

Summary Information

Title: Serrill J. Sharpless Collection

Collection Number: PH52

Creator: Serrill J. Sharpless

Collection Dates: 1907-1911

Extent: 104 glass plate negatives and 104 silver gelatin reference prints

Language:

The material in this collection is in English.

Repository:

Chester County Historical Society

225 N. High St.

West Chester, PA 19380

Date published:

May 2010

Author:

Pamela C. Powell, Photo Archivist

History

Serrill J. Sharpless¹ 1868-1934, was born in West Chester, PA, the son of Samuel Emlen and Martha Serrill Ash Sharpless. Samuel Sharpless² was the owner of a lucrative brick and coal business in West Chester. He also started a lumber and building supplies business in the property on Washington, Walnut and Matlack Streets. The storage sheds at the old Frazer Branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad on Matlack Street were used to store lumber³. Serrill Sharpless joined his father in the lumber business. His brother was P.M. Sharpless, who made a considerable fortune in cream separators.

Serrill Sharpless married Eleanor Scott Walsh, 1868-1934 of Yonkers, NY in 1893 in West Chester, PA. They made their home at 132 E. Washington St. beside the lumber yard. They had one daughter, Vivian who was born in 1895.

¹ Anderson, Bart. The Sharpless Family. West Chester, PA, 1966, p 336.

² Ibid, p. 213-214

³ "S.E. Sharpless" American Republican 18 August, 1891.

The couple moved to Newtown, Bucks County, PA in about 1909⁴ where Sharpless took up farming and raised pedigreed Swiss goats. Vivian married Phill Glenn Byrd in 1917⁵ and lived in Center Square, Montgomery County, PA. The couple had one son, Phill Glenn Byrd, Jr. Serrill and Eleanor Sharpless died within seven months of each other in 1934. They were buried at Buckingham Friends Meeting.

Collection Scope and Content Note

The Serrill J. Sharpless collection is a group of photographs taken by an amateur photographer recording his home, family and business interests in West Chester and Bucks County, Pennsylvania between 1907-1911. Included are portraits of Vivian and Eleanor Sharpless with friends and pets as well as views along East Washington St., West Chester, PA where Sharpless lived and worked at the lumberyard. Included is a view of the railroad turntable at Matlack St., West Chester, PA.

Other views in Chester County, PA record Birmingham Meeting, the Brandywine Creek, Bower's Mill and Abiah Taylor's house in East Bradford Twp., Grubb's Mill area along Valley Creek, a bridge near Embreeville and a roadway near Downingtown Water Works. A house in Wayne with Sharpless' relatives on the porch is included.

Also documented are goats raised by Sharpless at his farm in Newtown, Bucks County, PA. George School and Neshaminy Creek, Bucks County are included. Pictures taken while on vacation at Ocean City, New Jersey depict bathers on the beach, life saving station and the ship SIndia run aground. Views on the Delaware River at Trenton record activity on wharves and with fishermen.

Selected Search Terms

Corporate names

Birmingham Friends Meeting
Brandywine Creek
Delaware River
George School (Newtown, PA)
Neshaminy Creek
Ocean City Life Saving Station (NJ)
SIndia
Valley Creek

⁴ Note that Serrill Sharpless is listed in Boyd's 1908 West Chester Directory, but not in any subsequent ones.

⁵ Anderson, Bart. The Sharpless Family. West Chester, PA, 1966, p 528.

Geographic Names

Bridgetown (PA)
Bucks County (PA)
Center Square (PA)
Chester County (PA)
Darby (PA)
East Bradford Township (PA)
Newtown (PA)
Ocean City, (NJ)
Trenton (NJ)
Wayne (PA)
West Chester (PA)

Topics

Animals
Beaches – New Jersey, Ocean City
Boats
Bridges – Pennsylvania, Chester County
Bridges – Pennsylvania, Bucks County
Cats
Cattle
Chickens
Children
Christmas Trees
Dogs
Dwellings – Pennsylvania, E. Bradford Twp.
Dwellings – Pennsylvania, Newtown
Dwellings – Pennsylvania, Wayne
Dwellings – Pennsylvania, West Chester
Farms – Pennsylvania, Bucks County
Farms – Pennsylvania, Montgomery County
Flowers
Friends Meeting Houses – Pennsylvania, Chester County
Gardens – Pennsylvania, West Chester
Goats
Lumber yards—Pennsylvania, West Chester
Mills – Pennsylvania, E. Bradford Twp.
Piers & wharves –New Jersey, Trenton
Rabbits
Railroad switches – Pennsylvania, West Chester
Railroads -- Pennsylvania, West Chester
Roads – Pennsylvania, Chester County
Schools – Pennsylvania, Bucks County
Streets – Pennsylvania, West Chester
Winter

Personal Names

Jefferis, Edith
McVaugh, Charles
Sharpless, Eleanor, 1868-1934
Sharpless, Vivian, 1895-1965

Forms

Dry Plate negatives – 1900s
Photographs – Gelatin silver prints --2010
Silhouettes

Personal Contributors

Sharpless, Serrill J., 1868-1834

Arrangement

The collection was received in no discernable order. The negatives were cleaned and sleeved and assigned sequential numbers. For ease of description and access the reference photographs were organized by topics or geographic location.

The reference prints were made in CCHS darkroom by volunteer Mary Painter in 2009. The glass plate negatives were contact printed on Ilford photographic paper, developed using Dektol and Kodak chemistry. The prints were thoroughly washed in a rotating print washer.

Access and Use**Access restrictions**

None

Acquisition Information

This collection was donated to the Chester County Historical Society.

Preferred Citation

Serrill J. Sharpless Photograph Collection, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA

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Series Description

File 1: Animals

4 silver gelatin photographs, a dog taken in 1908, two cats and cows on Valley Creek.
Glass plate negatives #4, 27, 40, 43.

File 2: Birmingham Meeting

2 silver gelatin photographs, Birmingham Meeting 11/3/1907 and children climbing on the cemetery wall.
Glass plate negatives: 36, 37.

File 3: Brandywine along Bower's Mill [E. Bradford Twp.]

6 silver gelatin photographs, view of worker's houses at Bower's Mill, Bower's Island, Abiah Taylor's House and Creek Road.
Glass plate negatives: 22, 23, 24, 29, 30, 35.

File 4: Brandywine

3 silver gelatin photographs, views along the Brandywine 1907-1908 near Sugar's Bridge and Opposition Hill.
Glass plate negatives: 25, 33, 34.

File 5: Delaware at Trenton

3 silver gelatin photographs, a launch on the Delaware River, view of activity on the wharf, fishing boats and shoreline.
Glass plate negatives: 53, 54, 55

File 6: Flowers & Foliage

6 silver gelatin photographs, lilies, arbutus, skunk cabbage, a cornfield and a flower arrangement, 1907 & 1908.
Glass plate negatives: 1, 2, 6, 31, 32, 41.

File 7: George School

3 silver gelatin photographs, distant view of George School, Charles McVaugh and Vivian Sharpless with rabbits, 1908.
Glass plate negatives: 46, 47, 48.

File 8: Glen and boat

2 silver gelatin photographs, a child named Glen holding a model boat.
Glass plate negatives: 70, 72

File 9: Goats

31 silver gelatin photographs of Swiss and Nubian goats raised by Serrill Sharpless' family, 1910 & 1911. Some views in Newtown and Darby.
Glass plate negatives: 68, 74 – 102.

File 10: Grubb's Mill area, Valley Creek

2 silver gelatin photographs, Valley Creek near Grubb's Mill and Miss Irwin walking in the woods, 1908.

Glass plate negatives: 20, 28

File 11: Neshaminy Creek and Bridgetown

2 silver gelatin photographs, views of the Neshaminy Creek and a Bridge near Bridgetown, 1908.

Glass plate negatives: 49, 50

File 12: Newtown House and Creek

2 silver gelatin photographs, view of a house in Newtown and of a creek beside it in winter, 1911.

Glass plate negatives: 44, 45.

File 13: Ocean City, New Jersey

7 silver gelatin photographs, life saving station and views of bathers on the beach at Ocean City, New Jersey, also the Sindia aground, September 1907

Glass plate negatives: 56-61, 67

File 14: Railroad Turntable

1 silver gelatin photograph, repairing turntable near lumber yard [Washington and Matlack Streets], West Chester, PA, 1908.

Glass plate negatives: 16

File 15: Silhouettes

2 silver gelatin photographs, copies of silhouettes of an unidentified man and Edith Jefferis.

Glass plate negatives: 103, 104.

File 16: Vivian Sharpless [daughter of the photographer]

10 silver gelatin photographs, Vivian Sharpless as a young girl, her Christmas tree, with kittens, will Miss Irwin, and friend Marguerite, 1907- 1911.

Glass plate negatives: 12-15, 19, 21, 38, 42, 65, 66.

File 17: Wayne, PA

2 silver gelatin photographs, views of a Victorian house in Wayne, PA and a Aunt Minnie and May sitting on the porch.

Glass plate negatives: 51, 52

File 18: West Chester, PA

9 silver gelatin photographs, views of lumber yard on Washington St., Sharpless' house and gardens at 132 E. Washington St., Vivian Sharpless feeding cats, chickens, 1908. Copy photographs of photographs taken by Gilbert Cope of Olaf Stromberg's house and the original Chester County Hospital building, 1893.

Glass plate negatives: 3, 5,7-10, 11, 17, 18.

File 19: Views, Downingtown and Embreeville

2 silver gelatin photographs, view of willows and bridge on the road to Embreeville and a carriage horse drinking from a fountain at Downingtown Water works, 1908.

Glass plate negatives: 26, 39.