

ST. CATHARINES PHOTOGRAPHIC CLUB

A Brief History

The earliest reference to a St. Catharines Camera Club is in a copy of a journal called Canadian Engineer. It is dated February, 1897. There are four photographs on pages 292 - 294 that portray areas of the Willson Carbide and Acetylene Works. They are by J.T.Groves of the St. Catharines Camera Club. That company commenced operations on April 13, 1896. A note at the end of the above article states that "Acetylene gas is now used by the Camera Club of St. Catharines for photographing at night." We are, therefore, celebrating at least one hundred years of camera club membership in St. Catharines.

There was probably much activity for camera enthusiasts during the fifty years following this period but the records are rare. We are on much sounder ground by the 1940's as we have a member, Tom Fraser, who recalls attending the club in 1943. Some records also begin to appear at this time. Vern May became President in 1945 and Alice Eves, John Penner, Bert Titley and Tom Fraser completed the presidential terms to the end of the St. Catharines Camera Club and the beginning of the St. Catharines Colour Camera Club some ten years later.

One of our first secretarial records comes on September 5, 1950, when "the first meeting of the club for the 1950-51 season was held at the CKTB studios with twelve members present." The interest of the club was still for black and white prints. However, on October 24, 1950, Kodachrome slides were shown by John Penner and on January 9, 1951, "colour slides were shown by several members." Later in the year, Dorothy Sharpe, whom many of us remember, "was the guest speaker for the evening and showed several of her beautiful slides from her trip to the Rockies."

At this time competition was different to what it is today. Print competitions were held monthly and a point was given for each entry. Three entries per month were allowed. Ten points were given for first place, five for second place and three for third place. Prints were also sent to other photographers for comments which were written on the back. Tom Fraser recalls one comment told to him by a friend. A print was sent to an elderly photographer of experience who had a habit of speaking his mind. He commented on the exposure, on the

position of the landscape and on whether filters should have been used. He finished by saying that there was one thing very wrong - the lens cap should have been left on the lens.

Colour was certainly becoming popular and on September 18, 1951, "Mr. Thompson suggested that it may be possible if enough members were interested, to form a colour division." In December of that year a meeting was devoted entirely to colour, both prints and transparencies.

During the 1950's, the club was undoubtedly changing. Records were being kept and we note that on February 2 to 14, 1953, the club held its first Salon of Photography. To quote from those records, "It was the first of the type ever staged in the city and was opened in the art gallery of the library. Over 100 prints were displayed, including thirty-two from Toronto Camera Club." This certainly shows that the members had a great deal of enthusiasm, but the interest was still towards colour. On May 19, 1953, the St. Catharines Camera Club held its first colour slide competition. There were still two meetings, on Tuesday for colour and on Thursday for black and white. However, the Thursday evening section of the club gradually died through lack of interest.

On October 16, 1956, the secretary wrote the following: "This re-organization meeting had only three members present. It was moved to try posters and one more nature and then, if there was no interest, to amalgamate with the colour club, turning over funds in the black and white division to them."

Members of the club became very involved with the Niagara Regional Camera Clubs. A notebook entry on November 28, 1960, informs us that slide entries for the Second District Competition are to be sent to St. Catharines Slide Chairman, Dr. Don Mason. At the November, 1961, Regional Meeting for the Golden Horseshoe, "Tom Fraser reported that facilities were available at the Atlanta Hotel in St. Catharines. A chicken dinner was \$2.00 a plate. It was felt that with a charge of \$3.00, we would have sufficient funds to bring in a couple of outstanding speakers." There was certainly a difference in monetary value in those days.

Since then, the St. Catharines Photographic Club has concerned itself with every aspect of photography on the peninsula and south of the border. It has been an active supporter of the Niagara Frontier Regional Camera Clubs and its members have held most of the executive positions at various times. It has also been involved internationally. The

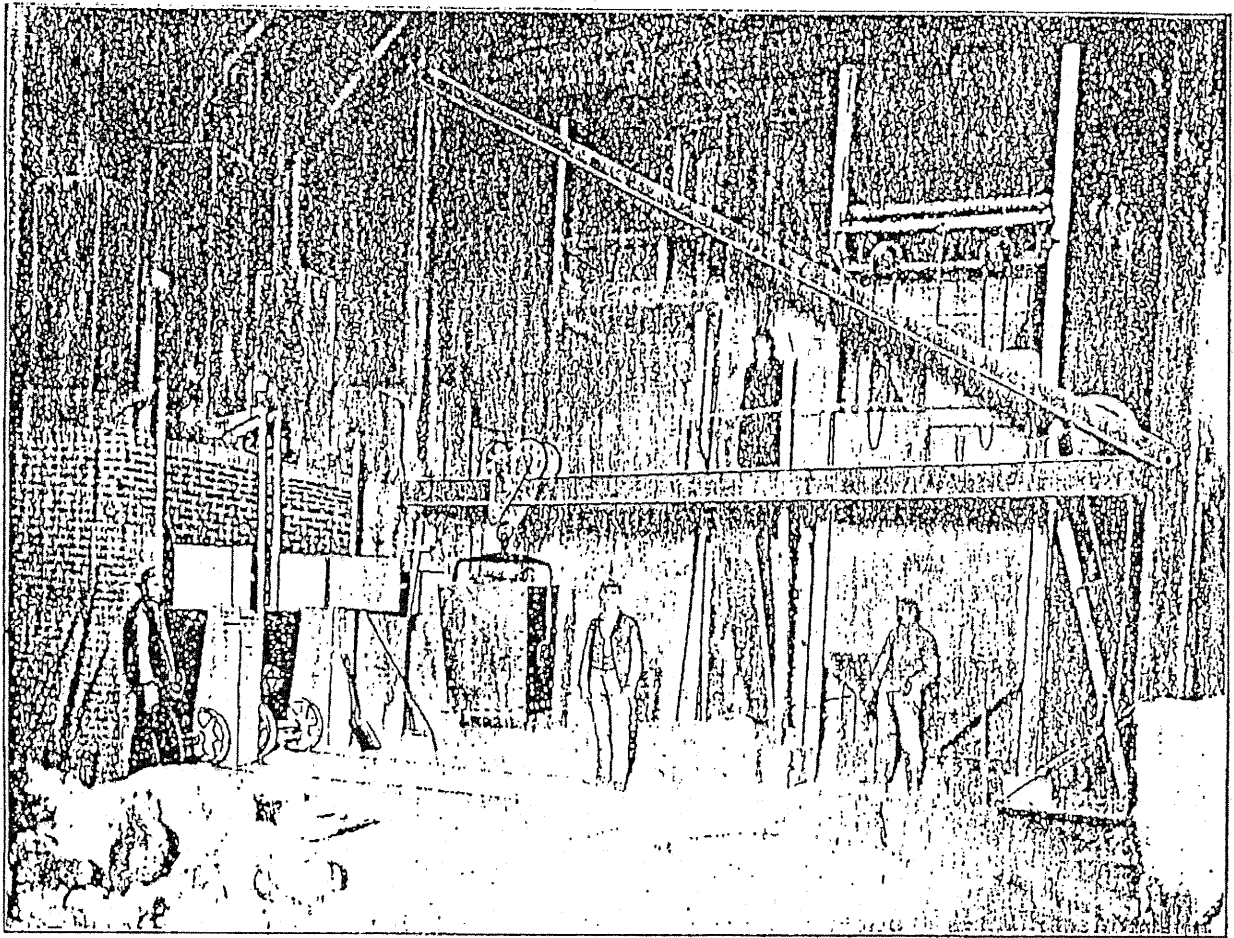
Federation Internationale de L'art Photographique colour competition was shown in North America for the first time in 1986. It was judged and shown in St. Catharines with the assistance of many club members. Wayne Tester was one of the five judges. Mary and Don Mason gave showings of the entries around Ontario, Quebec and the East Coast. There were entries from thirty-one countries. Also, in the fall of that year, the club joined the St. Catharines Standard to produce a pictorial record of twenty-four hours in Niagara. The forty-page booklet had numerous photographs by members, mainly in colour.

1988 was also a year to remember. In January, the club watched Mary Mason giving the club great coverage as she gave photography demonstrations on Cable Ten Television. Later that year, many members found themselves involved in an all-day seminar at Brock University. The two speakers were John and Janet Foster, well known for their wild life television shows and photography. Much credit must go to Wayne Tester for organizing so many aspects of this interesting and money-making project.

Throughout most of this time the journal, Tripod Topics, kept up its recording of competitions and happenings within the club. It also printed interesting and educational articles, mainly by the members. Tripod Topics was so named by Mrs. Thelma French on September 11, 1962. Many editors have come and gone but a large number of these journals are still available for reading in the St. Catharines Centennial Library and in the St. Catharines Museum at Lock 3.

Many activities have occurred in the last forty years. Some, like those of the Dirty Dozen (Tripod Topics - Winter 1995) must have given the club a reputation. It sounds very disreputable. One is surprised that the editor approved it! The St. Catharines Photographic Club is and always has been great competition and great fun. This is what we celebrate at this fortieth anniversary.

Jim Matthews



Photograph by J. T. Groves, of the St. Catharines Camera Club.

WILLSON CARBIDE AND ACETYLENE WORKS, VIEW OF FURNACE ROOM WITH CRANE.



Photograph by J. T. Groves, of the St. Catharines Camera Club.

WILLSON CARBIDE AND ACETYLENE WORKS--VIEW OF ELECTRICAL FURNACE ROOM.