



History of the Scott Studio, St. Thomas

The Early Years

After arriving in St. Thomas, Ontario in the late 1870's, Thomas H. Scott opened a studio under the name of "Scott and Company" in partnership with William Lindrop. When this partnership dissolved in 1881, James H. Hopkins, his brother-in-law, joined him in the business, henceforth operating as "Scott and Hopkins". Frequently, articles and advertisements appeared in the St. Thomas Journal testifying to their innovative ideas and success in business. In 1883, they were hailed as the first in the vicinity to do photography by gaslight. That same year, they posted a notice in the paper, stating that they had "earned such a reputation for fine work that orders [had] been received faster than they could be executed. In order to catch up to their business, they would close their studio during the week commencing January 8."

Jumbo's Death Immortalized on Glass Negative

The best known photographs of the Scott Collection are likely those of Jumbo, the P.T. Barnum circus elephant who was struck and killed by a Grand Trunk locomotive on the evening of September 15, 1885. Taking these photographs would have presented Scott with a real technical challenge. However, even in a setting as awkward as this one, Scott strove for artistry in the composition of the photograph. He arranged for a locomotive to park on the tracks behind the body of Jumbo; this provided both setting and a block to the sunlight. Glass plates on which the picture would be taken were coated with emulsion in the Scott Studio and rushed to the site, still wet. Once photographs were taken they were rushed back to the studio to be developed.

Studio Passes From Father To Son

In 1900, as a youth of 17, William Murray Scott became an apprentice in his father's business. However, in 1909, the call of adventure and the possibility of wealth lured him to try prospecting in the Elk Lake District. Two years later, he returned to St. Thomas to take over his father's business. Like many of the early photographers, Murray Scott tried innovative methods to attract customers. He opened a "Children's Studio," which had child-sized furniture, little boxwood trees, lots of toys, casement windows and a bubbling fountain. Murray Scott's skill and artistry as a portrait photographer was recognized beyond the community in which he worked. He won five awards from the International Association of Photographers and had photographs selected for the "Roll of Honour" seven times. His photographic services were requested by various groups and associations.

He appears to have been the photographer of choice for Alma college, as well as many other school systems in the area. The railroads employed him to photograph crossings and stations, and the RCAF used his services to take individual and class pictures of the participants in the Commonwealth Air Training Plan in the County of Elgin during World War II.

The Studio Has New Owners

Murray Scott retired in April, 1955 and sold the business to Frank Sefton and his son, Clifford, who had gained experience in Montreal prior to coming to St. Thomas.

When Frank retired in the late 1950s, Margeruite joined her husband, Cliff, and together they ran a successful business, specializing in wedding and catalogue photography. Many Saturdays they would photograph four or five weddings and on one particularly busy Saturday, they did eleven.

In the 1980s, the Seftons began to plan for their retirement. The Studio had accumulated a large collection of glass and plastic negatives from photographs taken over the past 110 years. The studio closed on October 30, 1989.

From *The Scott-Sefton Collection: Elgin's History Through A Photographer's Lens, Volume I*, published by the Elgin County Library and available for purchase through the Archives.