



Historic Camera Newsletter

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Aires Camera Company

The Aires Camera Industries Company, or K.K. Aires Shashinki Seisakusho of Tokyo, Japan, was established in 1952. The firm originally started as the Yallu Optical Co., but after the failed launch of a 35mm twin lens reflex camera, the firm ended the [Yallu camera](#) plans and changed its name to Aires with a new direction to manufacture traditional TLRs and 35mm roll film cameras. The firm ceased operations in 1960 due to bankruptcy.



See our website for new reference and camera value information for Aires cameras.

Pho-Tak Corporation

The Pho-tak Corporation was based in Chicago, Illinois and was active from approximately 1948 to 1960. The Pho-tak Corp. was connected with United States Camera company. USC produced several

model variations similar to Pho-Tak models using different names for their cameras.



See our website for new reference and value information for Pho-tak Cameras.

Carl Van Vechten

Author and photographer Carl Van Vechten's life and work can be characterized as a study of contrasts. Born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa on June 17, 1880 into a family of privilege - his father Charles Van Vechten was a banker and his civic-minded mother Ada Fitch Van Vechten was a founder of the Cedar Rapids Public Library - Carl Van Vechten was always attracted to the seamier side of life he was not going to experience in the bucolic Midwest. After graduating from Washington High School, he left "that unloved town" of Cedar Rapids to study at the University of Chicago. After graduating in 1903, he began his journalistic career writing a column for the Chicago American. He later moved to New

York, where he became a respected media critic, penning critiques for The New York Times and The New York Press.



After a brief marriage to high school sweetheart Anna Elizabeth Snyder, Mr. Van Vechten became the protege of art patron Mabel Dodge Luhan, who introduced him to the popular avant-garde movement. While traveling through Paris, Mr. Van Vechten met and befriended

American expatriate and Modernist author Gertrude Stein. In 1914, Mr. Van Vechten married Russian-born stage actress Fania Marinoff, and the couple stayed together for five decades despite his many homosexual dalliances. During the 1920s, Mr. Van Vechten began writing the first of seven novel and the carefree style he adopted personally and professionally was both celebrated and maligned. Though his novels were not commercially successful, by his mid 40s, Mr. Van Vechten had established himself within New York literary circles as an insightful theatrical and dance critic. He also became a frequent fixture of the Harlem Renaissance, becoming a vocal supporter of black musical artists in mainstream white publications like *Vanity Fair*, in which he described black music as the "only authentic American" musical genre.

During the Great Depression, Mr. Van Vechten's primary vocation was as Gertrude Stein's literary agent. However, a financial windfall courtesy of a late uncle's bequest provided him with the financial freedom to explore other creative venues. When Mexican caricaturist Miguel Covarrubias introduced him to a 33mm Leica camera, Mr. Van Vechten knew he had found his perfect medium of expression. His legendary parties often culminated in all-night sessions during which he photographed his celebrity friends.

Though he would photograph both black and white artists, it is his photographs of black authors and musical performers for which he achieved his greatest prominence. Mr. Van Vechten would later boast, "I have photographed everybody from Matisse to Isamu Noguchi." Mr. Van Vechten's trademark style was photographing his subjects in black and white while posing in front of ornate art deco swatches. He traded his lighthearted persona for that of a driven perfectionist, shooting hundreds of exposures but only producing one print per negative. Despite his status as an amateur photographer, his works were featured alongside such influential photographers as Cecil Beaton and Edward Steichen at New York's Second International Leica Exhibition of photography in 1935. Art critic Henry McBride observed, "What is literature's loss is photography's gain - quite distinctly Mr. Van Vechten is the Bronzino (Italian Renaissance painter) of this camera period." Carl Van Vechten also created several homoerotic images that were not exhibited in his lifetime. He was experimenting with color photography when he died on December 21, 1964 at the age of 84. Mr. Van Vechten's photographic negatives and more than 9,000 black-and-white prints are presently housed at New York Public Library and the Museum of Modern Art; Yale University's Beinecke Library in New Haven, Connecticut; and Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee.

- Ref:
 2003 Bessie: Revised and Expanded Edition by Chris Albertson (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), p. 52.
 2008 The Biographical Dictionary of Iowa (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press), pp. 522-524.
 2012 Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance: A Portrait in Black and White by Emily Bernard (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), pp. 1909, 1920.
 2013 Carl Van Vechten's Portraits (URL: <http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/collections/highlights/carl-van-vechtens-portraits>).
 2006 The Homoerotic Photography of Carl Van Vechten by James Smalls (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), pp. 1, 3-4, 10.
 2014 The Tastemaker: Carl Van Vechten and the Birth of Modern America by Edward White (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), p. 308.

Solomon D. Butcher



Solomon Devoe Butcher, the first of five children born to Thomas Jefferson and Esther Ullom Butcher, was born on January 24, 1856 in Burton, Virginia (which became part of Wetzel County, West Virginia after the Civil War). Within three years, the family relocated to Winona, Illinois, where Thomas Jefferson Butcher began a long association with the Illinois Central Railroad Company and his eldest son was introduced to photography. After a semester at Henry Military School, the junior Butcher became a tintype apprentice while supporting himself as a traveling salesman. In 1880, Mr. Butcher's father made the bold decision to quit his railroad job in favor of homesteading in Nebraska. Shortly thereafter, he and his brother George followed their father, and had received claims on land near the Middle Loup River. The sod house construction was an arduous undertaking, marred by the discovery of a human skeleton on the property. Within six weeks, Mr. Butcher had enough of homesteading and returned it to the government, declaring he would not have stayed "in exchange for 'the whole of Custer County'." He went to Minneapolis to attend medical school, where he met Lillie M. Barber Hamilton, whom he married on May 16, 1882. The couple later added a son and daughter to their family.

Within a year, Mr. Butcher and his wife returned to Nebraska, where he renewed his interest in photography. He took a teaching job in the Predmore District to finance his first studio construction. At the end of the winter semester, Mr. Butcher erected an 18 x 28" lathe and adobe structure, and when funds were depleted, cotton sheeting was used in place of glass, and the dirt floor reflected the rustic surroundings. With assistance from partner A. W. Darling, Mr. Butcher finally opened his gallery, proudly proclaiming, "There was not another art emporium like it west of the Mississippi River." Always struggling financially, Mr. Butcher supplemented his income by opening a post office in his gallery and assisting local farmers.

After relocating several times for economic reasons, Mr. Butcher decided compiling the history of Custer County might prove to be a lucrative proposition. His first assignment, photographing the sod house of Elizabeth Chrisman, led to a 30-year odyssey across the foothills of Nebraska, documenting numerous housing settlements while selling photographs and stories. Mr. Butcher was interested in capturing a unique moment in time, which involved more than mere human portraiture. His 1,500 photographs and hundreds of narratives provide insightful glimpses into the physical, cultural, and socioeconomic environment of the homesteaders. Shortly before completing his book, Mr. Butcher's home and manuscript were lost in a fire on March 12, 1899. Thankfully, his photographs were stored elsewhere, and *The Pioneer History of Custer County* was finally completed two years later.

In 1902, Mr. Butcher opened a gallery in Kearney, Nebraska that specialized in postcards and collaborated with his son on a history of Dawson County that generated more than 2 million postcard images. His wife died in 1915, and two years later he married Laura Brachear Nation. Mr. Butcher lengthy lobbying efforts to sell more than 3,500 of his

glass plate negatives resulted in their purchase by the Nebraska State Historical Society. Seventy-one-year-old Solomon D. Butcher died in Greeley, Colorado on May 26, 1927. His photographs of Midwestern homesteading in the late-nineteenth century remain Mr. Butcher's most enduring legacy.



Ref:
2004 Encyclopedia of the Great Plains (Lincoln, NE: Center for Great Plains Studies), p. 112.

1919 History of Custer County, Nebraska by W. L. Gaston and A. R. Humphrey (Lincoln, NE: Western Publishing and Engraving Company), pp. 962-967.

2010 Photographer Butcher 'Saved' the Sod House by Jim McKee, Lincoln Journal Star (URL: http://journalstar.com/news/local/jim-mckee-photographer-butcher-saved-the-sod-house/article_45f8d86c-07bc-11df-9ea9-001cc4c03286.html).

2001, Nebraska State Historical Society Website, Photograph of Solomon D. Butcher. (URL: <http://www.nebraskahistory.org/lib-arch/research/photos/highlite/butcher/bio.htm>)

A. E. Arden

Augustus Ephraim Alden was born to Rev. John Alden and Anna Marie (or Maria) Chamberlain Alden on February 22, 1837 in Shelburne Falls, Massachusetts. As his surname and birthplace suggest, he was a direct descendent of Pilgrims John and Priscilla Mullins Alden. His early childhood was spent in Shelburne Falls, where his father served for several years as the principal of Franklin Academy. At the age of 13, he lived with his parents, brother, and maternal grandmother in Westfield. Mr. Alden attended Middleborough's Peirce Academy in 1855, where he studied languages, and four years later married Ella Blake of Chicopee Falls. The couple had four children – daughters Mattie and Lillie and sons John and Edward.



By 1860, Mr. Alden was supporting his family as an artist and began dabbling in photography while living in his wife's hometown of Chicopee. When registering for

the Civil War draft in 1863, he listed himself as an artist who worked in Northampton, where his parents lived at the time. It is believed he moved his family to Providence, Rhode Island the following year, where he opened the Arcade Gallery photographic studio. During this period, he also became a licensed photographer in Troy, New York. Ultimately, he obtained the exclusive patent rights for photographing Troy and the surrounding area, with a gallery located at the corner of Grand Division and Fourth Streets. He also operated a studio in the neighboring enclave of Saratoga Springs. Mr. Alden's specialty was portrait cartes des visite, and he also dabbled in the photo-crayon portrait technique developed by Napoleon Sarony. His illustrious lineage allowed Mr. Alden to photograph some of the most important people of the time, including President and Mrs. Abraham Lincoln and legendary New England poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. However, derived equal pleasure from photographing everyday townspeople as evidenced by his charming tintype of a little girl and her cherished doll. For the Aldens, photography was very much a family business with Mattie and Lillie assisting their father in the studio and Edward Alden becoming a successful photographer in his own right. Mr. Alden opened another Massachusetts studio in Springfield with his younger brother Adonirum Judson Alden at 310 Main Street before moving the operation to Boston. By 1900, Mr. Alden, who was by now a widower and his son Edward were living and working in Boston municipality of Hyde Park.

Always proud of his heritage, Mr. Alden authored a family history entitled, [Pilgrim Alden](#): The Story of the Life of the First John Alden in America with the Interwoven Story of the Life and Doings of the Pilgrim Colony and Some Account of Later Aldens, which was published in Boston by James H. Earle in 1902, which included his photographs of the famed Plymouth Rock. Augustus Ephraim Alden died in 1914.



**BANNERS OF THE A. E. ALDEN PHOTOGRAPH ROOMS
IN THE INTERIOR OF THE WESTMINSTER ARCADE IN
PROVIDENCE, R.I., CIRCA 1860'S**

Ref:

2015 CDV of Lincoln Funeral in Springfield, Illinois (URL: <http://www.cowanauctions.com/itemImages/96114.jpg>).

1998 Chicopee by Michele Plourde-Barker (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing), p. 92.

1870 The Philadelphia Photographer, Vol. VII (Philadelphia: Beneman & Wilson), p. 271.

1902 Pilgrim Alden: The Story of the Life of the First John Alden in America with the Interwoven Story of the Life and Doings of the Pilgrim Colony and Some Account of Later Aldens by Augustus Ephraim Alden (Boston: James H. Earle), pp. 15, 197.

2014 Stereoviews on Plain Orange Mounts (URL: <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/~dalbino/photos/orange.html>).

1889 The Story of a Pilgrim Family by John Alden (Boston: James H. Earle), pp. 201, 447.

2014 Tintype: Girl with Izannah Walker Doll (URL: http://www.kathyschoemerantiques.com/offerings/offers_2013_07_tintype.html).

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