

W. C. Sawyer (1877-1954)
Glass Plate Negative Collection, ca. 1899-1917
GB2076 – GB2299

Introduction

This collection is comprised of 224 glass plate negatives taken by Wilbur Cyrus Sawyer (1877-1954) of Essex Junction, Vermont, around the turn of the twentieth century. The collection was given to the Vermont Historical Society by the Newport Harbor Nautical Museum in Newport Beach, California in 2007 (ms. acc. no. 2007.16). At the NHNM they had the collection number 2018 – 57. The negatives are housed in two archival boxes and occupy 1.5 linear feet of shelf space.

Biographical Note

Wilbur Cyrus Sawyer was born May 8, 1877, in Essex Junction, Vermont, to Frederick Parker Sawyer and Frances Axa (Bates) Sawyer who owned a furniture store at 418 Main Street. He attended the University of Vermont, graduating B.S., cum laude, in Civil Engineering in 1900. After graduation, he continued with the University of Vermont as an instructor in drawing and surveying for three years. It was during this time, as a student and instructor, that Sawyer took the photographs in this collection.

Sawyer left Vermont to work with the Hydrographic Branch of the United States Geological Survey as an assistant engineer, which in 1907 took him to California. Once in California, Sawyer worked for the City Engineers Office in Los Angeles as an engineer draftsman. While in Los Angeles, Sawyer worked with two colleagues, Homer Hamlin and Andrew C. Hansen, both deputy city engineers, to found the Los Angeles Section of the American Society of Civil Engineers in 1913. Sawyer, an avid yachtsman, was also a founding member of the Newport Harbor Yacht Club. He was an associate member of the American Society of Civil Engineers; a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Nu fraternities and a member of the Congregational church.

According to a biography published on <http://www.r-boat.org/html/history/sawyer.html> :

Many early residents of Newport Harbor remember W. C. (Bill) Sawyer as an eccentric, rather portly gentleman who always dressed in black, from his felt, snap-brimmed hat to his black high top shoes. He proudly wore his Phi Beta Kappa key on a gold watch chain. He was often to be seen on top of the Newport Pavilion, or on the Yacht Club roof, with his view camera on its tripod and with his head under the dark cloth, as he photographed one of the many memorable images he left of early Newport Harbor.

Although Sawyer continued to live in Los Angeles until his death on August 13, 1954, he was actively involved in the University of Vermont alumni association and worked with his father, who remained in Vermont, in the manufacture of artificial stone mantels, porches, chimneys, fire proof bungalows and garages.

Scope and Content

The collection contains glass plate negatives taken by Wilbur Cyrus Sawyer in and around Essex Junction, Vermont, as well as images of the University of Vermont (F-SCH-UVM) during his student days around the turn of the twentieth century. Images of UVM include campus architecture, student activities and early sports activities including, baseball, football, and tennis. The collection is particularly strong in domestic architecture. As well it includes family groups (F-PO) and manufacturing activities (F-MI-Essex).

The collection also includes images of the construction of Fort Ethan Allen (F-FO-Ethan Allen) and activities at Camp Olympia in Essex Junction (F-HIS-Spanish American War). In addition, the collection includes images of maple sugaring (F-MA) and the Essex Junction Railroad Station, including a wreck (F-RA).

A few images of California scenes are included in the collection. The donor instructed the VHS to retain these images even though they do not pertain to Vermont.

Sawyer stored his negatives in separate envelopes which were identified and in some cases dated. Vermont Historical Society staff has transferred the negatives to archival envelopes whenever possible, transferring the information that was on the original sleeve. In several instances the plates were not a standard size and so they remain in the sleeve provided by the Newport Harbor Nautical Museum (NHNM). The order that was established by the Newport Harbor Nautical Museum has been preserved.

All of the negatives have been scanned at 100% of the plate size (7.3" x 4" and 5.8" x 4"), 400 dpi and saved as a tif file. They have also been resized at 175 dpi and saved as a jpg file for use on the Internet. The negatives have been given VHS glass plate negative numbers and are stored in archival boxes by this number.

A few of the plates include dates. Most contain dates in the period 1900-1903; there is one plate dated as early as 1899 (plate GB-2092: Vt. Cons't) as late at 1917 (plate GB-2185: Dr. Albert Soiland, founder of the Newport Harbor Yacht Club).

An inventory of the entire collection has been created by the Vermont Historical Society. The NHNM item number has been recorded on this list, along with the image's title as reported by the NHNM. All of the images have been assigned VHS Picture File subject headings to aid in sorting by subject. In addition, separate columns are devoted to family name, place, and condition to aid in accessing the collection. The final column in the inventory contains a written description of the image.

Related Collections

The Newport Harbor Nautical Museum in Newport Beach, California, retained the California photographs of W. C. Sawyer, with the exception of the few that came to the VHS. Sawyer's photographs of yachts have appeared in *A Pictorial Primer of Yacht Racing Rules and*

Tractics and in an undated article about the famous auxiliary ketch *Sea Witch*¹ (see <http://www.heritech.com/seawitch/seawitch.htm>).

Inventory

See separate document.

Angela Ogle
August 2009
Revised August 2011
SawyerGlassPlateFindingAid.doc

¹ Hugh Angelman's 36 foot auxiliary ketch, the *Sea Witch* – a boat that not only became a classic, but (in spite of the relatively small number that have been built), went on to win the Trans Pac race and become a "class" in itself – known as the "Sea Witch Class." It is a boat that has never since been equaled, much less surpassed, for romantic appearance and living space and comfort in a small cruising design. (from <http://www.heritech.com/seawitch/seawitch.htm>)

Notes:

<http://www.r-boat.org/html/history/sawyer.html>

W. C. Sawyer

Many early residents of Newport Harbor remember W. C. (Bill) Sawyer as an eccentric, rather portly gentleman who always dressed in black, from his felt, snap-brimmed hat to his black high top shoes. He proudly wore his Phi Beta Kappa key on a gold watch chain. He was often to be seen on top of the Newport Pavilion, or on the Yacht Club roof, with his view camera on its tripod and with his head under the dark cloth, as he photographed one of the many memorable images he left of early Newport Harbor. Little is known of Sawyer's early days, other than he was an engineering graduate of an eastern school. In 1909, he was listed as being allied with a cement machinery and building business in Los Angeles. He became a City Engineer for the City of Los Angeles in 1914 and appears to have continued in that capacity until 1935, after which his occupation was listed as photographer. He lived the latter part of his life in Echo Park in Los Angeles and there had his studio and his photographic collection. He did all of his own darkroom work and visitors to his studio remember that prints, negatives and papers were stacked anywhere and everywhere, yet Sawyer seemed always to be able to put his hand on what was wanted.

Mr. Sawyer had been hurt in a mining accident at one time and received a head injury, after which time his mind seemed to wander a bit and he exhibited rather vague behavior. Bud Landers, a friend, found him out walking one day and invited him in for food and drink; after that they established a bond when they found they had both been Sigma Nu fraternity members at college.

Mr. Sawyer spent nearly every weekend in Newport or at waterfront scenes in Los Angeles.

He took the "Red Car" to Balboa and would spend the day recording marine events. His pictures of Newport Harbor, Los Angeles and California Yacht Club events have left us an incomparable record of the period up to the 1950s. He had a real gift for photographing sailboats and showing them from their best aspect.

...it's not attributed but I'm pretty sure the above link was written by John Blaich.

I've found a few other things just playing around on the web. He had some pics in Amateur Photography in the 20's, an article and pics in the 1920 "Rudder", and probably a lot more. I'll let you know if I learn anything more from the Newport Harbor Museum—Tim Jerman

More bio from Los Angeles Congregational church:

Wilbur Cyrus Sawyer (Born 8 May 1887 - Essex junction, Vermont). Mr. Sawyer was a Civil engineer by trade. He was the son of Frederick Parker and Francis Axa (Bates) Sawyer. He graduated from high school at Burlington, Vermont in 1896. he graduated with a B S cum laude in Civil engineering from the University of Vermont in 1900. Three years following his graduation, he was employed as an instruction in drawing and surveying at the University of Vermont. He entered the Hydrographic Branch of the U. S. Geological Survey as an engineering aid. At the end of six months on the job, he was promoted to the position of Assistant Engineer. he held that position with the Geological Survey and U. S. Reclamation Service in Washington DC; in Pennsylvania; in West Virginia; in Maryland; in Oregon; and in California. Upon arriving in California in 1907, he worked for the City Engineers Office at Los Angeles. He was, in addition to his profession, in association with his father in the manufacture of artificial stone mantels, porches, chimneys, fire proof bungalows, garages, etc. he was an associate member of the American Society of Civil Engineers; a member of Phi Betta Kappa and Sigma Nu fraternities and a Congregationalist.

They got the 1887 wrong, which is probably where your info came from....I doubt if he graduated from UVM at 13! Seems like the family followed him west, which accounts for them being gone from the 1910 census—Tim Jerman