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Paul McCarthy, interviewee

Stephen Lay, interviewer

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Paul McCarthy, university archivist at the University of Alaska Fairbanks, said the films are very explosive. McCarthy talked about the two major dangers associated with nitrate-based films that the archives has to face. Nitrate based films were used in Alaska and the United States from the turn of the century until the 1950s. They are extremely flammable and the second danger associated with them is deterioration. The film breaks down into a useless powder and the images are destroyed. Much of Alaska's photographic history was recorded on this type of film. Preservation must be done or the films crumble away. To prevent this Rasmuson Library has recently completed a one-year long project to recopy nitrate-based negatives and movies onto modern film. McCarthy said the nitrate replacement project came about because in looking through the holdings of the photographic collection they were finding nitrate negative film and they were concerned about the long-term preservation of the images on the film. The project came about to preserve the images on the film and preservation of other materials in the collection. In the first stages of deterioration the film gives off an obnoxious acidic gas which eats away at other materials in the vicinity. McCarthy said they had a full range of deterioration. Some of the film was in early stages of deterioration and some was very brittle. In the future there might be other forms of preservation, but they had to take the first step now. Some of the images were lost because of old age, but the bulk of the collections were saved and historically significant materials were recopied. The archives staff recopied more than 8,000 images. The media services department converted almost six miles of film. Both the films and images were from personal collections of long-time Alaskans who donated the material to the library. McCarthy said the photograph collection is one of the most heavily used collections. Copies of most of the prints are available for researchers at a modest price. Including images from the preservation project there are now more than 85,000 images in the archives. McCarthy is very much interested in finding additional collections. He said there are so many aspects of Alaskan history and development that have not been documented.

Steven Lay talks about the campus calendar and activities