

Grand Rapids History & Special Collections

Archives

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Finding aid for the

Guy Johnston Photo Collection

Collection # 066

November 2007 version

Abstract

The Johnston Photograph Collection consists of 106 photographs made by Guy Johnston (1875-1947), a lifelong resident of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Johnston was an amateur photographer. His family ran the Eagle Hotel on Market Street. Most or all of this work is believed to be copy work. That is, his photographs are of photographs and drawings originally created by others, though no documentation exists in many cases to verify the original source or photographer. The images depict Grand Rapids during the 1880s, 1890s and the flood of 1904. Included are images of houses, churches, and businesses, and some references to the use of the image when photographed in 1926. Included are photographs of original sketches by Miss Mary Cumings, ca. 1850s which provide some of the earliest views of Grand Rapids. The collection is strong in panoramic views of the City in a number of directions from several locations. Some of the images from the 1890s are of buildings in the city and are particularly clear and distinct.

1904 Flood images from Johnson Photographs Collection, and GRPL Photographs Collection
http://www.grpl.org/collections/grhsty_spcoll/exhibits/flood.html

Collection # : 066
Accession #: 00.000
Donor: unknown
Span dates: 1855-1904, 1926?
Original processing date: March 1988.
Size: 0.2 cu. ft. ; x linear ft.

Related Collections

Images in the Hooper, Fitch and Anderson photo collections, as well as other GRPL archival collections, such as Coll. 054, the GRPL Photo Collection, may included images copied from or duplicating Johnston.

Johnston, in turn, appears to have copied images from sources unidentified. The quality and amount of additional information about the image can vary from one of these collections to the next.

The Johnson Photo Collection is known to have some of the earliest images of Grand Rapids, but they may not be the original photographic form in which the image was first captured.

Box Summary

Box No.	Description of Contents	Box Description
1	Photos	standard
2	Contact copy prints	4x6 slim
Added 10/22/2005		
3	Contact copy prints	4x6 slim

Processing note:

Section II of this finding aid provides a generic description of each item.

Section III is just begun, which provided additional keywords or phrases to further describe the image.

Biography

Guy Johnston was a life-long resident of Grand Rapids (b. 12/31/1875 - d. 11/26/1947). Johnston graduated from Central High School and spent most of his working life (1884-1934) helping his family manage the Eagle Hotel on Market Street. He appears to have been an amateur photographer, acquainted with such other Grand Rapids photographers as James Hooper and George Fitch.

Scope and Content

This Johnston Photo Collection consists of 106 images, which from the numbering given on the items themselves, appear to be only a small portion of some 600+ items that may have been originally created. If this presumption is correct, and these numbers are from Johnson, then perhaps the Library or unknown donor only selected certain items of Johnson's total works. The existence of other sets of Johnson photos is unknown.

However, another explanation is that the photo numbers were assigned by the Library, and for some reason the numbering sequence was interrupted after #95, with only irregular numbers available from 575-645.

The photo numbers listed in the box/folder summary are those items that existed at the time of the 1988 processing. If the other items for the missing numbers actually ever existed at the Library in the past, they seem to have disappeared over the years.

Duplications of the images in the first two folders were made at some point in the past, and patrons are encouraged to use those duplicates first, to protect the earlier photos.

The images of Grand Rapids that are depicted in the collection can be divided into the following time periods:

- pre-1860s,
- 1880s,
- 1890s
- 1904.
- Ca. 1926, with reference to earlier views.

Some of the most widely duplicated views of the 1904 flood are in this collection. The photos also provide a series of panoramic views of the city from several vantage points. It appears that many of the other photo collections, such as Hooper, Fitch, and Anderson, copied some of their historic Grand Rapids views from Johnston, or from the same source as Johnston. However, some of the more distinct early views of the city are in the Johnston collection, suggesting that Johnson's images may be a generation or more closer to the original and/or that the quality of his photography was superior.

Methods of Description

This finding aid currently describes the images in this collection in four sections, with more detailed or alternative descriptions of the same items in each section.

Section I. Summary of Folder Locations.

Described by photo number, within the Folder Locations area. There are two sets of the images in this collection.

A. Usage Photos. Incomplete.

These are later copy photos made to protect the Johnson originals. Only copies duplicating folders 1 & 2 of the originals are available, and researchers are asked to use these items to save wear and tear on the items from Johnson.

B. Original Photos. Some missing.

The second subsection gives locations of the Johnson images. In fact, Johnson's images may be later copy photos of original historical photographs. But, they are believed to be the actual items given as the Johnson collection.

Section II. Brief general description with photo number & date.

This section serves as a brief inventory of each image by number. However, the numerous use of descriptions such as "Grand Rapids View" don't provide much information on the actual visual content of the photo. Some clues to the content of the image are available using the Index in Section IV. However, the entries are by the subject matter, so one must search the entire index by the number of the photo to find the match word or words which provide a clue to the image contents.

Section III. Expanded descriptions, including descriptive information from the photo, plus additional key words representing the visual content.

An attempt was made in this section to create easily readable access to the images by listing key facts about the image or its visual contents. Unfortunately, there has been no staff time to complete this process. A digital scan of the image attached to the brief description would facilitate access to the visual information, but not to key word searching. Those key words still need to be added to the finding aid.

Section IV. Photo Index, collocating photos numbers under like subject terms.

Contents

Box Folder Description

Section I. Summary of Folder Locations

1	1	A. Later copy prints, to be used first to protect Johnson “original” prints. 1979 copy prints of Nos. 1-9, 11-13, 15-17, 19-20 (17 items, 6/11/2003) Copies of nos. 14 & 18 are missing.
1	2	1979 copy prints of Nos. 22-25, 27-28, 30-36 (13 items, 6/11/2003)
1	1.5	B. Original to Johnson photos Original to Johnson photos, Nos. 1-9, 11-20 (19 items, 6/11/2003) No. 10 missing, possibly since 1979.
1	2.5	Original photos, Nos. 21-28, 30-35, 35a, 36-45, 47-50. (29 photos, June 2000) Nos. 29 & 46 missing for some time.
1	3	Photos, Nos. 51-76, 78-90 (39 original photos + 1 copy photo of #72, 6/11/2003)
1	4	Nos. 91-95, Nos. 575, 577-578, 582-584, 586, 589-592, 594, 612-613, 619, 622 [missing June 2000, 6/11/2003], 632, 634, 645. (23 photos, June 2000)

Section II. Brief general description with photo number & date.

<u>Folder</u>	<u>Item No.</u>	<u>Date</u>
Folder 1:		
Grand Rapids View (sketch)	001	1855
Grand Rapids View (sketch)	002	1855
Grand River View (sketch)	003	1855
Bridge Street View	004	c1870
Reservoir Hill	005	
Grand Rapids after the fire	006	1873
Grand Rapids after the fire	007	1873
Grand Rapids View	008	1880
Grand Rapids View	009	1880
Grand Rapids View	011	1880
Grand Rapids View	012	1880
Grand Rapids View	013	1880
Grand Rapids View	014	1872
Grand Rapids View	015	1872
Grand Rapids View	016	1872
Grand Rapids View	017	1872
Grand Rapids View	018	1872
Grand Rapids View	019	1872
Grand Rapids View	020	1872

Section II. Brief general description with photo number & date.

<u>Folder</u>	<u>Item No.</u>	<u>Date</u>
Folder 2		
Grand Rapids View	021	1865
Union Station	022	c1870
Summit Street View	023	c1870
Grand Rapids View	024	c1870
Congregational Church (1st)	025	c1870
St. Marks Episcopal Church	026	c1870
First Methodist Church	027	1872
Fountain Street Baptist Church (1st)	028	c1870
United States Post Office (1st)	030	c1870
Grand Rapids Water Pumping Station	031	c1870
Eagle Hotel	032	c1870
Calkins Law Office	033	c1870
Williams House	034	c1870
Pierce House	035	c1870
Chair Factory	036	c1870
Central High School	037	c1865
Central High School	038	c1865
Union High School	039	c1870
Division Avenue School	040	c1870
Valley City Woolen Mills	041	c1870
Voigt Mill	042	1880
Miller's Landing. Reeds Lake	043	c1870
Miller's Landing. Reeds Lake	044	c1870
Miller's Landing. Reeds Lake	045	c1880
Comstock's Row	047	c1875
Grand River View. Logging	048	c1875
Grand River View. Logging	049	c1875
Grand River View. Logging	050	c1875

Section II. Brief general description with photo number & date.

<u>Folder</u>	<u>Item No.</u>	<u>Date</u>
Folder 3		
Grand River View. Logging	051	c1880
Grand River View. Logging	052	c1880
Grand River View. Logging	053	c1880
Grand River View. Logging	054	c1880
Grand River View. Logging	055	c1880
Grand River View. Logging	056	c1880
Grand River View. Logging	057	c1880
Reeds Lake	058	c1880
Grand River View	059	c1880
Grand River View. Log Jam	060	1883
Steamboat Race	061	c1880
W.H. Barrett	062	1873
Market Street View	063	c1880
Pearl Street View	064	1875
Parade of "Horribles"	065	1871
Saengerfest Hall	066	1883
Pearl Street View	067	c1880
O-wash-ta-nong Club	068	c1880
Haldane House	069	1875
Sheppard House	070	1890
YMCA	071	1890
City Hall	072	1890
Kent County Building	073	1890
Grand Rapids View	074	c1890
Grand Rapids View	075	c1890
Grand Rapids View	076	c1890
Grand Rapids View	078	c1890
Campau Square View	079	c1890
Campau Square View	080	1873
Campau Square View	081	1873
Campau Square View	082	c1890
United States Centennial Celebration	083	1876

Section II. Brief general description with photo number & date.

<u>Folder</u>	<u>Item No.</u>	<u>Date</u>
Folder 3 continued ...		
Monroe Avenue View (north of Pearl)	084	c1890
Campau Square View	085	1875
Campau Square View	086	1875
Pearl Street View	087	1875
United States Centennial Celebration Arch	088	1876
United States Centennial Celebration	089	1876
United States Centennial Celebration	090	1876

Section II. Brief general description with photo number & date.

<u>Folder</u>	<u>Item No.</u>	<u>Date</u>
Folder 4		
Campau Square View	091	1852
Pearl Street View	092	c1870
Pearl Street View	093	c1870
Platt House	094	c1880
Rusche's Store	095	c1880
Flood. 1904	575	
Flood. 1904. Turner Street	577	
Flood. 1904. Turner Street	578	
Flood. 1904. Bridge Street	582	
Flood. 1904. Bridge Street	583	
Flood. 1904. Broadway Street	584	
Flood. 1904. Front Street	586	
Flood. 1904. Bridge Street	589	
Flood. 1904. Gas Plant	590	
Flood. 1904. Bridge Street Bridge	591	
Flood. 1904	592	
Flood. 1904. Fulton Street	594	
Flood. 1904. Turner Street	612	
Flood. 1904. 4th Street	613	
Flood. 1904. Broadway Street	619	
Flood. 1904. Leonard Street	622 Missing	6/2000
Flood. 1904. Turner Street	632	
Flood. 1904. Broadway Street	634	
Flood. 1904. Broadway Street		

Section III. Expanded Item Level Descriptions, processing incomplete.

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|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | J1. Sketch. Foot of Lyon St. Hill, 1855. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Judge Geo. Martin House.• Creek bed in foreground later site of a city hall.• Columns.• [Sketch probably by M. Cuming] |
| 1 | 1 | J2. Sketch. Top of Lyon St. Hill, 1855 by M. Cuming. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• St. Marks Church tower.• Stone Catholic Church, Monroe St. |
| 1 | 1 | J3. Sketch. Looking South from East end of Pearl St. Bridge, by Mary Cuming. Ca. 1861. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cows grazing• Grand River Island |
| 1 | 1 | J4. Looking down west from W. Bridge St. Hill., ca. 1870. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fencing• Split rail fence |
| 1 | 1 | J5. Reservoir Hill top <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ca. 1926 possible site of stadium/amphitheatre |
| 1 | 1 | J6 Looking Southwest from 1926 location of stand pipe, about 1870, before a big fire burned almost everything shown. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bird's eye view from hill.• Grand River view, with bridges• Houses• Pre-fire view |
| 1 | 1 | J7 From hill top above Livingston St., showing buildings put up after the big fire of July 1872 or 1873. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Berkey & Gay is largest building• Post-fire view |
| 1 | 1 | J8 City from North end of Crescent Park, ca. 1880 |

- 1 1 J9 View from Reservoir Hill looking N.
- Windmill
 - Beginning of Plainfield Ave., foreground
 - Parnell House at right near the old D & M Depot
- 1 1 J10 Missing since 1988
- 1 1 J11 View from Reservoir Hill near Ionia St. School, ca. 1875
- New waterworks pump house
 - Tanner Taylors old Tannery, old station ca. 1926
 - Comstocks Row multiple apartment dwelling for his colored laborers, just over the tannery. [African Americans]
 - Leonard St. Bridge.
- 1 1 J12 Comstocks Old Factory, ca. 1880
- Curved dam in river, just above the 6th St. Bridge in ca. 1926.
 - Old Lime Kiln near river bank.
- 1 1 J13 View west from High School, ca. 1880
- St. Mark's Church
 - Pearl St.
 - Universalist Church, middle of Pearl St.
 - Grand River & Bridge in background
 - Bird's eye view
- Missing. See Box 2 Contact Print. 3/10/2006
- J14. View from school tower, 1872
- Baptist & Methodist churches
 - Tower of stone Catholic church on Monroe St.
 - Ruik Building in distance
 - National Hotel (Morton Hotel)
- 1 1 J15 View South from High School, 1872.
- Fountain St. in foreground
 - Park Congregational Church left
 - Elias Matter large home on Fountain
 - D.D. Cody home above Matter's place
 - Baptist Church right
 - Union Depot shown in right upper distance

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|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1 | J16 View South from High School tower, 1872. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elias matter Home lower right• Park Congregational Church• Dr. J.K. Johnson home on Sheldon St. over the church |
| 1 | 1 | J17 North west view from Old High School, 1872. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lyon St. in foreground |
| 1 | 1 | J18 North west view from Old High School, 1872. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lyon & Ransom• Levitt House center• Stone house |
| 1 | 1 | J19 North view from Old High School Tower, 1872. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Houses• Church |
| 1 | 1 | J20 North view from Old High School, 1972 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ransom St. in foreground.• Camp home & Rev. Dr. Cumings, two large homes at left.• Circular deer park in a backyard. |
| 1 | 2 | J21 View from John St. Hill, 1865. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Just back of what was the Masonic Temple in 1926.• Henry house, Druggist, at extreme left, later site of old Grand Rapids Press Building.• Judge Lovell Moore House, with snow on roof, later the Livingstone.• Wooden Catholic Congregational Church, later Porter Block• Fulton St. Park with fence & flag pole in center• Park Congregational Church not yet built |
| 1 | 2 | J22 Old Union Station (GR&I from Ellsworth Ave. hill in left rear background behind railroad cars. c1870. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Houses• Fences• Dirt Streets• Wooden Board sidewalks• Restaurant / Saloon |

- | | | |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | 2 | J23 View down Ellsworth Ave. toward the old rink Building at Fulton St.
c. 1870 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Summit St. view• Rink Building removed to make way for Fulton St. Bridge.• Barnard Hotel.• Grocery• Wooden board sidewalks• Dirt streets |
| 1 | 2 | J24 View overlooking Shanty Town from Summit St. Hill, 1872 or 1876. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rear of old Stone Catholic Church shown on Monroe St.• 2nd high school just built on the hill. |
| 1 | 2 | J25 Division Ave. and Monroe, ca. 1870.
c1870 <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Catholic Church• Church built by Louis Campau.• Church lost building in panic of 1837-1840. |

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