

Piece by Piece

All across the state, piece by piece, Iowa's past is being put back together. Armed with state grant funds and energized by a passion for local history, Iowans have taken on an astounding number of projects to identify, preserve, and interpret historic resources in their communities—in essence, to put the pieces of Iowa's past back in place.

The impetus has been the REAP/Historical Resource Development Program (HRDP). Since 1990, this program has al-

located several million dollars to individuals, businesses, nonprofit organizations, Indian tribes, local and state government agencies, and Certified Local Governments. The State Historical Society of Iowa administers REAP/HRDP, which receives 5 percent of the funds allocated to a broader program known as the Resource Enhancement and Protection Act (REAP). Targeted are projects that have traditionally lacked the scope or funds to seek larger sources of revenues.

HRDP projects are often behind-the-scenes: repairing leaky roofs on historic structures, microfilming brittle newspapers, cataloging artifacts, researching and designing exhibits. The results are that more and more of Iowa's historic treasures are accessible to Iowans today and in the future. Starting with this issue, Iowa Heritage Illustrated will showcase some of these projects in an occasional series titled "Piece by Piece."

—The Editor

Image Conscious

Selections from the Photograph Collections of the Putnam Museum

by Scott Roller

Founded in December 1867 by a small group of local amateur scientists, the Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences (now the Putnam Museum of History and Natural Science) immediately began collecting history and natural science objects from the Davenport area and around the world. Through the years a good deal of that collecting included photographic prints and negatives, and the collection gradually grew to over 25,000 images. Unfortunately, due primarily to limits of staff time and budget constraints faced by most museums and historical societies, the collection remained largely uncataloged.

As a result, curators' memories too often served as the primary reference source for the images held

by the museum. When these curators retired or took positions elsewhere, vital information about the content and storage location of photographs inevitably went with them.

In May 1991, with funding from a State of Iowa Historical Resource Development Program (HRDP) grant, the staff of the Putnam Museum began the daunting task of reorganizing its entire photographic collection. The museum hired Matthew Carpenter to fill the temporary photo archivist position funded by the grant. During the next year, the Putnam's staff and a dedicated group of volunteers cataloged the bulk of the collection and provided archival storage enclosures for all photographic materials that did not already have it.

Because the project required the staff to reexamine each image in the collection, the Putnam rediscovered many priceless photographs that had been "lost" within the old classification system. The new filing structure, based on the subject headings used at the State Historical Society of Iowa, quickly resulted in a greater use of the collection. Already the project has spawned a temporary exhibit on the history of photography in the Quad Cities area, increased the use of historical images in museum and other publications, and made research in the collection by staff and researchers considerably more productive.

By surveying the entire collection and dividing photos into subject areas, staff also revealed the weaknesses in the Putnam's collection. While the museum serves as a repository for photographs of both eastern Iowa and western Illinois, more than 75 percent of its images feature Iowa subjects. Moreover, recent decades were revealed to be poorly represented.

As in many institutions, most of the photographs date to the 19th or early 20th century. To achieve greater balance, the Putnam has recently begun to concentrate on acquiring images from the post-World War II era and on those that focus on individuals and businesses in western Illinois. The museum also now devotes additional resources to collect or reproduce images that document the history of artifacts new to its collection.

During the course of the HRDP grant itself, Putnam Museum staff members and volunteers separated out of the general files more than 100 distinct collections relating to a particular family, photographer, or subject. The summaries and images on the following pages focus on 11 of those collections. While they include only a small fraction of the Putnam's photographic holdings, these individual collections illustrate the diversity of historical photography and of Iowa history itself.

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In this beautifully preserved ambrotype, Mary Louisa Duncan Putnam holds one of her children, c. 1856. The unknown photographer painstakingly added faint coloring to the flesh and gold to the jewelry to bring the image to life. In ambrotypes, an underexposed negative on glass is placed over a black background, creating the appearance of a positive image.

Putnam Family Collection

From the earliest days of photography people have preserved photographs of their family and friends, and collections of donated family photographs usually constitute the bulk of images held in photo archives. The Putnam Family Collection of images represents one of the Putnam Museum's most treasured possessions be-

cause it documents the lives of various members of the family that nurtured it for nearly seven decades.

Photographs in the collection dating from the mid-1850s to 1940 not only capture the history of this prominent Davenport family, but also trace the development of photography itself. Many excel-

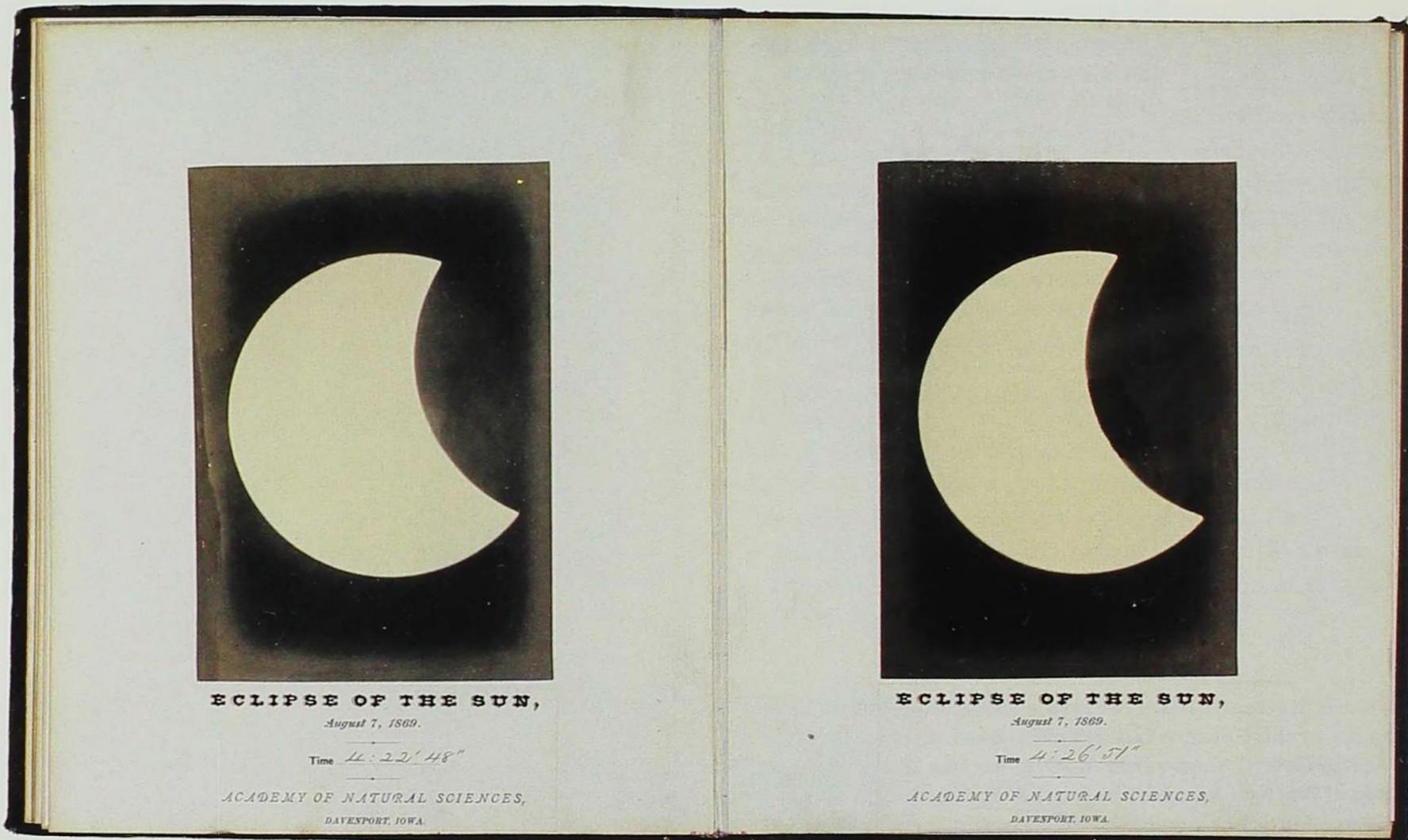
lent images appear on a wide range of formats including daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, tintypes, stereographs, glass plate negatives, albumen prints, and other formats used throughout this period.

Six children of Mary and Charles Putnam pose for a tintype in an unidentified photographer's studio on April 10, 1867. By the early 1860s the more durable and less expensive tintypes had replaced ambrotypes and daguerreotypes as the most popular format for portrait photography. Clockwise from bottom: George Rockwell (in dress), H. St. Clair, Joseph Duncan, John Caldwell, Charles Morgan, and William Clement. (The initials on the cardboard frame misidentify some of the children.)



Below: Strasser's Band performs music for hundreds of guests at the Putnam family's Woodlawn Estate during the "Kettle Drum" fund-raiser festival for the Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences in July 1877. Proceeds helped fund the academy's first permanent museum building. The two images on a stereograph card are photographed by a pair of lenses set apart like human eyes (note how one image shows more of the house shutters than the other does). When viewed through a stereoscopic viewer, the two images produce a three-dimensional effect.





The sun begins to disappear during the late afternoon solar eclipse in Davenport on August 7, 1869. Note that the time of day was handwritten and images were hand-retouched as necessary in each volume published by the academy.

Eclipse Collection

The use of photography to document scientific experiments and events was inevitable because of its ability to make accurate images as documentary evidence. This small collection of 20 original photographic prints is mounted in a volume entitled *Photographs of the Eclipse of the Sun, August 7, 1869*.

The images record the entire course of the solar eclipse that occurred over Iowa that Saturday afternoon. In addition to the scientific interest of these images, the work also represents the first attempt at a broadly disseminated publication by the fledgling Davenport Academy of Natural Sciences.

To produce this series of photographs, the academy purchased

a telescope specially designed for the occasion by Professor Thomas Lighton of Rock Island, Illinois. Davenport photographer Paul B. Jones used it with his studio camera equipment to produce what the committee in charge deemed "twenty pretty fair photographs" of the event.

Each copy of the publication required printing 20 original photographs and mounting them by hand on thick cardboard pages, a costly and cumbersome procedure. Still, the academy wanted to prove itself as a reputable scientific institution and chose to use the most accurate technology of the day to document the event visually. A printer's engravings would not have yielded the same

clarity or scientific value that photographs did.

The academy originally planned to sell 500 sets of prints to other scientific institutions in the United States and abroad, but financial disagreements with Jones slowed and complicated the production of the finished volumes. No final record of the number of sets actually printed exists, but it is doubtful that the academy published anywhere near its initial goal. Besides this volume in its collection, the Putnam Museum knows of only two other complete sets and one partial volume.

Marcus Curtis Smith Collection

The small fortune required to purchase early cameras and photographic processing equipment meant that only relatively wealthy individuals could afford to pursue photography as a hobby. As a result, only the people and other subjects important to such elite amateur photographers were documented through photographs; families in lower economic classes were not.

Marcus Curtis Smith represents one such elite early amateur photographer. A man of some wealth, Smith was a lumberman and manager of his mother-in-law's estate at Rose Hill, reputed to be the oldest farm in Scott County, Iowa. Combining his interest in photography with a love of nature and an enthusiasm for boating, he produced a beautiful legacy of photographic prints of

the Scott County area in the 1880s.

Smith focused primarily on nature and the leisure activities of family and friends. Like many of his peers, he probably had training in art. Certainly he developed an eye for composition and used it effectively while behind the camera. His images follow the naturalistic style gaining popularity in the late 1880s.

A member of the Davenport Boating Club and the Irrawadi Canoe Club, Smith took his camera along on many outings to capture the serenity of nature. One of his favorite subjects was the scenery on Offerman's Island (now Credit Island) in the Mississippi River near his home in southwest Davenport. On Offerman's Island, Smith found the lush foliage and access to water that he enjoyed capturing in his images.



Marcus Curtis Smith poses for this self-portrait while picnicking with his mother-in-law, Ellen Wilkinson, and wife, Gertrude Wilkinson Smith, c. 1886. The bright blue color of the image is characteristic of the cyanotype process, later widely used for architectural blueprints.



"Lotus Field - Offerman's Island," c. 1885, shows Smith's mastery of his art. He routinely photographed such pastoral settings.



Fort Collection

Benjamin Franklin Fort became interested in photography in the late 1890s. Like many other Iowans of modest incomes in the late 19th century, Fort took up photography as a hobby only after technological advances caused prices of photographic equipment to fall. Using his trusty Ray No. 1 folding camera, Fort photographed his family, friends, and other subjects. He then developed and printed his images at home, a practice made fairly common with the introduction of pre-sensitized printing papers in the 1880s.

Many of the nearly 300 glass negatives and lantern slides in the Fort Collection are candid images of Fort's family and friends enjoying leisure activities or interior views of his home.

Half of the collection features images on lantern slides taken by Fort on a 1914 vacation to Pike's Peak, Colorado. Lantern slides featured positive images on glass that could be projected with light onto a wall or screen (much like the 35mm film-based slides that replaced them).

Fort painstakingly mounted and hand-colored most of his vacation lantern slides and developed a presentation around them for his family, friends, and local fraternal organizations.



Fort photographed the **Why Clothing Company** store, Second and Brady Streets in Davenport, shortly before it was demolished in 1909. He first made a black and white exposure (above) on a glass lantern slide, and later hand-colored a duplicate slide (below) with transparent pigments. The next year the Putnam Building was constructed on the corner; its income continues to help fund the Putnam Museum.



Drivers wait in their carriages outside Davenport's Sacred Heart Cathedral, while Bishop James Davis officiates at the early morning wedding of Lucy Rogers and James Walsh on March 3, 1908. Later, guests and the wedding party gather for the reception at the Outing Club. The newlyweds stand in the center.

Walsh Collection

By the time of his marriage at age 39, James W. Walsh had already firmly established himself as a leading businessman in Davenport, and the extravagance of his 1908 wedding to Lucy Rogers reflected that standing. The Walsh Collection documents the lavish lifestyles led by many upper-class Iowans early in the 20th century.

For their wedding photos, the Walshes selected John B. Hostetler. A prominent Davenport photographer, Hostetler managed to capture the elegance surrounding the early morning nuptials and, in the process, to create some of the finest images of his 35-year professional career. Not allowed to photograph the wedding ceremony itself, Hostetler concentrated on the peripheral events, producing a series of images that are among the best in the collection.





Riverboat Collection

Throughout the history of Davenport and other Iowa river towns, riverboats have played key roles in both transportation and economic development. The "golden age" of the Mississippi River steamboats ended as the lumber industry diminished and railroads came to dominate transportation.

Yet throughout the 20th century riverboats have continued to be popular excursion vessels for the public and favorite subjects for photographers.

The "romance" of riverboats has also inspired many Midwesterners to search for images of steamboats, log rafts, barges, and

other scenes related to the Upper Mississippi and Ohio Rivers. Two such collectors in Davenport, Judge William R. Maines and Captain Walter A. Blair, spent much of their lives acquiring photographs of riverboats. They independently collected original and copy photographs from friends, acquaint-

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Bawden Bros. Collection

In response to the growing consumer market after the turn of the century, some professional photographers began specializing in business photography and photo postcards, thereby documenting local landmarks, parks, schools, and businesses. Albert R. Bawden founded one such company, the Commercial Photographic Company, in Davenport in 1913. Over the next few years G. Ray and Harry E. Bawden joined their brother and the name of the company was changed to Bawden Bros., Inc. By the 1920s, the company had expanded from commercial photography to a complete advertising service for Iowa and Illinois manufacturers and businesses.

Of the thousands of images the Bawdens produced during the 1920s and 1930s, more than 500 have survived and were donated to the Putnam in the early 1960s. Unfortunately, the Bawden Bros. photographed almost all of their images on cellulose nitrate-based negatives, the predominant format for photography from 1900 to 1940. Nitrate negatives have proven to be physically unstable over time and tend to combust spontaneously. In 1992, under another State of Iowa HRDP grant, the Putnam Museum made archivally stable duplicate negatives and prints of these images. Although a handful of the images had deteriorated too far to reproduce, the grant allowed the museum to preserve most of these important images for use in future research, exhibits, and publications.



A Bawden Bros. photographer captured a typical midday scene on “Commercial Alley” behind the Bawdens’ shop in downtown Davenport, c. 1919. Business alleys such as this one had mostly service-oriented businesses. Sales establishments, which formed most of Bawdens’ clientele, required more visible, prestigious, and expensive storefronts to attract customers.



The Bawden brothers and a few employees pose with vehicles in front of their business on East Third Street in downtown Davenport in April 1923.



"Pride of the Speeder." Employees at the Speeder Machinery Corporation of Cedar Rapids pose for Art and Emma Walter, September 11, 1936.

Walter Collection

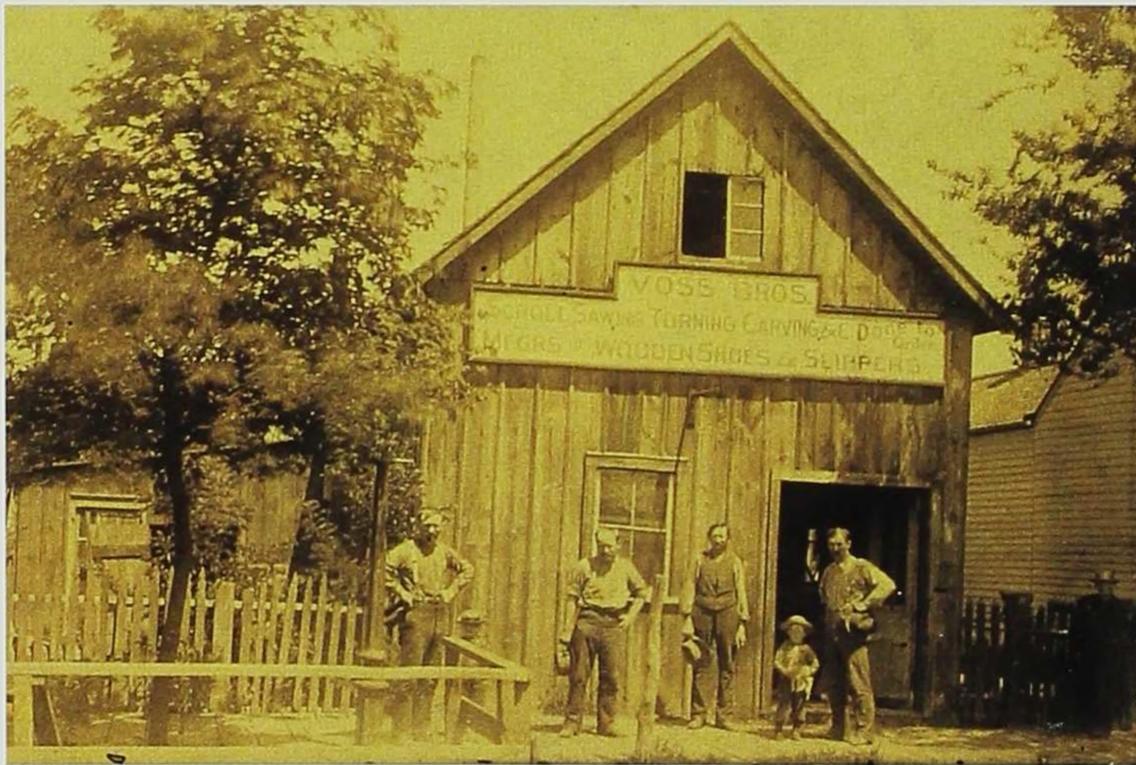
Discovered in a Davenport attic in 1992, the rare photographs in the Walter Collection document midwestern workers during the Great Depression. Like many during the Depression, photographers Art and Emma Walter traveled across the country to find work. For the last five years of the 1930s, they operated in Iowa and Illinois from their base in the Davenport area. Nearly 400 of the images they created from about 1929 to 1939 survive.

The collection contains well over 100 images of workers and workplaces from most of Iowa's urban areas—Burlington, Cedar Falls, Cedar Rapids, Davenport, Des Moines, Dubuque, Muscatine, Ottumwa, Sioux City, and Waterloo. Group portraits of workers

employed by railroads, foundries, and other heavy industries form the basis of the collection. These portraits capture the faces of thousands of midwestern men and women who managed to find work and hold onto it during difficult economic times.

Group portraits taken at work sites can provide a wealth of historical information. By conveying a sense of individual attitudes through facial expressions and posture, such photographs sometimes provide an overall sense of prevailing working conditions and relationships. Often these images also document what workers wore on the job. Because work clothing is generally discarded when worn out, museums usually lack information about this sig-

nificant part of people's everyday lives. Finally, group work photos represent a potential source of images for the genealogist who knows an ancestor worked for a particular company.



An early view of the Voss Bros. factory on West Third Street, Davenport in 1888. From left: John A. Voss, Fred P. Voss, an unidentified man who turned the shop's flywheel, Walter K. Voss (who as an adult later donated the collection to the Putnam Museum), and William H. Voss.

Voss Bros. Mfg. Co. Collection

The late 19th and early 20th centuries saw the growth and transition of many Iowa businesses from modest crafts-based origins to relatively large-scale mass-production factories. Davenport's Voss Bros. Mfg. Co. represents one such business, and the images in the Voss Collection trace its history from its founding in 1876 through the 1950s.

The earliest photographs show the small woodworking shop where brothers William H., Fred, and John Voss handcrafted wood products. Most of the images, however, depict the company's washing machine factory and the specific products made there.

The Voss brothers and their parents left Germany in 1872 to join an already established German community in Davenport. Within a few years, William Voss turned his attention to woodworking and construction of wooden household products. Although he invented his first wash-



Voss factory employees operate lathes and drill presses during World War II, producing military hardware for the war effort. Note the flag prominently displayed in the work area. Other images further document the highly visible patriotic symbolism that helped motivate American workers on the home front. Photographed by Edward Fromader, c. 1943-1945.



A young "Uncle Sam" awaits the beginning of a ceremony recognizing the Voss's Blackhawk Foundry for meeting high production quotas for defense. Photographer unknown, July 29, 1945.

ing machine in 1877, William devoted most of his time to the production of ornamental furniture, shoes, and other items.

By 1900, after substantial improvements in his washing machine, William and his brothers concentrated their efforts on washers, garnering a sizable portion of the Midwest market. Images of factory interiors show the various stages of production during the 1920s and 1930s.

By the time the United States entered World War II, the Voss brothers had acquired the Blackhawk Foundry. During the war they converted their machinery to produce military hardware such as the ball turret mechanism for B-29 airplanes. Several photographs in the collection document the scope of the company's wartime production efforts, including two Army/Navy "E" Award ceremonies held at the company's

factories in recognition of its contribution to the nation's defense.



Left: An unidentified participant competes in the 1940 National Corn Husking Contest in Scott County, Iowa, October 30, 1940.

Right: The Seattle Giant Wheel dominates the Royal American Shows midway along the Davenport riverfront, c. 1965. By the 1960s, improved cameras and color films allowed photographers like Sunderbruch to capture dramatic nighttime scenes like this.

Sunderbruch Collection

By the 1930s, technological advances in cameras and film allowed photographers to take photographs more quickly, in a wider range of light levels, and of moving subjects. A new generation of photographers could now capture many more images, making storage and documentation difficult. As a result they often kept only a fraction of the images originally

taken and worked primarily from negatives.

Richard K. Sunderbruch, a photographer who came of age during this period, began his professional career as a photographer for Walgreen's drugstore in downtown Davenport during the late 1930s. After serving in the army during World War II, Sunderbruch returned to Davenport. For much

of the next three decades he earned his living as an independent commercial photographer in the Quad Cities, producing a body of work that now represents the Putnam's largest collection of images by a single photographer.

Sunderbruch realized the potential historical significance of his images and donated more than 1,000 images to the museum over a ten-year period beginning in 1960. His subjects include businesses, schools, special events, and scenes from daily life—subjects that have formed the basis of work for many commercial photographers since the 1940s and represent the omnipresent nature of the camera in the last half of the 20th century.

Unfortunately, the Sunderbruch Collection is typical of sizable postwar collections in its lack of detailed documentation. As these massive collections move into historical repositories, photo archivists often have few clues regarding the identity of subjects in the photographs. Consequently, this lack of documentation means that the significance and context of many images have been, and will probably continue to be, lost.





W. Shorey Collection

Closely paralleling the growth of commercial photography in the 20th century was the tremendous increase in amateur photographers. Often the amateurs' dedication and purity of purpose produced work that rivaled and even surpassed that of professionals. The W. Shorey Collection comprises approximately 40 images taken by one such amateur, award-winning Davenport photographer Wilson H. Shorey.

A lawyer by profession, Shorey practiced law in Davenport for more than 50 years until his death in 1979. He began photography simply to ease stress and an ulcer problem. By the mid-1950s, however, he had earned a reputation as one of the finest amateur photographers in the country; more than 150 of his prints appeared in international exhibitions.

The bulk of this collection, only a small fraction of his lifelong work, centers on images relating to the Catholic community in eastern Iowa during the turbulent late 1960s and early 1970s. These fascinating views show young people attempting to assimilate the tremendous social changes in the secular culture into their traditional faith. Virtually every image in the collection demonstrates Shorey's wonderful eye for framing his subject and his strong understanding of light and contrast.

Left: Father James Grubb leads a "folk mass" at St. Anthony's Church, Davenport, c. 1970. Such non-traditional events were used to reach out in new ways to a generation of young people disillusioned with traditional religious and political authority.



During the 1952 presidential campaign Shorey photographed a seemingly relaxed Dwight Eisenhower at a campaign stopover in Davenport.

From Wilson Shorey's images of counterculture events during the 1970s, back to the exquisite ambrotype of Mary Louisa Duncan Putnam holding her child in 1856, each collection in the Putnam Museum's photo archives reflects the history of photography and documents a part of Iowa's heritage. Unfortunately, such precious reminders of our collective past are too often ignored until they disappear or deteriorate. Thanks to the support of

programs like HRDP and individual donations of time and resources, that history has become more accessible to the public. ❖

Formerly Putnam collections manager/registrar, Scott Roller is now museum registrar at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin. He thanks photo archivist Matthew Carpenter and Elizabeth Poti, Elisabeth Nations, Joan Baird, and all the other Putnam volunteers without whose help this project would not have succeeded.



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