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EARLY BOULDER PHOTOGRAPHERS

Early-day photographers didn't have an easy time. Exclusive of darkroom supplies, they carried around a big camera, a heavy wooden tripod, and a box of glass plates. Their outfit weighed about 75 pounds. The excellent record we have of Boulder today is due to the skill and perseverance of Boulder's early photographers.

Before the advent of photographic film, photographs were exposed on 5" x 7", 8" x 10", or even larger plates of glass. The larger the plate, the larger the picture, as photographs generally weren't enlarged during processing. Boulder's earliest photographers used "wet" plates, a process developed ca. 1851 to replace the earlier daguerreotypes. Ether, alcohol, and chemicals were floated in collodion on a glass plate. As soon as the ether or alcohol evaporated, but while the plate was still wet, the photographer dipped the plate in a solution of silver nitrate, then put the glass plate in the camera and took a photograph. It had to be developed at

once. If the photographer was away from his or her studio, a portable darkroom in a wagon or tent was required.

By 1880, cameras still were large and heavy, but the advent of the "dry plate" process made photography easier by eliminating the necessity of preparing fresh emulsion for each photograph. Commercial dry glass negatives were presensitized and precoated with a light-sensitive silver bromide. They could be stored until needed and printed later. Glass plates of this type were used by professional photographers through the late 1920s.

In the early days, albumen-coated paper was printed directly by passing sunlight through the glass plate and onto the paper. The paper was toned through submersion in a bath of gold chloride; then the photograph was fixed, air-dried, and glued onto cardboard with wheat paste.

One of Boulder's earliest resident photographers was Robert L. Thompson. As early as 1869, he advertised in the *Boulder County Pioneer*. His

studio and residence were on the southwest corner of 12th (Broadway) and Spruce Streets. The house was moved when the Willard Block replaced it in 1898, the year Thompson died. He also was the choir director of the First Congregational Church, where his brother, Reverend Nathan Thompson, was minister. In 1872, while continuing with his photographic business, Robert Thompson became the official territorial assayer for Colorado.

Alexander Martin went into partnership with Thompson in 1873. Later he had a photographic gallery of his own. Martin remained in business in Boulder until 1878.

Numerous other photographers were active in the 1870s and 1880s. Richard B. Collins and J. Henfield showed up in 1876. Mrs. L. A. McGregor had a photographic studio in 1878. Mr. Gregg had one in 1879.

Photographers in the 1880s included Joseph E. Streeter, Frederick Law, Isaac H. Hosier, Ben Sooy, King & Company, D. B. Yale, and Charles Weitfle, who in 1882 photographed the laying of the original Boulder County Court House cornerstone.

Others followed in the 1890s. Photographers included E. E. McGraw, L. Moore, Burns and Company, Mary Dudley, D. G. Clark, S. J. Clark, A. T. Wheeler, Lloyd E. Nelson, W. F. Freeman, and the Black sisters, A. E. Black and Minnie C. Black.

JOSEPH BEVIER STURTEVANT ("ROCKY MOUNTAIN JOE")

Early Boulder's most prolific photographer, Joseph Bevier Sturtevant, arrived in Boulder from Wisconsin in 1876 at age twenty-five. He thought of himself first as an artist, sketching buildings and mountain views. To earn a living, he painted houses, signs, and theater scenery, and hung wallpaper.

One itinerant lecturer commissioned him to paint the Seven Hills of Rome.

In 1884, he turned his talent to photography. By 1886, the *Boulder County Herald* was editorializing on Sturtevant's newly acquired skill by reporting that he spent July 4 of that year photographing "baseballers" in the mountain town of Sunshine.

Sturtevant had several studio locations. In 1893 and 1894 (see Chapter 9 for details of the Chatauqua



This studio portrait shows Joseph Bevier Sturtevant in his usual Rocky Mountain Joe image, complete with buckskin clothing, long hair, mustache, goatee, and camera. *Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder Historical Society Collection.*

movement), he was in partnership with Louis Meile. When Chautauqua opened in 1898, Sturtevant was on the scene with his photographic studio, called "Rocky Mountain Joe's Place—The Woodbine." He was considered "a colorful character," with long hair, mustache, goatee, and the clothes of an Indian scout, which he claimed to have been.

"Rocky Mountain Joe," as he was called, had a way with women. For instance, when driving a stagecoach with tourists in the mountains, and being told that one of the young women's names was "Mary," Sturtevant would point with a flourish to a mountain and say, "There is Mount Mary."

His wife, Anna, and their children, helped him with the business. They sold cabinet-sized photographs, 3⁷/₈" x 5¹/₂" mounted on a card, of Boulder scenes for 10¢ each. Other photographers complained about being undercut. At least two of his galleries were named "The Cabinet" because of his specialty.

After his wife died, Sturtevant took to the bottle and was briefly married again. He started, but never finished, an illustrated book of poetry titled *Sparkling Gems of the Rocky Mountains*. His topics ranged from humorous to sentimental, always displaying deep affection for Boulder. In his dedication, he wrote, "Please do not criticize me too strongly, should all not run smoothly, for little breaks oftentimes show up one's life."

Sturtevant was found dead in 1910, lying along the railroad tracks between Denver and Boulder. Speculation was that he hadn't had fare for the Interurban Railroad and had probably fallen trying to get on a moving train.

Martin R. Parsons, pioneer stagecoach driver and personal friend, salvaged and preserved thirty-five hundred glass plates from Sturtevant's

home after his death. Parson's initials, "MRP," appear on all of the plates that he found. However, not all of the glass negatives in Sturtevant's possession had been his own photographs, so MRP is not enough to identify a photograph as being taken by Sturtevant.

Sturtevant and Parsons are buried in Columbia Cemetery.

LOUIS MEILE

After being in partnership with Sturtevant, Louis Meile started a studio of his own. His specialty was portraits and commercial photography, but he's known for his photographs of the "100-year flood" in 1894. It was said that at the height of the flood, Sturtevant was stranded on the south side of Boulder Creek, with his camera and equipment on the north side.

Meile moved with his family to Haxtun, in northeastern Colorado, where he homesteaded a farm. Later, they returned to Boulder, where Meile died in 1935 at the age of seventy-seven. Like Sturtevant, Meile is buried in Columbia Cemetery.

LAWRENCE P. BASS

In 1888, Lawrence P. Bass was in partnership with Isaac H. Hosier. By 1892, Bass had his own studio. Although he continued as a commercial photographer, Bass also was a Boulder policeman from 1896 to 1920. He died when his police car was hit by a speeding fire truck.

Photographers of the early 1900s included Charles E. Gosha, C. A. Wales, George F. Britton, H. L. York, Pearl C. Lux, Flo E. Satterfield, William Hassebroeck, and Thomas C. Black (no relation to the earlier Black sisters). Thomas C. Black came



Lawrence P. Bass was both a commercial photographer and a Boulder policeman. *Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder Historical Society Daily Camera Collection.*

from Alabama and worked as an engineer on the Colorado & Northwestern Railroad before becoming a commercial photographer. Many of his photographs were published in the *Daily Camera*.

Although Sturtevant and other late nineteenth-century professional photographers continued to use dry glass plates, by the late 1880s, George Eastman, of Rochester, New York, had developed an amateur camera he named the "Kodak." It used a paper film instead of glass, and was the forerunner of photography as we know it today.

J. RAYMOND BRACKETT

J. Raymond Brackett came from Maine to Boulder in 1884 to teach English, Greek, and comparative literature at the University of Colorado. He was the first dean of the College of Liberal Arts (in 1892) as well as the first Dean of the Graduate School (in 1909).

His 6" x 8" glass plate negatives of university scenes spanned the years 1890–1915. Thirty-six of his university photos were on display at the Columbian Exhibition in Chicago in 1893, commemorating (one year late) the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's landing in America. Brackett traveled extensively, and, when back in Boulder, displayed his photographs of England, Italy, Greece, and Japan.

Brackett died in 1922 at the age of sixty-eight and is buried in Columbia Cemetery.

ED TANGEN

Ed Tangen came to the United States from his native Norway as a child and moved to Boulder from Chicago in 1900. He was a bachelor who enjoyed hiking in the mountains and was active with the Rocky Mountain Climbers' Club. For half a century, his studio remained on the second floor of the Ehrlich Block, on 14th Street across from the Boulder County Court House. He was on the scene of whatever was going on downtown.

Many of his photographs were stereographs. He used a special stereographic camera with two lenses mounted about three inches apart. They produced two images on one glass plate. As the photographs were from slightly different angles, they gave perspective to the scene when viewed through a stereopticon. The viewer, invented by doctor/poet Oliver Wendell Holmes, was common around the turn of the twentieth century.



Ed Tangen, "The Pictureman," took many Boulder scenes as well as this self-portrait. *Carnegie Branch Library for Local History, Boulder Historical Society Daily Camera Collection.*

Tangen continued to use glass plates into the 1920s and took a variety of scenes, including panoramas, in and around Boulder. Many are signed with his trademark, a "T" in a diamond.

Photography was also part of Tangen's long career in criminal investigation. His microphotographs were a revolutionary method for linking a specific bullet to a specific gun, thus providing evidence in the courtroom. He compiled and photographed an extensive collection of bullets. He then cataloged and cross-indexed them as to type of rifling, make of gun, and caliber of ammuni-

tion. He stated, "In this world of lies, deception, and hypocrisy, an ounce of honest circumstantial evidence is worth pounds of oral testimony." A Wyoming woman guilty of murdering her husband thought she would go free. When she found out that Tangen was going to testify against her, she hanged herself. From 1923, to 1951, when he died, Tangen was the official "identification officer" for the Boulder County Sheriff's Office and was in demand in the courtrooms of several western states.

CHARLES F. SNOW

Charles F. Snow bought Charles F. Gosha's studio at 2028 14th Street, near the Curran Theatre, in 1908. His partner was Georgie McNaught. Two years



Georgie and Charles Snow worked together in the Snow Photography Studio for forty years. *Author's collection.*

later, they were married, and they jointly ran the business until her death in 1948. In the later years, the studio was located at 1909 Broadway.

With Edith Pendleton, his second wife, Snow continued to take portraits, his specialty. He believed in capturing natural expressions and catching his subjects off guard. Snow was also known for his landscapes and photographs of the University of Colorado. He was made a fellow of the Royal Photographic Society in England and was president of the American Society of Photographers.

EBEN G. FINE

Eben G. Fine was a pharmacist at Temple Drug Store in the Masonic Temple Building. He was a

friend of Ed Tangen, whose studio was just across the intersection. For Fine, photography began as a hobby. Then Fine began giving illustrated lectures, and soon he was in demand all over the country, particularly in the Midwest and South. He was hired by the Burlington Railroad, and endorsed by the Boulder Chamber of Commerce, to give two-month lecture tours each spring to publicize and encourage people to come to Colorado. His glass lantern slides were pictures of his own photographs, which were then colored and projected on a screen.

Fine was very active in civic affairs. Eben G. Fine Park, between Arapahoe Avenue and Canyon Boulevard near the mouth of Boulder Canyon, was named for him.