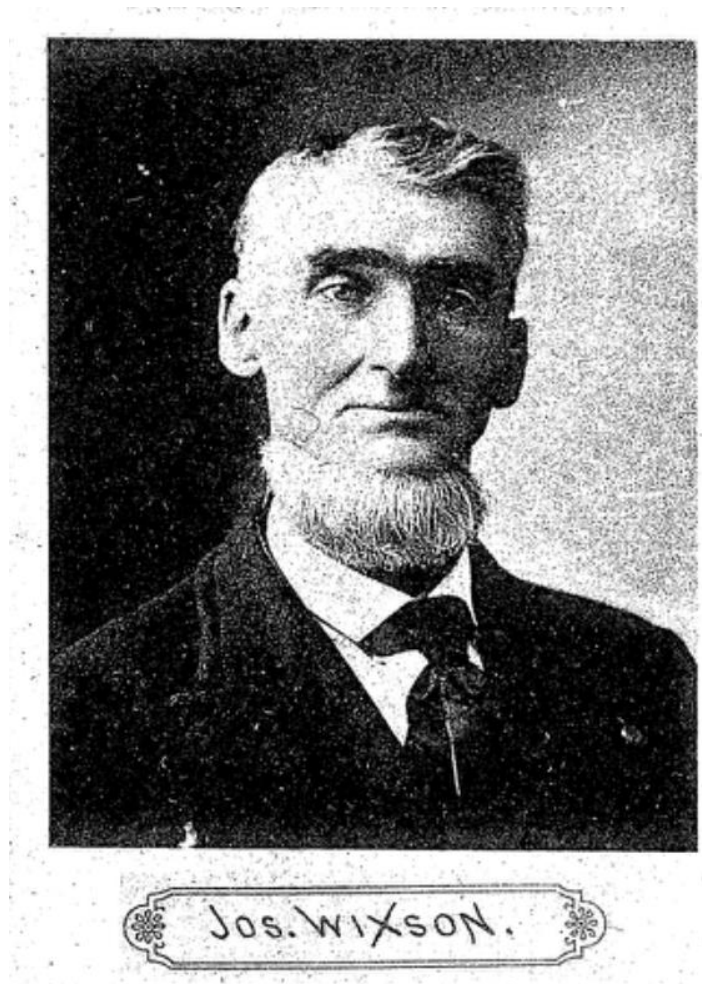


Citizens – Joseph T. Wixson, Photographer

By Barbara Bedau Brow
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It is not often that you find a photograph of a photographer as they are usually the one to be found behind the camera rather than in front of it, so finding this picture was a thrill.

Joseph Townsend Wixson was born in Steuben County, New York, on 29 May 1840, the seventh of twelve children of Jesse and Rebecca (ne Sorter) Wixson. When Joseph was about six years old, he and his siblings and parents moved to Michigan where he made his home except for a short time in 1871 when he moved to northeastern Iowa.

Joseph was raised on a farm and acquired his education in the public school of Lexington, Sanilac County, in northern Michigan. During much of his business career, he has either followed farming or lumbering.

Joseph married Sarah Maynard (1839-1934) of England on 16 Mar 1862. They had two sons: Albion Fremont (1862-1957); and Wilbert William (1870-1944).

On 24 Aug 1861 Joseph enlisted in Company D 11th Michigan Infantry. He was discharged on 31 Sept 1864.

Then it seems that on 6 Oct 1864 Joseph re-enlisted at Lexington with his younger brother George S. Wixson in Company I of the reorganized Third Michigan Infantry. They were mustered into service on 8 Oct 1864 and they both deserted at Pontiac on 14 Oct 1864.

While Sarah was pregnant with their son Wilbert William, Julia Etta VanCamp was hired as a servant in the Wixson household. William was born in Lexington on 9 Jul 1870. Sometime later Sarah obtained a divorce from Joseph Wixson but remained in Lexington with her sons while Joseph took Julia and headed West.

Julia Etta VanCamp was born in Sanilac County on 5 July 1852, the first of two children of Ezra and Adaliza (ne Newcomb) VanCamp. Joseph did some farming and lumbering in Northeast Iowa, where Julia gave birth to their son Chester on 27 Feb 1872.

Joseph T. Wixson came to this area and opened a studio on Colby Street west of Mears in Whitehall from 1874 through 1875. He joined with someone with the last name of Williams and together formed Wixson & Williams from 1876-1877.

Records indicate that Joseph & Julia were married in Spring Lake, Michigan on 13 Jul 1877. A daughter Lillian was born in September 1877 and Maud in August 1878. Another son was born later in 1888 but died at 6 days old.

In the meantime, Joseph opened a photo gallery over the Grand Haven Post Office in 1877. Wixson joined with Edwin P. Barker specializing in solar printing for the trade and photographed groups of students outside their schools.

Joseph's brother George S. Wixson came to the Whitehall area in 1878 and opened a photographic studio.

In 1882 Joseph Wixson moved to Escanaba. In later years, in connection with his son Chester, he was somewhat engaged in the real estate business as he is well informed on land values and was able to buy and sell advantageously. They were also engaged in the business as photographers, having two well-appointed and well-equipped galleries. Joseph managed the gallery in Escanaba while his son Chester managed the shop in Gladstone.

Joseph Wixson remained in Escanaba until 1905 when he moved to Rhineland, Oneida, Wisconsin, where he died on 8 Dec 1907. Julia remained in Wisconsin, living with her married son Chester and his family in 1910. Later they moved to California where she died at Valley Spring, California on 2 Jan 1922.

Joseph's first wife Sarah was described as the widow of Joseph T. Wixson in the Detroit city directories in 1880 and 1890 and the 1914 city directory of Saint Paul, Minnesota, where she was living with her son Albion. She died at St. Louis, Missouri at the home of her son William on 24 Jul 1935.