

A.W. & G.E. Howes Company Glass Plate Negative Collection

Windsor Historical Society

Creator: A.W. & G.E. Howes Company, Ashfield, Mass.

Dates: 1902

Extent: 75 glass-plate negatives; 3.5 linear feet

Accession #: 1976.5

Biographical Note

Brothers Alvah, Walter, and George Howes of Ashfield, Massachusetts formed a traveling photography business during the late 19th century. Alvah and Walter began touring the Berkshires and the Connecticut River Valley taking and selling photographs in 1886. When George joined the company in 1896, it became the A.W. & G.E. Howes Company and remained in operation until 1907. The company visited several towns each summer from 1896 through 1902, staying at boarding houses while they canvassed for business door-to-door. They took photographs of local people and sold three prints for \$1. The company photographed thousands of homeowners standing outside their houses; they also specialized in photographing workers and local businesses.

The A.W. & G.E. Howes Company visited Windsor, CT at least twice, once in the 1890s and again in 1902. Three negatives in this collection can be dated to the 1902 visit because they show the construction of the Huntington House on Broad Street Green. Since the company numbered the negatives consecutively, it is assumed that the whole collection dates to 1902.

Scope and Contents

This collection contains seventy-five 5"x7" glass plate negatives from the A.W. & G.E. Howes Company of Ashfield, MA, which depict Connecticut buildings and people at the turn of the twentieth century. The collection includes 38 photographs of buildings and people that are unidentified but believed to be from the Rocky Hill, CT community and the 37 photographs of buildings and people from Windsor, CT. The Windsor images include views of buildings on Broad Street and Batchelder Road, Young Ladies Institute, Windsor Public Library, Huntington House, Windsor Creamery, and the Loomis Homestead. Most of the photographs show groups of people standing outside their homes, but a few show trolley workers working on the trolley tracks and construction workers at the Huntington House.

Arrangement

The collection was arranged sequentially by the numbers that the Howes brothers assigned to each negative when it was taken (numbers 486-601). We have maintained the original numbering and order.

Box List

Box 1: Negatives 486-492
Rocky Hill, CT Views

Box 2: Negatives 493-504
Rocky Hill, CT Views

Box 3: Negatives 505-516
Rocky Hill, CT Views

Box 4: Negatives 517-525; 561-565
Rocky Hill, CT Views
Windsor, CT Views
Trolley Workers

Box 5: Negatives 566-577
Windsor, CT Views
Trolley Workers

Box 6: Negatives 578-579; 583-589
Windsor, CT Views
Hayden Hall, Young Ladies Institute

Box 7: Negatives 590-601
Windsor, CT Views
Houses on "The Island", Windsor, CT

Custodial History

In 1963 the Ashfield Historical Society in Ashfield, MA discovered over 20,000 glass plate negatives stored in the town's Zacharia Field Tavern. Two donors purchased the negatives and donated them to the Ashfield Historical Society. During the original sorting of the collection, Ashfield Historical Society distributed negatives with identifiable locations to the corresponding historical societies. In 1976, the Ashfield Historical Society donated what they thought was a complete collection of Windsor, Connecticut negatives to the Windsor Historical Society, creating this collection. Later research on the collection suggests that the first 38 negatives are images of Rocky Hill, CT while the last 37 are Windsor views.

Ashfield Historical Society began a preservation and storage initiative on thousands of Howes negatives remaining in their collection between 1978 and 1981. They published a book *New England Reflections, Photographs by the Howes Brothers, 1882-1907* in 1981.

Windsor Historical Society's collection of Howes negatives was placed in archival boxes during the society's 2007-2009 cleaning of the darkroom storage. The negatives were kept in their original order. In 2007, two copies of the Windsor, CT images were printed on archival paper by Gerrick Studios of Newington.

Related Materials at Windsor Historical Society

Elaine Benson Collection (2008.4)

Photo File – Business, Photographers, Howes Brothers

Photo File – Schools, Stony Hill

Subject Files – Business, Photographers, Howes Brothers

Subject Terms

Rocky Hill (Conn.)--Pictorial works

Windsor (Conn.)--Pictorial works

Objects History

Gelatin dry plate negatives were the first mass-produced, gelatin-emulsion negatives used in photography. The emulsion technology was invented in 1871 and gelatin dry plate negatives were first available in the United States in 1879. The plates were mass-produced in factories, making them cheaper and easier for photographers to use than earlier wet collodion negatives. They made photography an affordable hobby for the middle class and greatly increased the number of amateur photographers in the United States by the turn of the 20th century.

The Eastman Kodak Company was a major manufacturer of dry plate negatives, but many smaller manufacturers also produced negatives. The plates were sold in standard sizes and were packaged by the dozen in cardboard boxes. They were used from 1880 through the 1920s when film negatives became readily available.

Collection processed in March, 2007, finding aid prepared by curator Erin Stevic in December 2008, and edited by librarian Barbara Goodwin in 2015.