Alson Clark Collection of Photographs: Finding Aid

Finding aid prepared by Sue Tyson.
The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens
Photo Archives
1151 Oxford Road
San Marino, California 91108
Phone: (626) 405-2191
Email: reference@huntington.org
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Overview of the Collection

Title: Alson Clark Collection of Photographs


Bulk dates: 1889-1939

Collection Number: photCL 361

Creator: Clark, Alson Skinner, 1876-1949

Extent: 1289 photographs in 8 boxes and 1 flat file: chiefly gelatin silver prints; prints various sizes 35 x 27 cm and 28 x 36 and smaller, chiefly 18 x 28 and smaller, and one ticket book.

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Abstract: This collection contains 1289 photographs, chiefly gelatin silver prints, reflecting the professional life and travels of American impressionist painter Alson Skinner Clark, some taken by Alson Clark and some by commercial and unidentified photographers, from approximately 1889-1939. The collection chiefly comprises portraits of Alson and his wife, Atta Medora Clark; photographs depicting their studio home in the Arroyo Seco area of Pasadena, California; examples of Clark's work; and scenes reflecting Alson Clark's travels, both with and without Medora Clark, throughout the Southwestern United States and to Mexico, Europe, and Canada. The collection also includes photographs depicting India, China, and Korea in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and photograph albums depicting the aftermath of World War I in Europe and the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915 in San Diego.

Language: English.

Access

The collection is open to qualified researchers by prior application through the Reader Services Department. For more information, please visit the Huntington's website: www.huntington.org.

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Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Alson Clark Collection of Photographs, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Provenance

Gift of Alson Clark, Jr., April 19, 1992.

Biographical Note

Alson Skinner Clark (1876-1949) was an American Impressionist painter known for his landscape paintings; his murals, including at the Carthay Circle Theater in Los Angeles and the First Trust and Savings Bank in Pasadena; and the fire curtain of the Pasadena Playhouse, which featured a Spanish galleon in full sail.

Clark was born in Chicago, Illinois, and studied art at the Art Institute of Chicago in the 1880s and in New York in the 1890s; there, as a student of William Merritt Chase (1849-1916), he began painting en plein air. Clark's studies were enhanced by his family's travels around the world from 1889-1891, and in 1898, he moved to Paris, where he studied with James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834-1903); in 1901, Clark's painting, The Violinist, was accepted by the Salon des Beaux Arts. That year, Clark returned to the United States for surgery and lived with his parents, Alson Ellis Clark and Sarah Clark, on Comfort Island, one of the Thousand Islands in Alexandria Bay, New York; he then settled in Watertown, New York, married one of his former models, Atta Medora McMullin (1887-1973), and began exhibiting his work, with her assistance.

After marrying in 1902, Alson and Medora Clark moved to Paris and traveled to destinations including Normandy and Giverny in France; parts of Italy and Spain; the Netherlands; Dalmatia; Canada; and Comfort Island, New York City, and Chicago, exhibiting and selling paintings. In 1913, the Clarks visited the Panama Canal Zone, where Clark produced a series of paintings depicting the construction of the Panama Canal, works that were subsequently honored with their own room in the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Diego, California. When World War I broke out in 1914, the Clarks returned to the United States, living in New England, South Carolina, and Chicago before Clark, at age 41, enlisted in the
U.S. Navy in 1917, serving as a translator and military photographer.

In 1919, the Clarks moved to Southern California, where they lived in a home studio on the east bank of the Arroyo Seco in Pasadena designed by Reginald Johnson; they also had a son, Alson Clark, Junior (1921-1993). Clark taught at Occidental College in Los Angeles and at the Stickney School of the Fine Arts in Pasadena, where he became director. The Clarks also continued their travels, including to various locations in the American Southwest and to Mexico, especially Cuernavaca and Taxco, with Clark painting *plein air* and exploring his interests in architecture; landscape; color; ruins, including Mission San Juan Capistrano; and indigenous populations. Clark's work was popular, and he gained a variety of commissions, including for the murals at the Carthay Theater and at the Pasadena First Trust and Savings Bank (now Bank of the West) chronicling California history, the latter featuring panels depicting the Southern California industries of oil drilling, citrus farming, movies, and shipping. With Dwight Gibbs, Clark helped to design the skyline and the interior of the Pasadena Playhouse, and in the 1930s, he also worked on decorative commissions for private homes. Following a stroke in 1945, Clark devoted himself to figure painting in his studio, an activity he continued until his death in 1949 in Pasadena.

**Scope and Content**

This collection contains 1289 photographs, chiefly gelatin silver prints, reflecting the professional life and travels of American impressionist painter Alson Skinner Clark, some taken by Alson Clark and some by commercial and unidentified photographers, from approximately 1889-1939. The collection chiefly comprises portraits of Alson and his wife Atta Medora Clark, many showing Clark painting *en plein air*; photographs depicting their studio home in the Arroyo Seco area of Pasadena, California; views of Clark's work, including murals at the Pasadena Playhouse, the Polytechnic Elementary School, and the First Trust and Savings Bank in Pasadena; and images of Alson Clark's travels, both with and without Medora Clark, to Thousand Islands, New York; throughout the Southwestern United States; Mexico; and, to a lesser extent, in Europe and Canada. The collection also includes photograph albums depicting the aftermath of World War I in Europe and the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915 in San Diego, and photographs depicting various locations in India, China, and Korea in the late 19th and early 20th centuries; many of these appear to be reproductions and are curling.

The photographs of the Southwestern United States comprise chiefly landscape views of California locations including La Jolla and the desert environs of Palm Springs, Panamint City, and the Owens Valley, and also depict Western scenes and locations including Mother Lode towns in California and Nevada; other Southwest states; men on horses; rodeos; and Indians, including several in various poses. Depictions of Mexico comprise chiefly street and market scenes in Taxco, Mexico City, Mazatlan, Punta Banda, and other locations, many showing indigenous people; churches and other buildings, including ruins; dwellings; and landscape views. Several of the photographs show people in camping parties, some depicting painters, including Clark, at work. Photographs of Canada depict chiefly street scenes and dwellings in the city and province of Quebec and activities of the timber industry, including ships and timber hauling operations. Photographs of Europe depict chiefly village street and market scenes in Brittany, France and, to a lesser extent, in Dalmatia, Croatia; the collection also includes a photograph album depicting chiefly France and also Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands in the aftermath of World War I.

This collection is directly related to the Alson Skinner Clark papers, 1870-1971, bulk 1890-1940, held by the Archives of American Art at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., a portion of which was also donated by Alson Clark, Jr.

**Arrangement**

Photographs are grouped according to general topic and within topics in chronological order. The collection is arranged in the following 4 series:

- **Series I. Alson Clark and Family, Studio, and Projects**
  - Subseries A. Portraits and family travels
  - Subseries B. Studio home
  - Subseries C. Various projects

- **Series II. California and Southwest. Views**
  - Subseries A. California
  - Subseries B. Southwest

- **Series III. Mexico. Views**

- **Series IV. Asia, Europe, and Canada. Views**

**Indexing Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the [Huntington Library's Online Catalog](https://www.huntington.org). **Subjects**

Clark, Alson Skinner, 1876-1949.
Clark, Alson Skinner, 1876-1949 -- Homes and haunts -- Photographs.
Clark, Atta Medora McMullin, 1887-1973 -- Photographs.
Pasadena Playhouse -- Photographs.
Panama-California Exposition -- (1915 : San Diego, Calif.) -- Photographs.
Artists' models -- Photographs.
Artists' studios -- California -- Pasadena -- Photographs.
Automobile travel -- Southwest, New -- Photographs.
Bathing beaches -- California -- Photographs.
Children -- Mexico -- Photographs.
Deserts -- California -- Photographs.
Deserts -- Southwest, New -- Photographs.
Dwellings -- California -- Pasadena -- Photographs.
Horsemanship -- Southwest, New -- Photographs.
Indians of Mexico -- Photographs.
Indians of North America -- Southwest, New -- Photographs.
Landscapes -- California -- Photographs.
Landscapes -- Southwest, New -- Photographs.
Markets -- Mexico -- Photographs.
Mountains -- California -- Photographs.
Mountains -- Southwest, New -- Photographs.
Mural painting and decoration -- California -- Photographs.
Plein air painting -- Photographs.
Schools -- California -- Pasadena -- Photographs.
Street vendors -- Mexico -- Photographs.
Ships in art -- Photographs.
Villages -- Mexico -- Photographs.
World War, 1914-1918 -- Europe -- Photographs.
Arroyo Seco (Los Angeles County, Calif.) -- Photographs.
Baja California (Mexico: State) -- Photographs.
Beijing (China) -- Photographs.
Brittany (France) -- Photographs.
Canada -- Photographs.
Carson City (Nev.) -- Photographs.
China -- Photographs.
Dalmatia (Croatia) -- Photographs.
France -- Photographs.
India -- Photographs.
La Jolla (San Diego, Calif.)-- Photographs.
Mazatlán (Sinaloa, Mexico) -- Photographs.
Mexico -- Buildings, structures, etc. -- Photographs.
Mexico -- Photographs.
Mexico City (Mexico) -- Photographs.
Mother Lode (Calif.) -- Photographs.
Palm Springs (Calif.) -- Photographs.
Panamint (Calif.) -- Photographs.
Québec (Québec) -- Photographs.
Ruins -- Europe -- Photographs.
Saint Lawrence River -- Photographs.
Seoul (Korea) -- Photographs.
Southwest, New -- Photographs.
Taxco (Mexico) -- Photographs.
Thousand Islands (N.Y. and Ont.) -- Photographs.
Watertown (N.Y.) -- Photographs.

**Forms/Genres**
- Aerial views.
- Cabinet photographs.
- Clippings (Books, newspapers, etc.).
- Cyanotypes.
- Negatives.
- Photograph album.
- Photographs.
- Portraits.
- Postcards.

**Contributors**
- Champion, Clyde W., photographer.
- Clark, Alson Skinner, 1876-1949, compiler.
- Clark, Alson Skinner, 1876-1949, photographer.
- Fung Tai, photographer.
- Kourken, photographer.
- Paar, Th., photographer.
- Soreboe, photographer.
- Spalding, Eudora, photographer.
- Tyler, Harold, photographer.
- Yamamoto, S. (Beijing), photographer.
- A.M. Photo Mexico, photographer.
- Dickson & Thurber (Firm), photographer.
- Hiller, photographer.
- Hiller Studio, photographer.
- Keystone Photo Service, photographer.
- Pow Kee (Nanking), photographer.

**Container List**

**Series I. Alson Clark and Family, Studio, and Projects. 1889-1939, 1962**

**Physical Description:** 238 items in 2 boxes and 1 flatfile

**Scope and Content**
This series contains portraits of Alson Clark, Medora Clark, and others; scenes from family travels chiefly in Europe, California and the Southwestern United States, and New York; depictions of Clark's home studio in Pasadena, California; and various projects, chiefly murals.
Subseries A. Portraits and family travels

Physical Description: 159 photographs

Scope and Content Note

Photographs include studio portraits of Alson Clark from 1893-1894 and from 1939 (plus a reprint of one portrait, dated 1962); images of Clark in Algiers and Paris; photographs of Clark with Keith Spalding on the yacht Goodwill in 1920, taken by Eudora Spalding; depictions of Clark with Medora Clark and son Alson Clark, Jr., in Pasadena; Clark painting en plein air and in military uniform in 1918 (Folders 1-2); photographs of Medora Clark (Folder 5); and images depicting people and residences in Thousand Islands, Comfort Island, Watertown, and Saint Lawrence, New York (Folders 7-9). Also included are four photographs and a ticket book from travel to Spain in 1909 and 1910, one of these a portrait of Clark holding a palette (Folders 3-4), and one photograph depicting artists and others seated around a table at a formal dinner in Pasadena, with people identified on verso (Folder 6).

Box 1, Folders 1-2  Alson Clark, Medora Clark, Alson Clark, Jr., and friends. 1889-1939, 1962
Box 1, Folders 3-4  Spain. 1909-1910
Box 1, Folder 5  Atta Medora Clark. 1911, approximately 1920-1935
Box 1, Folder 6  Various people. approximately 1889-1925
Box 1, Folders 7-9  New York. approximately 1915-1919, 1926

Subseries B. Studio home

Physical Description: 24 photographs

Box 1, Folder 10  Interior and exterior views. 1920-1930
Box 4, Folder 1  Views of Arroyo Seco. approximately 1920

Subseries C. Various projects

Physical Description: 55 photographs

Scope and Content Note

Includes one photograph album containing 16 photographs taken by Harold Tyler from the Panama-Pacific International Exposition of 1915 in San Diego, chiefly of buildings and also one photograph of a curtain painted by Clark; exterior and interior views of the Pasadena Playhouse, including depictions of portions of Clark's mural; images of Clark's models, including an album with five photographs of Medora Clark; and depictions of murals in the Polytechnic Elementary School and the First Trust and Savings Bank in Pasadena, with panels showing scenes from the cinema and shipping industries.

Box 4  Photograph album, Panama-Pacific International Exposition, San Diego. 1915
Box 4, Folder 11  Pasadena Playhouse. approximately 1925
Box 4, Folder 12  Artists' models. approximately 1925-1928
Box 4, Folder 13  Murals. approximately 1925-1930

Series II. California and Southwest. Views. 1920-1939

Physical Description: 277 items in 3 boxes

Subseries A. California

Physical Description: 167 photographs

Scope and Content Note

Photographs include landscape views of the Colorado Desert, Palm Springs, Owens Valley, Sespe, La Jolla, Beaumont, and other locations, as well as wildflowers, people on horses, and onion harvesters parked with vehicles (Folders 1-3); and depictions of journeys to Palm Springs, some showing Medora Clark and others at a dwelling in the desert (Folder 4); Panamint City (Folder 5); and La Jolla (Folder 6), including beach scenes.
### Series II. California and Southwest. Views. 1920-1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box, Folder</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2, Folders 1-3</td>
<td>California. Landscape views. approximately 1920-1930</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, Folder 4</td>
<td>Palm Springs. approximately 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, Folder 5</td>
<td>Panamint City. approximately 1920-1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2, Folder 6</td>
<td>La Jolla. approximately 1920-1938</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

#### Subseries B. Southwest

**Scope and Content Note**
Photographs include depictions of Indians, including in poses; Western models including cowboys in rodeos; and various buildings (Folder 1); Mother Lode towns, Carson City, Nevada, and Tyler, Texas (Folder 2); various landscape views depicting deserts and mountains (Folders 3-4); and oversize photographs depicting bison on a range and locations in Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, and unidentified sites.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box, Folder</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3, Folder 1</td>
<td>Indians and Western models. approximately 1920-1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3, Folder 2</td>
<td>Mother Lode towns, Carson City, Nevada, and Tyler, Texas. approximately 1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3, Folders 3-4</td>
<td>United States Southwest. Landscape views. approximately 1920-1938</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4, Folder 2</td>
<td>Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah. Views. approximately 1920-1938</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Series III. Mexico. approximately 1920-1937

**Scope and Content Note**
Includes photographs depicting markets, street scenes, street vendors, churches, indigenous people, and villages, as well as images depicting Mazatlán; Mexico City and environs; Taxco and Cuernavaca, including views of the Santa Prisca church and of cockfights; and Punta Banda, in which several photographs show people camping and painting. Many of the photographs are very small snapshots, 7 x 9 cm (2 x 3.5 in.) or smaller, taken by unidentified photographers; examples are in Box 6, Sleeves 1-3 and 6.

| Box, Folders 1-4 | Various views. approximately 1920-1937 |
| Box 6, Sleeves 1-2 | Various views. approximately 1931 |
| Box 6, Sleeve 3 | Mazatlán. 1931 |
| Box 6, Sleeve 4 | Mexico City and environs. 1931 |
| Box 6, Sleeves 5-6 | Taxco. 1931 |
| Box 6, Sleeve 7 | Punta Banda. approximately 1937 |

### Series IV. Views of Asia, Europe, and Canada. approximately 1905-1919

**Scope and Content Note**
Contains 24 photographs depicting China including the Forbidden City; palaces, temples, and street scenes in Beijing; statues of animals in Nanking and at the Western Qing Tombs; birds-eye views of Macao; Wuchang; and scenes from the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion, including an image of Westerners standing over corpses and heads of beheaded rebels (Folder 1); 3 photographs of India including Benares, Darjeeling, and the Agra fort (Folder 2); and 4 photographs depicting Seoul, Korea, including people at a festival and a birds-eye view of the city (Folder 3).

| Box, Folders 1-3 | Asia approximately 1890-1910 |
| Box 8, Folders 1-3 | Asia approximately 1905-1919 |
Container List
Series IV. Views of Asia, Europe, and Canada. approximately 1905-1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Box 5, Folder 5</strong></td>
<td><strong>Europe. approximately 1912-1914</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Scope and Content Note</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Includes one photograph of Granada, Spain; 9 photographs depicting street scenes, markets, and street vendors in Dalmatia; and unidentified cityscapes.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Box 6, Sleeves 8-10</strong></td>
<td><strong>France. approximately 1905-1919</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Scope and Content Note</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Includes views of Rochefort-en-Terre and other locations in Brittany, chiefly depictions of markets and street scenes as well as views of military parades and warplanes; the photographs are 9 x 9 cm (3.5 x 3.5 in.) and smaller, chiefly 5 x 8 cm (2 x 3 in.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Box 7</strong></td>
<td><strong>Photograph album and photograph. approximately 1917-1918</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Scope and Content Note</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Includes 1 photograph album containing 39 photographs depicting post-World War I scenes including buildings in ruins; a British dugout; coal mining machinery in Lens; a British Officers’ rest house in Germany; soldiers and men, women, and children on streets in France and Brussels, Belgium; a post office in the Netherlands; and several images of Bailleul, including the destroyed Hotel de Ville. The loose photograph is an aerial image of an unidentified location by the United States Navy (1917).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Box 6, Sleeves 11-13</strong></td>
<td><strong>Canada. approximately 1906</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Scope and Content Note</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Includes views of the city and province of Québec, chiefly depicting city streets, villages, and residences, and also showing ships at a harbor, timber, and a few images of a flood.</td>
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</table>