

Kim Stargatt Collection-234 glass plate negatives photographed by Kim Stargatt's great grandfather, Leonard C. Talley circa 1890

In December of 2014, my friend Kim came to me with two small crates filled with glass plate negatives circa 1890. Her great grandfather, Leonard C. Talley, made the pictures in the late 19th century using a specially designed stereograph camera that created two pictures at the same time. The photographs were almost identical except for a slight difference in perspective. When the photographs were viewed, side by side, in a special machine called a stereoscope, a three-dimensional effect occurred. Kim found the negatives in her family's old barn. Kim said she occasionally visited the barn to "see what she might find." Apparently, the barn was filled with old family possessions that no one wanted. The glass plates had been in the barn nearly 100 years. Leonard C. Talley was also a talented wood worker. He made a custom stereograph cabinet to view the pictures, which Kim also salvaged from the barn. Kim and I had a wonderful time working with the plates. After I scanned the glass plates, Kim and I made salt prints in my darkroom. Eventually, I contacted several organizations to inquire about a possible exhibition, and The Biggs Museum of American Art, in Dover Delaware, showcased several pieces of Leonard's collection in a show that highlighted the early work of Ansel Adams.

The glass plate negatives provide an in-depth view of life in Wilmington, Delaware circa 1890. The glass plates include images of people enjoying camping and entertainment activities at Brandywine Springs Amusement Park circa 1890-1920. Holy Trinity Old Swedes Church is featured in several plates with the Alter displaying the date June 1890. Many plates document life and leisure along the Brandywine River in Wilmington, Delaware. The Augustine Mill is pictured in one glass plate, which displays the names Jessup and Moore – the owners of the paper mill at the time of the photograph. Leonard also photographed quite a few people upon their death. One baby who was photographed at the time of her death was named Harriet. The top of her coffin is inscribed with her name. One plate is a picture of, what looks like, the Capital building in Washington, D.C. Several plates are images of an establishment named Mansion House, which is located on the banks of what may be the Ohio River along the Ohio Railway.

The information on the signs and billboards in several of the pictures may be an interesting point of departure for future research. The information is as follows: J.L. Vantine (a name on a cabin at a campground that may be Brandywine Springs Amusement Park), Gravel Hill Dairy (a company name on the side of a horse-pulled cart), Holy Trinity Church Old Swedes (a church on the banks of the Brandywine River), F.A. Mitchell (a name on a cabin at a campground that may be Brandywine Springs Amusement Park), 2nd Delaware Infantry Civil War (veterans dressed in full uniform, for what appears to be some type of celebration – perhaps Memorial Day. Mansion House (the name of a hotel), and J.R. Kilmer (a local undertaker).