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

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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.

**Questions of Chronology**

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?

**CONCLUSION**

**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 meal 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 (SC.4.7968-.82.8079)
- **Topics**: College buildings, Food, Architecture, Restaurants, Kitchens, Littlejohn, Tom, Mess Hall (Barracks No. 1), (Clemson, S.C.)

**Building Confusion**

- **Title**: Aerial view of Johnstone Hall
- **Collections**: Clemson University Historical Images
- **Descriptive Information**: Language: English
- **Locations**: Johnstone Hall, Pickens County, South Carolina (Clemson University)
- **Topics**: College buildings, Dormitories, College campuses, Johnstone Hall (Clemson, S.C.)

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