



Guide to the Peter Sekaer photographs, circa 1937-1940

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David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

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Summary

Collection Title:

Peter Sekaer photographs, circa 1937-1940

Creator:

Sekaer, Peter, 1901-1950

Source:

Archive of Documentary Arts (Duke University)

Abstract:

Peter Sekaer (1901-1950) was a Danish-born American photographer. Collection consists of fifteen black-and-white photographs taken by Sekaer from about 1937-1940, while working for the U.S. National Housing Authority to document living conditions and public housing projects in various places in the U.S. Known locations include Louisville, Kentucky; New Orleans, Louisiana; Williamsburg, N.Y.; Nashville, Tennessee; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Austin, Texas. Individuals in the photographs include African Americans and other people of color, and White Americans; there are quite a few photographs of children playing. The focus is typically on urban and rural dwellings and yards in areas of poverty; there are also a few images of public housing projects, small businesses, and warehouses. The gelatin silver print sizes range from 4 1/2 x 4 5/8 to 10 1/4 x 13 1/8 inches. Acquired as part of the Archive of Documentary Arts at Duke University.

Extent:

1.0 Linear Feet (2 boxes)

Print versos are marked with legacy identifiers, sometimes including original photographer's numbers. Other markings sometimes include titles, locations, and dates assigned by former owners or the agency; and credit information.

Language:

English

Collection ID:

RL.11875

Permalink:

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m1dm9m>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Peter Sekaer photographs, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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Background

Scope and Content

Collection consists of fifteen black-and-white photographs taken by Danish-American photographer Peter Sekaer from about 1937 to 1940, who was working at the time for the U.S. National Housing Authority to document living conditions and public housing projects in various places in the U.S. Known locations include Louisville, Kentucky; New Orleans, Louisiana; Williamsburg, N.Y.; Nashville, Tennessee; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and Austin, Texas. Individuals in the photographs include African Americans and other people of color, and White Americans; there are quite a few photographs of children playing. The focus is typically on urban and rural dwellings and yards in areas of poverty; there are also a few images of public housing projects, small businesses, and warehouses.

The gelatin silver print sizes range from 4 1/2 x 4 5/8 inches to 10 1/4 x 13 1/8 inches; some are mounted on board, the largest of which is 16 x 20 inches, but for the most part they are unmounted and 8 x 10 inches or smaller. Titles in this collection, if present, originate from the prints; if there is no title, a brief description has been provided by library staff.

Biographical/Historical

Peter Sekaer (1901-1950) was born in Copenhagen, Denmark and emigrated to Canada in 1918. After arriving in New York in 1920, he studied at the Art Students' League, then worked with Berenice Abbott and Walker Evans. He was hired by the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) in 1936. He was transferred in 1937 to the National Housing Authority and remained until about 1940, during which time he took these photographs in this collection, documenting housing conditions and public housing projects in areas of poverty. He left federal employment in the late 1940s, and after several years of freelance work, he died of a heart attack in 1950 at age 49. The whereabouts of his negatives are unknown, but the Library of Congress holds a collection of several hundred prints.

The U.S. National Housing Authority was created in 1937 by the Federal government as part of the recovery programs known as the "New Deal" during the Great Depression.

[Source: Wikipedia, accessed January 18, 2021]

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library

411 Chapel Drive

Duke University

Durham 27708

askRL@duke.edu

URL: <https://library.duke.edu/rubenstein/>

Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the copyright section of the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

Acquisition Information

The Peter Sekaer photographs were received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library as a gift in December 2020.

Processing Information

Processed and described by Paula Jeannet, January 2021.

Accession(s) described in this collection guide: 2020-0091.

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Related Materials

Related Material

[Farm Security Administration photographs, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University](#)

[Walker Evans photographs, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University](#)

[Peter Sekaer photographs, Library of Congress](#)

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Names and Subjects

- African Americans -- Economic conditions -- 20th century
- African Americans -- Photographs
- Children -- United States -- Social conditions -- 20th century
- Documentary Photography -- United States
- Housing -- United States -- Photographs
- Minorities -- Housing -- United States -- Photographs
- Photographers -- New York (State) -- New York
- Poor -- United States -- Photographs
- Poverty -- United States -- Photographs
- Slums -- United States -- Photographs
- United States -- Economic conditions -- 1918-1945
- United States -- Social conditions -- 1933-1945
- Black-and-white photographs
- Gelatin silver prints
- United States. Federal Public Housing Authority
- Archive of Documentary Arts (Duke University)

Collection Inventory

Federal Agency photographs, circa 1937-1940

Scope and Contents

The fifteen black-and-white prints are arranged in date order, as sequenced in the donor inventory. All prints are marked on the backs with various legacy identifiers. Image titles, photographer's name, and locations are sometimes present. Titles in this collection, if present, originate from the print. If there is no title, a brief description is included in library staff notes.

Louisville, Kentucky, circa 1937-1940

Box 1 > Print RL.11875-P-0001

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Dimensions: 6 1/8 x 4 5/8 inches.

Scope and Contents

Photographer's identifier: S-53. Mounted on board, same size as print. Title present on mount verso.

New Orleans Mardi Gras, circa 1937-1940

Box 1 > Print RL.11875-P-0002

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Dimensions: 6 7/8 x 8 1/8 inches.

Scope and Contents

Mounted on board, the same size as the print. Title present on mount verso. Image is of a large group of people watching from a balcony.

Austin, Texas, circa 1937-1940

Box 1 > Print RL.11875-P-0003

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Dimensions: 7 3/4 x 6 3/8 inches.

Scope and Contents

Photographer's identifier: 1765. Mounted on board, same size as print. Title, National Housing Agency credit stamp, Federal Public Housing Authority LIBRARY stamp, and "DUPLICATE" stamp on mount verso. Seven children on porch of shack, with adult in doorway and several other children around the side.

No known title, circa 1937-1940

Box 1 > Print RL.11875-P-0004

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Dimensions: 4 1/2 x 4 5/8 inches.

Scope and Contents

Unmounted. Machine shop, "Auto Marine Machine Co." in an unknown large city.

No known title, circa 1937-1940

Box 1 > Print RL.11875-P-0005

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Dimensions: 7 1/8 x 6 7/8 inches.

Scope and Contents

Unmounted. Back alley leading to a five-story brick warehouse.

No known title, circa 1937-1940 Box 1 > Print RL.11875-P-0006

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Dimensions: 6 5/8 x 8 1/8 inches.

Scope and Contents

Photographer's identifier: S-2. Unmounted. African American group of three women and one boy on porch.

No known title, circa 1937-1940 Box 1 > Print RL.11875-P-0007

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Dimensions: 6 7/8 x 9 1/2 inches.

Scope and Contents

Photographer's identifier: S-28. Unmounted. African American children playing on the sidewalk and sitting on stoop, with one adult sitting in chair.

No known title, circa 1937-1940 Box 1 > Print RL.11875-P-0008

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Dimensions: 7 1/8 x 9 inches.

Scope and Contents

Photographer's identifier: S-21. Unmounted. Group of three White women and five children on porch.

No known title, circa 1937-1940 Box 1 > Print RL.11875-P-0009

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Dimensions: 7 1/8 x 6 7/8 inches.

Scope and Contents

Unmounted. Handmade cement and stone seat with "Take your ease" in raised relief on top.

No known title, circa 1937-1940 Box 1 > Print RL.11875-P-0010

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Dimensions: 6 3/4 x 9 3/8 inches.

Scope and Contents

Photographer's identifier: S-4. Unmounted. African American children playing in dirt yard.

Pittsburgh. Old mansion which has expanded down hill and now holds 22 families - overcrowded and with outdoor toilets which can be seen next to the stairs, circa 1937-1940 Box 1 > Print RL.11875-P-0011

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Sheet size: 8 x 10 inches; image size: 7 5/8 x 9 5/8 inches.

Scope and Contents

Photographer's identifier: S-24 B. Unmounted print with borders. Image title is found on paper label pasted to print verso.

No known title, circa 1937-1940

Box 1 > Print RL.11875-P-0012

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Dimensions: 6 5/8 x 9 1/2 inches.

Scope and Contents

Photographer's identifier: S-17. Unmounted. Public project houses and backyards under a large hill, with view of statehouse that appears to be in Nashville, Tennessee. A sign on fence advertises the "J. A. Jones Construction Co., Richmond, VA and Charlotte, NC." Another sign states "Federal Public Works Project 4962." This large construction company received many federal grants for Depression-era projects throughout the Southeast, including Nashville.

No known title, circa 1937-1940

Box 2 > Print RL.11875-P-0013

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Mount size: 13 3/4 x 10 3/4 inches; image size: 5 7/8 x 9 1/8 inches.

Scope and Contents

Mounted on thin board. Adults and children waiting outside in a line.

Abramowitz Court, Youngstown, Ohio, circa 1939

Box 2 > Print RL.11875-P-0014

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Mount size: 13 1/2 x 10 1/2 inches; image size: 6 3/4 x 9 3/8 inches.

Scope and Contents

Photographer's credit and title on mount verso. Children playing in front of houses.

Williamsburg houses, New York, circa 1937-1940

Box 2 > Print RL.11875-P-0015

Physical Description: Gelatin silver print. Mount size: 20 x 16 inches; image size: 10 1/4 x 13 1/8 inches.

Scope and Contents

Title on print verso. Group of four women looking out from a large window.

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