

From March 1993 Issue (article slightly edited) - Submitted by Sheila Wilson

Anyone who has seen photographs of early scenes of St. Catharines and area must have come across the name of Edwin C. Poole, photographer. Born in England in 1845, he first settled in Chatham and then in 1876 moved to St. Catharines, where he established a photography studio and soon gained a reputation for his fine photographic work. In 1878 he was awarded Honourable Mention at the Paris Exhibition, and he also received a diploma from New York City, a bronze medal at Toronto, and a gold medal at Hamilton Photographic Conventions in recognition of his work. He was also one of the founding officers and member of the Canadian Photographic Association.

While Poole's work was mainly portraits and studio work, it is his series of pictures of St. Catharines and other towns such as Thorold that local historians are so interested in, because of the reproductions of his prints, which appeared in such publications as the 1907 Souvenir number of the St. Catharines Standard. Some of his prints were also reproduced in the Toronto papers. Apparently he systematically photographed most of the buildings and the landscape of St. Catharines and area, and it is thanks to his prints that we have some idea of what St. Catharines looked like at the turn of the century, since many of those landmarks have disappeared. When Edwin Poole retired, his business, including all his negatives (in those days glass plates) were acquired by another photographer, his successor, a Mr. Friesman. He in turn offered to sell the plates to the St. Catharines Public Library, and the minutes of the Library record this transaction in 1922.

The Public Library also had some historical artefacts acquired by donations through the years, and since its main concern was for its book collection, the artefacts and the glass plates were put in the hands of the St. Catharines and Lincoln Historical Society for safekeeping. As the Society met in a room in the Library this seemed a good idea but no formal release of those artefacts was given to the Society. In the passage

of time, the Library outgrew its quarters and changing internal arrangements meant that the Historical Society had to seek new premises. For a while they met at Rodman Hall and had some of the artefacts stored there. Then it was thought a good idea to store things above the old Fire Hall on Lake Street. During these moves, the glass plates were moved several times, but therein lay the mystery of what finally happened to them. When I became head of Reference in the St. Catharines Public Library in 1960, my predecessor asked me to trace those interesting plates, but to no avail. Every older member of the Historical Society was quizzed; the late Miss Kathleen Duff said that she remembered hearing a “tinkle of glass” in one of the moves.

All the other artefacts became the nucleus of the present St. Catharines Museum, which the Historical Society helped to establish in 1967, but no one has seen or remembers these priceless Poole prints.

Dennis Gannon’s note: A memorandum summarizing the proposed Library purchase of Poole’s negatives contains some fascinating details. It refers to the Library Board acquiring “the first photographic negatives taken in this city, ...taken over by Mr. Poole when he started his business here ...” It also says the price would be \$10 “per thousand,” noting that “It is impossible to estimate the number of the plates.” So we have AT LEAST 1,000 plates, many of them Pre-Dating Poole’s arrival in 1876 (dating back to the 1860’s? the 1850’s? the 1840’s?) That “tinkle of glass” recalled by Miss Duff robbed us of more than anyone probably realized at the time.)

The story continued in the June 1993 Newsletter – “Responses to Poole story.”

Corlene Taylor responded with information about Poole and his family and mentioned a Standard article dated January 15, 1920 that reported on the donation of Poole’s negatives to the St. Catharines Library and also noted that the Poole gift included the negatives of other photographers, including J.T. See (active here ca.1868-1874). Corlene

suspects that the destruction of Poole's glass plate negatives probably took place while they were stored in Rodman Hall; during the time the Society stored its artefacts and records there.

Another local researcher found the following paragraph in the 1929 Annual Report of the Lincoln Historical Society, forerunner of our Society: We have listed 892 of the negatives from the collection from Mr. E. Poole's studio. These comprise buildings, general views, vessels, waterways, official and society groups, personal portraits and miscellaneous subjects.

In the September 1994 Newsletter, a photograph of Poole's Photo Studio on St. Paul Street appeared and the photo was dated March 1902.

EDWIN POOLE

In the May 1999 Newsletter, a portrait of Edwin Poole appeared, along with the reverse side of the portrait, which was an advertisement for his Studio and acted as a business card.

The article included a short biography of Poole as follows: Edwin Poole was a noted photographer who conducted a successful business in St. Catharines until his retirement in 1921. His work won several awards at photographic competitions around the world.

In an advertisement ca.1878 he was closing his shop to attend the Paris picture exposition.

For many years he was the superintendent of the Sunday school at the Lyman St. Baptist Church before becoming a faithful member of the Queen St. Baptist Church. For 44 years (1885-1929) he was secretary of the Upper Canada Bible Society. He was a prominent worker for the establishment of the YMCA here. He was one of the oldest members of Union Lodge I.O.O.F.

Edwin's wife predeceased him by seven years and two children died young. He loved children and he always carried peppermints in his

pocket for those who sought him out. Edwin died on January 27, 1931 at his home at 11 Race Street, St. Catharines. He is buried in Farringdon Cemetery in Brantford, where other members of his family are buried. At his death, he had two sisters, Mrs. Frances Staniland of Brantford and Miss. Agnes Poole of St. Catharines. He also had two brothers, William Poole of England and L.J. Poole of Detroit.

Since the above articles appeared in the newsletters the following information was found in two death notice entries:

February 8, 1893 – Died Brantford, February 7, Matilda, relict late John Poole and mother of E. Poole, Photographer this city, aged 75 years 9 months.

January 2, 1923 – died at late residence 11 Race Street, January 1 – Mary H. wife of Edwin Poole, Interment, Brantford.

Edwin Poole and several family members are buried in Farringdon Cemetery, Old 'J' Section 1 Row 3 beside the church. The cemetery is located on Mount Pleasant Street, Brantford, Ontario.

The POOLE monument was photographed and transcribed for me by K. Jackson. (I thank you, Karen, for this, Ed.)

There are ten people listed on one monument. The transcription on the POOLE monument in Farringdon Cemetery reads as follows:

(on the east side) – JOHN POOLE / died July 17, 1878 / Aged / 61 years 19 days / Thy will be done / Matilda / beloved wife of / John Poole / died Feb. 7, 1893 / aged / 75 years 8 mos / rest in the Lord and wait / patiently for him (on the west side) EDWIN POOLE / 1845 – 1931 / Mary H. / wife of E. Poole / died / Jan. 1, 1923 / aged 73 years (on the north side) Alfred E. / son of / John and Matilda / Poole / died / Sept. 11, 1889 / aged / 36 years 5 months / He giveth His loved sleep / Agnes POOLE / born / July 14, 1885 / died / Feb. 10, 1940 (on the south side) HENRY W. STANILAND / aged 50 years / died / Nov. 20, 1896 / his wife /

FRANCES POOLE / 1850 – 1932 / CLARISSA A. / age 2 yrs 7 mos /
died / Oct. 23, 1893 / GLADYS READWIN / 1891 – 1971