Language of Material: English
Contributing Institution: USC Libraries Special Collections
Title: Frank O'Grady photograph collection
source: O'Grady, Francis (Frank)
creator: Underwood & Underwood
Identifier/Call Number: 6182
Physical Description: 0.42 Linear Feet1 box
Date: 1919, circa 1940

Abstract: The Frank O'Grady photograph collection contains approximately 220 photographic prints of newsworthy events produced by the Underwood & Underwood photo syndicate for potential publication in various New York City newspapers in 1919. The collection was assembled by Francis (Frank) O'Grady, who was hired as a courier for the Underwood & Underwood photo syndicate in 1919. O'Grady was instructed to dispose of photographs that were not used by publications during his daily deliveries. Occasionally, O'Grady kept photographs that piqued his interest instead of throwing them away. The collection also includes approximately 40 cigarette cards picturing Adolf Hitler and Nazi Party activities throughout the 1930s, produced and published by Cigaretten-Bilderdienst as part of a series titled "Sammelwerk Nr. 15: Adolf Hitler." The Sammelwerk Nr. 15 cards may have been collected by Frank O'Grady's son, Donald O'Grady, during his service for the United States Army Air Corps, or by another family member.

Biographical / Historical
[Adapted from donor's statement by Donald DiPietro:]
My grandfather, Francis (Frank) O'Grady, served overseas in the United States Army during World War One. To the best of my knowledge, he left service in the early winter of 1918 and returned to New York City, where he lived with his family. He was in his early 20s.

In January of 1919, Frank was hired as a courier for the Underwood & Underwood photo syndicate. Every day, the syndicate's photojournalists would deliver raw film taken at newsworthy events from around the world. Underwood & Underwood would develop these negatives and make a dozen or more prints of those they felt the most commercially appealing. Frank's job was to deliver these photographs to the various publications in the hope they would print them, resulting in a publication or license fee.

Every day, Frank would collect a stack of the most interesting photographs and deliver them to the photo editors of the dozen or more newspapers being published in New York City at the time. Sadly, I don't know the degree to which Frank communicated with these editors. Did he review the images with them or simply drop them off? Was there a first-come-first-served protocol or some other exclusivity arrangement? I simply don't know.

What I do know is that once the daily run was made, the photographs were deemed of little to no value, so Frank was instructed to simply throw away any remaining prints. There was no concern about piracy because only a newspaper could commercialize these images and they were closely examined every day by the Syndicate's auditors for licensing. As Frank explained to his daughter (my mother) many years later, "every now and then I was captivated by some of these photographs, by the people and the places, some of which were familiar to me, others that were quite exotic..." So, instead of tossing them in a trash pail, he would occasionally keep one or two that he found particularly interesting.

Frank only did this job for about six months. He planned to study law but the economic realities of a growing family forced him to seek more immediate employment. When he retired in the 1950s, he was a highly respected Legal clerk in the Federal Court at Foley Square. He suffered a stroke in 1956 and passed away three years later.

The stack of "Dad's Old Photos" moved from house to house as his daughters had families of their own. (Frank's only son, Donald O'Grady, a pilot in the Army Air Corps, died in 1943).

By the 1960s, these photographs ended up with Frank's eldest daughter, Marie O'Grady DiPietro, of Westchester, NY, who found them a new home in a sturdy wooden box with a latch and faux-leather "skin" – it had probably housed a film projector or some similarly valuable device of the time. This box, while not contemporaneous to the photographs, protected them from the more common hazards risks old photographs face — sunlight and physical stress. Every year or so, one of the grandchildren would discover "Poppop's Box" and poke through the sepia-toned images. Marie was happy to let them do this but impressed upon them the need to treat these photos with delicate care.

Marie died in 2010. Shortly thereafter, the box was rediscovered by her son, Don DiPietro, and daughter-in-law, Quinn Cummings, who enjoyed seeing these photographs yet again but wanted them to find a better home before they were lost or accidentally destroyed.
What is most interesting about the collection is not just its curation – they were assembled by a well-educated young man simply because he found them interesting and worth keeping – but because they represent a visual look at the world’s most newsworthy events over a very narrow and specific slice of history: from January to June, 1919 – exactly one hundred years ago as I write this note.

Content Description
A collection of approximately 220 photographic prints of newsworthy events produced by the Underwood & Underwood photo syndicate for potential publication in various New York City newspapers in 1919. The photographs cover a variety of topics and include many images relating to World War I. The majority of the prints contain captions on verso (e.g., “Chinese Delegation of the Peace Conference”).

The collection also includes approximately 40 cigarette cards picturing Adolf Hitler and Nazi Party activities throughout the 1930s, produced and published by Cigaretten-Bilderdienst as part of a series titled “Sammelwerk Nr. 15: Adolf Hitler.” Each trade card includes descriptions in German on verso.

Arrangement
The photographs in this collection were previously divided in seven plastic bags with approximately 25 to 50 photographs in each bag. The photographs are now stored in acid-free folders, with the arrangement of the original seven bags reflected across seven folders.

Conditions Governing Access
Advance notice required for access.

Conditions Governing Use
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Preferred Citation
[Box/folder no. or item name], Frank O’Grady photograph collection, Collection no. 6182, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Subjects and Indexing Terms
World War, 1914-1918 -- Archival resources
World War, 1914-1918 -- Battlefields -- Photographs
World War, 1939-1945 -- Photographs
Cigarette cards
Photographs
O’Grady, Francis (Frank)
Underwood & Underwood -- Archives
Hitler, Adolf, 1889-1945 -- Photographs

Scope and Contents
Approximately 40 trade cards picturing Adolf Hitler and Nazi Party activities throughout the 1930s, produced and published by Cigaretten-Bilderdienst as part of a series titled “Sammelwerk Nr. 15: Adolf Hitler” with descriptions in German on the reverse side of each image. Also includes one photograph that is not part of the Sammelwerk Nr. 15 set, but was previously stored with the series, which depicts two men working with a large device involving film reels.