

Collection #
P 0103

**STEIGER FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS
CA. 1915, 1975**

Collection Information	1
Biographical Sketch	2
Historical Sketch	2
Scope and Content Note	4
Series Contents	5

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 1 folder black-and-white photographs, 1 folder color photographs, 1 folder 35mm color negatives

COLLECTION DATES: Ca. 1915, 1975

PROVENANCE: Gift from Mary S. Garman on behalf of Mrs. Carl E. Steiger, 8 August 1988

RESTRICTIONS: Any materials listed as being in Cold Storage must be requested at least 4 hours in advance.

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1988.0622

NOTES: *See also:* Indiana Hotels Photographs and Graphics (P 0638)

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Emil Herman Steiger (1871–1929) was a businessman from Wisconsin who was a frequent visitor to the French Lick and West Baden Springs area of Indiana in the early 1900s. His children accompanied him there during school vacations and revisited the area in 1975.

Emil H. Steiger was the son of German immigrants. In 1895 he married Sophia Lydia Faust (1872–1903). They had four children: Carl Emil (1896–1985), twins Emil Leander (1899–1982) and Sophia [Roth] (1899–1987), and Frances C. Rose [Fanning] (1902–1955).

The 1900 census lists Emil H. Steiger's occupation as dealer in wood in Fremont, Wisconsin. The 1912 Oshkosh, Wisconsin, city directory lists Emil H. Steiger as president of the Davis-Hansen Co., the Oshkosh Pure Ice Co., and the Phillips Co., and as secretary-treasurer of the Oshkosh Grass Matting Co. and the Oshkosh Steamboat Co. In the 1920s he was president of the Deltox Grass Rug Company. His son, Carl, in 1924 was vice president of the Davis-Hansen Pump Co. and later served as president of the Deltox Rug Company.

In 1924 Carl married Ruth Storms (1899–1988). They had five children: Donald Carl (1924–2017), Constance R. [Dempsey] (1926–2018), Ann E. [Haberstroh] (1928–2009), Mary Minnette [Garman] (1932–2018), and William Albert (1938–1978). William A. Steiger became a U.S. Congressman from Wisconsin, serving from 1967 until his death from a heart attack in December 1978, just weeks after winning reelection. In 1969 he employed future vice president Dick Cheney as an intern.

Sources:

Correspondence from Mary Steiger Garman, 31 July 1988

Ancestry <ancestrylibrary.com>. Accessed 4 December 2019:

Find a Grave

U.S. City Directories, 1822–1995

United States Federal Census, 1900–1940

Wisconsin Historical Society. "William A. Steiger Papers"

<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM97559>. Accessed 4 December 2019.

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Dr. William A. Bowles built the first hotel in the French Lick area in 1845, which would later be known as the French Lick Springs Hotel. The hotel was expanded in the following decades and became a popular mineral springs health resort. The main hotel building was destroyed by fire in 1897 and was rebuilt on a grander scale. By 1905, Thomas Taggart -- former mayor of Indianapolis, U.S. senator, and national chairman of the Democratic party -- had become the sole owner of the hotel. He made many improvements and also convinced the Monon Railroad to lay track to the hotel's grounds and run daily passenger

service between the hotel and Chicago. The hotel offered mineral spring baths, horseback riding, tennis, swimming, bowling, billiards, a gym, fine dining, and dancing to music from its own orchestra.

In the 1850s, Dr. John A. Lane built the West Baden Springs Hotel nearby. Lee W. Sinclair gained a controlling interest in the hotel in 1888. The hotel burned to the ground in 1901, but Sinclair rebuilt it the following year. The new round structure was opulent, with an atrium that was 200 feet across and 100 feet tall and topped off with the world's largest dome. It was billed as the Eighth Wonder of the World. The hotel and its grounds included golf courses, an opera house, barber, and mineral spas purported to have curative properties.

In the heyday of the resort hotels at French Lick and West Baden Springs, the rich and famous came as guests or gave performances. Visitors included movie stars, musicians, politicians, and other wealthy socialites.

In 1955, the French Lick Springs Hotel was bought by the Sheraton Corporation. The new owners lowered some ceilings to cover ornate plaster cornices and covered wooden and marble floors as well as the mosaic tiles in the lobby with black and white linoleum square tiles and carpet. In 1979 Sheraton sold the hotel to the Cox Hotel Corporation of New York. The hotel continued to change ownership for the next few decades. In 1991 work began to undo some of the Sheraton's renovations, including restoring the lobby's mosaic floor tiles.

Sources:

French Lick Resort. "French Lick Springs Hotel History" <<https://www.frenchlick.com/aboutus/history/flsh>>. Accessed 4 December 2019.

Historic Hotels of America. "West Baden Springs Hotel" <<http://www.historichotels.org/hotels-resorts/west-baden-springs-hotel/history.php>>. Accessed 4 December 2019.

Indiana Landmarks. "Grand Hotel Histories" <<https://www.indianalandmarks.org/tours-events/ongoing-tours-events/french-lick-west-baden/history>>. Accessed 4 December 2019.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

This collection is composed of photographs taken by and/or owned by members of the Emil H. and Sophia Faust Steiger family of Wisconsin during visits to the French Lick and West Baden Springs, Indiana, area. There are nine black-and-white photographs of people on the grounds of the French Lick Springs Hotel and the West Baden Springs Hotel taken ca. 1915. Only E. H. Steiger is identified in these photographs. There are also thirteen color snapshots taken in 1975 when Steiger's sons Carl and Emil and daughter Sophia revisited these hotels. Sixteen 35mm color negatives accompany the 1975 snapshots.

The collection is arranged into two series:

Series 1, Black-and-white photographs, ca. 1915

Series 2, Color photographs, 1975

SERIES CONTENTS

Series 1: Black-and-white photographs, ca. 1915

CONTENTS

Four real photo postcards of casual portraits of people on the grounds of the French Lick Springs and West Baden Springs hotels. Two of these photos identify E. H. Steiger, shown with other people. None of the other people are identified.

Five snapshots of casual outdoor portraits. Four of them identify E. H. Steiger shown with other people. None of the other people are identified. In one photo people are gathered around a car. In another, people are with a farm implement, and another includes a small airplane.

CONTAINER

Photographs, Folder 1 of 1

Photographs, Folder 1 of 1

Series 2: Color photographs, 1975

CONTENTS

Four snapshots of what was then known as the French Lick Sheraton Hotel and its grounds, including swimming pool.

One snapshot of horse-drawn carriages [probably in front of the French Lick Sheraton Hotel].

Eight snapshots of the West Baden Springs Hotel, including some interior views of the atrium as well as exterior views of the building and grounds. An unidentified man poses in one photo – this is likely either Carl E. Steiger or his brother, Emil Leander Steiger.

Sixteen 35mm negatives of the French Lick and West Baden Springs hotels and surroundings. [Four strips of four negatives each; including the color images listed above.]

CONTAINER

Cold Storage
Photographs, Folder 1 of 1

Cold Storage
Photographs, Folder 1 of 1

Cold Storage
Photographs, Folder 1 of 1

Cold Storage
Stored in 120-film
negative envelope