ALBERTYPE COMPANY
COLLECTION, CA. 1900–CA. 1950

Collection Information

Historical Sketch

Scope and Content Note

Contents

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1996
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Manuscript and Visual Collections Department
William Henry Smith Memorial Library
Indiana Historical Society
450 West Ohio Street
Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

www.indianahistory.org
COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 4 boxes of photographs
366 scanned images online

COLLECTION DATES: Ca. 1900–ca. 1950

PROVENANCE: Wisconsin State Historical Society, ca. 1980

RESTRICTIONS: None

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REPRODUCTION RIGHTS: Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained in writing from the Indiana Historical Society.

ALTERNATE FORMATS: Scanned Images Collections: search with the term, Albertype and all scanned images can be viewed

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1980.0007

NOTES:
HISTORICAL SKETCH

The Indiana Historical Society acquired the collection from the Wisconsin State Historical Society, ca. 1980. The photographs and negatives were originally part of a larger photographic collection that was acquired by the Wisconsin Historical Society from the Library of Congress.

Originally known as Wittemann Brothers, the Albertype Company was founded in 1890 by brothers, Adolph and Herman L. Wittemann. Company agents, including Adolph Wittemann, took photographs of landmarks in different cities and regions. Using the technological innovation of the collotype, or albertype, the company photo mechanically reproduced the images and distributed prints across the United States in the form of postcards and viewbooks.

In addition to using its own archive of original negatives, the Albertype Company reproduced photographic images that were taken by other companies or individuals. The company amassed photographic negatives of towns and cities across the United States and produced over twenty-five thousand collotypes before closing in 1952.

In the late nineteenth century, photographic and photomechanical reproduction became popular for commercial use. The collotype, a photomechanical process, was introduced in 1855 by French photographer and chemical engineer, Alphonse-Louis Poitevin. He discovered that a bichromated gelatin-covered plate could produce prints after being exposed to light through a negative. The plate could also be reused for reproductions.

Collotypes were important to the photographic reproduction industry because they were fairly inexpensive to produce, and their range of tones permitted exact reproductions of photographs through a photomechanical process. They are also noted for their accurate reproduction of drawings, prints, and watercolors, and are still in limited use today in fine art reproduction. Collotypes were known by numerous names, including “phototype,” and “albertype,” the name given by its inventor, Austrian photographer, Joseph Albert.

Sources:
Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Collection V-18, Albertype Company Photographs
SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection came with approximately 1,000 black-and-white copy photographs and 366 nitrate negatives related to the state of Indiana. The images were made between ca. 1900 and ca. 1950 for use as postcards, and souvenir booklets. The subjects are of important landmarks within each represented town and city. The subjects include businesses, universities and colleges, churches, schools, streets, natural attractions, tourist areas, and recreational activities. There are aerial views of towns, and images of monuments and memorials. Other scenes include views of residences, bridges, parks and asylums in Lafayette, New Albany, and Bloomington, Indiana.

The photographs are organized by subject and are in numerical order. The stock photographs were made here at I.H.S. from the originals and are stored in Box 4.

The nitrate negatives have been scanned. Some of the negatives were numbered and some were not numbered, each negative image is now online in the Digital Images Collections and is described with information taken from its envelope. Not all scanned images have a corresponding photograph.
CONTENTS

Holy Cross, Indiana:
1–2, 4

Immaculate Conception Academy,
Oldenberg, Indiana:
5–19

Immaculate Conception Academy,
Oldenberg, Indiana:
20, 21, 28, 31–38, 41–44

Saint Mary’s College, Notre Dame, Indiana:
45–49, 55–71

Saint Mary’s College, Notre Dame, Indiana:
72–87, 89–93, 95

Saint Mary’s College, Notre Dame, Indiana:
96–103, 105–120

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana:
122–127, 129, 131–140

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana:

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana:
170, 172, 175–176, 178–182, 184, 189, 190–193,
196–199

Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana:
121, 128, 130, 133, 143, 144, 150–151, 156, 161, 171,
173–174, 177, 183, 185–188, 194–195

Saint Joseph’s College, Rensselaer [Collegeville],
Indiana: 209–219, 221–222

Shakamak State Park, Jasonville, Indiana:
Long Lake/Kendallville, Indiana:
266–267

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 13

Turkey Run State Park, Marshall, Indiana:
272–273, 276, 283–285, 301–305

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 14

Spring Mill State Park, Mitchell, Indiana:
310–316

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 15

Brown County State Park and Nashville, Indiana:
319–320, 322, 324–327, 329, 331, 333–334

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 16

Brown County State Park, Nashville, Indiana:
330, 332

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 17

New Albany, Indiana:
335–344, 346–347, 349–352

Photographs:
Box 1, Folder 18

New Albany, Indiana:
353–362, 365–370

Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 1

New Harmony, Indiana:
372–375

Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 2

Rochester, Indiana:

Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 3

South Bend, Indiana:
405–412, 414–419, 421–428

Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 4

South Bend, Indiana:
413, 420

Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 5

West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue University:

Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 6

West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue University:
432–437, 442–444, 446–447, 450, 452, 455–457, 461, 463, 466, 469

Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 7

West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue University:

Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 9
West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue University:
Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 10

West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue University:
535–538, 542–543, 545–560
Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 11

West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue University Lafayette, Indiana:
539–541, 544, 589, 614–615, 618, 625, 632, 637
Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 12

West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue University:
561–580, 584–588
Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 13

West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue University:
591–610
Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 14

Lafayette / Battleground, Indiana:
Photographs:
Box 2, Folder 15

Notre Dame, Indiana:
648–657, 659, 663, 665, 669, 675, 677–680
Photographs:
Box 3, Folder 1

Notre Dame, Indiana:
682–683, 685, 687, 690, 694–695, 698–710
Photographs:
Box 3, Folder 2

Notre Dame, Indiana:
Photographs:
Box 3, Folder 3

Notre Dame, Indiana:
Photographs:
Box 3, Folder 4

Notre Dame, Indiana:
746–748, 750–753, 756–764, 767–770
Photographs:
Box 3, Folder 5

Notre Dame, Indiana:
Photographs:
Box 3, Folder 6

Notre Dame, Indiana:
772–788, 791–792
Photographs:
Box 3, Folder 7

Notre Dame, Indiana:
797–798, 800, 803–816, 820–823, 825–827
Photographs:
Box 3, Folder 8

Notre Dame, Indiana:
831–832, 834, 836–839, 841, 843–856
Photographs:
Box 3, Folder 9
Notre Dame, Indiana:
793, 796, 799A&B, 801–802, 817–819, 824, 828–830,
833, 842

Photographs:
Box 3, Folder 10

Bloomington, Indiana:
867

Photographs:
Box 3, Folder 11

Cedar Side Hotel, Lake James Hotel, Spencer, Indiana:
1285, no numbers

Photographs:
Box 3, Folder 12

Muncie, Indiana, Ball State University:
Frank Elliott Ball Residence Hall [original print]
no number

Photographs:
Box 3, Folder 13

Stock Photographs made from images #28–482

Photographs:
Box 4, Folder 1

Stock Photographs made from images #491–852

Photographs:
Box 4, Folder 2

Stock Photographs made from images #4–817

Photographs:
Box 4, Folder 3