



ArchivesSpace

Guide to the Bruce L. Harkness Poletown Photographs WSAV002727

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English

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Walter P. Reuther Library

5401 Cass Avenue

Detroit, MI 48202

URL: <http://reuther.wayne.edu>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Walter P. Reuther Library
Creator:	Harkness, Bruce (Bruce L.)
Title:	Bruce L. Harkness Poletown Photographs
ID:	WSAV002727
Date [inclusive]:	1981-02-1981-10
Physical Description:	1 Linear Feet (2 MB).
Physical Location:	3W-A-1(4)
Language of the Material:	English
Language of the Material:	Material entirely in English.
Abstract:	Bruce Harkness photographed the area known as “Poletown,” a multi-ethnic, multi-racial urban area on Detroit’s East Side, from February to December 1981. These photographs document the hundreds of buildings and businesses that were demolished to make way for the construction of a General Motors assembly plant. In addition, Harkness captured vibrant urban exteriors and interiors, neighborhood landmarks, residents, and street scenes. The collection is comprised of 200 8’x10’ silver gelatin, black-and-white photo prints.

Citation Style

"Bruce L. Harkness Poletown Photographs, Box [#], Folder [#], Walter P. Reuther Library, Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs, Wayne State University."

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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.

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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.

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Arrangement

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

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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5401 Cass Avenue

Detroit, MI 48202

URL: <http://reuther.wayne.edu>

Revision Description

Finding aid revised by Deborah Rice. 2014-12-04

Acquisition

The Bruce L. Harkness Poletown Photographs were transferred from the Wayne State University Folklore Archive by the Archive's Director, Professor Janet Langlois, and placed in the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs at the Walter P. Reuther Library in July of 1999 as part of the audiovisual records of the Folklore Archive. Harkness owns and retains rights to the negatives.

Processing History

Processed and finding aid written by Lauren Kata in May 2000. Updated by Deborah Rice in December 2014.

Access

Collection is open for research.

Researchers may only access one folder at a time and are required to sit at a front table while using the collection in the Reuther Library Reading Room.

Use

Refer to the Walter P. Reuther Library "Rules for Use of Archival Materials."

For image reproduction, contact the AV Department.

Other Copies

Digital copies of some images may be found on the Library's website

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Related Materials

Related Materials

Folklore Archives Collections

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Controlled Access Headings

- African Americans--History
- Photography
- Photographs
- Detroit (Mich.)
- Polish Americans
- Neighborhoods
- Deindustrialization
- Harkness, Bruce (Bruce L.)

Other Access Aids

An index to locations depicted in the images is included with this guide.

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