



From Film to Files: Impact of Gerald Annan Photographic Collection

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Abstract

Gerald Annan Forson's photographic collection deposited at the J. H. Kwabena Nketia Archives offers captivating socio-political, economic, urbanization and cultural lifestyle of the Ghanaian people. The collection serves as an invaluable resource to students, scholars and the public. Annan Forson's distinct techniques and skills offer a unique insight and clear details of capturing two decades of Ghanaian presidential history and socio-political movement. Inside the helm of the socio-political activities of government includes the change of government from military to civilian and from civilian to military, government projects, dignitary visitations and meetings, rallies and protest, elections and physical landscape of Ghana. However, this paper explores two case studies, one is the discovery of an old band named the Kyirem Cultural Band and St George's International School learning experience at the J. H. Kwabena Nketia Archives. The photographic collection reawakened and connected the band again to exhibit their talent. On the other hand, the collection offered students from St. George's International School a pictorial understanding of what was studied in class about government as a subject. Ultimately, Annan Forson's unique collection is resource poised to inspire and learn from diverse group of ages.

Keywords: Digital, Patient, Communication Tools, Interaction, efficiency

Introduction

The Gerald Annan Forson Photographic Collection, deposited at the J. H. Kwabena Nketia Archives, represent a unique rich and essential resource of Ghana. This extensive collection, comprising over 20,000 negatives and slides, exhibit political-historical moments in Ghana from President Hilla Limann's tenure in 1979 to former President John Dramani Mahama in 2015. A dedicated photojournalist and freelancer, Annan Forson captured a vast array of government activities from shift of government and legislative process to socio-economic construction of the Ghana including the physical structures with its landscape. His comprehensive documentation aligns perfectly with the Nketia Archives's core mandate to preserve and disseminate cultural heritage for academic

and public engagement.

The introduction of Gerald Annan Forson's collection into the academic discourse was led by Professor Jesse Shipley, with the support of Mrs. Judith Opoku-Boateng. Their collaborative efforts have resulted in major international exhibitions, showcasing Annan Forson's unfiltered historic images at esteemed institutions including Howard University, Sharjah Art Foundation, and the Hood Museum of Art at Dartmouth, alongside numerous conferences and open discussions involving key figures like Anthropologist Jesse Shipley, Archivist Judith Opoku-Boateng, Historian Bright Gyamfi, cultural anthropologist Kwame Otu, historian Scot Brown and Journalist Nana Ama Asante, have critically explored the collection's significance, future projections, and immense potential¹.

¹ <https://thedig.howard.edu/all-stories/howard-universitys-moorland-spargarn-research-center-launches-exhibit-showcasing-work-ghanian>
<https://www.theafricainstitute.org/institute-program/gerald-annan-forson/>
<https://hoodmuseum.dartmouth.edu/explore/exhibitions/beat>

This paper explores the diverse themes of the collection with particular focus on music and education. One of the central points of this paper is to examine the impact of the collection through discovering and rediscovery of historically significant images contributing to education.

And the second case is a class of students studying Ghanaian politics as part of their government subject witnessed for the first time a visual representation of the topics taught in class. The tour evolved into a lecture where new questions were asked and deeper understanding were captured giving a transformative learning experience.

Ultimately, this paper is set to contribute to the best practices of preservation, cataloging and dissemination of intangible cultural heritage. The digitization of these heritage materials is to promote research and public engagement. These collections confirm the power of photography and archiving. The photographs speak volumes of courses and programs to the colleges of humanities especially students and lecturers of history, information studies, and performing arts. It serves as a valuable material to students and lecturers of history, anthropologist, archeologist, architects, etc.

However, Gerald's collection also display variations colour, from black and white images to coloured. Using the available camera technique in transition is another skill to be examined and learned.

The ongoing comprehensive cataloging is set to discover and produce major themes to support user request especially students and lecturers.

The Discovery of the Kyirem Cultural Troupe

The Gerald Annan Photographic Collection holds within a number of captivating events including the World Festival of Youth and Students. He sailed on a ship from Ghana to Cuba with a Ghanaian youthful cultural troupe called the Kyirem Cultural Troupe. This band represented Ghana on a World Festival of Youth and Students, 11th edition hosted in Cuba. Gerald through his lens captured the sailing journey and entire ceremony in 1978 at Havana, capital of Cuba.

One of the lead singers of the troupe, Christian Mawuko had an engagement with the archivist of the Nketia Archives when the leader was looking for some cultural group performers in 2023. As both found themselves in one common grounds ie culture and music, Christian started talking about

his career in music and one of his historic journey to Cuba to represent Ghana when he was eleven (11) years old. The archivist quickly told Christian that she'd encountered those very pictures during a cataloging session and that the entire collection from that trip was right there in the archive. As excited as he became because he had never seen those pictures before. He made a point to visit the archive soon as he arrives in Ghana from the United States of America. Christian eventually visited the Nketia Archive and met Mr. Gerald who he met 40 years ago. After a long conversation among them, Christian requested if he can order and show the pictures to the rest of group since almost all the members reside in Accra. The band was planning how they can honor their founder, Nana Kwabena Amakwah Ampofo. The Nketia archive staff decided to assist in organizing a live musical concert by exhibiting the pictures to the group, and guests, and honoring the founder of the troupe.

A date was set for a senior research assistant from the archive to curate the exhibition and record the entire concert. The discovery of these photographs sparked a strong emotional response, having mixed feelings of joy and shock after 40 years of being on a ship trip for days. Now members can give a compelling story of their time with evidence. The troupe's historical visit and performance mark a period of political and cultural exchange between countries globally to mark solidarity for democracy and against war. A period where Ghana's military leader Acheampong had been forced to resign and Ghana had open for a civilian government (Dartey-Baah, 2015). A critical moment to travel. However, Gerald and the cultural troupe embarked on the trip. The 11th edition motto was for anti-imperialist solidarity, peace, and friendship. A copy of the exhibition can be found here with timestamps.²

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgbOWVxh4U8&t=7206s>



Figure 1. A shot the Kyirem Cultural Troupe with the leader in Kente, Nana Kwabena Ampofo and excluding Naa Amanua, 2023. Shot by George Gyesaw



Figure 2: A picture of the Kyirem Cultural Troupe 1978. Shot by Gerald Annan Forson



Figure 3: A rehearsal section inside the ship. Shot by Gerald Annan Forson, 1978

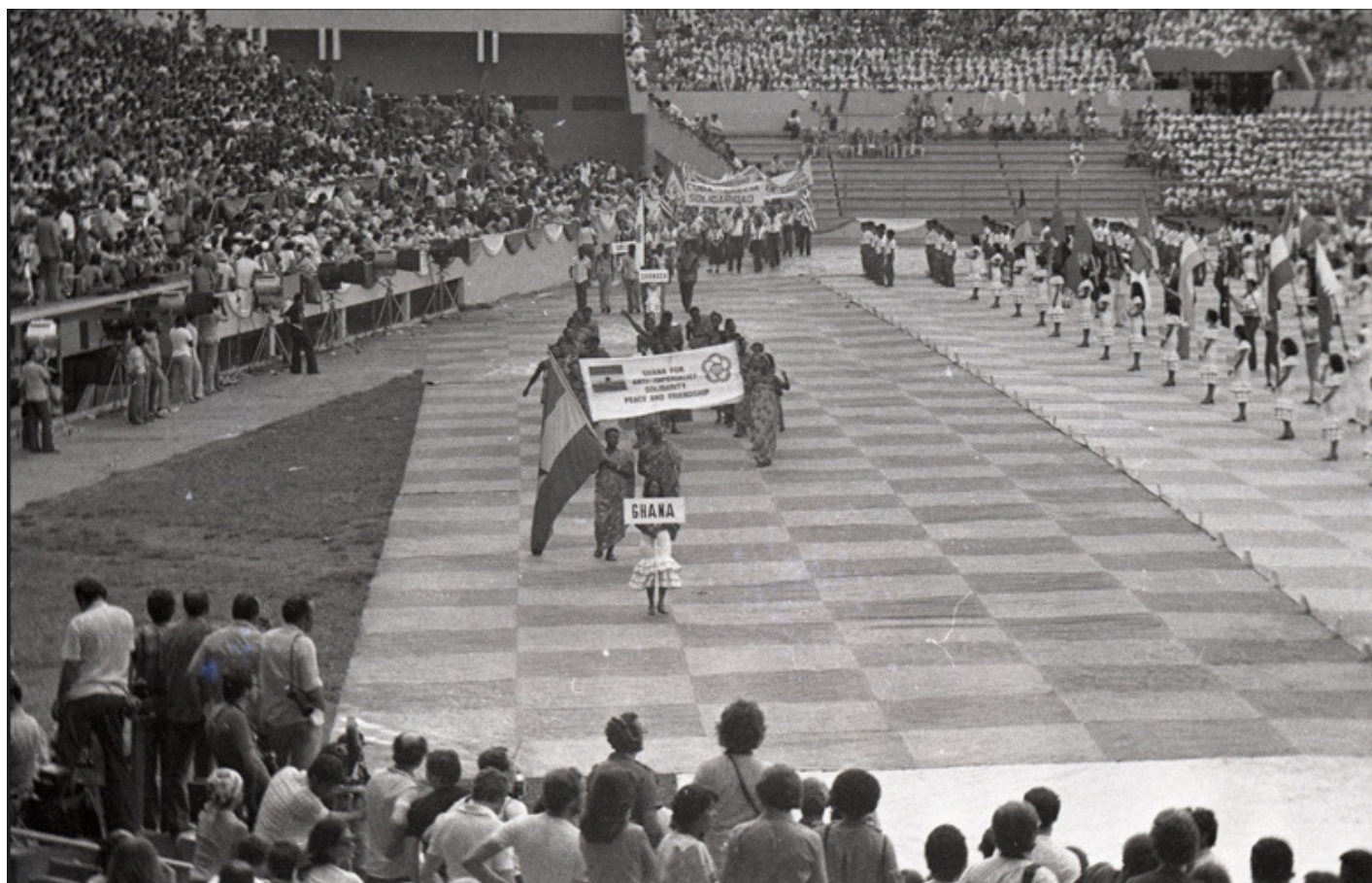


Figure 4: 11th Youth Festival in Cuba, 1978 shot by Gerald Annan Forson



Figure 5: 11th Youth Festival in Cuba 1978. Photographer, Gerald Annan Forson.



Figure 6: A picture of Gerald Annan Forson in Cuba, 1978. Photographer: Unkown

St George's International School visit to the Nketia Archives

Several subjects and courses can be deduced from Gerald Photo Collections. From primary schools to Universities, students can benefit immensely from the collection. Again, such collections serve as a learning tool for visual learners and boost critical thinking (Stokes, 2002).

A Junior High School called St George's International School paid an educational trip to the Nketia Archive. An album of Gerald's collection displayed at the Nketia Archives sparked questions and resulted in an open dialogue with their teachers. Lucky for them Gerald was available, joined the conversation as he gave an eye witness account. The students had studied political regimes and coup d'état that happened in Ghana but didn't empirically witness them and had not seen many pictures of that event. This album is the AFRC Album (Armed Forces Revolutionary Council) Ghana.

This engagement probed more questions and the research assistants at the Nketia assisted in giving out the basic descriptions of these collections. At the photo studio, students were quizzed on the wall photos with no captions. The Nketia Archives does this to test visitors if they can figure out the transformative nature of our urban cities, especially Accra and while others struggled, others grasped it.

The engagement with students gave the students a deeper understanding of events being studied in class. While a few students mentioned they had seen a few of such photos, others mentioned they had never seen such photos.

The students acknowledged and appreciated the efforts of Gerald's contribution to education and nation-building.

Preserving the Past, Inspiring the Future

Preserving and cataloging the Gerald photographic collections is key to ensuring the content's sustainability for future generations. Safeguarding the negatives may also serve as historical artifacts for the next generation.

The archives provided two basic methods to manage the photo collection. The first method is photo preservation. All photos are digitized in both high and low resolution for preservation and access copy respectively. The negatives are stored in a room-controlled environment to prevent deteriorating while the digitized are stored in house and off-house clouds and drives.

The second method is cataloging, currently ongoing as the archive seeks to achieve a comprehensive database to assist students, scholars, and the general public in the search for data. Consultation to historians is made where images of events, individuals, dates, and locations cannot be identified (Gracy & Kahn, 2012). This measure authenticates the data produced and entered into the database.

Conclusion

The opening of Gerald's lens offers a continuous storytelling of Ghanaian history is a chronological order. Through careful examination of the collections, one can derive a deeper understanding of the past, appreciate the present and predict the future of certain spaces of study.

Gerald's collection has increased the stock and filled the missing gap in the Nketia photographic collection, meeting the demand of students, researchers and the public.

The discovery of Kyirem Cultural Troupe photographs reveals the lost but not forgotten band with a nostalgic feeling. This certifies the importance of digitization and preservation of cultural heritage materials making it accessible to use.

Gerald's collection has demonstrated how photos serve as a powerful tool in education. By incorporating these images into the classrooms, teachers can create an engaging and meaningful teaching and learning experience. Contributing to the understanding of the humanities disciplines including African Studies, Sociology, Geography, Economics, etc.

Technically, the collection can inspire photographers creatively in capturing, documenting and preserving cultural in an intentional manner.

As we move forward, we must continue to excavate photographers like Gerald and shape the space of photography and archiving.

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