COALE COLLECTION
ca. 1850-1863
PP176

Special Collections Department, Maryland Historical Society
201 W. Monument St.
Baltimore, MD 21201

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History

George B. Coale (1819-1887), an amateur photographer, pursued a life-long career as an insurance executive in Baltimore, working with the Merchants Mutual Marine Insurance Co. His position allowed him to pursue his avocation even while at the desk; he once boasted that "I can . . . let my negatives print themselves in my office window while I am attending to my business". In his leisure time, Coale wandered over the country lanes surrounding Baltimore with camera, in pursuit of the perfect picture.

Sometime around Fall of 1857, Coale traveled Falls Road from the northern city limit (North Ave.) out towards the Ruxton area photographing buildings, mills, and outcroppings with his lens. In Coale's words, "Landscape, Architecture and similar subject (were) chosen for their exercise of skill," resulting in "views of marvellous (sic) accuracy, painted by Nature herself". Coale also travelled and photographed west from Baltimore along the Windsor Mill Road.

Coale's photographic experience prompted him to write an instructional book, A Manual of Photography, appearing in 1858 and purporting to be the first guide for amateur photographers published in the United States. He later joined the New York-based Amateur Photographic Exchange Club, founded in November 1861. These camera enthusiasts, drawn mostly from northern east-coast cities, exchanged copies of their work with fellow members at regular intervals.

By 1863, Coale's photographic activity seems to have ebbed. That summer a friend replying to Coale's earlier letter remarked, "I am sorry to learn you have to suspend your doings . . . with your enthusiastic temperament the weaning must be difficult". Possibly the movements of the Confederate Army throughout Maryland, or the string of protective forts ringing Baltimore interfered with Coale's camera "ruralizing". It is not known if he resumed his camera work with the same vigor following the Civil War. Coale's obituary in the Baltimore American makes no mention of his passion for photography, describing him merely as "a man of wide information and culture". He was known as an art collector, and was, as well, the second librarian of the Maryland Historical Society.
-- This section was adapted from an essay by Robert Schoeberlein which accompanied a portfolio of Coale images previously published in Maryland Historical Magazine.

Collection Origin

Provenance unknown. Possibly transferred from the Manuscripts Department, MS. 676, 1530, 1530.1, or 1530.3 (Gifts of Mary B. Coale Redwood or her estate, 1924, 1934, and 1941).

Scope and Contents

The collection consists of 1 box with 34 folders containing 47 photoprints, made in ca. 1850-1863. Subjects are views along Falls Road to the northwest and along Windsor Mill Road to the southwest of Baltimore. Included are farms, mills, hotels, quarries, train tunnels and bridges, houses, and ruins. There are views of Stricker's and Hollingsworth's mills, Nelson's Hotel, a Catonsville blacksmith shop, and the Jones Falls and Patapsco Rivers. There is also an image of African-American men at a shanty/wash-house, and one carte de visite portrait of George B. Coale.

Note: Related materials are found in the Manuscripts Department of the Maryland Historical Society: MS. 676 and MS. 1530, the Redwood Collection; MS. 1530.1, the Redwood Collection Transcripts; and MS. 1530.3, the George B. Redwood Papers.

Arrangement

The photographs are arranged according to PP catalog numbers.

Container List

1 Box

PP176.1 Farms, Baltimore Co.

PP176.2 Farms, Baltimore Co.

PP176.3a,b Old willow, Windsor Mill Road.

PP176.4 The point at which the Falls Road leaves the Valley of Jones Falls, 2 ½ Miles from Baltimore.

PP176.5 Stricker's Mill.

PP176.6 Stricker's Mill.
PP176.7 Stricker's Mill.

PP176.8 Stricker's Mill.

PP176.9 Stricker's Mill.

PP176.10 Stricker's Mill.

PP176.11 Stricker's Mill.

PP176.12 Stricker's Mill.

PP176.13 On Jones's falls, three miles from Baltimore.

PP176.14 White's Mill, later Timanus Mill, also known as Rock Mill.

PP176.15 Falls Road, Profile Rock.

PP176.16 Falls Road, Profile Rock.

PP176.17 Gneiss Quarry, Falls Road.

PP176.18 Hollingsworth's Mills.

PP176.19 Hollingsworth's Mills.

PP176.20 Hollingsworth's Mills.

PP176.21 Hollingsworth's Mills.

PP176.22 Jones Falls, 2 miles from Baltimore (Rock Mill dam).

PP176.23 Jones Falls, Rock Mill Dam (White's Mill/Timanus Mill).

PP176.24 Falls Road, Turnpike Gate, ca. 1860.

PP176.25 Falls Road, Turnpike Gate, ca. 1860.

PP176.26 Falls Road, stone house.

PP176.27 Falls Road, frame house, façade.

PP176.28 Falls Road, frame house, different view of façade.

PP176.29 Falls Road, frame house, rear view.

PP176.30 Falls Road, stucco house.

PP176.31 Falls Road, observatory? (Is this George Dobbin's observatory at "The Lawn"? Not on Falls Road!).
PP176.32 Falls Road, ruins of stone house.

PP176.33 Patapsco River at Thomas Viaduct.

PP176.34 Patapsco River at Thomas Viaduct.

PP176.35 Blacksmith Shop, Catonsville.

PP176.36 Potomac River near St. John's Run, B&O Railroad.

PP176.37 Railroads B&O tunnel.

PP176.38 Reading Railroad Bridge.

PP176.39 Elk Ridge, ca. 1860.

PP176.40 Nelson's Hotel.

PP176.41 West Saratoga St. at Park St., Baltimore.

PP176.42 Cheat River Valley.

PP176.43a, b Windsor Mill Road [African-American men at shanty/wash-house].

PP176.44 Unidentified women [sketches on verso] Coale?

PP176.45 Tygart Valley River, ca. 1860.

PP176.46 George B. Coale.

PP176.47a, b Bujac's House, Old Windsor Mill Rd.