

**W.H. BASS PHOTO COMPANY  
COLLECTION, CA. 1897–CA. 1970**

“Preliminary” Collection Guide (see “Notes” on next page)

Collection Information	1
Historical Sketches	2
Scope and Content Note	3
Bass Subject Headings	4

Processed by

I.H.S. Visual Collections  
February 2012

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

[www.indianahistory.org](http://www.indianahistory.org)

## COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION:	<p><b>Photographs:</b> 90 boxes of photographs, 11 boxes of OVA photographs, 5 boxes of OVB photographs, 3 boxes OVC photographs, 12 Cirkut photographs in hanging storage, 1 Cirkut photograph in flat file storage, oversize visuals in Flat File 1-L</p> <p>Albums: 12 albums stored in 6 PAB boxes, 4 albums were disbound and are now in processing on shelf</p> <p><b>Negatives:</b> approximately 180,000 negatives</p>
COLLECTION DATES:	Ca. 1897–ca. 1970
PROVENANCE:	W. H. Bass Photo Company, Inc.: 1983, 1988
RESTRICTIONS:	Negatives may be viewed only with the assistance of library staff.
COPYRIGHT:	
REPRODUCTION RIGHTS:	Permission to reproduce or publish material in this collection must be obtained from the Indiana Historical Society.
ALTERNATE FORMATS:	CONTENTdm Collection: <a href="http://www.indianahistory.org/our-collections/digital-image-collections/photo-studios-and-photogs">http://www.indianahistory.org/our-collections/digital-image-collections/photo-studios-and-photogs</a>
RELATED HOLDINGS:	Sutton, Susan S., <i>Indianapolis : the Bass Photo Company collection</i> / General Collection F534.I55 S88 2008
ACCESSION NUMBER:	1983.0914, 1988.0861
NOTES:	<p><b>Processing of the collection is a work in progress collection guide will be updated. In the interim, please contact <a href="mailto:reference@indianahistory.org">reference@indianahistory.org</a> for questions and to view a number of digital images at:</b></p> <p><b><a href="http://www.indianahistory.org/our-collections/digital-image-collections/photo-studios-and-photogs">http://www.indianahistory.org/our-collections/digital-image-collections/photo-studios-and-photogs</a></b></p>

## HISTORICAL SKETCHES

**The W.H. Bass Photo Company** traces its beginnings to 1897, when the James Bayne Company, a photographic firm in Grand Rapids, Michigan, opened a satellite operation in Indianapolis at 308-310 South New Jersey Street. The Bayne Company photographed local industrial products and produced trade catalogs that were distributed to merchants by traveling salesmen.

Two years after the Indianapolis office was established, Walter T. Woodworth and William H. Bass, acquired the local operation. Woodworth had been a photographer with James Bayne Company and Bass was a teacher and an independent photographer. The two operated the business under the name Woodworth and Company. By 1901 they changed the company name to Bass and Woodworth and worked together until 1905 when Woodworth sold his interest in the company to Bass. It then became the W. H. Bass Photo Company.

In 1912 Bass Photo incorporated with William H. Bass, Charles C. Branson, and Edwin H. Schafer as directors. When Mr. Bass died in 1936 the board consisted of Charles Branson, his wife Sadie Branson, and Theodore (Ted) Abel. Abel was an accountant for the company and was married to Branson's daughter Margaret. When Mr. Branson died in 1948 the Abel family held the majority ownership in the firm. In 1963 Fred Abel joined his father at Bass and when Schafer retired Fred stepped in to work in the darkroom and behind the camera. In 1984 Fred left Bass Photo to concentrate on his own company, Firehouse Colorlab. By 1978 the current owner, Gerald Abel, Ted's other son, joined the business. Ted retired in 1982 and today Gerald and his wife Kathy continue to run the business.

**William H. Bass** (20 January 1851–3 November 1936) was the son of Thomas W. Bass and Mary Jane Crane Bass of Bartholomew County, Indiana. Bass worked as a miller in Edinburg, Indiana from 1867 to 1872 when he contracted tuberculosis. He graduated from the Indiana State Normal School at Terre Haute and taught at Shortridge High School and helped start Manual Technical High School. He married Jane McCormick Wood in October 1879. The couple had no children. Bass was a member of the Indianapolis Rotary Club, the Capital City Lodge, the Scottish Rite, the Caravan Club, the Indianapolis Real Estate Board, and the Advertising Club. He lived at 847 East Drive, Woodruff Place, from ca. 1908 until the time of his death.

Sources:

Lutholtz, M. William. "The City's Family Album," *City Magazine*, February 1988, 29–33.

Pulliam, Myrta. "Photo Firm's Files Hoosierland's 'Family Album,'" *Indianapolis Star*, 13 August 1978, sec. 5, p. 2.

*Swartz and Tedrowe's Annual Indianapolis City Directory, 1873*. Indianapolis: Swartz and Tedrowe, 1873.

"William H. Bass, 85, Prominent As Teacher and Photographer, Dies," *Indianapolis Star*, 3 November 1936, p. 15, col. 2.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

William H. Bass and his successors specialized in photographing the infrastructure and built environment of Indianapolis. The Bass Photo Company not only made photographs for corporate clients and individuals, but also instructed the staff photographers to document local events, disasters, and daily scenes in Indianapolis. The collection is an accumulation of images whose subjects include: street scenes, homes, memorials, parks, and public institutions such as schools and hospitals, streetcar and railway lines, disasters such as floods and fires, and the Indianapolis 500 race. The company also made portraits of prominent individuals, including Indiana governors. Group portraits consist mainly of sports teams such as the Indianapolis Capitols hockey team, the Indianapolis Indians baseball team, and figure skater Sonja Henie.

The collection contains approximately 180,000 negatives, 12,000 black-and-white photographs, and 1500 cyanotype photographs. IHS acquired the Bass Photo Company Collection in two groups: Bass Photo Company donated 34,800 negatives in 1983, and IHS purchased the remainder of the collection from Bass Photo in 1988. Most negatives and photographs include a negative number assigned by the Bass Photo Company.

The collection came with two separate indexing systems of customer card files. One set is arranged chronologically by negative numbers, the other is alphabetical by client name. The cards list each negative number and provide the negative size, date, and client name. The alphabetical set is organized by client name, and also includes the negative numbers, negative sizes and dates. These card files are stored in the Processing Area of the Library and can be accessed by library staff when researchers require information on a specific image.

For conservation reasons the negatives are stored in the negative storage area of the Department of Visual Collections and are not readily available to researchers. The Library Reference Department maintains two in-house computer databases on the Bass Collection. The (ArchIE) database includes references to architectural structures in the Bass Collection. The other database is still growing as volunteers enter information from the Bass negatives. Patrons may request searches in these two databases from the Library Reference Department.

**Series 1 Photographs:** When the photographs arrived they were arranged alphabetically by subject headings created by the Bass Company. Processors at the Indiana Historical Society maintained the original order of the photographs and placed the items in acid-free file folders and boxes. The folders were labeled according to the Bass subject headings.

The Bass photographs have been scanned and are available online through the Digital Image Collections page on the IHS Web site.

<http://www.indianahistory.org/our-collections/digital-image-collections>

Researchers may use subjects from the following list when searching the scanned images.

## List of Subject Headings for Bass Photo Co. Collection

Aerial Views  
Airports and Airplanes  
Animals  
Apartments  
Art Schools  
Artwork  
Automobiles  
Automobiles (Showrooms, Sales Offices, Plants)  
Ayres, F. M. Estate  
Banks  
Bicycles  
Boats  
Bridges  
Brown County  
Buildings  
Buildings, Industrial  
Buses  
Canals  
Cemeteries  
Churches  
Civil War  
Clark, George Rogers-Memorials  
Clouds  
Clubs and Lodges  
Clubs and Lodges: Independent Athletic Club, Hoosier Athletic Club  
Colleges & Universities  
Construction  
Courthouses  
Crowds  
Crown Hill Cemetery  
Dams  
Eli Lilly & Co.  
Farm Views  
Farmer's Market  
Filling Stations  
Fire Stations  
Firemen & Fire Equipment  
Fires  
Fireworks  
Floods  
Florida  
Flowers  
Food  
Fort Benjamin Harrison  
Fort Harrison (Terre Haute)

Fruit  
Funerals  
Garages, Parking  
Golf Courses  
Government Buildings  
Government Buildings-Interior  
Sonja Henie  
Historical Markers  
Hockey Players: Indianapolis Capitols  
Hospitals  
Hotels  
Hotels: Claypool Hotel  
Hotels: English Hotel  
Hotels: Marott Hotel  
Hunting and Fishing  
Indianapolis 500  
Indianapolis Home Show  
Indianapolis Indians: Baseball Team and Bush Stadium  
Indianapolis Neighborhoods: Brendonwood  
Interurban Railroads  
Laundries  
Libraries  
Libraries: Indianapolis-Marion County (Main Branch)-Interiors  
Lilly, Josiah K. Estate-Apple Orchard  
Manuscripts  
Maps: Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio  
Monument Circle  
Monuments & Memorials  
Nature Views  
Night Scenes  
Non-United States  
Noyes, N.H. Estate  
Old Etchings  
Old Etchings: Indianapolis  
Parades  
Parks  
People  
Police Stations  
Policemen  
Printed Material  
Printing Companies and Publishers  
Prisons  
Prominent People  
Prominent People: Harrison, Benjamin and William  
Prominent People: Lincoln, Abraham  
Prominent People: Riley, James Whitcomb

Public Utilities  
Railroad and Interurban Tracks  
Railroads  
Railroad Bridges  
Railroads: Illinois Central Railroad Engines  
Railroads: Illinois Central Railroad Pullman Accommodations  
Railroads: Illinois Central Railroad-Railroad Fair, 1948-1949  
Railroads: Illinois Central Railroad-Ext., Publicity  
Residences  
Schools  
Schools: Cathedral High School, Shortridge High School  
Schools: Ladywood High School-Stoughton Fletcher Estate  
Schrader, Christian-Drawings  
Scottish Rite Cathedral  
State and City Institutions  
State Fair  
Stockyards  
Street Scenes  
Streetcars  
Swimming Pools  
Theaters  
Theaters: Circle Theater-Exteriors  
Theaters: Circle Theater-Interiors  
Theaters: Indiana Theater-Exteriors  
Theaters: Indiana Theater-Interior  
Thorntown, Indiana-Centennial  
Tornadoes and Storms  
Towers: Radio, TV, etc.  
Traction Railroads  
Train Wrecks  
Trains  
Trains: Interiors  
Trees and Plants  
Trucks  
Union Station (Indianapolis)  
United States Government  
Wagons  
War Interests  
War Memorial (Indiana World War Memorial)  
War Memorial-Interiors (Indiana World War Memorial)  
Warehouses  
Water towers  
Woodruff Place  
YMCA