

Depth of Field: Building a Story around a Historical Photograph

Author: *Michael Taylor, Public Services Librarian,
UNM Center for Southwest Research & Special Collections*

Introduction

In this activity, students will work with a historical photograph of the Albuquerque Indian School and learn two things:

- 1.) How to search for different kinds of primary sources in UNM's Center for Southwest Research & Special Collections.
- 2.) How to start with a single, textless primary source (a photograph or other image) and locate a variety of related sources in order to build a story.

Though this activity focuses on the history of education, it can be easily adapted to any subject, and students will be able to apply the search skills they gain to most other research projects, regardless of topic.

Audience

- Students in an undergraduate or early-graduate-level research methods seminar.
- Advanced information literacy / library instruction courses.
- Anyone seeking an introduction to primary source research.

Activity

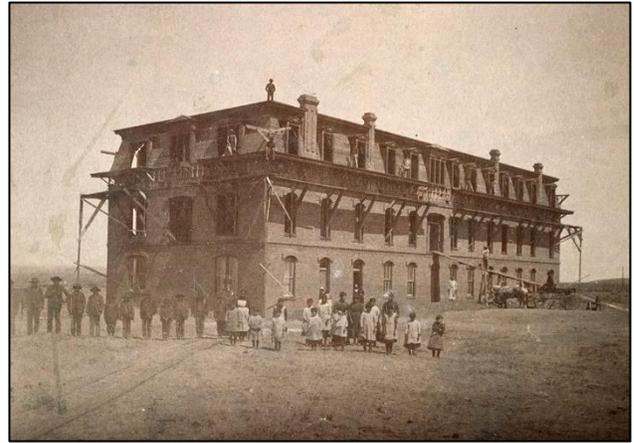
Select one or more photos of the Albuquerque Indian School from the R. W. D. Bryan Photographic Collection (PICT 000-001, box 1).

In class, give a brief overview of the UNM Libraries Catalog, the Rocky Mountain Online Archive, the Center for Southwest Research & Special Collections webpage, the Archives of Southwestern Architecture, New Mexico Digital Collections, major digital newspaper resources, LoboVault, and the UNM Libraries' list of databases.

If the class is small, divide it into groups and give each group one photo. If the class is larger, select one or two images and put them on the projector.

Ideally, students should bring laptops, but they could also come up to the classroom computer and projector for the next step of the activity and work together with the entire class.

Going back to what you showed the students about how to locate primary sources, ask them to locate one example of each of the following types of sources that is related to the history of the Albuquerque Indian School and public policy on Native American education.



Rare book
Scholarly monograph
Manuscript
Another photograph

Newspaper article
Oral history
Map
Ephemera

Architectural drawing
University Archives
General Vertical Files
NM Digital Collections

For example, students might locate the following sources:

Rare book: *Indian School Buildings at Albuquerque, N. Mex.: Letter from the Secretary of the Treasury* (1888).

Scholarly monograph: John Gram, *Education at the Edge of Empire: Negotiating Pueblo Identity in New Mexico's Indian Boarding Schools* (2015).

Manuscript: 50 handwritten legends written by students at the Albuquerque Indian School after having interviewed their grandparents, in the E. R. Harrington Papers, 1945-1978.

Another photograph: Panoramic photograph of the Albuquerque Indian School, in the Albuquerque Photograph Collection, 1880-1982.

Newspaper: "Superintendent Allen has nothing to say about Mr. Bilsborough," article in *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, Dec. 24, 1905, in *Chronicling America*.

Oral history: Ray and Doris Yazzie interview, 1970, in the American Indian Oral History Collection.

Map: *Albuquerque, New Mexico, Chief City of a New Sunshine State* (1912). Includes location and images of the Indian boarding school.

Ephemera: Scrapbook of articles about the Albuquerque Indian School, 1881-1886, in the Richard W. D. Bryan Family Papers, box 2.

Music: Songs and dances performed by students at the Albuquerque Indian School, in the John Donald Robb Field Recordings, 1942-1979.

Architectural drawing: 59 drawings for the Albuquerque Indian School, 1958, in the Louis G. Hessenden Architectural Drawings and Plans Collection, 1918-1975.

University Archives: Evelyn Lance Blanchard, *To Prevent the Breakup of the Indian Family: The Development of the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978*. UNM doctoral dissertation. In Lobo Vault.

General Vertical Files: Folder for Albuquerque Indian School, under "Albuquerque Schools."

New Mexico Digital Collections: Photograph, "Sleeping Porch and Study Rooms, Addition to Large Boys' Quarters, Albuquerque Indian School," 1925.

Suggested Topics for Discussion

What problems did students face while searching for different types of sources?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of each source the students found? Is there an obvious bias? What kind of information is missing?

How would the students use each type of source in their research project?

Were any students unable to find the specific information they were looking for? Discuss how this, too, is a common problem that researchers face, i.e., a lack of information or the need for persistence in finding it.

Ask the students what they would do next. Would they continue the search? Locate relevant secondary sources and mine the footnotes? Consult an expert? Broaden their topic? Pick a new topic?

Did any students discover a source that interested them more than what they were originally looking for?

Briefly talk about how it can sometimes be better to let the sources that you have at hand suggest a topic for research, rather than growing frustrated about not being able to find the perfect source for your topic.