

Summary Information

Title: Joseph T. Murtagh Glass Plate Negative Collection

Collection number: PH22

Creator: Joseph T. Murtagh

Collection Dates: [1883-1890s]

Extent: 259 glass plate negatives: 76 (6 ½ x 8 ½); 3 (5 x 8); 79 (5 x 7); 5 (4 ½ x 6 1/8); 96 (4 x 5) and 2 positive transparencies on glass (6 ½ x 8 ½).

Language:

The material in this collection is in English.

Repository:

Chester County Historical Society

225 N. High St.

West Chester, PA 19380

Date Published:

2018

Author:

Pamela Powell, Photo Archivist

Background research by Philip Deter

History

Biographical note Joseph T. Murtagh, 1843-1904:

Joseph Murtagh was a talented amateur photographer living in West Chester, PA. He was known as being in an association of early amateur photographers in West Chester, including J. Max Mueller, Dr. George Cardwell and others¹.

The earliest negative in Murtagh's collection is signed "Murta" and dated 1883. By 1885 the Daily Local News reported on January 10th that Murtagh and Cardwell photographed First West Chester Fire Co.'s old hand engine when it was retired. See Negatives 118-121 for that series of photographs. His work was notable enough that his activities were of community interest. The Daily Local News reported that he took a photograph of the old seckel pear tree covered in snow (negatives # 62, 74, 75) beside the bank building from the window of Thomas Marshall's office in the Jefferis Building². He had a photograph of First West Chester's engine house exhibited in a shop window on Church Street that was of "rare taste and much artistic ability"³.

¹ West Chester, PA: Daily Local News, 22 April 1913.

² West Chester, PA: Daily Local News, 12 March 1888.

³ West Chester, PA: Daily Local News 24 September 1890.

The quality of Murtagh's photographs is of the caliber of someone who was active in the amateur photographic salons in Philadelphia. His work is an example of Naturalistic photography both in the subject matter and the manner of composition. The collection includes two positives on frosted glass that have enhanced skies added into the views (See #2 & 3). These transparencies were often mounted in frames and hung in the window as ornaments.

His sequence of views of a haying scene bears a striking resemblance to the work of Robert Redfield (negatives #1, 2, 4, 151-153, 164, 166, see: Beck, Tom, *An American Vision: John G. Bullock and the Photo-Secession* University of Maryland Baltimore County: A.O. Kuhn Library & Gallery, 1989, page 44 and 45.) Still other landscape views bear resemblance to the work of John J. Bullock, see negatives #55, 113, 166, 202. Further research on Murtagh's involvement in amateur groups in Philadelphia is needed.

But who was Joseph Townsend Murtagh?

Joseph Townsend Murtagh was born on January 15, 1842 to James C. Murtagh and Hannah Hickman Townsend Murtagh, a family with long Chester County roots. Although he was born in Philadelphia, he spent his entire life in West Chester actively engaged in the life of the community.

Murtagh began his working life at the West Chester Post Office under the terms of Gibbons Gray and Dr. Taylor. Here he met Sallie Jackson, whom he married in 1867⁴.

During the Civil War he secured an appointment in the Paymaster's General's Office and worked in Washington, D.C. This appointment undoubtedly came through his time at the West Chester Post Office where he demonstrated beautiful cursive penmanship and accurate bookkeeping skills. He served in an independent battery of the Emergency Militia in 1863, Company F, and Tenth Regiment Pennsylvania Volunteer Militia for two months service⁵.

Returning to West Chester in 1866 he purchased the dry goods store on Gay Street of his late Uncle, Eusebius Townsend. Two years later, Murtagh sold the store and went into partnership with Eber D. Haines. The private banking firm was known as E.D. Haines & Co. was established in 1868⁶. Murtagh's career flourished in the banking industry. He became manager in 1892 upon the death of his partner⁷.

He was active in many community groups including the First West Chester Fire Company where he served as secretary for 25 years, vice president, president⁸ and in 1889 was elected a trustee.

⁴ West Chester, PA: Daily Local News, 21 January 1904.

⁵ Samuel P. Bates, The History of the Pennsylvania Volunteers 1861-5. Harrisburg: B. Singerly, 1871. Vol 5 page 1171

⁶ West Chester, PA: Chester County Democrat, 17 September 1891.

⁷ West Chester, PA: Daily Local News, 22 October 1892.

⁸ West Chester, PA: Daily Local News, 1 December 1896.

He was well-known as a talented musician; both as a pianist and for playing the alto cornet in Taylor's Band⁹. He was so well respected that in 1899 he became the chairman of the Music Committee for West Chester's Centennial Celebration¹⁰. He commissioned fellow musician and amateur photographer J. Max Mueller to compose the music for West Chester's Centennial hymn and March in honor of the borough's fire departments. He is pictured with the Executive Committee in the Centennial Souvenir book.

Murtagh died in 1904 after a short illness at the age of 62 and was laid to rest in Oaklands Cemetery near West Chester. He left a wife, Sarah (Sallie) Jackson Murtagh and son, J. Charles Murtagh. His first son, John T. Murtagh died in infancy.

Murtagh's estate inventory¹¹ reveals a well-furnished home on N. Church St. West Chester, PA and many shares of mining, gas and real estate stocks. His house which was built on the northwest corner of N. Church and W. Biddle Streets was razed for a parking lot during the 20th century.

Administrative history

CCHS glass plate negative collection has been organized by a variety of theories over time.

In 1957 CCHS staff arranged the glass plate negative collection according to the library concept imposed on all library material: as discrete items organized by township location and subdivided by topic. This organizational scheme can still be seen in the Newspaper clippings file, Township boxes and ephemera file in the library. This concept dispersed the images from the context of their makers.

In 1973, Thomas Thompson and Larry McDevitt volunteered to print the glass plate negative collection. They selected plates of interest, renumbered the negatives using a red felt tip pen, and transported them to the Daily Local News darkroom for printing. Negatives were contact printed and a red number inscribed on the print, we call these *Thompson Numbers*. The Thompson numbering set that are on negatives in the Murtagh collection may look like dates, they run from # 1880-1997. They are not dates, they are only a reference number.

In 1976, a group of Winterthur students undertook a practicum project at CCHS. As a group they worked on rehousing the glass plates out of their original Kraft paper sleeves and original glass plate negative boxes into acid-free enclosures. Information that was known was transferred to the sleeves. Negatives with known makers were numbered with the photographer's name and a sequential number. Negatives that were known to be taken by Murtagh were numbered using an "M" for the number.

During the organization of the Photo Archives beginning in 1986 all glass plate negatives were organized using the principle of provenance. Volunteers cleaned and rehousing them in four-flap

⁹ West Chester, PA: Daily Local News, West Chester Past & Present A Centennial Souvenir, 1899, page 104.

¹⁰ West Chester, PA: Daily Local News, West Chester Past & Present A Centennial Souvenir, 1899 page 134.

¹¹ Estate Inventory & appraisalment, #29814, Joseph T. Murtagh, 1904.

archival enclosures and placed them in upright archival boxes on open shelving according to current best practices.

In the course of this project, certain inconsistencies were uncovered. Some negatives were identified as having been taken by Murtagh, while the corresponding original prints had been identified by someone as having been taken by Charles S. Bradford, Jr. A case in point is PH22 File5 *Album Leaves*, which someone labeled the prints in ball point ink the name Bradford. Since ball point ink is not contemporaneous with Bradford's lifetime, this identification is in doubt, and the prints have been attributed to Joseph Murtagh. Also Photo Album #130, in which the photographer was unidentified, images were found to match Murtagh's glass plate negatives. These have been noted in the negative inventory.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The Joseph Murtagh collection is an example largely of naturalistic photography by an amateur gentleman photographer typical of the 1880s and early 1890s. It includes many views of the Brandywine Creek, and genre agricultural scenes. In some cases an enhanced sky has been added to the negative.

Many photographs taken along the Brandywine include groups of gentlemen fishing or taking refreshment. This may have been the coterie of upper class men who dabbled in amateur photography early on in West Chester including Dr. J. Max Mueller and Dr. George Cardwell.

There is a small group of local West Chester views that includes a street view of Gay Street, the First West Chester Fire Company, National Bank of Chester County, and a baseball game at the Chester County Fairgrounds. Other landmarks include Birmingham Friends Meeting and Lucy the Margate Elephant.

Some of the photographs are of Murtagh's family and West Chester neighborhood. There are also beautiful interior views of a Victorian house showing room settings and architectural features such as fireplaces.

Selected Search Terms

Corporate Names

First West Chester Fire Company, West Chester, PA
Lucy, the Margate Elephant
Birmingham Friends Meeting
Chester County Fairgrounds, West Chester (Pa.)

Topics

Agriculture
Architectural follies
Banks – West Chester

Baseball
Boating
Bridges
Cattle
Children
Clouds
Covered Bridges
Creeks
Dwellings – West Chester
Fairgrounds – West Chester
Farms – Chester County
Fire Departments – West Chester
Friends Meeting Houses
Horses
Interiors
Men
Musicians
Pianos
Streets – West Chester
Violins
Women

Geographic Names

Brandywine Creek
West Chester (Pa.)
New Jersey

Forms

Dry plate negatives – 1880-1899
Dry plate negatives –1890-1899

Personal Contributors

Murtagh, Joseph Townsend, photographer

Arrangement

Since the negatives were no longer in original order, they were grouped by size and numbered. Number 1 through 81 are 6 ½ x 8 ½; number 100 – 183 are 5 x 7 and number 200 – 295 are 4 x 5s. There is some variation of sizes which may indicate that a friend's camera was borrowed.

This guide contains a negative inventory, subject index and a visual catalog of scanned images.

Access & Use

Patrons are welcome to view the reference prints in CCHS library reading room during library hours. The original glass plate negatives were all scanned in 2017 to make the reference prints in this guide.

Access Restrictions

None

Acquisition Information

Found in Collection. Donor records have not been found on file that record the donation by any of Joseph T. Murtagh's family members.

Preferred Citation

Joseph Murtagh Glass Plate Negative Collection PH22, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA

Copyright

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Related materials

PH22 Files 1 – 4 are reference prints made by Tommy Thompson and Larry McDevitt in 1973.

PH22 File 2 contains an original albumen print of First West Chester Fire Company hand pumper wagon.

PH22 File 5 are album leaves of original albumen and platinum prints that coordinate with negatives from the collection.

Photo Album 131 – contains albumen and platinum prints from some of the negatives in this collection.

Murtagh's 1865 diary, kept while working in the Paymaster's Office in Washington, D.C., is in the Library Collection.

Contents List

6 1/2 x 8 1/2 inch plates

1. Haying scene with cart and horses
2. Haying scene with card and oxen, clouds added in – positive on glass
3. Four men relaxing near the creek, clouds added in – positive on frosted glass. Man holding the fishing rod may be J. Max Mueller.
4. Fields at Haying time
5. Brandywine Creek Dam (formerly #M15)
6. Brandywine Creek with a fisherman – vertical (formerly #M16)
7. Brandywine Creek with a boy sitting on a rock. (formerly #M17)
8. Brandywine Creek (formerly #M18)
9. Brandywine Creek – vertical (formerly #M19)
10. Brandywine Creek (formerly #M20)
11. Children and a couple boating on the Brandywine (5 x 8) CCHS negative#315
12. Man boating on the Brandywine with two boys beside the creek (5 x 8)
13. Grazing cows – The Brandywine
14. Brandywine Creek with a row of willow trees
15. Brandywine Creek (formerly #M21) label on negative: 5/13/85 EAV Plate B
16. Gentleman fishing on the Brandywine Creek (formerly M#22) scratched on negative: Aug '86
17. Brandywine Creek (formerly M#23)
18. Brandywine Creek (formerly #M24)
19. Brandywine Creek (formerly #M25)
20. Boating on the Brandywine (formerly #M26)
21. Stone arch bridge on the Brandywine with children fishing (formerly #M27) cracked edges
22. “Murtagh Lot Church St. before ground breaking” (formerly #M28)
23. “Murtagh Lot Church St. at ground breaking” (formerly #M29)
24. Formerly saw mill (formerly Thompson #1918)
25. Brandywine Creek (formerly Thompson #1919)
26. Farmland (formerly Thompson #1920)
27. House interior – parlor with fireplace (formerly Thompson #1921)
28. House interior – dining area (formerly Thompson #1922)
29. Brick house on a corner lot dated 1886 (formerly Thompson #1923)
30. Farm and farm house on a winding road. (formerly Thompson #1924)
31. Country Road – possibly Downingtown Pike (formerly Thompson #1925)
32. Mill, possibly Gilbert’s Mill, West Goshen? Emulsion bubbly – (formerly Thompson #1926)
33. Woman and Horse (formerly Thompson #1889)
34. Woman and Horse –scratched on negative: “Kitty ‘85” (formerly Thompson #1890) – emulsion flaking –
35. Family Group, two generations – 3 women, 2 men (formerly Thompson #1891)
36. Four men out in the country taking refreshment. “Choice 7s” written on the side of a top hat. Left to right: Unidentified, Unidentified, J. Max Mueller, Unidentified.

37. Man posing with dog, smoking pipe posed before oriental screen (formerly Thompson #1893)
38. Man posing, smoking cigarette posed before oriental screen (formerly Thompson #1895)
39. Man at Grindstone, stone engraved with name of Bennett (formerly Thompson #1894)
40. Child in coffin. Calendar on the wall unreadable. (formerly Thompson #1896)
41. Woman bowing wearing Japanese kimono and hair style (formerly Thompson #1898 emulsion flaking)
42. Woman displaying long hair – Vertical (formerly Thompson #1897)
43. Group of people & children picnicking outside, handmade tea cozy in the foreground. (5 x 8) (formerly Thompson #1899) *See: PH22 File5 page 16 for an original platinum print.*
44. Man with Horse – vertical. Scratched in negative: “Jay-roan ‘85” (formerly # M65)
45. Family group outside, mother and 2 daughters. Same women as in #35. (formerly M66)
46. Portrait of elderly woman, same as in #45. – vertical (formerly #M67)
47. Two ladies on porch – vertical (formerly”M68) - emulsion badly flaked
48. Woman and dog pose beside a house covered with shingles and a tall brick chimney – vertical emulsion flaking off (formerly M48)
49. Eight people posed on porch – vertical (formerly #49)
50. Woman on porch. – vertical (formerly #M71)
51. Group of eight people on porch, see #49 (formerly #M73) vertical
52. Woman on porch with dog – same as #50 (formerly #M72)
53. Man sitting against tree, possibly Joseph Murtagh- vertical (formerly #74)
54. Two men sitting in field looking across field toward large tree.– vertical (formerly #M86)
55. Open field with fence (formerly #M87)
56. Clouds above roof tops (formerly #M88)
57. Baseball game Chester County Fair Grounds – ‘Floral Hall ‘ (formerly #89)
58. Baseball Game Chester County Fair Grounds – ‘Floral Hall’ (formerly #90)
59. Country Landscape (formerly #M91)
60. Brick house on corner, same as #29. (formerly M92)
61. African American groom with pony, woman with large dog (formerly M93)
62. Tree in snow beside bank building, West Chester. (formerly #94) – vertical
63. Photo photograph of an artist’s rendering of a mansion house design. (formerly #M95)
64. Country scene with frame house, rock wall and a cart. (formerly #M106)
65. Family group posed indoors – probably Sally, Joseph and J. Charles Murtagh (formerly #M107) see M66
66. Family group posed indoors – probably Sally, Joseph and J. Charles Murtagh – see M65 (formerly #M108)
67. Home Interior - dining room – same as #28(formerly #M109)
68. Home Interior - hall & lady’s parlor – (formerly M110) – vertical
69. Brick house on NW corner of Church and Virginia Ave. West Chester, PA – (formerly #M111)
70. Large piano, barrister shelves with music, rows of seats arranged for a recital. (formerly #M112)
71. Porch with plants, same porch as 50 and 52. (formerly #M113)
72. Home interior – same parlor as #27. (formerly #M1214)

73. Group of four men nipping beside the Brandywine, same group as #36.
74. Side view, exterior, National Bank of Chester County, West Chester
75. Side view in winter, National Bank of Chester County, West Chester
76. Front view, National Bank of Chester County, West Chester
77. Photo taken from a window or rooftop – view of backyards featuring interplay of different roof styles including a round tin roof. [Formerly Thompson #1913]
78. Sweeping landscape, taken from a hill, showing farms & fields. [Formerly Thompson #1914].
79. View of formerly farmer, two women and dog before a stone house. [Formerly Thompson #1915.] *See Album 131, page 17 for original platinum print.*
80. View of stone farmhouse from side yard, shed, bell & outbuildings visible. [Formerly Thompson #1916] *See Album 131, page 13 for original platinum print.*
81. Back view of farmhouse above. Building stuccoed, shed and bell visible. [Formerly Thompson #1917]

5 x 7 Plates

100. Copy photograph of couple profile portrait with oval mat (formerly #2075A) vertical
101. Copy photograph of couple full face portrait with oval mat (formerly #2075B) vertical
102. Copy photograph identified as “Great, Great, Great Grandfather Ferrie Barn 1734” (formerly #M75)
103. Workshop of George R. Cope (geologist), same as #171– Vertical (formerly #M77)
104. Girls in woods – emulsion flaking – (formerly #M78) very poor condition
105. House in woods – (formerly #M79)
106. Boy among flowering trees, house in the background (formerly #M80)
107. Boys & girl playing tennis, possibly on Virginia Ave., West Chester, PA
108. Timber wheels and saw mill (formerly #82) *See: PH22 File 5 page 4 for original platinum print*
109. Saw Mill (formerly #M83)
110. Barn at the top of a hill, with outbuildings in the valley (formerly #M84)
111. Farm scene with twisting road (formerly #M85)
112. Brandywine Creek with children skinny dipping (formerly M6)
113. Brandywine Scene – boy posed in a boat (formerly #M7)
114. Brandywine Creek (formerly #M8)
115. West Chester Fire Co. #1 – N. Church St., building built in 1888.
116. First building of West Chest Fire Co. #1 – N. Church St. with decorative bunting
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118. Old hand pumper of First West Chester Fire Co. being retired - at 24 N. Church
119. Old hand pumper of First West Chester Fire Co. being retired - at 24 N. Church
120. Old hand pumper of First West Chester Fire Co. being retired - at 24 N. Church
121. Old hand pumper of First West Chester Fire Co. being retired - at 24 N. Church
122. Geo. F. Brinton – 112 W. Gay, West Chester, PA
123. Brandywine River View
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133. Brandywine River View
134. Brandywine River View of stone bridge
135. Brandywine River View
136. Brandywine River View
137. Brandywine River View, three people boating scratched into emulsion: Murta '83
138. Brandywine River View – closer view of stone bridge, possibly Cope's. *See: PH22 File 5 page 3 for original platinum print.*
139. Brandywine River view – couple boating & onlookers
140. House interior, including shelves of books, paintings (formerly #1927)
141. House interior, fireplace with portrait (formerly #1928) *See: PH22 File 5 page 14 for original platinum print.*
142. House interior – Front Hall with staircase (formerly #1929) *See: Album 131 page 13 for original platinum print.*
143. House Interior – formal parlor with upright piano, fireplace with stove insert (formerly #1930)
144. House Interior – close-up of stove above (formerly #1931 vertical)
145. House Interior – view from library into dining room (formerly #1932) vertical
146. House Interior – parlor with fireplace (formerly #1934) vertical. *See: PH22 File 5 page 12 for original platinum print.*
147. House Interior – fireplace, same as #141 (formerly #1935) vertical *See: PH22 File 5 page 11 for original platinum print.*
148. Farm scene on a windy day (formerly #1936)
149. Landscape showing farm fields and fences (formerly #1937)
150. Rooftops with clouds, same as #77 (formerly #1938)
151. Agriculture – Hay wagon (formerly #M30)
152. Agriculture – Loading a hay wagon (formerly #M31)
153. Agriculture – Hay field, with 1 man working (formerly #M32)
154. Women Playing Tennis on Virginia Ave., West Chester, PA (formerly #M49)
155. Old Mill (formerly #M50)
156. Stone barn with brick farmhouse and frame house (formerly #M51)
157. Stone Arch Bridge (formerly #M52)
158. Stone Arch Bridge (formerly #M53)
159. Stone Arch Bridge (formerly #M54)
160. House and sawmill in woods in summer (formerly #M55)
161. Man sitting near stone bridge (formerly #M56) [Cope's Bridge]
162. Old Mill (see #M155) (formerly #M57)
163. Fence surrounding lawn and trees (formerly #M58)
164. Man raking hay (formerly #M50) 4-1/2 x 6-1/8)
165. Woods & stream (formerly #M97) 4-1/2 x 6-1/8)
166. Agriculture – distant view of hay field (formerly #M98 4-1/2 x 6-1/8)
167. Man fishing off stump with reflection – Vertical – (formerly #M99)

168. Landscape of fences – back yard? 4-1/2 x 6-1/8 - (formerly #M100)
169. Woods with trail – vertical 4-1/8 x 6-1/8 – formerly (#M101) *See Album 131 page 12 for original platinum print.*
170. Lucy the Margate Elephant, Atlantic City, NJ ca. 1886
171. George R. Cope (the Geologist) in his work shop
172. J. Charles Murtagh (son of the photographer) reclining in chair with bandages on his head and shins.
173. Joseph Murtagh (the photographer) reclining in chair
174. J. Charles Murtagh (son of the photographer) (5-1/2 x 4-1/4)
175. Man and boy pumping water (possibly J. Max Mueller)
176. Group of four men fishing, same view as #3 reversed and without the sky added.
177. Two men by a spring in the woods
178. Two men drinking from a spring in the woods [see album leaves] *See: PH22 File 5 page 2 for original platinum print.*
179. Family group on a picnic, Murtagh standing far right. (Same as #3, 4x5 transparency)
180. Three men outdoors, Joseph Murtagh in the middle
181. Group of women on a picnic
182. Unidentified fiddler
183. 2 unidentified blacksmiths 6-1/2 x 4-1/4

4 x 5 Plates

200. Fisherman with net and creel crossing field (formerly #M102) see M202
201. Stonewall with wooden fence gate – (formerly #M201)
202. Fisherman climbing over fence- vertical – possibly Dr. George Cardwell (formerly M104)
203. Frame house, same house as #64. (formerly #M105)
204. Stream with fallen tree (formerly M60)
205. Landscape with road & fences (formerly #M61)
206. Trees & stream (formerly #M62)
207. Stone springhouse in ruins (formerly M63)
208. Woods (formerly M64)
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213. Woods, close-up of tree trunks (formerly#M96)
214. Pedestrians on Gay Street at intersection with Church St., West Chester taken out of window. (formerly M33)
215. Spring House in ruins (formerly M34)
216. Farm buildings in flood. – formerly (#M35)
218. Landscape with house and buggy (formerly #M38)
217. House with white picket fence.
219. Roof tops (formerly M38)
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228. Trees (formerly M47)
229. Landscape with road & fences
230. Brandywine Creek, Deborah's Rock (formerly Thompson #1974)
231. Brandywine Creek with footbridge (formerly Thompson #1975)
232. Brandywine Creek (formerly Thompson #1976)
233. Brandywine Creek – with road beside creek and willow trees (formerly Thompson #1991)
234. Brandywine Creek - (formerly Thompson #1992)
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238. Brandywine Creek with dam – (formerly Thompson #1989)
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253. Brandywine Creek with Cope's bridge (formerly Thompson #2070)
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257. Brandywine Creek with covered bridge (formerly Thompson #2066) *See: Album 131 page 4 for original albumen print.*
258. Brandywine Creek with covered bridge (formerly Thompson #2068)
259. Brandywine Creek (formerly Thompson #1977)
260. Brandywine Creek (formerly Thompson #1978)
261. Brandywine Creek (formerly Thompson #1979)
262. Brandywine Creek (formerly Thompson #1980)
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287. Brandywine Creek with large boulder in foreground (formerly Thompson #2128)
288. Brandywine Creek (formerly Thompson #2129)
289. Team of oxen and hay wagon ca. 1885. (Emulsion BADLY flaking)
290. Family group on a picnic (transparency on frosted glass) see: M179 for negative
291. Group men. Pictured L to R: unidentified, Dr. George Cardwell, two unidentified men, J. Max Mueller, Joseph T. Murtagh.
292. Unidentified man in Mexican costume and half mask, sitting on a bench with brick floor.
293. Group of 4 men sitting on a fence, Dr. Cardwell on the left
294. Group of 4 men sitting on a fence, Dr. Cardwell left, with Joseph Murtagh next to him.
295. Group of fishermen, Dr. Cardwell on the left, Murtagh on the far right, Max Mueller next to Murtagh.

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