

## **[BLOG: Art and Archive: Research at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art by Christopher Menking](#)**

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Christopher Menking is a Professor of History at Tarrant County College. His research focuses on the United States-Mexico War and the Texas-Mexico Borderlands. The current focus of his research is the influence of the US Army Quartermaster Department on South Texas. The research conducted at the Amon Carter contributed to a manuscript on the above topic and informs the following post. He is also working on a manuscript on the soldiers' experience during the Mexican War and a concert of Mexican War Era music. If you would like to contribute to this blog as well, I'm soliciting new drafts. Please contact Gretchen Pierce at [gkpierce@ship.edu](mailto:gkpierce@ship.edu) or on this [Google Form](#).

### **Art and Archive: Research at the Amon Carter Museum of American Art**

During the summer of 2022 I ensconced myself in the library and archive at the [Amon Carter Museum of American Art](#) in Fort Worth, Texas to make use of their collections. Although it is primarily an art museum it has robust repository of 19th century primary and secondary sources written in both English and Spanish. My topic focused on the U.S.-Mexico War, which falls into the timeframe of many of the museum's collections. In particular, a series of color prints captures many of the major events during the U.S.-Mexico War, giving the viewer a glimpse of what the soldiers may have seen as they journeyed through 19th century Mexico.

Before visiting the museum I made a list of all the books, documents, and images I planned on viewing. The Amon Carter has an extensive online database of their collections. The library and archive share a catalogue with Texas Christian University as well, which allows for further supporting research. The TCU library serves as a great supplement to what is available at the Amon Carter and is just about 10-15 minutes from the museum by car. After preparing my initial list of sources, I contacted the librarian and scheduled my first visit. The process was done primarily over email with an initial call to clarify their policies. The Amon Carter staff is not overly formal, and they are very responsive to inquiries. In preparation for my research at the Amon Carter Museum, I created an outline of my primary research topics as well as a handful of supplementary topics for future projects. Each topic had a Word and Excel file related to it for notes. In addition, I kept a comprehensive Excel document of every source viewed along with annotations for future reference. I kept everything organized on OneDrive using the Cloud storage options to make it easy to move between computers to access my files. This allowed me to switch between my laptop, home desktop, or the library computers without fear of not being able to access my files. When taking pictures of books or primary documents, I use the CamScanner application on a smart phone to capture the images. The app allows for color correction and reorientation of the photo to correct odd angles. It too has Cloud functionality to make it easy to transfer images from the phone to other devices. Cloud access is useful as the museum provides free Wi-Fi access to visitors. It is not secure, but should be fine for research purposes. If concerned, library desktops in the library can be accessed upon request.

The robust collections at the Amon Carter make it a centralized location for many 19th century

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documents and artifacts. My research centered on two parts of their library and archive: the collection of secondary books and a collection of microfilmed Americana. The Amon Carter has a thorough collection of U.S.-Mexico War works, surpassed only by the nearby University of Texas at Arlington Archive, about 30 minutes away by car, which has a primary focus on the war. While the collection of secondary sources is not comprehensive, it does provide a centralized location for many of the major works on the war. The Americana collection is one of the true treasures of the archive. This set of primary and some secondary sources includes both English and Spanish documents relating to all aspects of 19th century life from the United States and Mexico. Many of the records provide a colorful account of what people lived through during that period. The archive includes a smaller collection of primary letters and other documents that can also provide some interesting vignettes.

The artwork collections include a series of color prints that capture many of the major moments and locations of the war. While often military focused, they do give a glimpse into what Mexico looked like during the 19th century, albeit somewhat colored through the lens of the United States' perspective. This set of prints is the primary collection used as artwork for many of the secondary books about the war. They have become some of the most iconic images related to the war and inescapable for any scholar working in this period. The Amon Carter also has an extensive collection of drawings, daguerreotypes, and lithographs from this era. The U.S.-Mexico War was the first American conflict in which photography existed. Much of the imaging of the war remained prints and drawings, but photographic portraits became common of both soldiers and their family members. This set of images gives a face to the abstract soldiers often written about in the works on the war. The Amon Carter allows for images to be used if a researcher requests access through their [Image Request](#) site. A request requires information about what image will be used, what portion of the image, whether in color or black and white, and then for what purpose or type of publication the image will be used for. Depending on the expected use, the staff will make their decision and let you know what is or is not allowed for use.

The library and archive staff welcomed me in and proved very willing to help me complete all of my research. Scheduling visits was required during my time at the museum, but there are usually open library hours several afternoons a week for smaller research projects. The archive and library are not nearly as formal as the national archives in Washington, D.C. or Mexico City. There is no need to have a letter of introduction or have a long lead time to schedule an appointment such as at NARA. When viewing the library material, no gloves are needed. Book stands are provided and photographing is allowed without flash. At the time of writing this post, face masks were optional. I utilized my laptop and cellphone for most of my research through the library material and the staff is very accommodating when technology is concerned. During my time there a documentary film maker was filming artwork, staff descriptions, and filming interviews in the main research room. I even was able to serve as one of the interviewees, so my research may have led to me ending up in a documentary on Karl Struss. The library does have desktops researchers can use if arrangements have been made. The microfilm collection can be accessed and scanned using a digital microfilm reader that is connected to a desktop. This made it easy to view their microfilmed Americana collection. When requesting to view artwork, the library has a dedicated viewing room that they will pull the original artwork or artifacts. This allows researchers to see the original documents or artwork and analyze them directly. Setting up a viewing does require a little bit of lead time for the staff to pull the artwork and get it set up. Food and drink are not allowed in the museum, although

the staff did occasionally offer coffee or had snacks from special events. There is a small café in the museum that food can be purchased from. Otherwise, food would either need to be brought and left in a car or there are restaurants in a few minutes' drive from museum. Fort Worth is a typical Texas city that requires a car for easy transit.

I recommend the Amon Carter Museum for any Latin American scholars that deal with the U.S.-Mexico borderlands or are looking at any artistic topics. The librarians and archivists are some of the most helpful I have experienced in any archive I have worked in. If you find yourself in Fort Worth, Texas, I encourage you to stop in and see the collection on display.

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