OVERVIEW OF THE COLLECTION

Title: Rosalie O'Connell Photograph Album

Collection Date(s): 1912-1917

Extent and Forms of Material: 1/2 Flat Box


Collection Number: AC0187

Processing Note: David Haberstich, 7/86: based on a report by Carolyn Long, with additional information supplied by William Worthington and John Stine.

Administrative/Biographical History: In the 1890's the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad maintained a photographic record of bridges, tunnels, and other structures along its routes, or "Divisions": a book of cyanotype prints from these negatives was made for each Division for the use of B & 0 company officials. In 1979 the Museum's Division of Mechanical and Civil Engineering purchased a cyanotype book of the B & O's Philadelphia Division from Ona (Mrs. Richard C.) O'Connell. The seller was handling the financial affairs of her sister-in-law, Rosalie Melita O'Connell, who was elderly and presumably quite ill, as she had entered a hospice and Mrs. O'Connell had been given power of attorney.

Rosalie apparently had come into possession of the cyanotype book when she was a teen-aged girl, possibly due to her father's job with the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad and/or the presence of other B & O employees in the neighborhood. Between the years 1912-1917 Rosalie used it as a personal photo album and scrapbook, adhering snapshots, newspaper clippings, and memorabilia to the reverse side of the cyanotypes. Because these items and the adhesives were causing damage to the cyanotypes, in 1985 Carolyn Long of the NMAH Division of Conservation removed the O'Connell material from the cyanotype pages. Thus for the first time the "Rosalie O'Connell Photograph Album" was physically separated from the B & O cyanotype album.

Scope and Content: The collection contains 205 photoprints, including 149 informal outdoor portraits and 46 studio portraits. Although the photographs, post cards, and other materials have been physically removed from the cyanotype album, album captions for the photographs are preserved in copy photographs made before the materials were removed during conservation treatment. The following is excerpted from Carolyn Long's paper, "The History and Conservation Treatment of the Baltimore and Ohio Cyanotype Book and Rosalie O'Connell's Album, Plus the Cyanotype Process Explained" (copy in control file).

Snapshots, newspaper clippings, and other memorabilia were adhered to the reverse of the cyanotypes, and several sentimental poems, evidently Rosalie's own compositions, were written on the back pages. At the time the album was assembled, she dated the pages and wrote formal inscriptions with dark brown ink in a flowing script. In later years she wrote further explanations.
and made humorous comments with a blue ballpoint pen, apparently in the 1940's or later. The pictures and inscriptions create a record of a young woman's life in the early twentieth century that is as interesting as the views of railroad bridges and depots on the front of the pages.

Rosalie appears to have been in her teens or early twenties at the time, and was a pretty, vivacious girl with long dark hair. Her family, the C. T. O'Connells, lived at 2011 Barclay Street, Baltimore, in a blue-collar neighborhood near the railroad yards. Many railroad employees lived in the area, which offers an explanation of how Rosalie happened to have the cyanotype book. The O'Connells were a large Irish Catholic family, according to the album, which mentions Rosalie's siblings: Florence, an older sister with two children, Charles and Ursula; Bill, who served in the Mexican War; Ed, a football player; Richard, who ran for Democratic delegate to the State Convention in 1915; and a younger brother named Bartlett. Apparently Richard was Rosalie's favorite brother, for she wrote inscriptions such as "My Pal" and "My Dick" under his pictures. It was Richard's wife Ona who later sold the album to the Museum.

The O'Connells’ neighbors were the Gables and the Feldmeyers. The Gables and their children are shown behind their house, with a wooden privy in the background. Above their picture, Rosalie wrote "The Dirty Dozen in 1916." "Pop" Gable apparently worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad and is pictured on top of a "Pennsy" engine. There are also snapshots of Rosalie with her flock of chickens in the back yard, and of neighborhood girls having a "fresh air fund" bake sale at 2003 Barclay.

Rosalie's best friend was Beatrice "Beets" Malstrom. The two girls, with other friends and family members, swam and ice skated at Jane's Creek and went to Riverview Park. Rosalie worked at Turner's Grocery Store on North Avenue, and a series of snapshots shows her coworkers clowning with a bottle of beer on a motor scooter.

Rosalie was courted by George Barry, who is shown with her on the boat Louise when he was home on furlough from the Navy in 1917. Poems and inscriptions suggest an eventual breakup of the relationship. Above one of these pictures she wrote, "The arrival -peace and happiness unexpected." Later, however, she wrote in ballpoint, "so mixed up," and "He was nice, but I was not in love."

Acquisition Information: The collection was purchased by the Division of Mechanical and Civil Engineering from Mrs. Richard C. O'Connell.

System of Arrangement: Topical, with a copy photographic key to the original album arrangement.

Finding Aid: Container list to be completed.