



Smithsonian
National Museum of American History
Kenneth E. Behring Center

Guide to the Jack Robrecht Collection of Firefighting Photographs

NMAH.AC.1231

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Archives Center, National Museum of American History
Title:	Jack Robrecht Collection of Firefighting Photographs
Identifier:	NMAH.AC.1231
Date:	1852 - 1983
Extent:	1.5 Cubic feet (6 boxes, 1 oversized folder)
Creator:	Robrecht, Jack
Language:	English Some materials in Spanish.

Administrative Information

Acquisition Information

The collection was donated by CIGNA through Roxanne Korostowski, Director, Relocation Services on August 19, 2005.

Provenance

Transferred from the Division of Home and Community Life to the Archives Center in 2011.

Related Materials

Materials at the Archives Center, National Museum of American History

Warsaw Collection of Business Americana, Fires and firefighting (series), circa 1821-1955. (AC0060)

Warsaw Collection of Business Americana, Fires and firefighting: stereographs, ca. 1875-1888. (AC0060)

Warsaw Collection of Business Americana, Inventions: stereographs, 1880s. (AC0060)

Underwood & Underwood Glass Stereograph Collection, [Fire-fighters working water pump: Active no. 1810. photonegative] 1926. (AC0143)

Underwood & Underwood Glass Stereograph Collection, [Fire fighters in action.] 2031 photonegative. (AC0143)

Frank Seymour Firefighting Ephemera Collection (AC1232)

Materials at the Division of Home and Community Life, National Museum of American History

The Division of Home and Community Life holds fire-related artifacts. See Accession numbers 2005.0233; 2005.0279; 2006.0247; 2007.0160; and 2007.0174.

Processing Information

Collection processed by NMAH staff, 2011.

Preferred Citation

Jack Robrecht Collection of Firefighting Photographs, 1852-1983, Archives Center, National Museum of American History.

Restrictions

The 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

Jack Robrecht (1916?-1993) was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He graduated from St. Joseph's Prep and attended the University of Pennsylvania. Robrecht worked for thirty-one years at the chemical testing laboratory of Atlantic Refinery. He retired in 1978. Robrecht always wanted to be a firefighter, but missed qualifying due to the age limit. Undeterred, Robrecht spent much of his life from 1941-1993 as a volunteer historian for the Philadelphia Fire Department. He was also a collector, author, and photographer of fire-related materials.

Scope and Contents

The collection contains primarily photographs and postcards relating to firefighting. Many of the photographs are of firefighting vehicles and apparatus, both horse-drawn and gasoline-powered. The cities of Philadelphia and Baltimore are especially well documented, though other cities are represented, including Hamilton, Ohio; Camden, New Jersey; Dallas, Texas; Baltimore, Maryland; Portland, Maine; New Orleans, Louisiana; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Newburyport, Massachusetts; and Flemington, New Jersey.

Series 1, Photographs, consists primarily of black-and-white and color, both original and copy prints, illustrations, and postcards depicting images of fire engines, firefighters, fireboats, fire stations, and firemen and fire equipment in parades. The photographs are arranged in numerical order (for example, JR-2) as assigned by Jack Robrecht, who assembled the materials. The other number system included the designation "V 408." This alpha-numeric number was applied by the Cigna Museum which held the materials prior to their donation to the National Museum of American History. Many of the images are heavily annotated by Robrecht, providing specific details about a fire engine, geographic location, and date. There are some membership cards, envelopes, and a Christmas card depicting images of fire equipment. Two inventories for the photographs are available. The inventories provide an object/photograph number, artist/photographer, title/caption, genre/classification, date and dimensions.

Series 2, Research Files, 1852-1983, consists almost exclusively of handwritten and typescript photocopies of fire-related documentation assembled by Robrecht. Included are sheet music, lists of statistics for fire alarms, inventories of equipment in parades, newspaper clippings, and an ink sketch of a fire ladder.

Series 3, Publications, [1859?]-1975, consists of original and photocopies of various fire-related publications. The only non fire-related publication is *The Grace Log*, a publication of Grace Line.

Arrangement

The collection is divided into three series.

Series 1, Photographs, 1880-1972

Series 2, Research Files, 1852-1983

Series 3, Publications, [1859?]-1975

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements

Gloves must be worn when handling unprotected photographs, negatives, and slides.

Bibliography

Wallace, Andy. "John Robrecht, 76, Friend to Firefighters." (July 29, 1993), http://articles.philly.com/1993-07-29/news/25977190_1_firefighting-philadelphia-fire-department-trucks-and-chiefs (accessed on July 5, 2012).

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Fire departments -- Maryland
Fire departments -- Pennsylvania
Fire engines
Fire extinction
Fire stations
Firefighters

Types of Materials:

Photographs -- Black-and-white photoprints -- 1900-1950
Photographs -- Black-and-white photoprints -- 1950-2000
Postcards

Container Listing

Series 1: Photographs, 1880 - 1972

Box 1 JR 1 to JR 120

Box 2 JR 121 to JR 234
[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 3 JR 235 to JR 349

Box 4 JR 352 to JR 512
[Image\(s\)](#)

Box 5 Miscellaneous
[Image\(s\)](#)

Map-case 3, Drawer 22, Panoramic views showing devastated area of Atlanta's great fire, 1917 May 21
Folder 1

Box 6, Folder 1 Inventory for photographs, undated

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Series 2: Research Files, 1852 - 1983

	Baltimore City Fire Department (facts), undated
Box 6, Folder 3	Cartoons, undated
Box 6, Folder 4	Cobleskill Fire Department (Cobleskill Fire Department), 1983 March
Box 6, Folder 5	Fire alarms list (for Baltimore and Philadelphia), 1969, 1959, 1985, 1904
Box 6, Folder 6	Fire department statistic (from <i>Insurance Monitor</i>), 1872
Box 6, Folder 7	Fireman's Parade, Philadelphia (equipment in parade), 1852
Box 6, Folder 8	New England States Veterans Fireman's League (steamer muster lists) , 1983
Box 6, Folder 9	Pennsylvania Railroad Station fire, 1896
Box 6, Folder 10	Philadelphia Volunteer Fire Department (equipment inventory) , 1857, 1859
Box 6, Folder 11	Sheet music, undated
Box 6, Folder 12	Sketch (ink) of fire ladder, undated
Box 6, Folder 13	Newspaper clippings, 1873
Box 6, Folder 14	Miscellaneous, 1973 and undated

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Series 3: Publications, 1859 - 1975

- Box 6, Folder 15 *Antique Fire Apparatus Locator* (Union Historical Fire Society, Philadelphia), [1975?]
- Box 6, Folder 16 *The Grace Log*, 1950 May-June
- Box 6, Folder 17 *Instructions to Engineers of La France Steam and Fire Engines*, undated
- Box 6, Folder 18 Officers Call (Philadelphia Officers Association), 1963 January
- Box 6, Folder 19 *Origins and Introduction of Steam Fire Engines*, [1859?]
- Box 6, Folder 20 *The Pennsylvania Fireman*, 1982 November
- Box 6, Folder 21 *P.F.D. News* (Philadelphia Fire Department), [1963?]

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