

Was Ken Johnston EVER “NASA Photo Manager”?”

Johnston has described his task as being in charge of all Apollo mission imagery, (a status that supposedly gave him 'insider' access to unique Apollo imagery, as well as the power to delete imagery from the master archives. Press reports based on the book “Dark Mission” publicity releases describe Johnston as 'director of Apollo photo archives'.

Dr. Jeffrey Warner, whom some sites present as authenticating Johnston’s claim, does not actually remember it that way. In an email to me, he wrote:

"I was part of the Curator's office during all the Apollo missions. Over the years I had different assignments. During Apollo 11 and 12 [1969-1970], among other things, I was in charge of lunar sample photographs in the Lunar Receiving Laboratory (LRL). BRN [JEO: Johnston's employer] technicians took photographs of lunar rocks, the photographs were processed in the JSC photo lab, and the prints came to me. A BRN employee technician named Marion (I disremember his last name, but it must be in the records) was my assistant in dealing with rock photographs. I did this as part of my duties as Associate Curator - there was no special or identified office.

For Apollo 14-17 [1971-1973], dealing with photographs became quite routine, and was handled by the Curatorial BRN support staff... [JEO: I think Warner is referring to Johnston and his co-workers here] "There never was an 'office of Apollo mission photography' in the LRL [JEO – Building 31].”

Warner: “As you know, mission photographs went directly to the JSC photo lab [JEO – Bldg 8] where they were processed and where prints were made. Mission photographs were never curated in the LRL. The only mission photographs we had in the LRL were copies of prints that we used to document specific rocks on the lunar surface.”

JimO resumes comment: It seems that there has been major misrepresentation and deliberate confusion regarding Mr. Johnston's duties and responsibilities regarding lunar

photographs.

He reports having received a number of sets of Apollo imagery, clearly from the office responsible for it, in another building. Then, in 1973, once the LRL stopped receiving new Apollo samples, it went through a major down-sizing and consolidation of records and elimination of duplicative (and no longer useful) multi-copy material. It was under those circumstances, apparently, that Johnston was directed to clean out the cabinets and trash the images.

I don't know why he would have been told he couldn't keep them -- perhaps there were regulations that material generated for NASA internal use was not for public release, and public access to lunar photos would be through the public information office.

In any case, I've seen no indications that the LRL photo sets that Johnston seems to have been given, and was custodian of (but not originator or controller of), were different in any substantive way from the master files, which have always been fully accessible to researchers (and the press) at depositories such as the Lunar Science Institute [later the Lunar and Planetary Science Institute].

Johnston's function, an important one like all the others, was a shipping clerk for sending out lunar samples and photographs of them to scientists all over the world.