Smart Studio photographs

1882-1953
Descriptive Summary
Title: Smart Studio photographs
Dates: 1882-1953
Collection Number: LH_258-2-1
Creator/Collector: Conaway, B.F. (Benjamin Franklin)Hickox, Lou P.Smart, Mary A.Lutes, RussellSmart StudioExcelsior Photo GalleryHickox Photo StudioMary A. Smart Studio
Extent: Approximate
Online items available  http://www.oac.cdlib.org/items/ark:/13030/kt3199s113
Repository: California State University, Fullerton. University Archives and Special Collections
Abstract: Approximately three hundred black and white photographs of Orange County created by the Smart Studio and its predecessors between 1882 and 1953. The collection includes photographic prints, glass plate negatives and film negatives.
Language of Material: English
Access
Collection open for research
Preferred Citation
Smart Studio photographs. California State University, Fullerton. University Archives and Special Collections
Acquisition Information
Smart Studio owner, Wayne Sorenson, sold a large collection of glass plate negatives to the California State University, Fullerton in 1967, including hundreds of images taken by B.F. Conaway and Lou Hickox. In 1992, he also sold a small collection of glass negatives (all portraits) to the Orange County Archives. Another collection of original 19th century Conaway prints can be found in the Tubbs Collection in Special Collections at the University of California, Irvine library.
Biography/Administrative History
Benjamin Franklin Conaway (1848-1935) purchased the Excelsior Photo Gallery in Santa Ana around 1887, and soon sold a half-interest to P.J. Hummel. Their partnership lasted just one or two years. Conaway was Orange County’s leading landscape photographer in the late 1880s and early 1890s, and traveled throughout much of the young county with his bulky cameras and delicate glass plates. In 1889, Conaway hired a teenage assistant named Lou P. Hickox. In April 1894 B.F. Conaway sold his studio to Lou Hickox, and moved to San Bernardino, where he operated a photographic gallery for another decade. Lou Hickox was the son of R.A. Hickox, who did some commercial photography in the area in the late 1880s. The 1895-96 Orange County Directory lists him as photographer, working with his young son. Around 1897, Lou Hickox moved his studio to 111½ W. Fourth Street in Santa Ana, where it would remain for more than 80 years. Hickox was better known for his portrait work, but continued to take photographs around Santa Ana as the community grew in the early 1900s. As his business increased, in July 1898 Hickox bought out the rival Bowman Gallery, which he continued to operate along with his own studio. At the time, he seems to have owned the only two photographic studios in town. In November 1899, Hickox sold the old Bowman studio, to J.C. Lamb, a local photographer. The Hickox Photo Studio continued to flourish, but Lou Hickox’s health did not. In September 1904 he sold the business to J.E. Todd, a Los Angeles photographer. After about a year, Lou Hickox returned to photography and hired a new assistant, Mary A. Smart (1883-1970), who initially worked for him retouching portraits, and later rose to the role of chief assistant in the studio. Upon Hickox’s death in 1915, Mary Smart arranged to purchase the studio from the estate, and took on a partner, Carl Conaway (not Conaway). They worked together for two years before he sold his interest back to her. Smart continued to operate the business as the Hickox Studio until November 1920, when she renamed it the Mary A. Smart Studio. She seems to have concentrated almost entirely on portrait work. In January 1939, Mary Smart sold the business to Russell R. Lutes (1885-1963), who had been working as a photographer for the County of Orange. Mary Smart announced that she was retiring, but later returned to the photographic business, working for the Betzold studio in Anaheim in the early 1950s. Lutes shortened the name of the business to the Smart Studio, and ran it on into the 1950s. By the mid-1960s, Wayne Sorenson was running the Smart Studio (still located at 111½ W. Fourth as late as 1980). In 1992, Sorenson announced his retirement, and the Smart Studio closed for good.
Scope and Content of Collection
The collection consists of photographs taken between 1882 and 1953 of various exterior locations primarily in Orange County, California, including Santa Ana, Tustin, Newport Beach, Laguna Beach, Garden Grove, Orange, San Juan Capistrano, San Juan Hot Springs, and Irvine. There are also photographs of Catalina Island and Riverside. More than half of the photographs date to the period prior to 1900. The collection includes in most cases the glass plate or film negatives used to...
create the prints.