My Summer at Descanso
Olivia Hadley

Working as an archivist at Descanso Gardens in La Cañada Flintridge, LA County, California
About Descanso Gardens

- Botanical gardens with a variety of naturally-styled sites and landscapes
  - Rose Gardens
  - Japanese Gardens
  - California Garden
  - Oak and Camellia Forest
  - Boddy House

- Also serves as an event space
  - Summer concert series
  - Enchanted Forest
“Descanso Gardens is a unique Southern California landscape distinguished by its specialized botanic collections, historical significance, and rare natural beauty. Our mission is to practice exemplary stewardship of Descanso’s distinctive character and assets; offer people an experience close to nature; and cultivate understanding of the natural world and people’s place in it through inspiration, education and example.”
My Job as an Archivist

- Organizing the archives room in Descanso’s Boddy House, which contained photos (including slides) and documents about Descanso Gardens from the 1930’s through the early 2000’s

- What did these documents and photos include?
  - Scrapbooks of the gardens
  - Newspaper articles written by Manchester Boddy
  - Documents concerning administrative decisions and plans
  - Photos (and slides) of events and people at the gardens
  - Photos (and slides) of garden landscape
Choosing to focus on slides

- More organization was needed for archives than I could provide in an 8 week period
- Photos and slides needed preliminary sorting, documents had already been preliminarily sorted
- Greater quantity of slides than photos
  - Sorting slides could then serve as a model for photo sorting
Why is this important?

- Providing an organized record of Descanso’s photographic history
- Descanso can use images of previous versions of gardens to inspire future visions of gardens
- Getting this job started was then one less job for current Descanso staff, who are already busy with the important job of attending to the present-day gardens
- Providing a framework for archival organization that can continue to be used as archives are organized in the future
What the Organizational Process Looked Like
Organizational process, cont.
Basic Outline of Organizational Plan for Slides

● 3 general categories
  ■ Landscapes/flowers
  ■ Events
  ■ People
  ○ Many subcategories within each of these general categories
  ○ Chronological ordering within each subcategory

● 3 general levels of categorization
  ○ Fully identified (labeled, dated)
  ○ Partially identified (label no date OR date no label)
  ○ Unidentified (unlabeled, undated)

● Additional categories included trips off-site, wildlife, PR photos, and filming, among others
Other projects

- **Boddy House Display Case**
  - Located in lobby of Boddy House
  - Exhibit for the reopening of the Boddy House to the public
  - I was tasked with finding items in the archives room that would showcase highlight interesting objects and important parts of Descanso’s history

- **Visitor’s Center**
  - Sold tickets and greeted visitors entering the gardens
  - Answered visitor questions
  - Scanned tickets at concerts in Descanso’s summer concert series
  - Got to know the wonderful staff of Descanso’s Visitor Center!
Display Case

Items that I chose for the case included:

- Scrapbook of Manchester Boddy photos (1940’s)
- Map of Descanso (early 1950’s)
- Brochures (1954, 1959, 1967)
- LA’s *Home* magazine celebrating the opening of the Japanese Tea House and tiles from the Japanese Tea House (1966)
- Advertisement from Festival of Fountains and Garden Lighting (1967)
- Postcards (1960’s)
- Tray from Descanso’s Japanese Tea House (1970’s)
Visitor’s Center

- Interacting with visitors
- Getting to know Descanso’s amazing staff!
What I Learned

- Independent problem solving
- Organizational skills
- Archival skills
- Process of exhibit design
- Customer service skills

Thank you Descanso!