

CAMERA CLUB OF OTTAWA



75 years of
photography

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*THE OTTAWA CAMERA CLUB
Ottawa, Ontario,
Meets at Brouse's Hall
Twice a Month
President: R.B. Whyte
Sec-Treas: G.E.Valleau*

-Ottawa City Directory 1896

The formative days of the Camera Club of Ottawa are obscure even though the Ottawa City Directory of 1896 carried the notice shown above. Similar notices appeared for subsequent years to 1901. It is conceivable that members met informally prior to 1896 as the wording of the notice appears to accept the existence of the Club as fact.

Two members who were presidents, William Ide 1899-1900, and Charles Edward Saunders 1901, are represented by their photographs in "Seventy-Five Years of Phototgraphy".

The earliest document held by the Club covers the season 1898-1899 and records a lecture by William J. Topley on the development of negatives. Topley was one of Canada's foremost photographers of the time, and photographs made by him are also in the Exhibition.

Disenchantment with the Ottawa Camera Club followed shortly after, for in 1904, eight members broke away and formed the Photographic Art Club of Ottawa. Two volumes of minutes recorded by the PAC indicate that Dr. Frank Shutt, Dominion Chemist at the Experimental Farm, and, Charles Edward Saunders, Dominion Cerealist, also at the Farm, were the chief architects in the formation of the new club.

The Club Constitution of 1908 curiously limited admittance to 12 members. The rotation of meetings among members' homes was a practical reason for such a limitation. But, the minutes also clearly reveal the dedication of these early members to photography as a form of art and visual expression. They had no time for dilettantes. And, as members also figured prominently in the social and cultural life of Ottawa, the new PAC represented a compatible and natural banding of men having like minds, similar tastes and a social acceptance of each other.

The years from 1904 to 1921 were happy and productive. Practising photography mainly in the summer, the members met during the winter to examine their photographs with a critical eye.

Meetings usually concluded with some thought for the needs of the inner man, and a quick dash to catch the last street-car to the Barn. One of the group, Charles Macnamara travelled to and from Arnprior - no mean feat in those days.

Frequent photographic exhibitions were held on the premises of Messrs. Wilson and Company Studio, 121 Sparks Street, and in the Carnegie Library (now The Ottawa Public Library).

A catalogue covering a Special Exhibition in October and November, 1915, in aid of the Red Cross Society produced \$81.45 and a warm letter of appreciation from James W. Robertson, Chairman of the Red Cross.

Several of the Ide prints and one by Saunders displayed in the 1915 exhibition are also on show today in "Seventy-Five Years of Photography".

The War Years 1914-1918 inflicted scars on the Club too, as the following abstract from the minutes of February 26, 1917 reveal:

Dr. Saunders presented a verbal message from Mr. H.T. Gussow in regard to his membership in the Club. Mr.

Güssow stated that under the existing circumstances, he felt that his presence at the meetings would be likely to interfere with the freedom of expression and absence of restraint which do so much to make the meetings bright and profitable. He therefore requested that his name be dropped from the membership list for the present, but said that he would be glad to resume his membership as soon as the Club feels it is desirable to do so.

The resignation was formally accepted, but regretfully, the name of Güssow never appeared in the minutes again.

Nonetheless, the close attachment of members to the Club and to each other is poignantly illustrated by the death of R.B. Whyte, a fellow-member and a past-president, in the spring of 1918:

Moved by Mr. Sykes and seconded by Mr. Wilson: That the Photographic Art Club of Ottawa hereby gives expression to its profound regret and feeling of loss at the death of its late member, Mr. R.B. Whyte, and wishes to place on record its appreciation of his love of the beautiful in nature and in art, his zeal for the improvement of society as shown in the many good works he was actively engaged in, his independence of views and his integrity of character.

-Carried.

Nor was the Club without a sense of humor, as shown by an entry of March 3, 1919:

Moved by Mr. Wilson and seconded by Dr. Saunders that: The members of this Club having learned with great regret that one of its members, Mr. W.J. Topley, has gone on an extended holiday trip without taking a camera with him, feel it to be their solemn duty to place on record their entire disapproval of such conduct and their sincere hope that the delinquent member will, with so many beautiful subjects on this journey, never again dare to leave home unless suitably equipped for photographic work.

Further, that the members of this Club are highly surprised and indignant that one of their numbers should so demean himself and lower the status and dignity of the Club, as to suggest that a collection of picture post-cards which he is sending, may serve in the place of original photographs to illustrate and inform the Club of his journeyings.

-Carried.

By 1921, restiveness had once again seized the Club. Sparked by J. Montague Bate, a member of only two year's standing, the formation of a large, general photographic club began to take shape.

When informed by Montague Bate that a new club was being formed, the members of the Photographic Art Club assured him of their support and co-operation. Though the members optimistically set the next meeting for January 1922, the Photographic Art Club had collapsed. There were no further entries in the minute book.

Club records from 1921 to 1935 are either non-existent, or do not carry sufficient detail from which observations can be made on activities with accuracy and certainty. The elegance with which the Photographic Art Club recorded meetings and lectures, in the fine handwriting of either William Ide or Dr. Frank Shutt, became a lost art.

By 1923, the reformed Ottawa Camera Club was meeting in a large bare room in the Central Chambers on the south side of Sparks Street east of the Topley store. A darkroom had been built in one corner but as green lumber had been used in its construction, cracks developed and resultant light leakages made its use virtually impossible.

Maurice Button, present proprietor of The Camera House on Sparks Street, was Executive President. Members from the disbanded Photographic Art Club included

J. Montague Bate, William Ide and Dr. Frank Shutt. Meetings were held around a big table with members sitting on kitchen chairs.

Montague Bate was keenly interested in lantern-slide making and turned out some excellent work. As well, he was one of the first members to instal a modern and complete darkroom with an enamel sink, splashboard at the back and pegs in the wall to hold graduates of every imaginable size. It was kept impeccably free from dust.

He also had the only multi-speed shutter with speeds up to 1/2,000 of a second - an incredible camera at the time. Maurice Button recalls a photograph taken of an arrow in flight in which the motion was fully stopped. However, if the shutter was often used at its fastest speed, it tore itself to pieces.

Other types of cameras in use during the 1920s were the Goerz Anschutz Focal Plane 4" x 5" Press Camera, Zeiss 4" x 5" Folding Reflex, Erenman 9 x 12 cm Focal Plane, and numerous Korona and Premo Plate cameras. There was also a 2¼" x 3¼" Graflex for cut film, but this was considered too small and insufficiently versatile for the serious photographer.

Between about 1927 and 1930, other members whose photographs are exhibited in "Seventy-Five Years of Photography" were Frederick George Ashton, Clifford M. Johnston and Harold F. Kells.

Harold Kells has recently retired from the Public Service, resides in Ottawa, and is very active in color photography.

All three were successful exhibitors in salons throughout the world. Following the lead set by Clifford M. Johnston and another able member, Johann Helders, the group worked towards the establishment of a Canadian

international salon. This was realized in 1934 when The National Gallery of Canada sponsored the first Canadian International Salon of Photographic Art.

Each had photographs accepted in the Salon, and three originals by Ashton, Johnston and Kells, hung in 1934 are in the current "Seventy-Five Years of Photography" Exhibition.

It was also at this time, in 1933, that the Baird Trophy, presented to the Camera Club of Ottawa by Doctor Baird and awarded for the best print of the year, became the first manifestation of a competitive spirit that has been a characteristic of the Club ever since.

The addition of the Photographic Stores Trophy in 1935, awarded for the best print of the year in the Beginners Class, provided additional fuel for competition. For the first time too, a formal class distinction was drawn between novice and experienced worker.

Several of the Baird Trophy winning prints could not be located, and it has been virtually impossible to identify and collect beginners' prints that won the Photographic Stores Trophy from 1935 to the present time.

Formal records begin again in 1939 and note that the Camera Club was holding its meetings in Trafalgar House, 29 Cartier Street. For six years, Club meetings were held there until the pressure on accommodation in 1945-46 forced the Club to move. For the next two years, meetings were held in the Library of the Ottawa Technical School on Albert Street.

By 1946, color-slide photography had become within the means of most members of the Club, with the result that color-slide competitions were introduced into annual programs. Maurice Button of the Camera House presented the Rose Bowl Trophy to the Club to be awarded for the color slide of the year.

Donald J. Munro's slide was selected in 1947 and not only did he become the first winner of the Rose Bowl, but he also repeated the performance in 1948. Color prints have been made from Munro's and most other winning color slides and are on exhibition in "Seventy-Five Years of Photography".

But once again, an aura of discontentment hung over the Club arising from pointedly different approaches to photography. The dispute could not be resolved and for the third time in its history, the Club was rocked by another breakaway. This time, 11 members turned from the Camera Club of Ottawa and formed the f/11 Club. Frederick George Ashton and William Ide were among the eleven. Others, whose prints are in "Seventy-Five Years of Photography", were R.M. Cunningham, Alison Dickison, James Dick and Arthur Y. Smith.

Arthur Y. Smith, now nearing 80 years of age and residing in Ottawa, is the only member of the Club to win the Baird Trophy four times. His astounding feat was accomplished in the four consecutive years from 1943 to 1946 inclusive.

In 1949, the Club re-located in the Lingard Studios, 1186 Bank Street, and though membership was small, the Club went through a happy and productive period. At least two exhibitions were held in the store of Murphy-Gamble Limited. An invitation poster of 1949 proclaimed the Second Annual Ottawa and District Salon of Photography to be held from June 20 to 25.

With the closing of the Lingard Studios in the mid-1950s, the Club moved once again to St. Georges Hall, at the corner of Metcalfe and Gloucester Streets. By the 1960s, meetings were being held in the National Research Building on Sussex Drive. Apart from the 1969-1970 season in the National Library and Public Archives on Wellington Street, the NRC Building has been home for the past decade.

Additional trophies were added to the Club's arsenal for recognizing photographic prowess. A. Crombie McNeil presented the McNeil Trophy in 1951 to be awarded for the high aggregate score in the Advanced Class each season. The Lingard Trophy, awarded for high aggregate score in the Open Class, was presented to the Club by William Lingard in 1952. Dr. G.B. Oakland, A.R.P.S., donated the Oakland Trophy for high aggregate score in color-slide competitions. An Award of Merit, presented to the Club in 1963, is awarded to those exhibitors whose work meets the standards set by the Award of Merit Committee headed by the donator, Mrs. Alice Watson. Jon Joosten, noted Ottawa photographer, presented the Jon Joosten Trophy in 1965 to be awarded for the best protrait in open competition. Robert Lundgren gave the Anniversary Scroll in 1968 to be awarded to the beginner with the highest aggregate score each year. With the presentation of SAROS Trophy by Sam Edelson in 1970 for the high aggregate in the Advanced Class, there are awards to cover prints-of-the-year, color-slides-of-the-year, and high aggregate scores in all classes.

The addition of the Advanced Class during the 1950s was an attempt to bridge the differing capabilities between beginners and the veteran and accomplished club photographer. By and large, it has worked well.

Travelling salons were a key activity in the 1950s, and exchanges of photographs were made with other camera clubs across the country. As each travelling salon reached its destination, members of that club would adjudicate on the prints and either send them back to the originators with comments, or send them onto a another club. When more than one club commented on a salon sent out by the Camera Club of Ottawa, contradictory comments were frequently and amusingly encountered.

Some of the clubs which exchanged salons with the Camera Club of Ottawa were: Hart House Camera Club,

University of Toronto; The Camera Obscurists, Halifax; Northlands Camera Club, North Bay; London Fotoforum, London; St. Catherines Camera Club; Montreal Camera Club; Hamilton Camera Club; Guelph Camera Club; and others. Today, the practice of sending out travelling salons has largely stopped.

Divisions continue to exist in the Camera Club of Ottawa. The issue is recognized and to a large extent, it is tolerated. It exists between those espousing photography as pictorial art and those who would employ the realism of the photograph as a social document. Both are valid points of view and place dependence on whether photography is a hobby or employed as a visual language by the concerned photographer.

It takes all kinds of photographers to make a club, and the heterogeneous group in the Camera Club of Ottawa at the present time, are examining their positions in relation to photography.

Executive Committee - 1970

President - Mrs. Kay Whitaker

Vice President - John Butterworth

Secretary - Mrs. Hilda Maxwell

Treasurer - Miss Elizabeth Amey

Past President - E.H.Q. Smith

Program Director - Arthur Quanbury

Print Director - Otto Graser

Assistant Print Director - Gilles Guttadauria

Color Director - William R. Brown

Assistant Color Director - Fred Light

Publicity Director - Stanley G. Metcalfe

Social Director - Pamela Rider