

Historical detective on the case at SF Library

By Kat Duncan, San Francisco Chronicle | January 22, 2017 | Updated: January 22, 2017 3:31pm



Christina Moretta is the exuberant person whose careful, white-gloved hands discover and sort historical materials for San Francisco. More than 2 million photos and other visual materials are taken care of by Moretta as a photo curator, archivist and librarian at the San Francisco History Center inside the San Francisco Public Library.

“Postcards, negatives, glass plates, actual photos; I take care of them, I help create access to them and I enjoy them!” Moretta says with a laugh. A self-proclaimed inquisitive, photo adoring, “positive-penny,” she has been working for the library for 10 years.

“We’re definitely not digitizing everything,” she says about the huge amount of materials at the library. “But we do digitize based on popularity or request or preservation needs.” The glass plates, because of their fragility, are digitized so people can view them with ease on the computer.

Moretta loves to dive into piles of historical materials to see what people were doing 100 years ago and examine how history has repeated itself over time. “The hairstyles might be different and the clothing might be different, but people’s thoughts



Photo: Kathleen Duncan / The Chronicle, The Chronicle



IMAGE 1 OF 4

Christina Moretta works at the reference desk at the San Francisco Public Library where she is a photo curator in the San Francisco History Center December 6, 2016.

and sentiments are about the same,” she says.

Though she has no favorites among her materials, she loves viewing the panoramas. “They’re so cool, they’re just a special format of photography,” she says. And the glass plates are “stunning” once they are scanned because of the detail in the images.

While pursuing a degree in women’s studies at UC Irvine, Moretta took a class taught by two librarians. “They opened up my world to research and getting deep into discovering. I basically discovered a job to get paid to be a detective and do research but not write papers, so I thought that was pretty cool. And then I decided to move to San Francisco, applied for this job and I got it,” she says, grinning.

Ten years later, Moretta is far from bored. “I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again: I think I have the best job in the library,” she says.



Kat Duncan

Photo & Video Editor

HEARST *newspapers*

© 2017 Hearst Corporation