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Guide to the Early Cameras Collection

GEN MSS 1020



by Matthew Daniel Mason

2013

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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CALL NUMBER: GEN MSS 1020

TITLE: Early Cameras Collection

DATES: 1889-1926

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 2.6 linear feet (7 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: This collection includes examples of early cameras used chiefly in the United States by amateur photographers, 1889-1926. Manufacturers represented in the collection include Blair Camera Company, Conley Camera Company, and Eastman Kodak Company.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.cameras>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.cameras>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to beinecke.images@yale.edu.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Acquired from various sources. For more information see the collection contents list.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The Early Cameras Collection is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Early Cameras Collection. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

Processing Information

Collections are processed to a variety of levels, depending on the work necessary to make them usable, their perceived research value, the availability of staff, competing priorities, and whether or not further accruals are expected. The library attempts to provide a basic level of preservation and access for all collections, and does more extensive processing of higher priority collections as time and resources permit.

The collection serves as a means for bringing together photographic equipment acquired singularly and in small groups.

Scope and Contents

This collection includes examples of early cameras used chiefly in the United States by amateur photographers, 1889-1926. Manufacturers represented in the collection include Blair Camera Company, Conley Camera Company, and Eastman Kodak Company.

The collection includes a Kodak No. 2 camera manufactured by the Eastman Kodak Company and formerly owned by amateur photographer Mary King Porter, as well as a photograph album with photographic prints she made from images captured with the camera, September 1890-October 1891, of persons and sites in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

Arrangement

Collection is arranged alphabetically.

Collection Contents

Series I: Cameras, 1889-1926

2.6 linear feet (7 boxes)

Series I is arranged alphabetically by camera manufacturer.

Blair Camera Company

In 1878, Thomas Henry Blair (1855-1919) founded the Blair Tourograph Company, which manufactured his tourograph, a kit that contained material needed by amateur field photographers to expose and develop wet collodion plates. In 1881, the company name changed to the Blair Tourograph & Dry Plate Company, and it soon manufactured "detective cameras." By 1886, the company name shortened to the Blair Camera Company. In 1899, the Eastman Kodak Company purchased the company.

b.1 Hawk-Eye Detective Camera - Improved Model circa 1895

1 camera: wood, brass, and leather; 16.3 x 18.1 x 30.7 cm

Boston Camera Company of Boston, Massachusetts, introduced Hawk-Eye Detective cameras in 1888. The Blair Camera Company purchased the Boston Camera Company in 1890 and continued manufacturing this camera with various improvements until 1898.

The term "detective camera" described many handheld cameras during the late nineteenth century. Given their portable nature, photographers considered these cameras unobtrusive.

This camera makes exposures on gelatin dry plate negatives that measure 4 by 5 inches. A hinged door on the top of the camera reveals a ground glass focusing screen, while a removable panel at the back of the camera also reveals the focusing screen. On the right side of the camera, a knob calibrated with marks for distance in feet provides focusing adjustment for an internal box and bellows.

To use the camera, an operator loads gelatin dry plate negatives into wooden holders; this camera includes a single negative holder, as well as two unprocessed gelatin dry plate negatives. The back of the camera also has space for storing plate holders or an optional roll film holder.

The camera has a fixed focus lens with a fixed aperture. A wire spring protruding from the side of the camera latches between three positions to one side or the other, which provides spring tension to the shutter for three increasing levels of tension, and consequently three different uncalibrated shutter speeds. Two buttons located on the sides of the tensioning wire provide discrete releases for time exposure and instantaneous exposure.

Purchased from William Reese Co. (Cowan's sale, 2011 December 2, lot 135) on the William Robertson Coe Fund No. 3, 2011.

Conley Camera Company

The Conley Camera Company of Rochester, Minnesota, sold cameras chiefly through the commercial catalogs of the Sears, Roebuck and Company from 1899 to 1927.

Conley Camera Company (continued)

b. 2 Improved Conley Magazine Camera circa 1910

1 camera: wood, brass, and leather; 18.3 x 16.3 x 20.3 cm

Also known as the Model III.

Camera designed to hold 12 metal plate holders (9 plate holders extant) with gelatin dry plate negatives that measure 4 by 5 inches. The plate holders advance by using a winder (knob missing on this camera) on the right-hand side of the camera. After exposing a negative, the winder causes the plate holder and exposed negative to drop along a pair of guide rails to the bottom of the camera. After exposing all the negatives, the back of the camera reveals a catch-release that opens a door in the bottom of the camera for retrieving the negatives.

The camera has a fixed focus lens with a fixed relative aperture of $f/16$. The shutter for the lens releases through a lever on the front right-hand side of the camera or by an optional bulb (a length of bulb cord accompanies the camera). The shutter also has options for a timed exposure and instantaneous shutter, about 1/50 of a second (the shutter does not function on this camera). A knob beneath the lens allows the operator to choose an additional unknown aperture and solid lens cover.

Purchased from William Reese Co. (Cowan's sale, 2011 December 2, lot 135) on the William Robertson Coe Fund No. 3, 2011.

Eastman Kodak Company

George Eastman (1854-1932) established the Eastman Kodak Company, commonly known as Kodak, in Rochester, New York, in 1892. It was one of the first firms to mass-produce standardized photography equipment.

b. 3 Kodak No. 2 1889-1897

1 camera: wood, brass, and leather; 12.7 x 11.2 x 22.9 cm

Formerly owned by Mary King Porter (1865-1938).

This camera originally came pre-loaded with film from the Eastman Kodak Company in a length that created 60 circular exposures with a diameter of 3.5 inches. The camera has a fixed focus lens with a string set shutter with three aperture stops: the largest stop for instantaneous street photographs, the middle stop for interiors, and the smallest for timed exterior exposures.

Purchased from William Reese Co. (Cowan's sale, 2011 December 2, lot 133) on the William Robertson Coe Fund No. 3, 2011.

b. 4 Photograph album by Mary King Porter 1890
September-1891
October

1 album (241 photographic prints): b & w; 25.5 x 22.4 cm.

Mary King Porter (1865-1938) was born in Batavia, Illinois, the eldest daughter of Susan Ellen Lockwood Porter (1830-1915) and Charles Wendell Porter (1823-1913). Her father graduated from Bowdoin College in 1843 and Harvard Law School in 1846, and worked as an attorney, as well as well as a land commissioner and secretary with the Chicago, St. Paul, and Minneapolis Railway Company in Hudson, Wisconsin. Mary had two sisters, Harriet Eddy Porter (1867-1962) and Anna "Nannie" Lockwood Porter (1869-1906). Their maternal grandfather was Samuel Drake Lockwood (1789-1874), an Illinois politician who served as the state's Attorney General, Secretary of State, and Supreme Court Justice.

Photograph album with photographic prints created by Mary King Porter with a Kodak No. 2 camera, September 1890-October 1891, of persons and sites in Minnesota and Wisconsin. Images include

Eastman Kodak Company (continued)

informal portraits of family and friends, as well as snapshots of homes, pets, vacations, and holiday celebrations, including Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Identified individuals include her family members, Susan Ellen Lockwood Porter, Charles Wendell Porter, Harriet Eddy Porter, and Anna "Nannie" Lockwood Porter, as well as extended family members, including John Cooper Porter (1825-1916). Many images of Nannie Porter depict her in a wheelchair. Identified friends include Ruth C. Andrews (born 1878) and Charles Gibson Andrews (1885-1949) in Hudson, Wisconsin, as well as Margaret Washburn (later Hunt) (1885-1959) in Minnetonka, Minnesota.

Identified locations and activities in the album include sailboat races on Geneva Lake, Wisconsin, as well as cottages and estates on its shores, including "The Folly" estate of Samuel Waters Alleron (1828-1914). Other images include camping on Lake St. Croix, Minnesota, and a log jam on the St. Croix River.

Purchased from William Reese Co. (Cowan's sale, 2011 December 2, lot 133) on the William Robertson Coe Fund No. 3, 2011.

b. 5	<p>Kodak No. 3 <i>1 camera: wood, brass, and leather; 10.9 x 14.1 x 29.1 cm</i></p> <p>This camera originally came pre-loaded with film from the Eastman Kodak Company, usually in lengths that produced 60, 100, 250 exposures, 3.25 by 4.25 inches. The camera has a fixed focus lens with a string set shutter with three aperture stops: largest stop for instantaneous street photographs, the middle stop for interiors, and the smallest for timed exterior exposures. A knob on the top side of the camera with calibrated marks for distance in feet that provided focusing adjustment for an internal box and bellows.</p> <p>Purchased from William Reese Co. (Cowan's sale, 2011 December 2, lot 134) on the William Robertson Coe Fund No. 3, 2011.</p>	1889-1897
b. 6	<p>Pocket Kodak, '96 Model <i>1 camera: wood, brass, and leather; 6.1 cm x 7.5 cm x 9.9 cm</i></p> <p>This camera makes twelve exposures, 1.5 by 2 inches, on paper-backed size 102 roll film. A push lever at the bottom front of the camera provides access to the roll film and interior of the camera. The camera has a fixed focus lens with three apertures, as well as a time and instantaneous shutter, and a square viewfinder.</p> <p>Purchased from William Reese Co. (Cowan's sale, 2011 December 2, lot 135) on the William Robertson Coe Fund No. 3, 2011.</p>	1896-1897
b. 7	<p>No. 1 Panoram Kodak <i>1 camera: wood, nickel, and leather; 8.4 cm x 18.7 cm x 10.9 cm</i></p> <p>This camera makes panoramic exposures, 2.25 by 7 inches covering 112 degrees, on paper-backed size 105 roll film. The camera exposes the film by a fixed focus lens that swings in an arc. To arm the swinging lens, a lever mounted on top the camera moves left or right, which latches in different positions for various levels of shutter tension. A small button next to the lever serves to release the lens and expose the film. The camera also has an optical viewfinder and spirit level on its top, as well as a fold-down door that stores the lens on its front.</p> <p>Purchased from William Reese Co. (Cowan's sale, 2011 December 2, lot 135) on the William Robertson Coe Fund No. 3, 2011.</p>	1900-1926

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Cameras -- Specimens.
Photography -- Equipment and supplies

Geographic Names

Minnesota -- Pictorial works
Wisconsin -- Pictorial works

Genres / Formats

Photograph albums

Names

Porter, Mary King, 1865-1938

Corporate Bodies

Blair Camera Company
Conley Camera Company
Eastman Kodak Company