Summary Information

Title: William C. South Photograph Collection & Papers
Collection number: PH7
Creator: William C. South
Collection Dates: 1890 - 1912
Extent: 219 Solgram color photographs, 1 cyanotype, 9 halftones, 21 silver gelatin photographs, 69 silver gelatin reference prints, 76 glass plate negatives, 7 digital prints..

Language:

The material in this collection is in English and French.

Repository:

Chester County Historical Society
225 N. High St.
West Chester, PA 19380

Date Published:

2010, updated 2018

Author:

Pamela Powell, Photo Archivist

Administrative/Biographical History

William C. South, 1866-1938\(^1\), was the son of Mary Ella and George W. South of “Arden\(^2\)” Berwyn, PA. According to his biographical sketch \(^3\)found in an advertising piece, he was educated at the Spring Garden Institute in Philadelphia with a degree in Art and Mechanical Engineering. He wanted to be a landscape painter, and frequently used photographs as an aid for his painting studies. In 1891 he was in placed in charge of George W. Brown’s photograph Gallery and later purchased it.

He later did commercial photography for the Erie Railroad and International Navigation Co. steamship lines. A photograph of a letter (File 30) reveals that he traveled extensively along the railroad lines taking views.

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\(^1\) Baptismal record 14 January 1872, St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, Philadelphia, PA. William Clinton South born 29 October 1866 to George W. and Mary E. South.


While he succeeded at commercial work his heart was leading him to new forms of artistic expression. South patented a color photographic process in 1904, similar to gum bichromate, which he called “The Solgram.” With his partner, Hugh O’Donnell⁴, he patented a unique camera which took three color separation negatives simultaneously, each with a different colored filter. These negatives were used to make full color photographs by treating prepared paper with three different pigments. Each color, red, blue and yellow were printed one layer at a time, registering the image with the negative taken with the corresponding filter.

South took patents on the camera and Solgram process in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France and Belgium. He founded the Solgram Color-Photo Company on December 21, 1904⁵ and began manufacturing printing kits in his factory building on St. Joseph’s Alley in Downingtown, PA. He began promoting the process through demonstrations and exhibitions. The first demonstration of the Solgram was given on December 28, 1903 at a meeting of the Columbia Photographic Society in Philadelphia⁶. He won a bronze medal for his color photographs at the Pennsylvania exhibit at the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis⁷.

He wrote in his pamphlet “The Solgram” A System of Color Photography: “As there is no process of means of producing pictures, which for truthfulness of reproducing nature can rival a water-color drawing executed by master, I have made the aquarelle my standard.”⁸

South got some interest in the process from the United States Department of Agriculture as well as contemporary artists like Charles E. Dana⁹. However, the process had some drawbacks. It was time consuming to produce and registering the negatives exactly for the three printings was difficult. The Solgram Color Photo Co. went out of business in 1906 and was declared defunct by 1910.

In 1911 South filed a complaint¹⁰ against Eastman Kodak Company charging that they were attempting to create a monopoly by limiting their dealers to Kodak products only. South sued Kodak for $100,000 for losses incurred by the Solgram Paper Company and for $200,000 for loss of profits from his patents. Kodak denied the charges. South’s evidence was not convincing enough and judgment was not in his favor.

Undaunted, South opened the Keystone School of Photography in his building on St. Joseph’s Alley in Downingtown in 1910. He offered a nine-month course for $150 which

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⁵ Complaint, William C. South v. Eastman Kodak Company (S.D. NY filed Dec. 27, 1911), p1 CCHS.
⁹ South, W.C. correspondence, 1904-1912, William C. South Papers, CCHS
¹⁰ Complaint, William C. South v. Eastman Kodak Company (S.D. NY filed Dec. 27, 1911), CCHS.
taught students how to operate their own photographic gallery. He also offered an advanced degree in “Artography” a term he coined for photography as a fine art. Naturally the Solgram color process was taught. He did not attract the 200 students he anticipated and closed the Keystone School of Photography down around 1912.

South then retired from photography to teach music and make violins. He was an accomplished musician and directed the Premier Concert and Dance Orchestra in Downingtown.

After his wife, Anna Boyle South died in 1935, he moved to the Turk’s Head Inn in West Chester, PA. South was well known in West Chester for his collection of rare violins. He died in 1938 at age 66 in a Berwyn nursing home and left no heirs.

Scope and Content

Collection of photographs and papers spanning the career of William C. South between 1890 and 1912. Forty-nine reference prints made from original glass plate negatives along with seven original silver gelatin prints show South’s career as a commercial photographer before the turn of the 19th century working for railroad lines, steamship lines and industries. Included are views on the Erie Railroad such as Tuxedo Station New Jersey, a firemen’s parade in Jamestown New York, merry-go-round in Elmira NY, tennis grounds in High Point NY and interiors of the railroad cars. Views in Philadelphia include the piers of the International Navigation Co. Red Star Line and American Line steamships. Activity on the wharves and steamships are shown. Also included are Philadelphia Traction Co. trolley, teams with wagons and Fire Association building. Some views are unidentified, showing a Corliss engine and a machine shop.

Two hundred and nineteen Solgram Color photographs (a process similar to gum bichromate) reveal the potential of the process that South invented and patented in 1904. Included are many still lifes of fruit, flowers, Toby mugs, tankards, lamps, phonographs, food, cigar boxes and photographic equipment. Also included are portraits and landscapes all largely unidentified.

Six silver gelatin photographs document South’s Solgram Color Photo Company and Keystone School of Photography on St. Joseph’s Alley in Downingtown, PA. Views show a photographic studio with equipment, students printing photographs, exterior of the building. Some of the Solgram color photographs have been taken by the unidentified students and are marked with the student’s cipher.

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11 South, William C. “The Keystone School of Photography” (Downingtown, PA : n.d.)
13 “Premier Orchestra” Downingtown, PA Archive 24 August 1916.
Also included are views taken in Downingtown, PA of the Downingtown National Bank, Minquas Fire Co., Downingtown Motor Co., Swan Hotel, Pennsylvania House Hotel, Downingtown Public School and Shelmire’s Mill.
Selected Search Terms

Corporate names
Brandywine Band (Downingtown, PA)
Downingtown Motor Co. (Downingtown, PA)
Downingtown National Bank (Downingtown, PA)
Erie Railroad
Fire Association (Philadelphia, PA)
International Navigation Co. (Philadelphia, PA)
Keystone School of Photography (Downingtown, PA)
Minquas Fire Company (Downingtown, PA)
Philadelphia Traction Company (Philadelphia, PA)
Solgram Color Photo Company (Downingtown, PA)

Topics
African Americans
Art reproductions
Automobile Dealerships -- Pennsylvania, Downingtown
Banks -- Pennsylvania, Downingtown
Barns
Boats
Carts and carriages
Cattle
Churches -- Pennsylvania, Downingtown
Creeks
Dolls
Engines
Fire Departments – New York
Fire Departments – Pennsylvania, Downingtown
Fishing
Flowers
Fruit
Genre photographs
Horses
Hotels & taverns -- Pennsylvania, Downingtown
Landscapes
Machine Shops
Mills – Pennsylvania, Downingtown
Musical instruments
Oysters
Parades – New York
Parks
Phonographs
Photographic apparatus & supplies—Pennsylvania, Downingtown
Photographic studios—Pennsylvania, Downingtown
Photography industry—Pennsylvania, Downingtown
Piers & wharves—Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
Portraits
Railroad cars
Railroad locomotives
Railroad Stations – New Jersey
Roads
Schools – Pennsylvania, Downingtown
Steamboats—Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
Still life
Streets – Pennsylvania, Downingtown
Streets -- Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
Tennis
Trolleys – Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
Waterfalls
Winter

Geographic Terms
Downingtown, PA
Elmira, New York
Goshen, New York
High Point, New York
Jamestown, New York
Philadelphia, PA

Forms
Cyanotypes, 1890-1900
Gum Bichromate prints, 1900-1910
Halftone photomechanical prints, 1890-1910
Silver gelatin photographs, 1900 – 1910

Personal names
South, William C., 1872-1838

Arrangement

The materials were found with no original order. An artificial topical arrangement was imposed on the prints for ease of access. The glass plate negatives were received in their original sleeves, but were unnumbered and in no particular order. The negatives were cleaned and sleeved by CCHS and numbered.
William C. South  PH7

Access and Use

Access restrictions: Patrons are welcome to view the reference prints in CCHS library reading room during library hours. Reference prints are available for all glass plate negatives.

Acquisition Information

According to former librarian Dorothy Lapp, the William C. South papers, original Solgram color photographs, original silver gelatin prints and glass plate negatives #1 -14; 68-74 were given to CCHS by William South.

Glass plate negatives 15 - 67 were donated to CCHS by John Chinquioine in 2001 (L2001.12.2) who obtained them from Bud Purnell of P & G Photo, a photography studio in West Chester, PA.

The glass plate negatives donated to CCHS in 2001 were contact printed in CCHS darkroom by volunteer Mary Painter. The plates were printed using Ilfobrom paper and Kodak Dektol developer and thoroughly washed. Selected negatives were printed by Photo Archivist, Pamela Powell using Portriga Rapid paper and amidol developer in 1989.

Glass plate negatives 68 – 74 were discovered in the Unidentified Makers Collection by the photo archivist in 2018. They were scanned and digital prints were made for the file.

Preferred Citation

William C. South Collection, Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, PA

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Related Material

William C. South’s biography was placed on Wikipedia in 2014 by Jim LaDrew and Pamela Powell.

Newspaper clippings files containing background information can be found under the personal names section of the file: South, W. Background information can be also be found on the business under the heading of Downingtown Business houses – South, William C.
COLLECTION INVENTORY
Photographic prints

Box 1:

File 1: Still life - apples & jug, 4 Solgram color prints.


File 4: Copy photographs of paintings and Sunday Magazine dated August 13, 1905, 8 Solgram Color Prints.


File 6: Dolls, 7 Solgram color prints.

File 7: Still life – flowers. Includes one photo of W. C. South making violins, on back of one still life. 4 Solgram color prints.

File 8: Still life - fruit, 18 Solgram color prints.


File 10: Studies with people costumed as peasants, 8 halftones, marked copyright 1899.

File 11: Industrial photographs of machinery, including the Corliss engine, 7 silver gelatin photographs.


File 15: Landscape studies of Valley Forge and unidentified places, 5 silver gelatin photographs.


File 17: Still life – peaches, 6 Solgram color prints.

File 19: Still life – photo equipment, 3 Solgram color prints.

File 20: Portraits - sitters unidentified, 12 Solgram color prints.

File 21: Portraits - William C. South, young woman playing piano at Keystone School and other unidentified sitters, 1 halftone, 1 cyanotype, 4 silver gelatin photographs.

File 22: Street scene, unidentified, 1 silver gelatin photograph.


File 25: View of locomotive and the interior of a railroad card, 2 silver gelatin photographs.

File 26: Still life – violins, 9 Solgram color prints.


File 28: Keystone School of Photography, Downingtown, PA
Reference prints from original glass plate negatives:
   #9: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [Downingtown Photography School and auto]
   #10: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [Letters Patent, Solgram Color Photo Co.]
   #11: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [School of Photography and auto]
   #13: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [photographic equipment]
   #14: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [Keystone School of Photography darkroom]
   #46: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, view of a portrait studio with large view cameras, background and reflectors

File 29: Downingtown, PA Views
Reference prints from original glass plate negatives:
   #2: 1 5 x 7 plate, [Downingtown National Bank, Lancaster Ave., Downingtown]
   #3 and # 4: 2 5 x 7 plates, [Brandywine Band, Downingtown]
   #5: 1 5 x 7 plate, [probably Brandywine Creek Downingtown in background]
   #8: 1 5 x 7 plate, [Downingtown National Bank, Lancaster Ave., Downingtown]
   #12: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, Downingtown Motor Company, Lancaster Ave., Downingtown, PA, ca. 1915.
   #21: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, labeled: train, Hancock, NY [possibly, Shelmire’s Mill, Downingtown]
   #22: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, Minquas Firehouse, firemen & pumper, Downingtown
   #U67: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, Pollock’s Mill, Downingtown, PA
   #U69: 1 6.5 x 8.5” plate, Downingtown brass band posed by I.Pawling & Sons West End Meat Market, Downingtown, PA
File 30: Erie Railroad
Reference prints from original glass plate negatives:

1 5 x 7 nitrate negative [Erie Locomotive #1494 - cityscape in background]
#45: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, copy of letter, 1897 from Frank Presbrey to Mr. W.A. Turk, re: William South photographer.
#54: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, labeled: “There they come, near Monroe E.R.R.” (#498)
[Gentleman and lady sitting on fence with bikes, ca. 1896]

File 31: Horses and carriages
Reference prints from original glass plate negatives:

#50: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate [gentleman and lady in a four wheeled break cart trotting past fountain]
#53: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate [man driving dapple gray draft horses pulling a tank wagon. Negative poor.]
#56: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [gentleman driving two horse team.]
#62: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [colts in a pasture]
#63: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [masked negative - dapple gray stallion]

File 32: New Jersey
Reference prints from original glass plate negatives:

#20: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, Tuxedo Station, NJ

File 33: New York
Reference prints from original glass plate negatives:

#15: 1 5 x 7 plate, Fireman’s Parade in Jamestown NY - showing reviewing stand
#16: 1 5 x 7 plate, Elmira, NY merry-go-round (#283)
#17: 1 5 x 7 plate, Orange Co. Pastoral near Goshen, New York (#212) [cows in field]
#18: 1 5 x 7 plate, Tennis Ground High Point, New York (#228) [mixed doubles play tennis]
#19: 1 5 x 7 plate, Erie R.R. Station, Jamestown, NY (#300) [poorly exposed-discolored]
#26: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, Fireman’s parade Jamestown NY #414
File 34: People
Reference prints from original glass plate negatives:

#6: 1 5 x 7 plate, [gentleman sitting beside photo of woman]
#7: 1 5 x 7 plate, [William C. South]
#24: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, people at gateway to estate “Arden” [near Berwyn, PA]
#59: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [man fishing in lake with wooded hills around]
#60: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [young woman carving (?) on a tree, ca. 1899.]
#64: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [two ladies walking in a park, ca. 1912]

File 35: Philadelphia
Reference prints from original glass plate negatives:

#23: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, trolley, Philadelphia Traction Co. Car #528
#25: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, team with wagon, sign reads: S.D. Hall, 39th & Parrish [Phila.]
#28, #29, #30: 3 6.5 x 8.5 plates, architectural views “Fire Association”

File 36: Steamships
Reference prints from original glass plate negatives:

#32: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, received broken, Pier 55 International Navigation Co. Red Star Line for Antwerp 305 & 307 Walnut St., Pier & steamship.
#33: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, view of “Richard Willing” steamship in canal.
#34: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, copy of poster: “American Line Belgenland, Philadelphia, Queenstown, Liverpool - International Navigation Company”
#35: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, steamship at Pier 54, International Navigation Co., Red Line for Liverpool, Pier 53 on right
#36: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, interior of pier warehouse
#37: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, view showing Piers 52-55
#38: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, view showing Piers 53-55
#39: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, view of two men on porch of warehouse
#40 and #41: 2 6.5 x 8.5 plates, men weighing bales in warehouse
#42: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, man boarding a steamship next to a sign “For cabin Passengers Only”
#43 and #44: 2 6.5 x 8.5 plates, views of steam ships sailing
#67: 1 8 x 10 plate, copy of poster: “American Line Belgenland, Philadelphia, Queenstown, Liverpool - International Navigation Company”

File 37: Still Life
Reference prints from original glass plate negatives:

#48: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, copy photo of drawing of Ben Franklin
#49: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, still life - jug with apples in dish.
#66: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [still life - Cisco cigars]
File 38: Unidentified
Reference prints from original glass plate negatives:

#27: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, side view of firehouse and dwelling
#31: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, landscape, trees & stream
#51: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate [heavily retouched - winter landscape with road, house, fields.]
#52: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate [[cows beside a still pond - large sky area]
#55: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [tree farm and neglected houses]
#57: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, heavily retouched - person crossing footbridge in snowy woods.]
#58: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [auto on dirt country road.]
#61: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [cows standing in a dammed up stream]
#65: 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, [cascading waterfalls]

File 39: Downingtown Views II:
Glass plate negatives discovered in the Unidentified Makers Collection at CCHS
Attributed to William C. South

#68 1 8 x 10 plate, Looking east on Lancaster Ave. from Brandywine Ave., ca. 1910 – 1915. [Formerly U65]
#69 1 8 x 10 plate, Swan Hotel, Downingtown. [formerly U68]
#70 1 8 x 10 plate, Pennsylvania House Hotel, Downingtown. [formerly U66]
#71 1 8 x 10 plate, Downingtown Public School [formerly U71]

#72 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, Pollock’s Mill, Downingtown [formerly U67]
#73 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, Downingtown Band [formerly U69]
#74 1 6.5 x 8.5 plate, Downingtown Band [formerly U70]

Oversize photographs:

PH7/OV/A20 Untitled landscape with barn and peasant, signed William C. South, copyright 1897. 1 silver gelatin photograph.

PH7/OV/A21 Untitled studies with peasants, one photo signed, W.C. South 1898. 3 platinum prints, 1 silver gelatin photograph.

PH7/OV/A22 View of an unidentified waterfall, and an unidentified sprawling large brick mansion. One photograph has St. Louis World’s Fair label. 2 Solgram color prints.

PH7/OV/A23 Copy photograph of a printing of an unidentified man. Signature on painting illegible, dated 1895. Also, copy of a painting showing a grandmother reading to four children. 8 Solgram color prints.
Manuscript Inventory
William C. South
Solgram Color Photo Co. & Keystone School of Photography Papers

File 1: The Solgram Company Articles of Agreement and By-laws, 1904
Articles of Agreement and by-Laws, Portland, Maine, 1904.

File 2: United States Patents, 1904
Patent 769773 William C. South of Berwyn, PA. Color photography

File 3: Canadian Patents, 1904

File 4: British Patents, 1904

File 5: French Patents, 1903

File 6: Belgian Patents, 1903

File 7: Solgram Patent Option, 1902
Option from William C. South to William Barney Dillon of New York

File 8: Solgram Company Stock, 1904
Stock Certificate: Charles Carter 100 shares Solgram Color-Photo Company Stock

File 9: Solgram Company Mortgage, 1906
Mortgage between Solgram Color Photo Co. of Downingtown and Jos. H. Johnson of Downingtown for $3,000.00

File 10: Advertising Ephemera Solgram Company
Pamphlet, William C. South “The Solgram’ A system of Color Photography” Vol 1
Pamphlet, William C. South Solgram Color Photography: A New and Wonderful Invention for Producing Photographs in the Colors of Nature, n.d. 3 copies
Pamphlet, William C. South Solgram Color Photography: A Subject for Everyone interested in Photography, n.d.
Solgram Color Photography price lists, advertising material, chemical envelopes, postcards, envelopes, instructions.

Artograph Photo paper instructions

_The Columbia Camera_, Vol VII No 12, December 1903 – announcing demonstration by W.C. South on December 28th.

_The Columbia Camera_ Vol. VIII No.1 January 1904 – report on the above meeting with handwritten notes by W.C. South. (2 copies)

_The Columbia Camera_ Vol. VIII No. 3, March 1904 – “Solgram Color Photography Number”

Lecture Notes, Wm. South on Color photography. See: _The Columbia Camera_

**File 11: Correspondence, 1904-1912**
Letter, to W.B. Dillion, Esq., New York, n.d.
Letter, Richard Barnes to Wm. South, 14 October [no year]
Letter, Charles Butler Esq. to George W. South, 24 April 1904.
Letter Charles Butler Esq. to O’Donnell & South, 4 September 1904.
Letter Charles Butler, Esq. to George W. South, 18 March 1905.
Letter, Charles Butler Esq. to George W. South, 15 January 1906
Letter, Charles Butler Esq. to George South, 16 June 1906
Letter fragment to Wm. C. South, 18 February 1905.
Letter, F. W. Cummings to Photo Color Co., 28 October 1905
Letter, L.M. Estabrook, USDA to Solgram, 16 February 1912
Letter, James M. Mautern [?] General Electric Co. to W. C. South, 5 May 1911.
Letter, Charles Dana to Mr. South, 27 November [no year]

**File 12: Attorney’s Agreement, 1911**
Agreement, William C. South with Wellman, Gooch & Smyth, 10 November 1911.

**File 13: Complaint and Answer, 1911 & 1912.**

**File 14: Keystone School of Photography**
Envelope, The Keystone School of Photography
Brochure, The Keystone School of Photography, n.d.
Mailing card, Keystone School of Photography, n.d.
Calendars, 1910 (three designs)

**File 15: Miscellaneous**
Envelope, Premier Concert and Dance Orchestra
Comments from Printing Room. Solgram Color Photo Company, 190?

Copper printing plate, Keystone School of Photography Diploma.