

snapshots

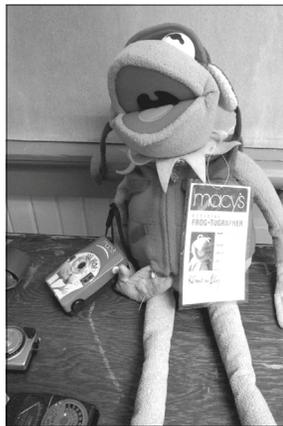
Volume 17 Number 4

December 2011

My Favorite Camera, Chapter 2

Sunday, December 4, 2011, Americal Center, Wakefield, MA

Last December PHSNE tried a new meeting format, “My Favorite Camera” in which the members brought their current photographic love interest. There were so many it’s hard to remember it all, but we were treated to a selection of Nikon rangefinders, some uncommon versions of the Stereo Realist, an utterly amazing Alpa panoramic camera (no things are NOT simple at the top, no matter what their advertising claims), among many others. There were images in the mix too, from home-made glass plate negatives to some very large Kodak prints. The meeting proved to be very popular and there were numerous requests to do it again. So we are.



Kermit the Frog Camera
Photo by Joe Walters

Another year has come and gone, and if anything is true of PHSNE members it is that their interests don’t sit still. There have been the rounds of shows,



Giant print made from negative taken with old Chinese made View Camera
Photo by Paul Nisula

in this past twelve months —stories of great finds and possibly great disasters are waiting to be told. So please come one and all with the current king of your collection (or junkpile) and share the story.

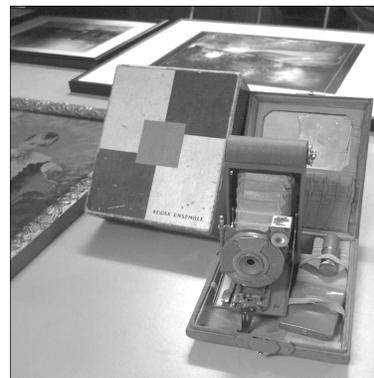
Long tables will be placed around the perimeter of the meeting room, so you can set up your cameras,

images, advertising items, books, interesting accessories, teapots, in short—your photographica. As we did last year, the Master of Ceremonies will call those willing up to the center of the room to speak to the congregation about what they brought. There will again be a sideboard with soda, coffee, sandwiches and holiday treats, so come hungry.

Marti Jones plans to display her most recent acquisition, purchased at the Photohistory XV trade show in Rochester, NY. She was excited to come across an original six-pack of Budweiser Can 110 cameras, and she is trying to learn about the Kalimar Company, manufacturer of the novelty item. If anyone has knowledge about it, please send the information to snapshots@phsne.org.



Six-pack, Budweiser 110 Cameras
Photo by Marti Jones



Kodak Vanity Camera
Photo by Joe Walters

Photographica replaced the November meeting this fall. As a result, we will be holding the formal annual business meeting and election of the new slate of Board members and officers at the beginning of the December meeting. Please mail in your ballot if you haven’t already

done so, or vote at the beginning of the December meeting.

~John Wojtowicz

Mystery Bride



The June 2011 issue of *snap shots* featured a story about a box of glass plate negatives at the PHSNE warehouse that included a wedding portrait of Rose Kennedy, then Governor of Massachusetts Calvin Coolidge at his desk flanked by a couple of girl scouts, and a standing 3/4 view of President Warren Harding. All three were donated to appropriate libraries and museums.

That same box also contained glass plate negatives of lesser known figures.



One was a wedding portrait noting that the bride's name was Rogers. It is believed that the wedding took place in the Boston area around 1915. Does anyone know who this beautiful bride is? We'll publish the information if we can identify her.



PHSNE Membership

PHSNE membership is \$15 for students, \$35 for individuals and institutions, \$40 for a family, and \$45 for foreign membership. Join or renew online at phsne.org/paypal or send a check in U.S. dollars, drawn on a U.S. bank or dollar denominated international money order.

Members should check the expiration date on the *snap shots* mailing label before sending in dues.

Send payments, changes of address, and other contact information, to Joe Walters Jr, PHSNE Membership Chair, P.O. Box 650189, West Newton, MA 02465. (Call: 617-826-9294; email: membership@phsne.org; or use the Web form at phsne.org/contacts).

snap shots, edited by Beverly Regelman, is published by the Photographic Historical Society of New England, Inc., P.O. Box 650189, West Newton, MA 02465-0189. Articles and exhibition/book reviews are always welcome. Send to snapshots@phsne.org. Authors retain copyright to their original articles; however upon written application to the *snap shots* editor, PHSNE may grant non-profit societies with similar aims and interests a one-time right to reproduce a *snap shots* article as long as the author and source are credited and a complimentary copy of the publication is sent to the PHSNE mailbox.

Library of Congress Ends Service

Once upon a time, you could order high quality silver gelatin reproductions of any image housed in the Library of Congress archives. Unfortunately, this service came to an abrupt halt in October, 2011. With government trimming expenses wherever it can, darkroom prints will no longer be produced; only digital versions will be available.

On October 26, John Anderson posted a blog on the Library of Congress Website Arts Desk titled *Negative Attitude: The Library of Congress Turns the Light Out on Darkrooms* (see a related story on page 3). In it, Anderson cites Jennifer Gavin, the Library's acting Director of Communications, who offered several reasons for the Library's decision: the "customers' preference for digital files, the difficulty of acquiring photo-



Washington, District of Columbia. Officers of 3d Regiment Massachusetts Heavy Artillery, 1865
Library of Congress collection



Poor whites, Georgetown, D.C.
Photo by Carl Mydans, 1935
Library of Congress collection

graphic supplies, and overall cost-effectiveness." She added that new acquisitions generally arrive in digital format, so there is no negative to draw on.

The duplication service began in 1936. With the onset of digitization, demand has been declining steadily; most users now download images directly from the Library of Congress website.

Other government collections, including the Supreme Court collection, have also switched to digital reproductions only.

Franz Jantzen, a freelance photographer who contracted for many years at the Library of Congress, posted the last darkroom images on his website; to view them visit washingtoncitypaper.com/photos/galleries/57/last-library-of-congress-darkroom-prints/2.

Last One Out, Please Turn On The Light

UK Photographer Richard Nicholson Documents the Demise of London Darkrooms

1979—the year my father constructed a darkroom and introduced me to photography. I was immediately entranced by the printing process and cherished the long hours spent in this dark, private space; standing in the gloom of the red safelight, slowly rocking



Kevin Markwick, Bayeux



Robin Bell

the print tray, watching the ghost-like image reveal itself through the gently lapping developer solution. As I experimented with many formulas and techniques, I often found the most interesting prints were the chemically stained accidents pulled from the bin at the end of a session.

The darkroom became a bolt-hole for me; a private space where I could escape from the noise of school, jobs, and family life. As I honed my skills - solarizing, masking, bleaching, split-toning, hand-colouring - my prints began to attract public attention.

In 2006 I'm working in London as a photographer. I'm still shooting film, but digital is becoming ubiquitous. The photographic manufacturer Durst announces that it will no longer be producing enlargers. Annual sales have dropped from a peak of 107,000 units in 1979 to just a few hundred units in recent years.

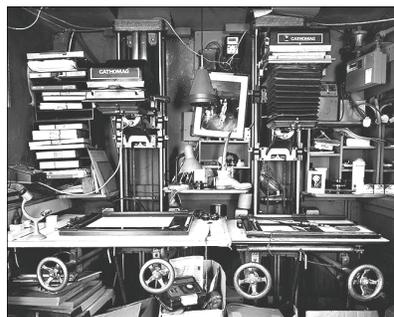
Once bustling darkrooms have become eerily quiet, and London labs are dropping like flies. Polaroid has stopped making instant film and Kodak and Fuji are discontinuing one emulsion after another. The recently introduced Canon 5D camera has persuaded many diehard film photographers that digital is the future, and those who remain unconvinced are facing clients who no longer have the budgets for film, Polaroids, clip-tests, contact-sheets and prints. The darkroom's days are numbered.

Against this backdrop, I start to look at the darkroom in a new light. My enlarger (a handsomely en-

gineered GEM 504) now it presents itself as a sad and lumpen creature in the face of extinction. With its long neck, heavy head and inviting focus handles, the thing has a human form which elicits sympathy. Hearing tales of noble machines being unceremoniously dumped when labs close down, I decide to document them before they all disappear.

I chose to photograph professional darkrooms because they are often shrouded in mystery; hidden behind the tidy glass facade of the lab's front desk. The spaces I discovered were often haphazard and brimming with personal details; coffee cups, CD collections, family snapshots, unpaid invoices, curious knick-knacks brought back by globe-trotting photographers.

I photographed each darkroom on large format film. Working in total darkness, I carefully painted these normally dingy spaces with a flashgun, seeking



Roy Snell



Pavel Kantasevich

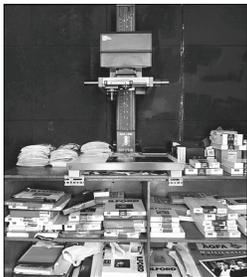
to reveal the beauty of the machinery, and shed some light on the clutter stained with the patina of time. Some of the darkrooms were busy; others were neglected (all attention being given to the new inkjet printer

in the adjoining corridor). Many of the darkrooms were facing imminent closure. (The one with the slogan pinned to the wall, 'I want to stay here forever', was dismantled the day after I photographed it and is currently being converted into luxury apartments.)

Commercial work is now routinely carried out in Photoshop and professional printers have had to seek out new avenues for their skills. The art market is perhaps the last bastion for traditional darkroom printing, but even this area is being taken over by digital machines - Lightjet, Lambda, and Chromira printers.

(Article continued on page 4)

Demise of London Darkrooms—continued from p. 3



Gordon Bishop Assoc.

But suddenly there is a resurgence of interest in analog processes by younger photographers. Left cold by the clinical nature of the virtual workspace, they seek depth and authenticity via the ambience of the traditional darkroom. Alternative processes are being rediscovered, Polaroid instant film has been re-launched, and the craze for poorly engineered Russian and Chinese film cameras (Lomo, Holga, Diana etc.) continues unabated.

I wonder at this enthusiasm. Like many committed film photographers, I experienced a belated epiphany when I finally switched to digital. My skills were easily transferred to the digital realm, and I soon discovered that Photoshop offered creative printmaking possibilities that far exceeded what I could achieve in the darkroom.

While I don't miss the chemistry of the darkroom - much of it highly toxic - I do miss the aura of the red safelight and the soothing sound of running water. I miss the excitement of making a complicated print (there's no 'undo' button in the darkroom), and the physicality of dodging and burning, the manual shaping of the light. With film I had a network of contacts across London and felt embedded in the city, whereas with digital I feel disembodied.

The history of photography is young and fast moving. The darkroom era was short-lived. My collection of images represents its apotheosis.

~Richard Nicholson, November 2010

More images are available online at richardnicholson.com

PHSNE Meetings

Meetings are usually held on the first Sunday of each month, September to June, at 1:30 p.m. at the Americal Center, 467 Main St., Wakefield, MA, preceded by a mini trade fair at 12:30 and an open meeting of the PHSNE Board at 11:00 a.m.

Upcoming meetings:

January 8—Al Holmy on Soviet cameras

February 5—Members' Auction and Pre-Super Bowl Party

Driving directions to Americal Center:

I-95 to exit 39, North Ave. toward Reading/Wakefield (right turn on North from the south; left turn from the north). Drive approximately 1.5 miles, then turn left at Main St. Destination is on the left: 467 Main St., Wakefield, MA 01880.

Parking available next door at the school, behind the building, and on Main St.

Public transportation:

The Wakefield station of the Haverhill rail line is within 1/2 mile of the Center, and a bus line stops in front of the building. Details are available at mbta.com.

PHSNE Online

PHSNE's Web site is online at phsne.org. George Champine is the Webmaster.

Join the PHSNE Forum online discussion moderated by Joe Walters; sign up and log in at phsne.org/forum. For an archive of back issues of *snap shots* and meeting presentations, visit phsne.org/archive.

FIRST CLASS MAIL
Address Service
Requested

Photographic Historical Society of New England
Next Meeting: December 4, 2011
My Favorite Camera, Chapter 2 and Annual Meeting
Americal Center, Wakefield, MA 1:30 P.M.

West Newton, MA 02465-0189
P.O. Box 650189

PHSNE

phsne.org

**snap
shots**

