

Photographers in the Whitehall Area

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If it were not for the many photographers who came to this area over the years, we would not have any pictorial records of what things were like back in the day. While some were only here for a very short time, still others stayed much longer. Some of you may even have one of their pictures in your old family album. Here, then, is a “picture” of some of them. Unfortunately, there don’t seem to be any photographs “of” them. Probably because they were always behind the camera.

Norman & Austin (ca 1870) – Due to the limited number of newspapers for this time period, there is very little known about this photography company. It appears that they were located over the bakery. They produced a carte de visite (a calling card) of a group of two-story buildings which included a drug store, a hardware shop and a store offering groceries and provisions. That could be anywhere.

Ruggles, William H. (1872-1875) – William Ruggles was the oldest of three children born in New York to Harlow E. and Mariah (ne Miller) Ruggles in 1837. By 1857 he had made his way to Grand Haven where he married Elizabeth Flinn in September of that year. They had two children and they also divorced twice. In 1860 he, his wife and daughter were living in Carrollton, KY, where his occupation was listed as silversmith. William enlisted for 90 days in Co. E of the 22nd Kentucky Infantry. He mustered out of the Union Army on January 15, 1862.

By 1870, the Ruggles family included a son, and they were living in Whitehall where his occupation was listed as jeweler. From 1872-1875 he was also in the photography business. His studio was located in rooms above the Whitehall Post Office on Colby Street West of Mears Avenue. It seems that by 1880, he and his wife had separated again. William Ruggles died in Whitehall on May 22, 1882. His wife Elizabeth died in January 1918 in Sac City, Iowa, where she was living with their daughter.

Wixson, Joseph T. (1874-1877) – Joseph Townsend Wixson was born on May 29, 1840, in Steuben County, New York. He was the seventh of twelve children born to Jesse and Rebecca (ne Sorter) Wixson. He came with his family to Michigan in 1846.

On March 16, 1862, Joseph married Sarah Maynard. Their son Albion Fremont Wixson was born on September 23, 1862. On October 6, 1864, Joseph and his brother George S. enlisted at Lexington for 3 years in Co. I of the Third Michigan Infantry. They mustered into service on October 8, and both deserted at Pontiac on October 14, 1864.

Joseph started his photography business in Lexington in 1868 and was there through 1870. His wife divorced him about this time, and she remained in Lexington with their two children. Joseph and his second wife Julia (ne VanCamp) headed west to northwest Iowa where he did some farming and lumbering. They had a son Chester in 1872.

By 1874 he had come to the White Lake area where he set up shop in a storefront on Colby Street West of Mears Avenue. From 1876 to 77 the business was known as either Wixson & Williams or Williams & Wixson.

After he left Whitehall, he went to the Grand Haven-Spring Lake area, where he set up a photograph gallery over the Grand Haven Post Office. Wixson and Edwin P. Baker specialized in solar printing and photographed groups of students outside their school. From there he moved to Escanaba where he was in business from 1884-1905, along with his son Chester.

Joseph died in Rhinelander, Wisconsin, on 8 December 1907. His wife Julia died at Valley Springs, California on January 2, 1922. His first wife Sarah died at the home of her son William in St. Louis, Missouri, on July 24, 1935.

Strong, Nelson F. (1876-1885) – Nelson born in Know, Ohio, around 1820, the son of Augustus and Sarah (ne Doolittle). and died 1 Mar 1894 in Saginaw, MI. He married Rebecca Bailey 15 September 1850 in Knox, OH. They had a son Herbert P. Strong who was born in 1858, and who was listed with them in the 1880 Census. At the time, they were residing on Colby Street.

Sawyer, John (ca1878) – John was born in Canada on November 12, 1832. He married Eliza Arnold about 1851 in Ontario, where seven of their children were born. Then they moved to Michigan where they had three additional children. In 1873 he set up his photography studio over the Post Office in South Haven. Around 1878 he moved to Whitehall where he had a studio for about a year before moving on. He and his first wife divorced, and he remarried around 1882. John died in VanBuren County in May 1913. His first wife Eliza died in VanBuren County in February 1916.

Wixson, George S. (ca 1876-1878) – George Wixson was a younger brother of Joseph T. Wixson. Unclear exactly when he came to Whitehall and joined the business. By September 1878 he was selling his furniture and other household items.

Fortune, Eugene W. (1886-1887) – Fortune was born in July 1857 in Minnesota the only child of William N. and Elizabeth (Wilson) Fortune. He married Ida Cameron in Whitehall on 12 November 1879. He taught school in Fremont in 1880. They had a son in September 1882. He started his photography business in Fremont in 1882 before coming to Whitehall in 1886. They went back to Fremont around 1888 and then moved to California where they spent the rest of their lives.

Pitts, Francis A. (Pitt, Towne & Co) (1887) – According to the 1887 City Directory, Pitt, Towne and Co. made up of Francis Pitt, his brother James D. Pitt and Alverson H. Towne. It appears that it opened in October 1887 in the Covell block where they took photos and did tin-type work. They were burned out in the September 1890 fire but relocated.

Francis Pitt was born in New York in 1848 and his brother James D. was born in 1851. In 1860 Francis moved to Ottawa County where he became a farmer. He enrolled in Co. M 10th Michigan Cavalry at Grand Rapids on February 15, 1865, and was honorably discharged in November of that year. He was listed as a resident of Claybanks from 1866 to 1869 and in Berlin from 1870 to 1877. In 1870 Francis Pitt was single and working in the Brick Yard in Grand Haven. He married Sarah Ellen Smith in Kent County on August 5, 1871. They had a daughter, Clara, in 1874. He became a photographer in Shelby in 1878 and continued there until 1882. In 1887, while living in Shelby, he engaged in the Whitehall photography business with his brother James D Pitts and Alverton H. Towne. Eventually, he got out of photography and became a grocery and meat dealer. Francis Pitts died in July 1930.

Towne, Alverton H. (Pitt, Towne & Co.) (1887-1894) – Towne was born in Vermont in April 1846, the first of four children born to Simon and Mary Ann (Chilcoth) Towne. Alverton's father served in the military and spent his last years in the Soldiers Home in Grand Rapids. Alvertson was boarding and working on the farm of Jason W. Bascom. Jason and his wife Elizabeth (Downs) Bascom had a daughter Hannah Elizabeth who was born in New York in June 1849. Alvertson married Hannah Bascom in 1876. They had two children. The company of Pitts, Towne & Co. was formed in 1887 when Francis A. Pitts, who had photographic experience was taken on.

The business burned in the September 1890 fire and the Pitts brothers left the business. In March 1892, A. H. Towne reopened his photo studio on the ground floor in M.S. Green's new building. It's unclear what he did between the fire and the reopening in 1892.

The 1900 census showed Towne was living in Shelby and his occupation was listed as farmer. He died in Shelby in 1923.

Thurston, Arthur Rufus (1890) – Arthur was born in Connecticut in April 1848. He married Charlotte McBride in 1884 and they had two children. His studio in Whitehall was located on the north side of Colby. He was only here a short time when his business was destroyed in the Fire of September 1890. He moved to Muskegon where he was identified as a bookkeeper at the time of his death in April 1905. His wife Charlotte was the proprietor of a Muskegon boarding house in 1910 which she operated with the help of her daughter.

Tromp, William (1894-1895) – William was born in the Netherlands about 1866, the seventh of eight children of Willem and Johanna (Klassen) Tromp. He came to the United State with his family in 1867. He was called Willem as a child and he and his siblings were orphans living in different families by 1880. At that time, he was boarding with Marinas and Anna Westveert. In 1892 he was a partner in Tromp &

McDermand Photo on Western Avenue in Muskegon. He came to Whitehall and worked from 1894-95. He was a fisherman in Muskegon from 1897-98. He and several of his brothers formed Tromp & Brothers in 1889. By 1899 he was back in Muskegon as a laborer and fisherman. He moved to Grand Rapids in 1907 where he worked as a photographer from 1909-1911.

Edmondson, William L. (ca 1895) – Limited information available other than he also appeared for a short time in the towns of Fremont, Hart, Whitehall and Montague during 1895. Little else is known about him.

Swanson, G. R. (ca 1895) - Only found a few ads in the local newspaper during this time period but no other mention of his name or information.

Ericson, Carl (1897-1899) – Was born in Sweden in June 1866 and immigrated in 1887, becoming a US citizen by 1900. He had married Helga V. Klint about 1891 and they adopted a daughter around 1900. Carl worked as a photographer for Orville Gillett in Grand Rapids in 1895 before coming to the Montague-Whitehall area in 1897. He was located on Thompson Street. By 1898, he had moved back to Grand Rapids and later to Seattle. He had sold his photograph business to Milford J. Dyer, who had worked for him.

Dyer, Milford J. (1898-1899) – Worked for Carl Ericson and bought the business when Ericson moved to Grand Rapids. Dyer was born on August 28, 1877, at Blue Lake, the son of Horatio B. and Mary (ne Darling) Dyer. There was no census information for him in 1900 and by 1910 it appears that he had moved to Mississippi.

DuFour, Lou (Miss) (1900-1901) – There is very little known about Miss Lou DuFour. In April 1900 she had returned to Whitehall and reopened the Penny Gallery, which had not been previously mentioned. By August 1900, Miss DuFour had taken several thousand pictures since coming here a few months ago.

Raze, J. E. (The Whitehall Gallery) (1901-1902) – James E. Raze was born in Michigan in November 1887 to David E. and Rose (ne Wellman) Raze. He married Helen G. Hough in October 1890, and they had five children. According to the 1900 Census he was a teacher in Charlotte at the time. He had made his way to the White Lake area where he took a panoramic view of the lake front property of William Peck, as well as some elaborate views of Montague's principal buildings and had them on display in the Franklin House in November 1901. In December 1901 he had a studio over the Eagle Drug store in the Franklin block. By August 1902, he had opened the Whitehall Gallery which was located opposite the tunnel, according to the local ads. In March 1903, it was announced that he had secured a job in Lansing and had gone there already with his family to follow shortly.

Murphy's Gallery (William J. Murphy) (1903-1909) – William Murphy was born in Rockford, Michigan on 31 October 1868. He came to Montague in 1888 and married Emma Hawks on 18 September 1890. They had three daughters: Myrtle, Hazel and Fern.

Murphy started out as a photographer in Montague sometime around 1903. His studio was located over the Bank building. In April 1903 he moved to Whitehall where he stayed until January 1910. He began to develop some mental issues then and was eventually hospitalized in Traverse City where he died on 11 August 1910.

Petersen, John (1912-1913) – According to an ad in the Whitehall Forum on 20 November 1913, both John and his wife were in the photography business together. However, that was the only ad that appeared.

Masure, Ismar B. (The Photo Shop) (1914-1941) – Ismar Bismark Masure (I.B.) was born at Posen, Germany on November 11, 1881. He was one of seven children born to Solomon and Cecelia Masure. His family immigrated to the US in 1882. One of his brothers, Morris, became a photographer in Chicago and continued there in his own name until 1910. Ismar may have gained his photographic experience through his brother.

Masure married Nettie Appel in Chicago in April 1905. They had a daughter Fern in 1907. They divorced shortly after.

From 1914 to 1917, he operated The Photo Shop at Michillinda. His pictures had appeared in virtually every resort folder and booklet printed in this area. His postcards of the White Lake area were identified as being made by The Photo Shop.

I.B. Masur had a photo studio in Shelby in 1918 which was only open on Mondays. For 17 years, Masure was located on Colby Street, in a building East of the former original bank building – next door to Ruggles Insurance.

In 1930 he purchased the building which is now home to Hunt's Hardware. He moved his photo shop into that building in 1934.

Flowers were his hobby but they soon took over more and more of his attention until he finally abandoned photography and devoted all his time to the florist business by 1941. His flower business was located where White Lake Greenhouse is now located. And he lived in the apartment overhead.

In November 1951 he married Mary Lena Rusteika in Whitehall. It was a short marriage, however, as he died in Grand Rapids on May 20, 1952. He was buried in the Oakhurst Cemetery in Whitehall.

Other photographers who followed included: Bervin Johnson (1948-65); Howard Johnson (1949-); Charles Kassner (1954-1990); Charles Mindham (1956-1977); Don Martin replaced Bervin Johnson in 1965 and took over his location on Colby Street (1965-); Ken Kooiman (1999-2001-)