

HISTORY

Frank Dean, Fotografer

Eyewitness to history

Just a few months short of 50 years, on Oct. 1, 1964, a demolition crew was knocking down the old Frank Dean studio on the west side of Fifth Street, between Rood and White, then the site of Mesa County Public Health Department.

Unknown to the workers at the time, the building contained the glass negative plates of Mesa County history from about 1887 to 1947, taken by the "Dean



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of Photographs," Frank E. Dean.

As the steel jaws of the large shovel shattered and scattered a portion of the 15 wooden cases of tightly packed glass negatives, hundreds of these negatives fell into the basement of the old studio and were broken.

How were these glass negatives forgotten? Among them Frank Dean had recorded clothing styles, parades, babies, weddings, street and buildings views, disasters, and high and low points of life in Mesa County. He was always the "Eye Witness to History" in our community.

FRANK DEAN FOTOGRAFER (YES, THE NAME IS SPELLED WRONG FOR A REASON)

Frank Ellsworth Dean was born on Sept. 9, 1864, in Marshall County, Iowa. In 1869, his family moved to Sedalia, Mo., and it was there at age 10 he began learning about what was to become his career by washing glass plates used for early photographic work for the Latour Gallery. Frank left school after the sixth grade to learn his trade and became a master photographer. Then at age 18, he went west to find his future and make a name for himself.

In 1882, Dean struck out for the town of Gunnison, the jumping off point for the Western Slope of Colorado, and set up a studio there. In his early work he covered the area from the Continental Divide to the Utah state line. While in Gunnison, he was asked to take a picture of the "Man-eater," Alfred Packer, during Packer's second trial for cannibalism and theft.

Dean came to Grand Junction for the first time in 1887, where he pitched a tent at Fifth and Main streets and took many photographs. He was going to establish a business there but a severe snow storm devastated his tent and



This photo, taken by Frank Dean, is of Main and Seventh streets looking west during the mid-1930s. It's a nighttime view of Grand Junction's Avalon Theatre. Above: Frank Dean with his second wife, Sarah Walsh Sweeney, 1940.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS



The Dean photo building in the year 1900. It was located at the northwest corner of Fifth and Rood. Alpine Bank is there now.

business, so he packed up and returned to his young wife, Lucy, and children in Gunnison.

By 1900 a friend, L.M. Jones, persuaded Dean to come back to Grand Junction. Jones, himself a photographer and banker here, found him a place for his shop on the northwest corner of Fifth and Rood (now the location of Alpine Bank). Dean, always a marketing guy, painted on his building "Fotografer Dean." The obvious spelling error would attract attention and bring people to his shop to tell him about the misspelling. Once an irate farmer visited Dean to tell him about the misspelling, to which Dean told him it was on purpose to bring people in. They both had a laugh and then Dean asked if he could take his photo — point taken.

Before moving to Grand Junction, Dean had studios in both Gunnison and Crested Butte. While in Gunnison, Dean, age 19, met and married 18-year-old Lucy Mary Buckey. Lucy was born on August 22, 1865, in Brederick City, Md., and in 1883 her family moved west to Gunnison. She and

Frank were married on July 2, 1884, by Rev. Father Quinn at St. Peter's Catholic Church in Gunnison. While in Gunnison they had five children — two sons, Francis (Frank Jr.) who died in infancy (1891-1892) and Preston Henry (1894); and three daughters, Mary (1885), Elizabeth (1887) and Willa A. (1889).

The marriage of Frank and Lucy was long and happy. On July 1, 1934, at their home in Grand Junction, a 50th Wedding Anniversary Party was given for them with a recap of their lives. Four short years later Lucy passed away on Nov. 22, 1938, in Grand Junction and was laid to rest in the Orchard Mesa Cemetery. Thus ended in this life what many said were "Two Hearts that Beat as One."

Frank was a widower until July 8, 1940, when he married Sarah Walsh Sweeney at St. Joseph Parish by Father N. Bertrand. This was a happy union until her death on Aug. 28, 1946, at St. Mary's Hospital. Sarah was buried in the Dean Family plot on Orchard Mesa.



The wedding between Frank Dean and Lucy Mary Buckey on July 2, 1884, in Gunnison, Colo. Left to right: E.E. Mueller, Frank Dean, Lucy Buckey and Mary Cleary

In 1908, his first studio was torn down to make way for the Y.M.C.A. and Dean built a new shop north of the Y.M.C.A. on Fifth Street between Rood and White. Dean was good at taking photos, and there is one picture taken in front of his shop of the horse-drawn fire department wagon where all the horse's feet are off the ground simultaneously.

Dean also opened a retail camera shop on Sixth and Main streets, west of the Avalon Theatre, and it was run by his son, Preston, and daughter, Mary Dean Eble. Most of the photos of Main Street during that time period are from the top of Frank Dean's camera shop.

In his later years Dean started using film negatives and told people with the glass negatives he didn't have people smile because with the old camera, they could

not hold a smile that long. With film he could have people smile, and now he could take photos at night with a timer to pick up nighttime events on Main Street.

Dean served as the director of the Chamber of Commerce for three years and was elected for a fourth term, but declined stating "new timber should be taken in." He was also a member of the "Four Horseman," a group of four men who were early Grand Junction citizens who made outstanding contributions to the life and early development of the community.

Dean died on Feb. 16, 1947, and was laid to rest in the family plot. One might think the story ends here, but the legacy he left behind is far from over.

As the wrecking crew began to

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tear down the old Dean studio in 1964, the breaking of glass began; the crew stopped the steel jaws of death for those pieces of Grand Junction history. Wooden cases of negatives were routed from their hiding places in the corners, basements, wall and attic of the studio. The find drew a crowd of people as the cases were stacked on the sidewalk.

Nobody knew what to do with the glass plates and they were destined for the city dump until a local Mesa College student by the name of Terry Mangan, a member of the state historical society, went into action. He secured all the unbroken plates, about 2,300, and cleaned and numbered them. In this collection were photos taken before the turn of the century and into the mid-20th century.

In December of 1964, the glass plates left Mesa County for the Colorado Historical Society in Denver where they are stored. Over the years people have made donations of photos, and negatives by Frank Dean to the Museum of Western Colorado, Loyd Files Research Room, creating a second major Frank Dean Collection. Donors include Al Look, Mary Dean Eble and Mary Dean Stucker.

Unfortunately Frank's customer book containing the code numbers to the negatives is lost and, if you don't know the person in the photo, they are just a face behind a glass plate. At least the photos of the places, buildings, streets, cars and events can be identified.

As of this writing in 2014, there is a missing Frank Dean collection that was last

seen around 1938 of all the Mesa County veterans from World War I. Frank had a standing invitation to all service men on furlough or leave during the war or returning after their discharge to call on his studio and pose for their portraits. Frank had photos of the soldiers and sailors pasted in large albums, which he mentioned in a newspaper story by Merle McClintock of The Daily Sentinel. He said he wanted to find a safe place, under proper supervision, to place the veterans' albums so their faces would not be lost to history.

In 1922, Dean said in a story, "Glancing rearward, it has been a short and pleasant experience just to have lived this 40 years anywhere... Forty years of photographs... Beginning with baby's first birthday, it is now into the third generation... To you folks I have been privileged to serve, I wish to thank you."

No, thank you Frank Dean, for all you and your family did for Grand Junction and Mesa County. You were and still are "An Eyewitness to History."

Photos: Museum of Western Colorado, Loyd Files Room, Michael Menard; Marie Tipping: Daily Sentinel Reporter's Files: Files of Mary Dean Stucker; Mary Dean Eble; Willa Dean Frey; and Frank and Lucy Dean, and Terry W. Mangan, the young student who saved all the glass negatives.

Garry Brewer is storyteller of the tribe; finder of odd knowledge and uninteresting items; a bore to his grandchildren; a pain to his wife on spelling; but a locator of golden nuggets, truths and pearls of wisdom. Email Garry at brewer62@bresnan.net.