



Historic Camera

Newsletter

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Bencini Camera Co.

Like many of his Italian compatriots, Florence-born Antonio Bencini was drafted into World War I. An aeronautical engineer by trade, he was assigned the daunting task of maintaining and repairing old French-made cameras the army scouts relied upon in the field. After the war, Mr. Bencini returned to Florence and opened a carpentry business that specialized in camera building. In 1920, he and a partner founded Fabbrica Italiana Apparecchi Macchine Materiali Accessori (FIAMMA, also known as FLAME). The business grew steadily, and by 1931 had 100 employees and occupied a space of 3,000 square meters. Mr. Bencini, who also served as the company's technical director, recognized the potential of making and manufacturing amateur box cameras. In 1933, he produced the Fiammetta, a compact wooden camera for image sizes 4.5 x 6 cm and 6 x 9 cm on 120 film.



By 1935, Ferrania, one of Italy's oldest and most successful photographic firms, purchased FIAMMA, which prompted Mr. Bencini to relocate to Turin, where he began doing business as Filma, and his focus remained on mass production of amateur box cameras. The first camera to roll off the assembly line was the appropriately named Filma, which took 4.5 x 6 cm images on 127 film, with a fixed f/11 aperture and fitted with a 75 mm meniscus lens. Two years later, the ever-expanding Ferrania obtained Filma, and

Mr. Bencini moved to Milan and opened ICAF, which continued the lucrative practice of making and marketing simple and affordable cameras and equipment. In 1939, ICAF introduced the Roby (later renamed Robi), a compact black enamel camera (4.5 x 6 cm) on 127 film with a fixed aperture of f/11, fixed focus meniscus lens, and a reversible viewfinder mirror. The Gabry (later renamed Gabri) box camera soon followed, also small (4 x 6 cm) on 127 film. Mr. Bencini chose these names to honor his son Roberto and daughter Gabriella. Other cameras followed including Argo, Eno, and the Delta (6 x 9 cm) folding camera.



Camera production was halted by the outbreak of World War II, and replaced by aviation and bicycle parts manufacturing. In 1946, the name was changed to CMF -

Bencini, which marked an important camera making transitional phase, with cloth bellows typically associated with a folding camera being replaced by a barrel plate fitted with a mounted lens-shutter lock. That same year, the Rolet camera (4 x 6 cm on 127 film), constructed by Roberto Bencini, then an architectural student, was introduced. The junior Bencini began assuming more of his father's leadership responsibilities, and one of his pet projects was designing the Comet camera, a name which reflected his interest in aviation. Released in 1948, the small and simple Comet camera produced 3 x 4 cm negatives on 127 film. It became one of CMF's best-selling cameras, and subsequently led to a series of similar cameras, including the Relex, Koroll (and Koroll 24, Koroll 24 S, and Koroll II), Comet II, and Comet III.



In 1953, the corporate moniker was further simplified to Bencini, but by the 1960s, this camera-making pioneer had peaked, but the Comet name was resurrected in the 1970s in the form of various types of 35 mm plastic cameras, distinguished by their initials (e.g., K 35, K 36, NK 135, etc.). The Personal 35 and 8 mm Super 8 film cameras were also being produced in the 1970s, but by now Bencini had clearly lost its competitive edge to the Japanese and German markets. By the 1980s, all Bencini production operations ceased, thereby writing the final chapter in the story of one of Italy's most innovative and commercially successful camera makers.

Ref:

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2015 Bencini Comet Super 8 (URL: http://www.super8data.com/database/cameras_list/cameras_bencini/cameras_bencini.htm).

2011 The Filma Camera (4.5 x 6) (URL: <http://www.storiadellafotografia.it/2011/12/29/fotocamera-filma-4-5-x-6/#more-4424>).

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Bertha Shambaugh

Bertha Maude Horack was born to Czech immigrants Frank J. and Katharine Mosnat Horack in Belle Plaine, Iowa on February 12, 1871. When she was eight, she moved with her family to Iowa City, where she received the finest academic education her parents could provide for their only daughter. A student of naturalist Bohumil Shimek, she became a talented sketch artist, and soon her stories and her plant drawings were being featured in local periodicals. After receiving a camera from her parents as a high school graduation gift, Miss Horack's attention shifted from illustrations to photography. An early proponent of dry plate photography, she regarded a camera as an important historical tool for documenting cultural traditions and daily lives. Miss Horack has the distinction of being the first 'outsider' allowed to photograph the Amanas, seven seven utopian communities settled by German expatriates who had been persecuted in their native land for their radical Lutheran beliefs known as the New Spiritual Economy. In less than a year, the young woman took more than 100

photographs of a way of life that was rapidly disappearing within an increasingly industrialized landscape.



Photo courtesy of Benjamin Shambaugh Horack.

While studying botany at the State University of Iowa (now known simply as the University of Iowa), Miss Horack met Benjamin Franklin Shambaugh, and the couple married in 1897, during which time she continued her research on the Amana Colonies for the Iowa Bureau of Labor Statistics. Her exhaustive documentation and photographs she painstakingly made from glass plate negatives were published in the 1908 book, *Amana: Community of True Inspiration*. By this time, Benjamin Shambaugh had established himself as a popular lecturer, and the couple formed the center of a diverse social and academic circle that included Jane Addams, Amelia Earhart, and Thornton Wilder, among others. During the 1920s, Mrs.

Shambaugh's active lifestyle was slowed by progressive hearing loss. However, she could not deny the request by Amana communal leaders to assist in defending them against a corporate takeover of their property. The result of this latest collaboration was a poignant text entitled *Amana That Was, Amana That Is*, was published in 1932. Sadly, Mrs. Shambaugh and her ever-present camera were forced to conclude: "The old integrity, the old solidarity, could not successfully resist the encroachments of the world and the powerful influences of the machine age."

Eighty-two-year-old Bertha Horack Shambaugh died on August 30, 1953. Her texts and photographs are included in collections at The University of Iowa and the State Historical Society of Iowa. Her involvement in the Amana Communities is the subject of Abigail Foerstner's book, *Picturing Utopia: Bertha Shambaugh and the Amana Photographers*, published in 2000 by the University of Iowa Press.

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1972 *Commitment and Community: Communes and Utopias in Sociological Perspective* by Rosabeth Moss Kante (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), p. 143.

2003 "The 'Iowa City' Horaks" (URL: <http://girvanealogy.com/iowacityhoracks.html>). Photo of Bertha and her camera courtesy of Benjamin Shambaugh Horack.

2014 *Shambaugh Family Papers: The University of Iowa Libraries* (URL: http://www.lib.uiowa.edu/scua/archives/guides/shambaugh/shambaugh_family).

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S. D. McKellen, Mfg.



Samuel Dunseith McKellen was born to James and Margaret Dunseith McKellen in County Antrim in 1836. The following year, James McKellen moved his family to Manchester, where he became Superintendent and Missionary with the Manchester and Salford Mission. After his death in 1843, Mrs. McKellen generated income for her family by taking in boarders. Young Samuel went to technical school for watchmaking and jewelry, and after graduation became a craftsman's apprentice. Mr. McKellen started his own business in 1861, and it is believed this is when his experimentation with photography commenced. Two years' later he began submitting patents for his own watches and clocks. At the age of 29, he married Jane Jones, who later gave birth to their son John Dunseith McKellen. Sadly, tragedy befell the family in rapid succession beginning with the deaths of their young daughter Maud, their infant son Samuel, and the consumption death of Jane Jones McKellen. Within five years, Mr. McKellen married again to the much younger Eliza Moulton; however, his son John continued living with relatives. The off-troubled marriage would ultimately produce five sons.

At the time of his remarriage, Mr. McKellen applied his watchmaking skills to the design of his first camera, which consisted of a cigar box and a lens. He commissioned Manchester camera maker Joshua Billcliff to develop a model based on this design, and 'the McKellen Camera' was exhibited by the Photographic Society in 1884. So impressive was its innovative construction that it received a gold medal, the first ever bestowed upon a camera. Mr. McKellen began manufacturing his camera (under the Treble Patent name),

and within three years had incorporated eight patents. The camera was easy to mass-produce because it was simply constructed, lightweight, easily compacted, accepted various focal length lenses, and contained a convenient swing back and front. In 1888, Mr. McKellen's detective camera was licensed to be sold by London's Marion and Company Ltd. He also improved upon Thomas Sutton's panoramic camera design, adding a roller blind shutter and an internal mirror so that the image could be reflected onto a ground glass screen.



Throughout his lifetime, Samuel Dunseith McKellen received 28 patents for his photographic innovations, at considerable expense. Unfortunately, however, he did not secure ownership of his revolutionary designs, resulting in massive lost revenues. An ill-advised decision to launch a public company resulted in financial troubles and the breakup of his marriage. The photographic pioneer celebrated as "the father of the modern camera" died on December 26, 1906 at age 70, after an operation due to a serious internal complaint. His son reportedly continued the business until 1914, but no advertising past 1901 could be traced.

Ref:
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2007 *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography*, Vol. I (New York:

Frank H. Wenham



Frank H. Wenham

Francis Herbert Wenham was born in the London district of Kensington in 1824. The son of a military surgeon, Mr. Wenham displayed keen mechanical and analytical at an early age. After the death of his father, the 17-year-old became a marine engineering apprentice, and would for the remainder of his life take great pride in his accomplishments as a marine engineer. His first important project was forging a crankshaft for 'Great Western' merchant ship. Mr. Wenham's boundless curiosity led him to study microscopes, and by age 26, he was an active member of the Royal Microscopical Society. He authored several papers on illumination under a microscope and perfected aperture measurements of object glasses. He also received several patents for his lighting improvements to gas lamps.

Mr. Wenham's interest in photography actually began quite by accident. In 1853, he accompanied his friend, British photographer Francis Frith, on a lengthy voyage to Egypt and Palestine. The photographs of this expedition are believed to be the first of the exotic landscape and Egyptian tombs utilizing the wet-collodion plate process. It is doubtful Mr. Frith could have successfully photographed the dark tombs without the sophisticated lighting techniques Mr. Wenham developed through the use of mirrors. The subsequent photographic compilation was an immediate success, and Mr. Wenham was soon splitting his time between his engineering pursuits and his photographic experiments. Although he

described himself as a rank amateur, his knowledge of optics and microscopy enabled him to make life-size portraits with his own homemade solar camera (referred to at the time as a "sun enlarger"). He is also recognized for having produced the first enlarged calotype paper photographs from collodion negatives.

It is believed Mr. Wenham's fascination with aviation commenced in 1866, when he was issued a patent for an engineering design that enabled Lawrence Hargrave to construct the first box kite in 1893. He also collaborated with optician John Browning on the construction of the first wind tunnel in 1870, the same year he retired from engineering. Upon the recommendation of his friend, The *Photographic Journal* editor George Shadbolt, he joined Ross & Co. as a scientific advisor. Credited with several microscope advancements during his decade-long tenure, Mr. Wenham also developed portable symmetrical lenses that vastly improved upon Thomas Grubb's original design, and were eagerly embraced by long-suffering landscape photographers.

Rapidly deteriorating health led to Mr. Wenham's retirement from Ross & Co. After a lengthy illness, 85-year-old Francis Herbert Wenham died on August 11, 1908. In a memorial tribute in the October 1908 issue of *The Aeronautical Journal*, he was described as "the 'father' of aeronautics." Ironically, it was Mr. Wenham's optical innovations that contributed significantly to the evolution of twentieth-century landscape photography.

Ref:

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1910 *Vehicles of the Air* by Victor Lougheed (Chicago: The Reilly and Britton Co.), p. 149.

Albert L. Rogers



Born in Beallsville (Washington County), Pennsylvania in October 1853, Albert Long Rogers was the son of James Robinet and Sarah McLean Rogers. At the age of 16, he went to Waynesburg to apprentice at his brother Samuel's photography business. His other brothers also became photographers, with John H. Rogers owning a studio in Luzerne County, Pennsylvania; Thomas W. Rogers operating a studio in Greene County, Pennsylvania; and half-brother Jessie A. Rogers running a studio for a short time in Greensburg, Indiana. Mr. Rogers quickly mastered the delicate art of retouching, and received an offer to join photographer George W. Robinson at his studio in Wheeling, West Virginia. After a few years with Mr. Robinson, he joined the prestigious Baltimore firm of Kuhn & Cummins, where for two years he served as its retouching specialist. In 1878, Mr. Rogers married Baltimore native, photographer Elizabeth Eugenia Jonas, and the following year he worked for Richard Walzl's Palace of Photography.

In 1880, Mr. Rogers started his own business in Baltimore, and within two years was operating a studio at 68 Lexington Street. His trade cards, fashionably designed with elegant script, are believed to be one of the earliest known business cards. His award-winning cabinet photographs cemented his reputation as Baltimore's most successful photographer of the time. To accommodate his ever-growing customer base, Mr. Rogers also operated a studio in Hagerstown,

Maryland, and in 1891, he purchased Norval Busey's famed studio at 112 North Charles Street, the hub of downtown Baltimore. During a brief partnership with Harry J. Jeffres, he focused his attentions and his glass-plate cameras on life outside studio confines, taking some of the earliest extant photographs of the Baltimore Orioles. His financial prosperity enabled him to purchase a fruit farm in Washington County, Maryland, to which Mr. Rogers retreated when he began experiencing health problems. He became an accomplished gentleman farmer, growing plentiful peaches, pears, and apples.^f

Despite his thriving business interests in Maryland, Mr. Rogers and his wife decided to relocate to Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where he opened another successful gallery at 49 South Main Street. He and his wife Elizabeth often collaborated on portraits that were known for their style and detailed substance in the evocative uses of lighting and shadow. On December 31, 1916, Mr. Rogers retired from the photography business, and sold his Chambersburg operation to his assistant, M. B. Mumper. After the death of his wife Elizabeth in 1917, Mr. Rogers married the much younger Louise McCann, with whom he would have two daughters. Albert L. Rogers died in 1934, and is buried in Chambersburg's Norland Cemetery.

Ref:

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