

**Bruce L. Harkness Poletown Photographs**

1 linear foot (2 MB)

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Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI

Finding aid written by Lauren Kata in May 2000. Updated by Deborah Rice in December 2014.

**Accession Number:** UR001731

**Creator:** Bruce L. Harkness

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**Copies:** Digitized copies of some images may be found in the Library's online image galleries.

**Other Access**

**Aids:** A map of the Poletown area and an index to locations depicted in the images are included with this guide.

**Related Material:** Folklore Archives

## **History**

Deriving its nickname from once serving as a primarily Polish immigrant neighborhood, the multi-ethnic, multi-racial urban area referred to as “Poletown” roughly forms a rectangular area of land, extending from Gratiot Avenue northwest to the city of Hamtramck, and from the Detroit Medical Center (St. Antoine and Canfield) northeast to Mt. Elliot (see map with this guide).

In June of 1980, in the midst of a severe economic recession, the cities of Detroit and Hamtramck jointly offered the northern portion of the Poletown district as a site upon which to build a new General Motors assembly plant. The area proposed for the plant—renamed Central Industrial Park—was bounded by I-94 on the south, Mt. Elliot Avenue on the east, St. Aubin Avenue on the west, and the former Dodge Main site on the north. Intended to ensure that the new plant would create thousands of jobs within the city, the offer to GM also meant the destruction of the Dodge Main plant and numerous other buildings, the removal of thousands of residents, and over a hundred businesses. Events during the year 1980-1981 fostered a sharp division among residents within the Central Industrial Park area, while demolition of the Dodge Main plant and other sites continued to take place.

From February through December of 1981, Bruce L. Harkness set about photographing the neighborhood before and during the clearing of the Central Industrial Park area. Harkness took over 400 photographs, documenting neighborhood landmarks, panoramic views, residents, urban interiors and exteriors, as well as various intersection and street scenes. Through the funding from the Michigan Council of the Humanities, and a Humanist Grant-in-Aid won by WSU Professor of History, John J. Bukowczyk, Harkness was able to print 200 of those photographs, with the understanding that the collection would be permanently stored and preserved at Wayne State University. The Harkness Poletown Photographs were donated to the WSU Folklore Archive’s Ethnic Archives Project. In October of 1986, some forty photographs from Harkness’ Poletown documentation were chosen for exhibition at Wayne State University’s Purdy/Kresge Library.

Documentary photographer Bruce L. Harkness, of Dearborn, Michigan, received his BFA in photography at the Center of Creative Studies, and his MFA at Wayne State University. A veteran photographer of Detroit’s urban neighborhoods, Harkness has contributed photographs to several Michigan publications, has exhibited his work in numerous galleries around the Southeastern Michigan area, is an instructor of photography, and photographer for the city of Dearborn.

## **Scope and Content:**

The Bruce L. Harkness Poletown Photographs are a collection of 200, 8”x10” silver gelatin, black-and-white photo prints that document the Poletown neighborhood of Detroit as it existed in February through October of 1981. The inventory indicates subject and date of each photo, but researchers may find further identification on the back of each individual print.

**Important Subjects:**

Afro-American—Michigan—Detroit  
Architectural Photography—Michigan—Detroit  
Central Industrial Park  
Deindustrialization—Michigan—Detroit  
Documentary Photography  
Dodge main Plant  
East Side Neighborhood—Michigan—Detroit  
Ethnic Neighborhood—Michigan—Detroit  
Graffiti—Michigan—Detroit  
Industrial Archaeology—Michigan—Detroit  
Land Use, Urban—Michigan—Detroit  
Poletown  
Polish Americans—Michigan—Detroit  
Protest Movements—Michigan—Detroit  
Public spaces  
Reindustrialization—Michigan—Detroit  
Urban Space

**Arrangement**

Arranged by sequential numbering system (1-201) imposed by the photographer.  
Note: the Library never received photograph #47.

**Box 1**

1. Group of African-American men working on car repairs. Trombly, west of Chene, February, 1981
2. Apartment building with Kuehn Building in left foreground. E. Grand Blvd. At Chene, February, 1981
3. Corner store diagonally across from Immaculate Conception Church. Trombly at Moran, February, 1981
4. Holy Cross Church, Apostolic Faith, a storefront church. Mitchell, February, 1981
5. Pro-Central Industrial Park Project demonstration. Jos. Campau at Finley, February or March, 1981
6. Two young African-American men outside Hupp Billiards. Chene, north of Milwaukee, February, 1981
7. First birthday party, African-American family and neighbors; birthday foodways. Du Bois Apartments on E. Grand Blvd., February 18, 1981
8. African-American birthday party. DuBois Apartments on E. Grand Blvd., February, 1981
9. African-American parents and one-year-old pose in hallway outside first birthday party. DuBois Apartments on E. Grand Blvd.
10. Four women and child at first birthday party. DuBois Apartments on E. Grand Blvd., February, 1981
11. White Family with rented truck, family moving day. Kanter, February, 1981
12. Entrance to Dodge Main plant during demolition; demolition cranes. Jos. Campau near Dunn, February 18, 1989
13. Mitch's Bull Dog Bar, Ruth and Russell Soul Food; graffiti. Jos. Campau near Dunn, February 18, 1981
14. Philips 76 filling station on extreme west side of Poletown district. E. Grand Blvd. at St. Aubin, February 19, 1981
15. Well-kept homes on the east side of Poletown area. Piquette, west of Ellery, February 21, 1981
16. Two African-American women standing at the gate of chain-link fence, in front of home. 2190 DuBois and Horton, one block north of E. Grand Blvd., February 19, 1981
17. Dupont Apartments, 2420 E. Grand Blvd. North side of Grand Boulevard at DuBois, February 19, 1981
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19. Abandoned duplex on street still largely occupied. Kanter, February 21, 1981
20. White family moving in pick-up truck. Dane off Moran, February 21, 1981
21. Holy Trinity Lutheran Church (formerly Polish Protestant parish). Griffin at Elmwood, February 21, 1981
22. Moving a storefront church; Murray's Markey next door. Chene at Grandy, February 22, 1981
23. Sunlight Café, and, in right rear, Chene-Trombly Market, near Murray's Market. Trombly, from Grandy toward Chene, February 22, 1981
24. Liberty Lounge and Hospital Drug Co.: second-story offices. Chene and Milwaukee, February 22, 1981
25. Famous Bar-B-Q Restaurant, near Liberty Lounge and Hospital Drug Co; graffiti. Chene between Grand Blvd. and Milwaukee, February 28, 1981

26. Backyard incinerator. Backyard on Newton, February 28,1981
27. Well-kept home with decorations on portal. Piquette, March 5, 1981
28. Homes on Kanter; sign reading "Lady's coat for sale." Kanter at E. Grand Blvd., March 5, 1981
29. Possibly Queen Anne-style cottage, with wooden walkway to rear. Kanter, March 5, 1981
30. Elderly white women poses on front steps of well kept home. Kanter, March 5, 1981
31. Home in Poletown (Eastlake style cottage?) Finley near Jos. Campau, March 2, 1981
32. Berkshire Inn Motel across Dodge Main plant, said to be place of recreation for Dodge Main workers. Jos. Campau between Finley and Newton, March 2, 1981
33. Milwaukee Junction, wreckage of Dodge Main at right. Railroad near Denton, March 12,1981
34. Temple of Faith Missionary Baptist Church (formerly St. Nicholas Byzantine Greek Catholic Church). E. Grand Blvd. March 15, 1981
35. Boarded-up, empty Stanley Hotel; note older style lamp post. 2372 and 2375 E. Grand Blvd., March 15, 1981
36. View south down Chene Street from top of apartment building on E. Grand Blvd.; roof in foreground is top of hospital Drug Co. E. Grand Blvd. and Chene, March 16,1981
37. View north toward Hamtramck, taken from top of the apartment building on E. Grand Blvd; Beth Loem (Olam) Cemetery in upper left; steeples of St. Florian's Church, Hamtramck, on horizon; Dodge Main plant in right rear. E. Grand Blvd. and Chene, March 16, 1981
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39. Rear of homes in central portion of Poletown district; Dodge Main parking lot (not depicted) across street. Newton west of Jos. Campau, March 16, 1981
40. Street scene in central portion of Poletown district. Kanter between E. Grand Blvd. and Elmwood, March 17, 1981
41. Row of homes in Poletown district. Trombly, east of Elmwood, March 17, 1981
42. Front of façade of two homes on Finley, at DuBois. Taken from the North side of Trombly between Elmwood and Moran, March 17, 1981
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44. Row of homes in Poletown district. Finley at DuBois, March 19,1981
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46. Two African-American youngsters on porch of duplex. Trombly, west of Chene, march 21, 1981
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48. Four African-American children pose for photographer; one holds discarded cross; one leans on stick or broom handle. Alley between Trombly and Adele, March 21, 1981
49. Row of homes west of E. Grand Blvd. Adele at Chene, March 26, 1981
50. Church of Godin Christ, near Chene-Trombly Market; note revival meeting sign. Chene at Trombly. March 26, 1981

51. Well-kept homes in vicinity of Immaculate Conception Church. Piquette at Moran, March 27, 1981
52. Ruins of Dodge Main plant; St. Joseph Mercy hospital and nurses' quarters at rear, center of photograph. Dodge Main from Conrail north track, March 27, 1981
53. Three African-American men cleaning up backyard littered with refuse, on far west side of Poletown district. Alley behind St. Aubin, March 28, 1981
54. Three White men (possibly Yemeni) moving mattresses from home. Grandy/Piquette, March 29, 1981
55. White mother and daughter on porch of home, in southeast part of Poletown district. Edsel Ford Service Drive at Moran, March 29, 1981
56. African-American children play baseball on vacant lot, in west side of Poletown district; burned-out house in right foreground. Alley between Adele and Trombly, March 19, 1981
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58. On far west side of Poletown district, African-American boys fool around with croquet mallet for photographer, as African-American girls look on; E.J. Hackett in rear. Widman south of Milwaukee, April 1, 1981
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65. Berkshire Inn Motel across from Dodge Main plant. Jos Campau between Finley and Newton, April 12, 1981
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67. Well-kept backyard, White women hanging laundry on clothesline. Edsel Ford Service Drive near Jos. Campau, April 13, 1981
68. Three homes in central/east part of Poletown district. Kanter, east of Elmwood, April 16, 1981
69. Dodge Main plant ruins; parking lot razing. Dodge Main near Dunn, April 16, 1981
70. Nice home with yellow aluminum siding in central/west part of Poletown district, owned by African-American family; African-American women sitting on second-story porch next to hanging laundry. Trombly at Mitchell, April 18, 1981
71. Bend in E. Grand Blvd, Fisher Building in right background; left corner foreground (not shown) is St. John Evangelist Church. E. Grand Blvd., April 18, 1981
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79. Milwaukee Avenue and, in background, St. Joseph Mercy Hospital nurses' quarters; tree painted white, probably for visibility to drivers. Mitchell north of Milwaukee, April 23, 1981
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81. Teenagers pose for photographer in front of home in central southern part of Poletown district. Jos Campau at Piquette, April 25, 1981
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100. Homes on Piquette in south central part of Poletown district; "X" marks on home at left indicate building slated for demolition. Piquette, May 12, 1981

**Box 2**

101. White family on porch of home at southeast corner of Poletown district. Adele, east of DuBois, May 16, 1981
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111. Photograph, taken from front steps of Immaculate Conception Church, of prayer gathering around statue of the Virgin Mary; Rev. Karasiewicz, pastor stands at right rear. Moran at Trombly, across from Immaculate Conception Church, May 24, 1981
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116. African-American youth. Trombly, west of Chene, May 25, 1981
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118. Polish-Americans (non-residents of area), sitting on porch; owner of home seated at right. North side of Trombly near DuBois, May 25, 1981
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121. Polish-American homeowner in background, brother of Mrs. Giannini, expressed pride in his trees to photographer. Lyman, east of DuBois, May 31, 1981
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127. Goodwill Community Chapel (formerly Industrial Branch of YMCA?); dog on porch of home at left. E. Grand Blvd., east of DuBois, June 5, 1981
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