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Frances and Mary Allen Collection of Photographs of Deerfield

Digital

1900-1910

1 volume (0.25 linear ft.)

Call no.: PH 1



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Influenced by the arts and crafts movement, Frances and Mary Allen began taking photographs of their native Deerfield, Mass., in the mid-1880s. Displaying a finely honed pictorialist aesthetic, the sisters specialized in views of Deerfield and surrounding towns, posed genre scenes of life in colonial times, and the local scenery, earning a reputation as among the best women photographers of the period.

The Allen sisters photograph album contains ten gelatin developing out prints of street scenes in Deerfield, ca.1900-1910. Among

these are two shots of the house they inherited from their aunt Kate in 1895, which thereafter became their home and studio.

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Background on Frances Allen

As Frances Allen and her younger sister Mary gradually lost their hearing in the 1880s, they were forced to abandon their careers as teachers and find a new livelihood. They found that livelihood through photography, turning artistic views of local scenery into a long career that brought them international recognition and the reputation as two of the best female photographers of their day.

The Allens were probably introduced to photography by their brother, Edmund, and they are known to have been taking images by at least 1884. The realization that photography held the potential for income came somewhat more slowly, but by the end of the decade, the sisters were accepting commissions and were publishing in works like Horace E. Miller's *Sketches of Conway* (1890) and *Picturesque Franklin*.

At the time that the Allens were branching out in their new career, their native Deerfield, Mass., was emerging as a local center of the arts and crafts movement. Both Frances and Mary readily adopted the aesthetic and its nostalgia for the pre-industrial past, and their mature work shows the influence of like-minded pictorialist photographers such as Henry Peach Robinson. Specializing in views of Deerfield and surrounding towns, posed genre scenes of colonial life, and gauzy shots of the region's scenery, the Allens' work was included in a number of important exhibitions, including the Washington Salon and Art Photographic Exhibition (1896), the 3rd International Congress of Photography, Paris (1900), the 3rd Philadelphia Photographic Salon (1900), the Canadian Pictorialist Exhibition (1907), and at the Art Institute of Chicago (1908).

Although they are uniquely associated with the Connecticut River Valley, the sisters traveled occasionally, working as far away as Maine and Quebec and taking their camera on tours of England, Scotland, and Wales in 1908, and to California in 1916. After about 1918, poor health and poorer eyesight began to take its toll. Frances did little photography after the First World War, although she continued to assist in the darkroom and with the business, and Mary's productivity slowed. They continued to sell prints until 1935, and after the flood of 1938, they appeared to have ceased operations entirely. The sisters, neither of whom married, died within four days of one another in February 1941.

Scope of collection

This small album contains ten photographs by Frances and Mary Allen depicting their beloved Deerfield, Mass., in the years shortly after the turn of the twentieth century. The majority of the images are artfully composed views of Deerfield Street and the colonial houses familiar to the Allens. Among these are two photos of the house the sisters inherited from their Aunt Kate Allen in 1895, which subsequently became their home and studio.

The silver developing out prints, approximately 6x8" (15.5 x 20.5 cm.), are mounted on stiff gray cardboard mounts and bound inelegantly onto stubs with fabric tape.

Inventory



Allen, Frances and Mary: Tree-lined lane
ca.1900-1910
Silver developing out print



Allen, Frances and Mary: Unidentified colonial house
ca.1900-1910
Silver developing out print



Allen, Frances and Mary: Rear of Allen house, Deerfield
ca.1913
Silver developing out print



Allen, Frances and Mary: Tree-lined lane, with carriage in background
ca.1900-1910
Silver developing out print



Allen, Frances and Mary: Unidentified Deerfield house
ca.1900-1910
Silver developing out print



Allen, Frances and Mary: Allen house and studio, Deerfield
ca.1910
Silver developing out print



Allen, Frances and Mary: Unidentified colonial house
ca.1900-1910
Silver developing out print



Allen, Frances and Mary: Deerfield Street
ca.1900-1910
Silver developing out print



Allen, Frances and Mary: Unidentified ivy-covered house
ca.1900-1910
Silver developing out print

Administrative information

Access

The collection is open for research.

Provenance

Although details on the provenance are not available, the album was acquired between 1935 and 1947.

Digitized content

All images in the collection have been scanned and are available online through our digital repository, Credo.

Processing Information

Processed by rsc, November 2005.

Related Material

Picturesque Franklin (Northampton: Wade, Warner & Co., 1891). Call no. : F72.F8 W2 1891 +

A major collection of prints and glass plate negatives by the Allen sisters is held by the Memorial Hall Museum of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Historic Association, Deerfield, Mass.

Bibliography

Flynt, Suzanne L. *The Allen Sisters: Pictorial Photographer, 1885-1920* (Deerfield: PVMA, 2002). Call no.: TR140.A45 F58 2002 +

Language:

English

Copyright and Use (More information)

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Search terms

Subjects

Deerfield (Mass.)--Photographs.

Women photographers--Massachusetts.

Contributors

Allen, Frances. [\[main entry\]](#)

Allen, Mary E. (Mary Electa), 1858-1941.

Genres and formats

Photographs.

Link to similar SCUA collections

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Photographs

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