



The Historical  
Society of  
Pennsylvania

Collection V-18

Albertype Company  
Photographs

1910-1952

43 boxes, 14.4 lin. feet

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**Restrictions:** None

**Related Collections at** Albertype Company photographs (V-18A)

**HSP:**

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**Albertype Company**  
**Photographs, 1910-1952**  
43 boxes, 14.4 lin. feet

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**Abstract**

The Albertype Company was founded by Adolph and Herman L. Wittemann in 1890 as a postcard and viewbook publishing company. The Brooklyn-based company used the recent technological innovation of the collotype, or albertype, to photomechanically reproduce images. Amassing photographic negatives of towns and cities across the United States, the Albertype Company produced over twenty-five thousand collotypes before its closure in 1952.

The collection includes 4223 cellulose acetate and cellulose nitrate negatives, 212 prints, and 66 postcards. These images document buildings, natural attractions, streets, and recreational activities in Pennsylvanian towns.

**Background note**

Originally known as Wittemann Brothers, the Albertype Company was founded by brothers Adolph (1845-1938) and Herman L. Wittemann, and owned by Herman. The company operated from 1890 to 1952, and was located in Brooklyn, New York. During its nearly sixty year run, the Albertype Company produced over twenty-five thousand prints, which were distributed across the United States in the form of postcards and viewbooks. The company had agents, including Adolph Wittemann, take photographs of different cities and regions, which were then reproduced as collotypes. In addition to using its own archive of original negatives, the Albertype Company also reproduced photographic images taken by other companies or individuals.

The Albertype Company was created to take advantage of the commercial applications of the collotype, a type of printing which used photographic negatives. In the late nineteenth century, photographic and photomechanical reproduction were becoming increasingly popular for commercial use. The collotype, one of the most commercially successful photomechanical processes, was introduced in 1855 by the French photographer and chemical engineer Alphonse-Louis Poitevin. Poitevin discovered that a bichromated gelatin-covered plate could be used to produce prints after being exposed to light through a negative. The collotype process consisted of numerous steps. First, a

plate was rendered light-sensitive by coating it with warm potassium or ammonium bichromated gelatin and heating it at a steady temperature in an oven until dry. After nearly two and a half hours, a negative was placed between the plate and a light source, exposing the gelatin layer to ultraviolet light, and hardening the exposed areas. The hardening of the gelatin resulted in less absorption in the areas which received the most light (those which will appear the darkest in the print). The plate was soaked in cold water, dried, and before printing it was wet again with a glycerine and water solution. Greasy ink was rolled out onto the plate, and did not adhere to those areas which soaked up the most water. The plate was rolled through a press with paper, causing the ink to transfer. The plate could be reused for a limited quantity of reproductions.

Alphonse-Louis Pontevin's process was adapted by C.M. Tessie du Motay and C.R. Marechal, who covered copper plates with bichromated gelatin. The gelatin often separated from the copper during the printing process, so the quantity of images that could be produced from a single plate was limited to approximately one hundred. Joseph Albert, a photographer from Munich, substituted glass for the copper plate, constructed a mechanical press, and also added another layer consisting of silicate mixed with gelatin, albumen or stale beer, which was applied between the gelatin and plate to facilitate adhesion. Albert presented his improved collotype process at the 1868 Photographic Exhibition in Hamburg. Immediately after the introduction of his innovations, companies were able to produce about two thousand prints from each plate using etching presses and hand rollers. Towards the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century, improvements in mechanical presses and a switch to the rotary collotype, a high-speed process using an aluminum plate, meant that up to five thousand collotype prints could be produced daily. Color was added to the collotype process by Albert in 1876.

Collotypes were important to the industry of photographic reproductions because they were fairly cheap to produce, and their range of tones permitted exact reproductions of photographs through a photomechanical process. They are also noted for their ability to accurately reproduce drawings, prints, and watercolors, and are still in limited use to this day. Collotypes were known by numerous names, including "phototype," and "albertype," the name given by Joseph Albert.

## **Scope & content**

This collection consists of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania's second acquisition of Albertype Company negatives related to the state of Pennsylvania. There are 4223 negatives, 66 postcards, and 212 prints, which were used as proofs. Originally, the negatives were sequenced alphabetically by town, and stored by medium and size. The images have been sorted by film base and presence of deterioration, and are grouped by size as: cellulose acetate, cellulose acetate with deterioration, cellulose nitrate, cellulose nitrate with deterioration, and positives. Within these new groupings, the negatives and positives have been kept in the original alphabetical order.

As the photographic images in this collection would have been used as postcards and viewbooks, the subjects tend to emphasize important landmarks within each represented

town and city. These subjects include businesses, universities and colleges, churches, schools, streets, natural attractions, tourist areas, and recreational activities. There are many aerial views of towns, and images of monuments and memorials. Recreational activities include golfing, skiing, sledding, ice skating, tennis, baseball, basketball, shuffleboard, seesawing, swimming, sailing, ice sailing, rowing, fishing, hunting, basket weaving, and general social gatherings. Portraits, mainly of sports teams and academic administrators, are also included. There are a few images of animals, including a bear cub, huskies and ponies in Buck Hill Falls, and horses and buggies, and horseback riding throughout the collection.

Included are seventy-eight negatives showing bakery and ice cream plants in the United States and Canada, for the McCormick Company in Pittsburgh. There are also numerous views of the Sesqui-centennial International Exposition grounds and buildings in Philadelphia. Though the time period covered by the collection runs from circa 1910 to 1952, many of the photographs were taken in the 1940s. Photographers are not generally named; however, photographers who have been noted include W. B. Foster, H. Weitzer, Luther G. Harpel, J.G. Care, Billingsly, and C.F. Melick. The editing process of the Albertype Company is evident throughout the collection, as some of the negatives have been altered in order to lighten or darken specific details, and also to crop the borders. Some of the positive images also have notes on the back, including quantity ordered. The postcards offer examples of Albertype Company products, as well as those from other companies.

## Related materials

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania also houses Collection V-18A, the Albertype Company, which includes negatives and positives pertaining to other towns and cities in Pennsylvania.

## Bibliography

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## Subjects

Albertype Co.

Witteman, Adolph  
Witteman, Herman L.

Collotype  
Pennsylvania  
Film photonegatives  
Silver gelatin photoprints

Bedford (Pa.)  
Bedford Springs (Pa.)

Bethlehem (Pa.)  
Buck Hill (Pa.)  
Bushkill (Pa.)  
Carbondale (Pa.)  
Central City (Pa.)  
Chambersburg (pa.)  
Coatesville (Pa.)  
Delaware Water Gap (Pa.)  
Dingman's Ferry (Pa.)  
Easton (Pa.)  
Erie (Pa.)  
Everett (Pa.)  
Forest Park (Pa.)  
Greensburg (Pa.)  
Hummelstown (Pa.)  
Kennett Square (Pa.)  
Lebanon (Pa.)  
Lewisburg (Pa.)  
Mauch Chunk (Pa.)  
Mercersburg (Pa.)  
Milford (Pa.)  
Mill Rift (Pa.)  
New Castle (Pa.)  
New Wilmington (Pa.)  
Philadelphia (Pa.)  
Sayre Park (Pa.)  
Troy (Pa.)  
Valley Forge (Pa.)

## **Administrative Information**

### **Restrictions**

The collection is open for research.

### **Acquisition information**

Gift of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1959.

### **Preferred citation**

Cite as: [Indicate cited item here], Albertype Company Photographs (Collection V-18),  
The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

### **Processing note**

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Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this finding aid do  
not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

## Box and folder listing

Town	Boxes
Ashland P.O. (PA), Fountain Springs (PA)	1, 12
Athens (PA)	8
Bakery & ice cream plants	23, 38, 39
Bangor (PA)	15, 24
Beach Lake (PA)	12
Bedford (PA), Central City (PA), Everett (PA)	1, 6, 8, 12, 15, 24
Bedford Springs (PA)	6, 8, 15, 24, 25
Bellefonte (PA)	1, 12, 16, 25, 40, 41
Bernharts P.O. (PA), Hyde Park (PA)	16, 25
Bethlehem (PA), Sayre Park (PA)	1, 6, 8, 11, 12, 16, 25, 41, 42
Blossburg (PA)	16, 26
Blue Ridge Summit (PA), Thurmont (MD), Deerfield (MD)	16, 26
Bradford (PA)	8, 12, 26, 41
Braman (PA)	12, 41
Buck Hill Falls (PA)	1, 6, 8, 11, 12, 16, 17, 26, 27
Bushkill (PA)	1, 5, 6, 8, 11, 17, 18, 27
Canton (PA)	27
Carbondale (PA)	1, 8, 12, 18, 27
Carlisle (PA)	11, 12, 18
Chadd's Ford (PA)	27
Chambersburg (PA)	4, 8, 12, 18, 28
Coatesville (PA)	6, 8, 12, 18, 28, 43
Cornwall (PA)	12, 28, 41
Cresson (PA)	12
Dallas (PA)	1, 18, 28
Danville (PA)	18, 28, 42, 43
Darby (PA)	4, 5, 11, 18
Delaware Water Gap (PA)	1, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 18, 28, 41
Dingman's Ferry (PA)	1, 6, 8, 11, 12, 18, 29, 40, 41, 43
Eagles Mere (PA)	1, 18, 29
Easton (PA)	4, 5, 8, 11, 12, 18, 29
Ebensburg (PA)	12, 40, 41
Elizabethtown (PA)	8, 18
Ellwood City (PA)	12, 43
Ephrata (PA)	29, 43
Erie (PA)	2, 4, 5, 8, 12, 29, 41
Fairview Lake (PA)	30



Farrell (PA)	18, 30
Fern Ridge (PA)	30
Forest Park (PA)	5, 8, 12, 18, 30
Frackville (PA)	30
Gaines (PA)	30
Gallitzin (PA)	8, 30
Gap (PA)	30
Glen Riddle (PA)	19, 30
Gouldsboro (PA)	30
Grassville (PA)	30
Greeley (PA)	19, 30
Greencastle (PA)	12
Greensburg (PA)	2, 6, 8, 12, 19, 30, 31
Greentown (PA)	12, 41
Grove City (PA)	4, 8
Gwynedd Valley (PA)	31
Haverford (PA)	31
Herman (PA)	31
Hershey (PA)	2, 19, 31
Hoban Heights (PA)	2, 19, 31
Hollidaysburg (PA)	31
Honesdale (PA)	31
Immaculata (PA)	11, 12, 19, 31
Kennett Square (PA)	2, 12, 19, 31, 41
Kittanning (PA)	12
Kutztown (PA)	2, 12, 19, 31
La Plume (PA)	31
Lackawaxen (PA), Highland (NY), Minisinkford (NY)	2, 19, 31, 41
Lake Como (PA)	9, 19, 31
Lake Harmony (PA)	32
Latrobe (PA), Beatty (PA)	13, 19, 32
Laurelton (PA)	32
Lebanon (PA), Hummelstown (PA)	2, 11, 13, 19, 32, 41, 43
Lewisburg (PA)	2, 11, 13, 19, 32
Lincoln University (PA)	19, 32
Loretto (PA)	19, 32
Mansfield (PA)	13, 19, 32
Marshalls Creek (PA)	2, 19
Matamoras (PA)	2
Mauch Chunk (PA)	2, 4, 5, 9, 32
McConnellsburg (PA)	2, 20, 32
Mercer (PA)	13, 33
Mercersburg (PA)	4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 20, 33

Merion (PA)	2, 33
Milford (PA)	2, 10, 11, 13, 20, 33, 41
Mill Rift (PA)	7, 10, 13, 20, 34
Millvale (PA)	2, 10, 20, 34
Minisink Hills (PA), North Water Gap (PA)	20, 34
Montrose (PA)	11, 34
Mountainhome (PA)	34
Mt. Pocono (PA)	20, 34
Myerstown (PA)	20, 34
Nazareth (PA)	34
New Castle (PA)	11, 13, 20, 34, 40
New Florence (PA)	34
New Geneva (PA)	2, 20, 34, 42
New Hope (PA)	34
New Wilmington (PA)	2, 4, 5, 11, 13, 20, 34
Newmanstown (PA)	11
Newville (PA)	34
Oil City (PA)	5, 10
Old Forge (PA)	34
Overbrook (Philadelphia, PA)	2, 21, 34
Oxford (PA), Pinegrove (PA)	13, 21, 34, 43
Paradise Falls (PA), Cresco (PA), Henryville (PA)	7, 11, 21, 35
Parkesburg (PA)	21, 35
Penns Cave (PA)	11, 13, 21, 35
Pennsburg (PA)	13
Philadelphia (PA)	2, 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, 21, 35, 36, 43
Phoenixville (PA)	11, 36
Pine Grove (PA)	21, 36
Pocono Manor (PA)	7, 10
Reading (PA)	21, 36, 43
Schuylkill Haven (PA)	21, 36
Scranton (PA)	7, 10
Sesqui-Centennial International Exposition (Philadelphia, PA)	36
Shenandoah (PA)	36
Shohola (PA), Barryville (NY)	7, 10
Sinking Spring (PA)	36
Slippery Rock (PA)	10, 13, 36
Starlight (PA)	10
State College (PA)	22, 36
Stroudsburg (PA)	22, 36
Summit Hill (PA)	22, 36

Sunbury (PA)	13, 22, 36, 41
Swarthmore (PA)	2, 7, 10, 11, 22, 36
Tannersville (PA)	22, 36
Thompsontown (PA)	2, 36
Tionesta (PA)	22
Titusville (PA)	13, 22, 36
Tobyhana (PA)	2, 11, 22, 36
Torresdale (PA)	11, 14, 22, 36
Towanda (PA), Towanda (NY)	14, 22, 36
Treose (PA)	36
Troy (PA)	2, 7, 10, 14, 22, 36, 37, 41
Tunkhannock (PA)	37
Twin Lakes (PA)	2, 14, 22, 37, 42, 43
Tyrone (PA)	14
Union City (PA)	37
Upper Darby (PA), Bel Air (PA), Brewster (NY), Bryn Mawr (PA) Concordville (PA), Collingswood (NJ), Doylestown (PA), Exton (PA), Jessup (MD), Kennett Square (PA), Lancaster (PA), Media (PA), Milford (PA), Spring Lake (NJ), Valley Forge (PA), Warrington (PA), Willow Grove (PA), West Chester (PA)	14, 22, 37
Valley Forge (PA)	2, 3, 5, 7, 10, 14, 23, 37, 43
Villa Maria (PA)	38
Villanova (PA)	23, 38
Washington (PA)	10, 23, 38
Washington Crossing (PA)	11, 14
Wayne and Radnor (PA), Ambler (PA)	14, 38, 41, 43
Waynesboro (PA)	7, 10, 38
Waynesburg (PA)	23, 38
Wernersville (PA)	11, 14, 23, 38
West Chester (PA), Malvern (PA)	14, 38
West Pittsburgh (PA)	3
Westtown (PA)	11, 23, 38
White Haven (PA)	14
Wilkes-Barre (PA)	5, 7, 10
Womelsdorf (PA)	23, 38, 41
Wysox (PA)	38
Youngsville (PA)	14, 23, 38
Zieglerville (PA)	14