

## GLASIER PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

[Overview](#)  
[Administrative Information](#)  
[Historical Note](#)  
[Scope and Content Note](#)  
[Related Materials](#) [Subject Headings](#)  
[Contents of the Collection](#)

### Overview

Repository	Archives The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art 5401 Bay Shore Road Sarasota, FL 34243 <a href="mailto:archives@ringling.org">archives@ringling.org</a>
Creator	Glasier, Frederick W. (1866 – 1950)
Title	Glasier Photographic Collection
Dates	1895 - 1942, bulk 1900 - 1930
Extent	15 linear feet; approx. 4,150 items - including all formats: approx. 1450 8"x10" & 400 5"x7" glass plate negatives, 1800 copy prints, and approx. 500 polyester copy negatives
Language	English
Arrangement	It is assumed that the glass plate negatives and copy prints were arranged in a numerical order that was imposed by the Glasiers. The numbers have no relationship to the subject matter of the image. Because of this, the glass plates have been placed in numerical order while the prints have been arranged in eleven subject groups and then placed in numerical order within these groups. This allows for easier access to the collection. Glasier

titled many of the glass plates and these titles have been transferred to the glass plate four-flap envelopes and the reverse of the prints.

The Museum Archives also has a collection of approximately 500 polyester copy negatives of the glass plate negatives, which are of poor quality. These were produced for various exhibits and are arranged in plate number order. Approximately 50 high quality negatives were made by Jerry Uelsmann, a well-known photographer and graduate research professor at the University of Florida, for the Museum's Education Office's Circulating Exhibit *Circus of Yesteryear*.

#### Summary

The Glasier Photographis Collection .

#### **Administrative Information**

##### Provenance

Museum purchase, 1963.

In 1953, three years after her husband's death, Emma C. Glasier offered the collection to The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art; but the collection was not purchased by the Museum. Then the Glasier Collection included not only the glass plate negatives and prints, but also Indian memorabilia and woodcarvings of Wild West scenes. In 1956, Mrs. Glasier wrote to Henry Ringling North about the collection she still had for sale. While North was not interested in the collection, he suggested that the Ringling Museum might be and sent her letter and his reply to A. Everett Austin, Director of the Museum. Austin responded that the Museum was again not interested in buying the collection. Subsequently, Andy Palmer, a gun collector and historic tavern owner from Dearborn, Michigan, purchased the Glasier Collection. After owning the collection for five years, he contacted the Museum in 1961 to see

whether they would like to buy the collection of glass plate negatives of the circus and Wild West shows. After negotiations over the purchase price, the collection was bought by the Museum in 1963.

The collection was transported by rail from Dearborn to Sarasota in wooden boxes; some of the glass plate negatives were broken or chipped in the move. The negatives were stored in the North basement of the Art Museum and during a flood in the early 1970's suffered water damage. Gay Ann Burke, who was then working on her thesis and was copying some of the negatives, salvaged many of the plates. The plates were later moved to the Circus Gallery and placed on the floor of the vault. In 1985/6, Michelle Scalera, Conservator for the Museum, requested that the crated negatives be placed on shelves and opened so they could "off-gas." The negatives were found to be jammed into the cases; many were found to be broken. Most were "sleeved" in a glassine-type paper or waxed paper. Some had obvious evidence of water damage [see note from M. Scalera].

After the Ringling Museum received a NHPRC grant to establish an archives, the glass plate negatives and prints were surveyed. The glass plate negatives are gelatin dry plates: plates coated with either bromide or chloride, combined with silver nitrate and a slightly acidic solution to produce silver bromide or silver chloride. Since the glass negatives were considered to be at the greatest risk, they were handled first. Each negative was cleaned on the non-emulsion side and supported, if needed. They were then placed in acid-free, four-flap envelopes. The condition of each glass plate was noted and recorded, as well as any identifying information found on the old glassine jackets. Negatives were then placed in

file cabinets with supports at intervals of eight. Still needed are anodized aluminum file cabinets for the permanent housing of the glass plate negatives. Approximately 300 8"x10" plates were severely water damaged when stored in the North basement of the Art Museum; because of the extent of the damage, no work has been done on these negatives. The reference prints and negatives have been re-sleeved and identified; there is an index available in the Museum Archives for the collection. The reference prints were either produced by the Glasiers, or by Palmer. In the 1960s, Jerry Uelsmann printed a selection of images from the collection. The prints are available for researchers to use. Each print bears the correct glass plate number for cross-referencing.

In 1997, Museum received an NEH grant, which supported the conservation of the glass plates, creation of inter-negatives and a new set of reference prints. Chicago Albumen Works of Housatonic, Massachusetts, did the conservation work. Copies of their condition reports are available. In 1999, the Fran E. Duckwall Foundation supported the digitization of the collection. A database was created to ease access to the collection.

#### Information about Access

The Glasier Photographic Collection may be viewed by appointment. No restrictions on access for prints; however, strict physical handling guidelines and restrictions are in place for the original glass plate negatives. Use of certain materials is restricted by statute, by the office of origin, or by the donor. For the protection of its collections, the Archives also reserves the right to restrict access to records which are not arranged, are being processed, or are exceptionally valuable or fragile. In some cases, copies may be substituted for the originals.

Ownership and Copyright	Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.A.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.
Cite As	Credit must be given for any use of materials. The credit line should read: The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, Florida State University, Glasier Photographic Collection and should include the negative number and size.
Processing Note	Processed by and initial finding aid by Waneta Sage-Gagne, 1990; additional processing by Jan Silberstein and Sigrid Merrington; finding aid updated Deborah W. Walk, 2004, 2010, and 2018.

### **Historical Note**

Frederick Whitman Glasier was born in Adams, Massachusetts, on 5 March 1866. He was the son of Henry Glasier, of St. Johnsbury, Vermont, and Lucy Ann Whitman Glasier; the family came from Pilgrim and Native American stock [see *Talking Leaves*, "Vanishing Race"]. In 1897, Glasier marries Nariet (Hattie) Byram, who dies in 1907. In 1910, he married Emma Chillingworth of Brockton. Rev. Albert M Hyde, pastor of the Porter Congregational Church in Brockton, performed the service.

Before he became a photographer, he worked as a clerk in the town hall (1889-1890 Adams and North Adams, Massachusetts Directories) and a textile designer in Adams, Massachusetts. By 1900, Glasier had moved to Brockton, Massachusetts, where he would live for the rest of his life. In 1908, Glasier was listed as a photographer in the Brockton, Massachusetts City Directory. He opened the Glasier Art Studio and Museum in the Brockton apartment where he and his wife lived. It was at his studio that he worked, exhibited his photographs, and sold copies of his

prints.

Glasier was fascinated by Native Americans and their way of life and was adopted into the Massasoit tribe as a blood brother by Lottie Mitchell [see Emma C. Glasier's letter to John Ringling North, 21 January 1956 – also, there are photographs of Lottie Mitchell, her sister, and their home in the collection]. His photographs reflect this interest in the West and Native Americans. As a young man, he had traveled out West and was greatly influenced by "Buffalo Bill" Cody. Some Brockton residents would later "recall that he dressed in cowboy regalia, shoes, hat, leather jacket, with a goatee to match" [see Emil S. Skop's letter to Gay Burke, 24 May 1972].

At one time, he was the official photographer for Barnum & Bailey; therefore, many of his photographs did appear in the Barnum & Bailey Route Books. Circus performers also bought Glasier photographs of their acts, which they in turn re-sold. To supplement his income, Glasier would give lectures using lanternslides of his photographs; his wife, Emma, would hand tint the slides. They also sold "a large variety of hand-colored prints in both oil and water colors, a number of Indian portraits and western scenes in three color printing, that are of great value for school and home decoration" [see *Talking Leaves*, introduction]. In 1942, Glasier retired and spent most of his time doing woodcarvings. He was a fine wood carver of western themes and sold his woodcarvings, which he called "whittlings." [There are two photographs of his carvings in the collection.]

Glasier used three 8"x10" King view cameras to which he added a Thornton-Pickard focal plane shutter speeded up to 1/3000 second. He used high quality Goertz and Dagors lenses. Glasier also used a Coerz Celor lens on a 5"x7" Graflex with an accordion-line pleated focusing hood and a post card Kodak camera [see Emma C. Glasier's letter to John Ringling North, 21 January 1956]. Using this equipment, Glasier became a master at the action photograph.

Glasier died suddenly on 28 July 1950 of a cerebral hemorrhage in Brockton at the age of 84. He was cremated and his ashes were placed in the family plot in the Maple Street Cemetery in Adams. He was survived by his wife and a brother, Mark S. Glasier.

## **Publications**

*Talking Leaves* was published by Emma Glasier in 1927 and describes the Glasier lecture series.

Glasier, Frederick W.; Peter Kayafas; Deborah Walk; Luc Sante. *Circus: The Photographs of Frederick W. Glasier*. New York: Eakins Press Foundation, 2009.

King, Jonathan. *Native American Portraits: Photographs by Frederick W. Glasier*, pocket album. New York: Eakins Press Foundation, 2004.

Sloan, Mark and Timothy Tegge. *Wild, Weird and Wonderful: The American Circus, 1901 – 1927, as seen by F. W. Glasier*. New York: Quantuck Lane Press, 2002

Walk, Deborah. The Big Top: Photographs by Frederick W. Glasier, pocket album. New York: Eakins Press Foundation, 2004.

## **Scope and Content Note**

Researchers interested in the late 19th- and early 20th- century photography and popular culture will find the Glasier Photographic Collection an important resource for the American circus, Wild West shows, and Native Americans. Glasier's portrait style is typical of the commercial photography of the time: the personality and presence of the subject are presented directly to the viewer. With the use of the speeded-up lens, he was able also to take action shots that were unique. The Glasier Photographic Collection is an important record "of a way of life and of a photographic approach that no longer exists" [see Burke, p. 64]. The great appeal of Glasier's photographs also comes from the "strength and personality of the people he chose to photograph" [see Burke, p. 26].

Since Glasier did sell his photographs to make a living, many Glasier prints can be found in other collections. The Collection at the Ringling Museum of Art is important because of its size for the circus and Wild West shows. A number of glass plate negatives are known to be missing from the circus photographs; these were bought and later donated to the Circus World Museum in Baraboo, Wisconsin, by Robert Good, a circus collector, who had been interested in buying the Glasier Collection at one time. A collection of copyrighted Glasier prints can be found in the Prints and Photographic Division of the Library of Congress. Also Gerald Beale of Easton, MA,

has a collection of lantern slides that Glasier used for his lectures. Mr. Beale is active in the Brocton Historical Society.

Glasier took most of the photographs between 1896 and the 1930's; he began to copyright his photographs in 1902. Glasier took publicity photographs for most of the major circuses (Barnum and Bailey, Adam Forepaugh, Sells Floto, Ringling Brothers [later Ringling Brothers Barnum & Bailey], and Sparks Circus). Because of his fascination with the West and Native Americans, he also took many photographs of Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show and the 101 Real Wild West Show. There are many shots taken of the Brockton Fair, in Massachusetts.

The Glasier Collection includes practically every aspect of circus operations. There are images of the circus owners and administrators, as well as ushers and ticket sellers. There are also shots of concession stands, cookhouses, wagons, the Midway, train cars, and the exterior and interior of the Big Top. The photographs of circus performers and animal trainers consist of many action shots of performances, as well as posed shots. In total, the circus photographs "document the golden age of the circus when its size, scope and social impact was unrivaled" [see Burke, p. 1].

The Wild West show photographs are similar to the circus photographs. Famous performers, owners (Gordon William "Pawnee Bill" Lillie, "Buffalo Bill" Cody, and the Miller family, for example), performances, and backyard scenes, can be found. The Native American images contain many posed shots (such as a portrait of Iron Tail, whose profile is on the buffalo nickel). The Native costumes are clearly identifiable, as well as personal names and tribal affiliations for many of the pictures. He also photographed many tribal customs.

Photographs from the collection have been used for a number of statewide circulating exhibits and exhibitions at The John and Mable Museum of Art, as well as for the backdrop for the Backyard at the Circus Galleries. They were also used in the Ringling Museum's exhibition, "A Day the Circus Came to Town," at the 1964 World's Fair. The Hallmark Gallery in New York City exhibited 100 prints from the Glasier Collection, "Circus Reminiscence", in 1966. PBS used some of the Glasier photographs for the show The American Experience - P. T. Barnum in 1990.



**For additional information** concerning the Glasier Photographic Collection see:

Belcher, Walt. "Photo Exhibit Captures Early Days of the Circus." *Tampa Bay Times*, May 25, 2013, [http://www.tbo.com/arts\\_music/photo-exhibit-captures-early-days-of-the-circus-b82495278z1](http://www.tbo.com/arts_music/photo-exhibit-captures-early-days-of-the-circus-b82495278z1)

Bradbury, Joseph T. "The Old Circus Album: A Historic Look at Shows of the Past". *The White Tops*, 41 (January/February, 1968): 24 - 27.

Burke, Gay Ann. *Circus Photographs from the Ringling Collection by Fred Whitman Glazier* [sic]. Master's thesis, University of Florida, 1972.

Corcoran, Ann. "Revisit the Circus' Heyday, 1890 – 1925, through Photographer Frederick W. Glasier's Lens." *RadioSRQ*, May 16, 2010. <http://radiosrq.com/john-and-mable-ringling-museum-of-art/revisit-the-circus%e2%80%99-heyday-1890-1925-through-photographer-frederick-w-glasier%e2%80%99s-lens/4519/>

deNobel, Jacob. "Visions of the Circus Celebrates Life Under the Big Top." *Carroll County Times*, August 23, 2017, <http://www.carrollcountytimes.com/entertainment/cc-en-visions-of-the-circus-20170817-story.html>

Glasier, Emma C. "Talking Leaves," 1927. This pamphlet describes the Glasier lecture series.

Glasier, Frederick W.; Peter Kayafas; Deborah Walk; Luc Sante. *Circus: The Photographs of Frederick W. Glasier*. New York: Eakins Press Foundation, 2009.

Hart, Phil. "Indians of Plains Laughed at Old Age, Says Glasier." *The Boston Herald* (October 23, 1927), 7.  
<https://www.genealogybank.com/doc/newspapers/image/v2%3A1386BF60B4F67060%40GB3NEWS-13E22018C9FDCC40%402425177-13E2111374ADBC8C%4058-13E2111374ADBC8C%40?h=1&fname=Fred%20W&lname=Glasier&fullname=&kwinc=&kwexc=&rgfromDate=1866&rgtoDate=1950&formDate=&formDateFlex=exact&dateType=range&processingtime=>

Holmes, January. "Ringling Photo Exhibit Features Turn-of-the-Century Circus Performers." *Bradenton Herald*, May 9, 2010, <http://clownalley.blogspot.com/2010/05/frederick-glazier-photographs-ringling.html>

Kavanaugh, Shane Dixon. "Discovering the Soul of the Ringlings' Circus." *The New York Times: LENS Blog* (April 5, 2010) <https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/04/05/archive-15/>

King, Jonathan. *Native American Portraits: Photographs by Frederick W. Glasier*, pocket album. New York: Eakins Press Foundation, 2004.

Lentz, John. "Another Look at Glasier's Historic Circus Photographs". *Bandwagon*, 29 (November/December, 1985): 32 - 34.

"Photos by Old-time Lensman: Valuable Circus Records are Acquired". *Sarasota Herald-Tribune* (April 5, 1964): 41.

Sante, Luc. "Circus: The Photographs of Frederick W. Glasier." *Design Observer Presented by AIGA* (22 September 2010) <https://designobserver.com/feature/circus-the-photographs-of-frederick-w-glasier/14948>

Scott, Preston. "Celebrate World Circus Day." *Smithsonian Folklife Festival Blog*, April 16, 2016, <https://festival.si.edu/blog/2016/celebrate-world-circus-day/>

Sloan, Mark and Timothy Tegge. *Wild, Weird and Wonderful: The American Circus, 1901 – 1927, as seen by F. W. Glasier*. New York: Quantuck Lane Press, 2002

Walk, Deborah. The Big Top: Photographs by Frederick W. Glasier, pocket album. New York: Eakins Press Foundation, 2004.

Weiss, Margaret R. "The Big Top's Mathew Brady". *Saturday Review* (March 12, 1966): 146 - 147.

## **Related Materials**

Registrar's Office. Exhibition Files

Education Office. Circulating Exhibits, 1972 - 1985, "Circus of Yesteryear."

General & Vintage Circus Photographs, Photographic Group 1.

Circus Route Books and Programs.