

Grand Rapids History & Special Collection

Archives

GRAND RAPIDS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Finding Aid for the

Grand Rapids Public Library Cyanotype Collection

Collection # 087

September 2009 version

Abstract

The Grand Rapids Public Library Cyanotypes Collection is a devised collection, which now contains two series of blue colored images called cyanotypes, because of the chemical process used, which produces prints on paper with a bluish color. Series I is a set of mixed views of Grand Rapids, containing forty-one (41) cyanotype photoprints, purchased from now unidentified sources by Grand Rapids Public Library staff. Most of the identification data has been created by staff from their research and personal knowledge. The source and creators of these images is unknown. The views are of Grand Rapids area scenes, houses, house interiors, John Ball Park, and four unique views of the damage caused by the 1900 break in the city water reservoir. Series II is a set of 56 images of vehicles manufactured by the Grand Rapids based Couple Gear Company, and in use across the United States during the early decades of the 20th century. Cyanotypes or early blueprints of photographic images, were a technique of photography use around the 1880s to 1920s. These prints can still be made today using kitchen chemistry, and are a relative of the building blueprints which share the same coloration.

Collection #: 087

Accessions #: 00.000. Some donor data on photos. ; 1991.023

Donor: Library purchases

Span dates: ca. 1880-1900

Processor: Original processor, Richard H. Harms, October 1988. Box Summary added, Sept. 7, 2000, Marcella Beck. Inventory, item level description & location address labeling. Analysis of current housing conditions & some additions & revisions to finding aid, 8/23/2001-2005, R. Mayne.

Size: 1.1 linear ft. (12.75 inches)

Box Summary

Box No.	Description of Contents	Box Description
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Box Inventory 9/2009		
1	photos	small print box 3x10x13
2	Couple Gear 1991.023	slim

History

Cyanotypes are one of several photo processes based on the ferric process, also called iron printing. The familiar blue color in architectural blueprints is due to the similarities in the chemicals used in their production. Cyanotypes were invented in 1842 by Sir John Herschel, and are considered the first permanent photographic process. Though considered permanent, they fade in contact with alkaline substances or from extended exposure to light. In the later case, many faded cyanotypes will magically regenerate their blue after resting in the dark. The concern with alkaline fading effects the type of paper chosen for use in making the print, as well as the nature of the materials used in archival storage. Known to be popular with amateurs who could easily make the prints at home for postcards or other keepsakes, cyanotypes were sometimes also printed on cloth as decorative pillows, clothing, wall hangings, and other decorative objects.

Unfortunately, no information is known about the photographer of these cyanotypes or the source of these unique historical reproductions.

Physical Condition (8/24/2001)

Images #1-36 have been adhered to either side of a buff colored, textured paper. The paper is acidic, which in the case of cyanotypes is less likely to reduce fading. No information is available on the specific nature of the paper or the adhesive used. Images have been placed on both the front & the back of the buff paper support. Any identifications are written on the buff paper. Image & support are enclosed with a plastic photo sleeve, probably Polyguard, via Hollinger. This is believed to protect the image from the possible bad effects of the acid-free (alkaline) file folders. Several photoprints are housed in the same folder. A better housing, in a box and neutral sleeve closer to the correct size of the paper, may be indicated in the future.

Images #37-41 are attached to board, and in a plastic sleeve.
Images #38-41 are 8 x 10 including board.

Apparently, black & white copy negatives have been made of all items, probably within the last 10-20 years.

Arrangement

Series I. Images have apparently been arranged at random, and are numbered successively on either side of the support(#1-36) or verso(#38-41). A group of the images are housed successively in regular sized file folders, currently in a flat 3" print box.

Series II. Arranged by number recorded in the image.

Processing needs:

Series II. Images need physical processing, including the addition for collection/box/folder numbers to the back of each item in pencil. Consider the proper housing of the images. Polyester sleeves may trap the acid next to the paper, and ultimate cause brittleness. However, they name also strengthen and protect the items during usage handling. Otherwise, consider what adjustments in the acid free sleeves for buffered/unbuffered may need to be made.

Scope and Content

This collection is the only known representation of the cyanotype photographic process currently located in the Grand Rapids History & Special Collections Archives. It is suggested by the manner of collection that the items came from more than one source.

The description in bold below are those words given on the items. Additional descriptions have been given in order to provide more search access, and to provide a mental description of the image to remote users of the finding aid. An index at the end co-locates similar themes, and provides added access.

Contents

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Description</u>
1	1	Series I. Mixed Set #1 Cascade Springs . Shows park-like setting. #2 Channel & bridge between Fisk & Reeds Lake . Man in straw hat rowing a boat in channel near bridge underpass. #3 Hazel, and smaller boat Trixie , at dock, probably on Reeds Lake. #4 O-wash-ta-nong Boat Club , Reeds Lake #5 Wealthy Ave.(Park)Baptist Church [Tentative ID. Previously misidentified as O-Wash-ta-nog Boat Club] #6 Interior, unidentified, possibly the O-Wash-ta-nong Boat Club. Floral draperies at room entrance, table. Overlighting or fading of image obscures image in center.
1	1	#7 Cascade house, unidentified . Woman with dog standing, and boy on porch. #8 Small boathouse & pier with 2 males(?) and row boat at pier #9 Grand Rapids View. Bird's eye view toward Grand Rapids city, from east, including old City Hall and County Building. #10 Grand Rapids View. Bird's eye view toward Grand River #11 Grand Rapids View. Bird's eye view. Tower center right is Berkey & Gay. #12 Grand Rapids View. Bird's eye view with road center, stretching to the horizon
1	1	#13 Boat Club Street Entrance, Lakeside Club [Tentative ID] #14 Lakeside Club , Reeds Lake, view from lake #15 Lakeside Club , Reeds Lake, view from land, with picket fence walkway, horse-drawn carriage in lane. #16 Ramona Park , Second Pavilion with tower [Tentative ID]
1	2	#17 Robinson(?)Road View . Robinsons horse & buggy (surrey) on ? Road. #18 Thornapple River at Cascade? #19 Thornapple(?) River #20 Wooded scene, with man-made water flow constructions, Flume

Series I. Mixed Set

- 1 2 **#21 Dr. Addison Robinson, dentist d. 1913, on dock at Reed's Lake**
#22 Inside of Boat Club, Reeds Lake? O-Wash-ta-nong or Lakeside clubs.
- 1 2 **#23 Cherry(?) St. View.** Man in wagon with horse, turning corner, another man looking on. Large building in background left. Post on street corner near left, with possible large rock in street near curb.
#24 Unidentified tree-lined street.
- 1 2 **#25 Grand Rapids View.** View of Grand Rapids, believed to from down river, possibly from West side, toward dam, with Berkey & Gay tower visible center right
- 1 2 **#26 (44) 54 Sheldon Ave., Robinson Residence 1894-1922.**
Previously identified as the Amberg Residence, 54 Sheldon Ave., no evidence of Amberg residence has yet been found. However, a David M. Amberg is listed in the 1879/80 through 1892 directories at 56 Sheldon Ave. It is known that the house shown was the home & office of Dr. Albert Robinson, when it was still 44 Sheldon St., later 54. Per city directories, the house was purchased by the Robinsons around 1894, and Mrs. Jennie M. Robinson (widow) lived in the house until 1922. See image #27.
- 1 2 **#27 Dr. Albert Robinson, Mrs. Jennie M. Robinson?, Doris (baby) and Olga Robinson at Home/Office 44 Sheldon Ave.**
#28 **Unidentified house interior.** Class front bookshelves, rocking chair & 2 other chairs, draped entry into next room.
- 1 2 **#29 Helen Remington Faye, rowing in boat** in unidentified waters.
#30 **Cascade Springs. Unidentified encampment, with tents.**

#31 **Unidentified House interior.** Fireplace with high bricking and slim mantel. Clock on mantel has greyhouse type dog figurine atop.
Piano in corner, 2 rocking chairs.
#32 **Unidentified house, 2-3 stories,** singled 2nd store, porches at entrance 1st and 2nd storied.
- 1 3 **#33 Large House Corner of Union & Cherry.** Possible the same building as seen in back in #23 above.
#34 **Unidentified house** seen through trees, with picket fence in front.

#35 **Fountain, probably Fulton Street Park.**
#36 Houses on **unidentified tree-lined street.**
Horse hitch near right corner?

Series I. Mixed Set

1 4 #37 **John Ball Park.** Bird's eye view of Greenhouse with ponds.

1 5 **Water Reservoir Break, 1900**
#38 Unidentified houses, standing. Rubble of one house at top of hill against standing house. Church in background center right.

#39 Rubble, seen through trees, with many people standing around.

#40 Distant bird's eye view of scene. Houses. Railway. People gathered above, on right side of railway underpass

#41 Scene of slide, downhill to right, with house viewed on opposite side of slide. People on lower portion of slide.

Series II. Couple Gear Co. Blueprints

1991.023 Added 3/10/2009

2 1

19, 50, 53, 56, 57, 63, 92,

- 19 “Couple Gear Freight Wheel Co., Makers, Grand Rapids, Mich”.-- Displayed on side of seating section, with lantern above.
- 50 The Ice Delivery Co. “Ice When You Want It” parade of trucks with bands on board, on curve of unidentified streetscape.
- 53 Flatbed loaded with what appear to be extra long wood laths parked in front of a large building . Building ID has Tatterball's, 1882. A poster at lower right on the building appears to advertise an Automobile show, Nov. 30-Dec. 7, 1907. Label on base of truck too small to read.
- 56 Pittsburgh Malleable iron Co. truck, from Bellefield Motor Co., Agents, Couple Gear Freight Wheel Co., Makers, Grand Rapids, Mich. “The Keeley Institute” is on the hill in the background.
- 57 Pittsburgh Malleable Iron Co. Perhaps the same truck as above, shown from a different angle and with sides up.
- 63 Truck & extended wagon with bags of grain, probably, with buildings behind.
- 92 Enclosed caravan type truck with “2199?” under the footplate at the front.

2 2

102, 107, 109, 118A, 119A, 131(2), 132, 134, 135(2), 136, 137, 142, 143-B, 143-D,

- 102 Short based vehicle with double lanterns at front.
- 107. Jenkins Flour Groceries. License plate 21166. Dec. 1, [19]09. Truck stands on a brick street, in front of a brick building. There is a “To Let” sign in the window center left.
- 109 Sign for the company, near the cab, has Tileson? ... Co. Paper Manufacturers. Another sign below the bed of the truck reads: “Couple-Gear”, W.E. Eldridge, Agent. Boston. Couple-Gear Freight-Wheel Co., Makers, Grand Rapids, Mich.
- 118A “39” with a lattice type structure and wing on top, at the center of the truck.
- 119A Commercial Truck Co., Drayage E. Storage. ... No. 2302 to 12 East E. St. Has ladder sides
- 131 Short bodied vehicle with a lock box on the side, “Couple Gear” written on the radiator. (2)
- 132 The Ice Delivery Co. vehicle in country road setting.
- 134 Double images. Appears to be a fire vehicle drawn by the couple gear short-bed vehicle, with a similar background in each image, perhaps a grain elevator left rear.
- 135 No. 10. The Brown Shoe Co., Washington Ave. at 17th St. Prescott Motor Car Co., Agts., 1728 Walnut St., St. Louis, Kansas City, Mo. Brown's 5 Star Shoes are Best (2)

Series II. Couple Gear Co. Blueprints

- 2 2 102, 107, 109, 118A, 119A, 131(2), 132, 134, 135(2), 136, 137, 142, 143-B, 143-D, continued ...
- 136 Church E. Gates & Co., Inc. Lumber & Timber. Church E. Gates & Co., Inc. 138th St., 8 Mott Ave. Truck appears loaded with lumber with a house on a hill behind in partial view.
 - 137 Curtis-Blaisdell Co. Auto 2. Appears to be a sand or dirt truck.
 - 142 Flatbed loaded with board planks. Prescott Motor Car Co., Agts., 1728 Walnut St., St. Louis, Kansas City, Mo.
 - 143-B Has the "Couple Gear" logo written on a side piece, instead of the radiator. Appears to be a dump truck with a chain hinged door at the side for unloading? Prescott Motor Car Co., Agts., 1728 Walnut St., St. Louis, Kansas City, Mo.
 - 143-D Appears to be the same dump truck as above, this time with the bed raised to the dumping position. The empty interior appears to show the side doors on either side, but the back is open to dump the load. Prescott Motor Car Co., Agts., 1728 Walnut St., St. Louis, Kansas City, Mo.
- 2 3 153, 158, 159, 165, 167, 168(2), 169, 173, 176, 179, 180(2), 181, 185,
- 153 Pynchon St. Fire Station, with a long ladder truck standing in front with firemen atop and standing along side.
 - 158 F.D.N.Y. Engine 31 / Battalion 21. Couple Gear first truck loaded with firemen posed at the entrance of a firehouse.
 - 159 Another view of the same firehouse, truck and crew, showing a corner view of the city street, and a corner fire plug?
 - 165 Two vehicles and crew posed on a city street. The rear vehicle has a sort of house structure with a front pulley, labeled C.J. Cook co. A two story house behind is flanked by larger buildings on either side.
 - 167. Curtis Blaisdell Co. Auto 7. Dump truck type standing on a brick street with a high stone wall behind.
 - No. 168. Flat bed with side lock box. (2). Nos. 168 & 158 have ID notes on verso.
 - 169. No Couple Gear ID. Large spoked wheels at the back, with upright posts around the bed to hold the side pieces, perhaps.
 - 173. Long fire vehicle posed in front of a brick building with a man looking out a window on the second level.
 - 176. Electric Truck operated by Edison Current. Edison light dump truck, on a brick street with buildings behinds.
 - 179. Fire vehicle 117 with a driver and two at the end, standing in front of a building with another building in the background right.
 - 180. Another view of 117 from the side without firemen. This view shows the New York Foundling Hospital in the background, which may be the background building at right seen in the image above. (2)

Series II. Couple Gear Co. Blueprints

- 2 3 153, 158, 159, 165, 167, 168(2), 169, 173, 176, 179, 180(2), 181, 185,
continued ...
- 181 “6”, 3rd Ave. Ry. Co. Loaded utility vehicle with driver surrounded by large buildings.
 - 185 Short bed vehicle with side lock box, appears to have a wood box full of material on the back.
- 2 4 201, 206, 208, 211, 212, 214, 216, 217, 218, 219, 224, 225
- 201. Couple Gear ID no visible.
 - 206 Clarence L. Smith Co., Excavating & Shoring, 30th St. & 11th Ave., License no. 100982NY Covered double cab. Standing in front of a warehouse type building with loading dock.
 - 208 Covered cab, large lock box on the side, no obvious ID
 - 211 3rd Ave. R.Y. Co., Board of Health Permit No. 8. “10” Dump truck type function?, with large spoked wheels at back and single front wheel. Standing in front of large building.
 - 212 Fuzzy view of a large dump truck with a covered front cab, large spoked back wheels, standing in front of a wooden building or fence.
 - 214 Front end view with what might be a small ID plate bottom center under the face plate.
 - 216 Ahrens-Fox Steam Electric “Continental” Fire vehicle with bell
 - 217 Road construction scene with wood carrying vehicle and others, plus crews.
 - 218 Long Fire vehicle which might read: Medicine Hat Fire Department. Vehicle and firemen standing in front of a Fire Department Building. A small wood structure center right has a horse standing in front.
 - 219 Another view of the same building and vehicle, this time with the long ladder extended from the vehicle, above the decorative center tower of the building, with a man at the top of the ladder.
 - 224 Covered cab dump truck with Michigan license 1913 “5023M”
 - 225 Same truck from the side has “Blac...kston E. Val ...ley Gas & Electric Co.

Series II. Couple Gear Co. Blueprints

2 5

229, 234, 241, 242(2), 256, 291, 298,

- 229 Dump truck with dirt standing in front of a vine covered building with ornate iron fencing.
- 234 Front end view of Couple Gear truck on country road. Main standing near the front left wheel. Africa American man inside the cab and another standing on top in front of a large barrel shaped construction on the rear.
- 241 New York Railways Company. Dump truck which appears to be constructed in two detachable units.
- 242 Couple Gear truck with covered cab, and steel sides to the bed, chains on the front tires, large spoked rear wheels. License plate 6023M partially visible under the truck front. (2)
- 256 Long covered truck bed with a motor centered behind the driver, a cason pulled behind the truck, and a spindle, perhaps for hose or wire, in the side rear of the truck bed.
- 291 Long flat bed with gear, such as might be used at a railway station.
- No. 298 has sign: Built by H.E. Homes & Co. Automobile Body Builders, 744-746 Folsom St., S.F. License A2295. Standing in front of a large building.

2 6

314-A, 327, 328, 331(2), 338, 362.

- 314A "4832A" Overhead perspective view of open flat bed truck with a large boxy construction centered between the wheels. Couple Gear Power Truck Co., ... on the box. Covered cab. Standing on a brick pavement with a street drain cover near the rear wheel.
- 327 Heavy equipment type vehicle pulling two flat beds, all with thick wheels, in front of William Cluff Company building.
- 328 Heavy equipment type vehicle pulling a covered container over hilly rough terrain
- 331 Heavy equipment type vehicle as in 327 above, pulled two covered contains with a small settlement as it backdrop. (2)
- 338 Emmons Draying & Safe Moving Co. Equipped with "Ironclad Exide" batteries. Low to the ground with open section of uprights in center. Standing in front of a large building.
- 362. Front view of a stripped down front end construction?

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