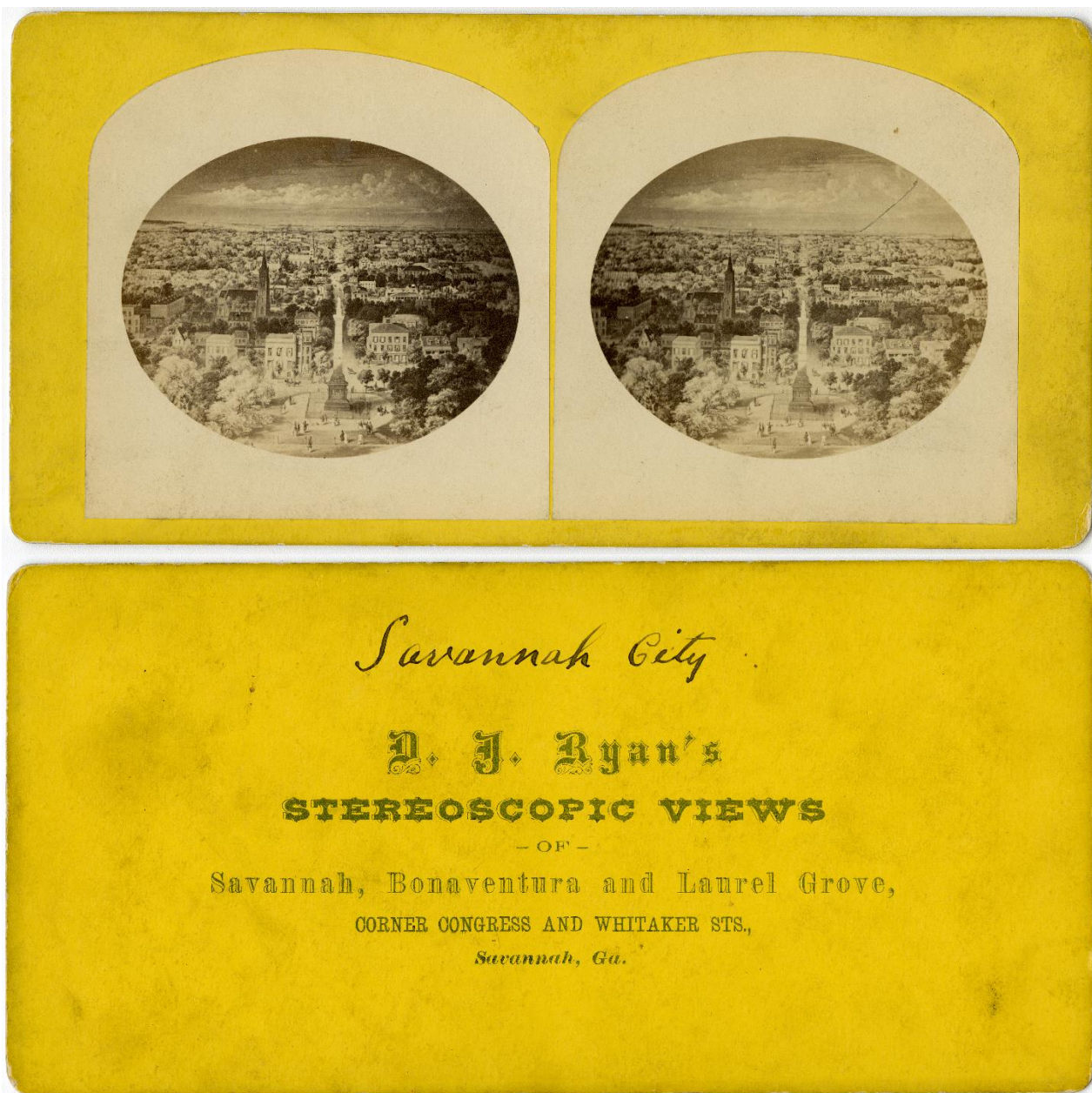
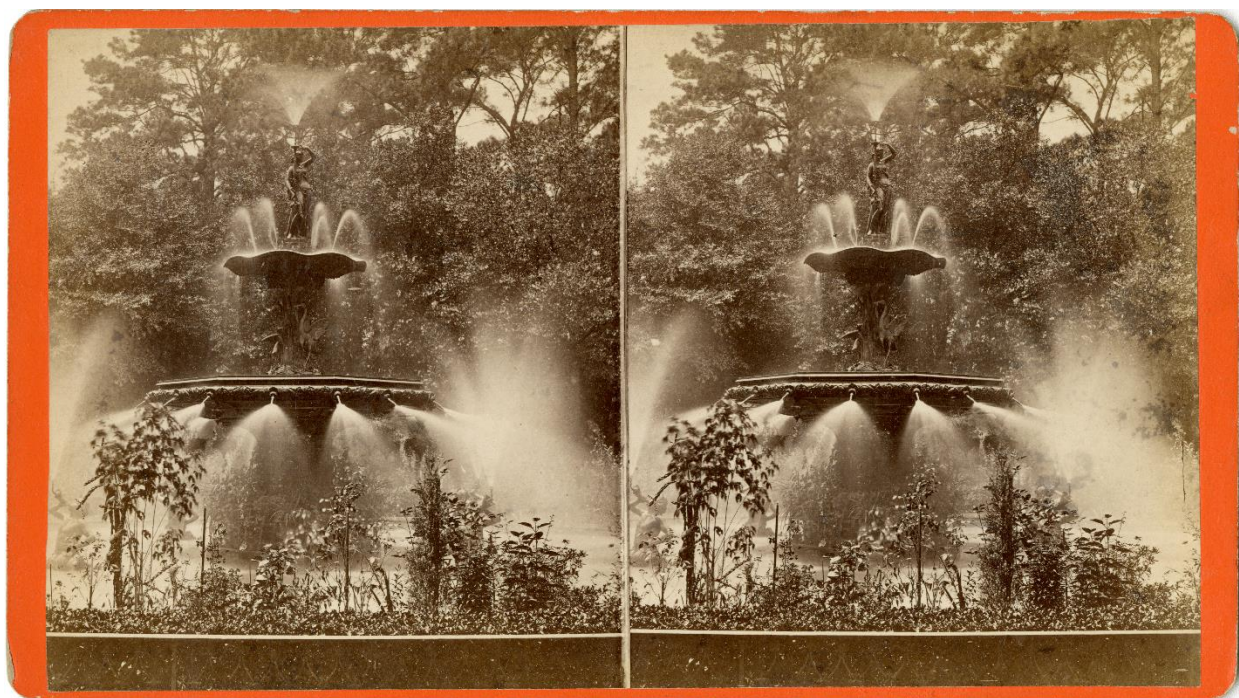


Image 10



M¹ "Fannie Foster" 3-15-44

PHOTOGRAPHED BY WILSON & HAVENS,

SAVANNAH, GA.

Park Fountain

UM. A. 52

827

Image 11



Image 12



Image 13