



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Jan Wolff Collection of New York City Photographic Postcards

NMAH.AC.1165

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Jan Wolff Collection of New York City Photographic Postcards
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1165
Date:	circa 1927-1930
Extent:	0.33 Cubic feet (1 box, 53 items)
Creator:	Rotary Photo Frage, William Fairchild Aerial Surveys Brown Bros. Wolff, Jan Jonas (L.) & Co., Inc. (Woolworth Bldg., New York City)
Language:	English Collection is in English. Some materials in German.
Summary:	Photographic postcards collected by Dr. Rudolf Wolff, a pediatrician from Krefeld, Germany during a trip to the United States in the early 1930's and brought back to America when the family immigrated in 1936.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

This collection was donated by Jan Wolff, son of Dr. Rudolf Wolff.

Provenance

Collected by Rudolf Wolff, the father of Jan Wolff, the donor. Rudolf Wolff was a pediatrician in Krefeld, Germany.

Processing Information

Processed by Christine Windheuser (volunteer) and Ryan Monahan (intern), March, 2010; supervised by David Haberstick, archivist.

Preferred Citation

Jan Wolff Collection of New York City Photographic Postcards, ca. 1928-1930, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Collection items available for reproduction, but the Archives Center makes no guarantees concerning copyright restrictions. Other intellectual property rights may apply. Archives Center cost-recovery and use fees may apply when requesting reproductions.

Biographical / Historical

The first known photographic postcard made its appearance in 1899, but this type of card did not gain popularity until George Eastman marketed Velox developing out paper in 1902, which was a heavy stock that resisted curling and could be preprinted with a postcard back.

Most of the postcards during the early 1900s were printed in Europe, primarily in Germany, where the printing technology was considered the best. Imports dropped after the start of World War One, and from 1915 more printing was concentrated in England and the United States. White border cards were developed at this time, and they were popular until 1930.

The printing of the photographer's or manufacturer's name on the back of real photos was an expensive proposition. This practice was only cost effective on cards printed in large numbers.

A postcard may have a number of different names printed on it. The most common name is that of the publisher who commissions the postcard and supplies the image. The next name is that of the printer who manufactures the card. The photographer who supplied the initial image may have his name on the card, often next to the picture.

One of the largest categories of postcards was those produced for tourist consumption, and they mostly consisted of views. This collection of New York landmarks falls into that category.

Sources

History of the Real Photo Postcard <http://www.metropostcard.com/card07realphoto.html>

Rotary Photographic Company 1899-1921 <http://www.metropostcard.com/publishersr1.html>

Irving Underhill <http://theboweryboys.blogspot.com/2009/08/picture-perfect-irving-underhill-and.html>

Brown Brothers, New York, New York <http://www.metropostcard.com/publishersb2.html>

NYPL Fairchild Aerial Surveys Collection <http://iarchives.nysed.gov/PubImageWeb/listCollections.jsp?id=67854>

The Fairchild Story <http://web.whittier.edu/fairchild/home.html>

Scope and Contents

The collection consists of fifty three photographic postcards of New York City buildings and landmarks, including aerial views. The postcards were collected by Dr. Rudolf Wolff, a pediatrician from Krefeld, Germany during a trip to the United States in the early 1930s and brought back to America when the family immigrated in 1936. The cards are arranged into four series by the company that published or printed the materials.

System of Arrangement: The collection is arranged into four series.

Series 1, Cards published by the Franco-American Novelty Company, New York, consists of three items. The Franco-American Novelty Company was established in 1910 at 1209 Broadway in New York City. The cards published under this company's name have the same set numbering convention as series 4 and one is marked "Printed in England", suggesting they were printed by Rotary Photo. Series 2, Cards published by William Frange, New York, consists of two cards. William Frange was a New York photographer who sold photographs to other publishers and published cards himself. His slogan, printed on the cards, was "Real Photographs, New York's Best Views". The cards in this group were printed in England.

Series 3, Cards printed in Germany published by L. Jonas & Company, Woolworth Building, New York, includes sixteen cards. The L. Jonas Company ran the observatory at the Woolworth Building. Most of the postcards in this series were published by them. No German printer is named but the cards in this set have a numbering convention differing from those printed in England.

Among these materials are eight cards copyrighted by photographer Irving Underhill (1872 -1960) whose studio was located at 17 Park Place in New York City. He became a leading contributor of images for many different postcard publishers. Underhill opened his studio in 1896, specializing in "artistic portraits, city views and panoramas, group photographs, marine, legal and machinery photography." He was so successful that his agency received exclusive commissions to photograph and promote new buildings like the Woolworth Building, which he would capture in timed intervals to track the construction process. One postcard has a copyright date of 1927 on the image, helping to establish the dates of this collection.

Photographs on three other cards in this set are copyrighted by photographer William Frange. Other cards include a photograph from the New York Central Railroad and a theater photograph from the Paramount Famous Lasky Corporation.

Series 4, Cards printed in England by Rotary Photo and published by L. Jonas & Company, Woolworth Building, New York, consists of thirty two cards. These materials were printed by Rotary Photo in England. Rotary Photographic Company, founded in 1899, was located at 23 Moorefields, London, England. It produced a wide variety of greetings and postcards as real photographs. These cards were manufactured in Great Britain and issued under many trade names. They also made photograph cards for other publishers as shown by the example above. In 1921 they became one of seven companies that joined together to form Amalgamated Photograph Manufacturing Ltd., and they are now part of Ilford.

This series includes four photographs credited to Brown Brothers. Large publishers became desperate for photographs trying to meet the ever increasing demands of the postcard-collecting public. This generated a new type of business that would warehouse negatives and sell them on request. Brown Brothers was the first such company, founded in 1904 with a staff of twelve photographers. At first they targeted large newspapers, which at this time often did not have their own photographers. They went on to supply postcard publishers with images as well. They were a forerunner to the stock photography industry. There are also four photos taken from an "aeroplane" credited to Fairchild Aerial Surveys.

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into four series.

Series 1: Cards published by the Franco-American Novelty Company, New York Series 2: Cards published by William Frange, New York

Series 3: Cards printed in Germany published by L. Jonas & Company

Series 4: Cards printed in England by Rotary Photo and published by L. Jonas & Company

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Types of Materials:

Photographic postcards

Photographs -- Black-and-white photoprints -- Silver gelatin -- 1920-1930

Picture postcards -- 1920-1930

Postcards -- 1920-1930

Names:

Woolworth Building (New York, N.Y.)

Container Listing

Series 1: Cards published by the Franco-American Novelty Company, New York

- | | |
|-------|---|
| Box 1 | Card number 10781-95 "New Medical Centre, New York" Photograph: Fairchild Aerial Surveys Incorporated |
| Box 1 | Card number 10781-96 "New York Life Building, New York" Used card mailed 1930. See transliteration and translation of German text |
| Box 1 | Card number 10781-97 "New York Central Rail Road Building, New York" |

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Series 2: Cards published by William Frange, New York

Box 1 Card number 1 "Medical Centre of New York, World's Largest" Printed in
England

Box 1 Card number 12 "42d St. and 5th Ave, New York's Busiest Spot" Printed in
England

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Series 3: Cards printed in Germany published by L. Jonas & Company, Woolworth Building, New York

- Box 1 Card number 202 "Sherry-Netherlands and Savoy Plaza Hotels, New York"
Photograph copyright 1927 Irving Underhill
- Box 1 Card number 203 "Equitable Building and Surrounding Skyscrapers, New York"
Photograph copyright Irving Underhill
- Box 1 Card number 206 "Woolworth and Transportation Building, New York"
Photograph copyright William Frange
- Box 1 Card number 207 "New York Skyline at Night" Photograph copyright William
Frange
- Box 1 Card number 208 "Flatiron Building, New York", Photograph copyright William
Frange
- Box 1 Card number 211 "New York Life Insurance Building, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 212 "Paramount Theatre Building, New York", Photograph
copyright Paramount Famous Lasky Corporation
- Box 1 Card number 213 "Pennsylvania Rail Road Station, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 214 "Equitable Trust Company Building, New York" Photograph
copyright Irving Underhill
- Box 1 Card number 215 "New York Stock Exchange Building, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 217 "New York Central Building, New York" Photograph: New York
Central Lines
- Box 1 Card number 225 "Statue of Liberty, New York" Photograph copyright Irving
Underhill
- Box 1 Card number 226 "Woolworth Building, New York" Photograph copyright Irving
Underhill
- Box 1 Card number 227 "Municipal Building, City Hall, New York" Photograph copyright
Irving Underhill
- Box 1 Card number 228 "Brooklyn Bridge, New York" Photograph copyright Irving
Underhill

Box 1

Card number 229 "Times Square Section, New York" Photograph copyright
Irving Underhill

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Series 4: Cards printed in England by Rotary Photo and published by L. Jonas & Company, Woolworth Building, New York

- Box 1 Card number 10781-1 "City Hall Park and Newspaper Row, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-2 "Hudson Terminal Building, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-3 "Trinity Building and Broadway, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-4 "Broadway Downtown and Woolworth Building, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-9 "Grant's Tomb and Hudson River, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-29 "Singer Building, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-31 "Trinity Church, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-36 "Williamsburg Bridge New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-41 "Municipal Building, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-42 "Broadway Downtown /Entrance to Harbour from Woolworth"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-44 "East River Bridges as seen from Woolworth Tower, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-47 "Bankers Trust Company Building, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-48 "Brooklyn Bridge"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-52 "New York Waterfront and Skyline", Photograph: Brown Brothers New York
- Box 1 Card number 10781-53 "Hotel Pennsylvania, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-54 "Whitehall Building , Battery Park and Entrance to North River"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-59 "New Cunard Building, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-65 "New York Telephone Company Building, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-66 "Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York"

- Box 1 Card number 10781-72 "Ritz Tower, Park Avenue and 67th Street, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-73 "Delmonico Building, Fifth Avenue New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-74 "The French Building, Fifth Avenue, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-76 "Metropolitan Life Building, New York"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-77 "New County Court House, New York." Photograph:
Brown Brothers New York
- Box 1 Card number 10781-79 "Financial District and Downtown New York from an
Aeroplane" Photograph: Fairchild Aerial Surveys Incorporated
- Box 1 Card number 10781-80 "Lower New York Entrance to Harbour and Hudson
River from an Aeroplane"
- Box 1 Card number 10781-81 "The Roxy Theatre, New York," Photograph: Brown
Brothers New York
- Box 1 Card number 10781-82 "Bird's Eye View of Central Park and Fifth Avenue New
York" Photograph: Brown Brothers New York
- Box 1 Card number 10781-83 "Woolworth Building Tower Above Clouds 792 Feet."
Photograph: Fairchild Aerial Surveys Incorporated
- Box 1 Card number 10781-86 "East River and Downtown New York from Brooklyn
Bridge" Photograph: Brown Brothers New York
- Box 1 Card number 10781-87 "Ellis Island, New York Harbour from an Aeroplane"
Photograph: Fairchild Aerial Surveys Incorporated
- Box 1 Card number 10781-92 Lower New York, Brooklyn and Manhattan Bridges from
an Aeroplane" Photograph: Fairchild Aerial Surveys Incorporated

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