

FRED A. KISER,

Material prepared by Sue Sely of Oregon Historical Society Staff

Fred A. Kiser entered the photographic business around 1902 with his brother, Oscar, as Kiser Brothers Scenic Photographer. With studios both in Portland and at Warrendale, Oregon, they established themselves as significant landscape photographers. Their early images of the Columbia Gorge, some of which were hand-colored, played an important role in their rapid success.

The Kiser brothers' background is not known although it is documented that in 1902 they were living in the Gorge, at Warrendale, where their father was proprietor of the Columbia Beach Hotel (near Mosquito Island). It is believed that the Kisers were introduced to photography by Lily White, who lived on a houseboat and called the Raysark near Lyle, Washington, on the Columbia. As an active member and instructor in the Oregon Camera Club, White was a dedicated photographer with a special interest in capturing the diversity of landscape forms and moods of the Gorge. The sensitivity and richness of the Kiser's early work may be a direct influence of Lily White.

By 1905, Oscar Kiser was no longer associated with the business and Fred had been named official photographer for the Lewis and Clark Exposition. In 1907, an exhibition of Kiser's tinted photographs was held at the Portland Hotel. Termed by the Oregonian one of "the finest art collection(s) ever on exhibit in Portland," the display later traveled to 20 major cities in the East.

A number of Kiser images taken c. 1910-1913 also bear the Spokane, Portland, and Seattle Railroad insignia. Working for SP&S allowed Kiser to photograph a broader range of locations and subject matter than the predominantly scenic work on which he built his business. After a number of studio locations, the Kiser Photo Co. was located on East 32nd in Portland in 1909 and advertised hand-colored enlargements, transparencies and lantern slides of Northwest scenery. In 1915 Kiser moved his business to Milwaukie Avenue where he eventually expanded his business to include motion pictures. Kiser's Scenic America Co. also included a retail store in downtown Portland. The last city directory listing for Kiser appears in 1938.

Over the years, Kiser had a number of different company officers, although he always retained control of the business. However, in 1911 Clarence L. Winter is listed as vice president of the Kiser Photo Co., and in 1916, Winter was in business at the East 32nd St. studio as the "successor to Kiser." Winter had previously (until 1908) operated the Winter Photo Co. in Eugene with his father, J. A. Winter.

As was often the case with studio transfers, the negatives of Kiser photographic studio were sold with the business and Winter wasted no time distributing the tinted scenes, now signed by himself. Coincidentally, Winter took over the studio the same year the Columbia River Highway opened when the demand for scenic views of the Gorge was at a peak. In general, Winter's work was very tourist-oriented, certainly more so than the Kiser Brothers's early views.

The bodies of work that make up the Kiser-Winter Collection reveal differences in photographic technique as well as a changing attitude toward photography and the interaction of humans with the landscape. As a whole they offer an important contribution to the esthetic and visually documented history of the Columbia River Gorge.

A COLUMBIA GORGE REMINISCENCE:

The Romance of the Falls; Working for Fred Kiser by Mrs. Malcolm B. Frykman

During the summer of 1925, after graduation from Oregon State College, and before starting a teaching job in the fall, I worked for Fred Kiser at Multnomah Falls Lodge.

The Falls studio occupied the west corner of the lodge's main floor. A sandwich, ice cream, and soft drink bar filled the east front space, a convenience for those travelling by commercial bus who barely had time to view the falls, have a snack, and dash into the studio to pick up film and the Kiser line of Gorge scenic post cards and folders.

The wall space of the studio was covered with sepia, black and white, and hand tinted photographs of the Columbia Gorge. We also carried Kodak supplies and a few small gift items.

When customers expressed particular interest in the Kiser photos, I would suggest the visit the lounge and dining area on the second floor. Many large scale photos, representing Kiser's most beautiful and distinctive art were hung on the lodge's second floor. These photos have the appearance of oil paintings; the colors were painstakingly honest -- lovely hues in light and shadow reflecting the hour of the day and the four seasons of the year.

The magnificent new Scenic Highway with its awe inspiring vistas drew thousands to the Gorge by car, motor coach, private tour bus, excursion train and limousine.

After about a week's on-the-job training, Fred Kiser himself visited the studio. I remember him as tall and slender, dignified, sensitive, and of a quiet nature. First taking care of business at hand, he discussed sales psychology with me. One suggestion he made I will never forget.

"When a customer asks for film," he said, "try holding up two packs instead of one. Chances are, he'll take two, thus doubling your sales." With a cordial hand shake, he wished me well and was on his way.

The following morning a tall, blonde young man wearing a maroon and gold University of Minnesota sweater entered the studio and asked for film. I tried out my newly learned sales pitch, holding up two packs of film. The fellow looked at the two packs and then directly at me, hesitated, smiled, and said, "Yes, I'll have two," and departed.

He was later with his equally blond and charming travelling companion.

We chatted about their trip from Minnesota, their first visit to the West, and about their picture taking, and about how they happened to visit Multnomah Falls.

At Hood River they had debated whether to follow the sign, “Mt. Hood to Portland,” or “Columbia River Highway to Portland.” They flipped a coin. The Columbia River won. They marvelled at the luck of their choice.

August 11, 1982

Friends of the Gorge
Mrs. Nancy Russell
4921 S.W. Hewett Bv.
Portland, Or. 97221

RE: Kiser, Winters Photos

Dear Nancy.

In about 1973, my Dad, Willard Breakey, did some work for a man on his car in Spokane, who was in the process of moving to the East. This man didn't have much money and wanted to trade these boxes of old photographs to my Dad for the repair of his car. My Dad was an amateur photographer and enjoyed looking at old photos, especially taken back when he was a kid. He does not remember the man's name but, he thought he was from the Portland area.

Last year my Dad wanted to get the photos out of the basement and to some place they could be saved, so he gave them to me to store or to get preserved.

After much sorting of all the photos, we found these nice ones of the Columbia River Gorge and felt that your group should have them as a gift. The balance of the photos will be given to the Oregon Historical Society.,

Yours very truly
DON L. BREAKEY



PIECES OF HISTORY -- Nancy Seyl of the Oregon Historical Society displays some of the historic photos of the Columbia Gorge donated recently to the Friends

of the Gorge. The photographs are on display at the organization's Vancouver office, 1306 Main St.

Gorge photo gift proves windfall

By **PATRICK ROSENKRANZ**
Correspondent, *The Oregonian*

VANCOUVER, Wash. -- Ten years ago Willard Breakey fixed a car in exchange for some aging photographs.

Until his son, Don, fire chief of Brush Prairie, decided to haul them out of the basement where they were stored and donate them to the Friends of the Columbia Gorge, the Breakeys had no idea of the value of the old pictures.

Nancy Russell, chairwoman of the Friends of the Gorge, said she expected to see "pictures of Aunt Minnie in front of Multnomah Falls" when she was told of the donation. Instead she received photographs that displayed beautiful and unique views of the scenic wonders of the river valley.

"I was overwhelmed," said Russell. "They were extraordinary."

The photos are part of a collection of Gorge photographs placed on display last month when the Friends of the Gorge opened its office at 1306 Main St. in Vancouver. Many are signed and hand-tinted and include views of Celilo Falls and the Cascade Rapids, landmarks which have since disappeared under water because of dam construction.

The Columbia River Scenic Highway, which was completed in 1916, is featured prominently in many pictures and is also conspicuous by its absence in earlier photos. Fish wheels, canneries, steamboats and a group of Royal Rosarians at a "Wheel of Progress" also are featured.

The Breakey photos are an important part of the exhibit of 100 photos of the Gorge taken by Oscar and Fred Kiser between 1902 and 1927. According to Susan Seyl, photographs librarian for the Oregon Historical Society, the Kiser brothers operated studios in Portland and Warrendale around 1902. Fred Kiser was named official photographer at the Lewis and Clark Exposition in 1905.

"There's a real dearth of Kiser pictures among collectors," she said. "We knew the stuff was out there somewhere. It just hadn't turned up yet. You can imagine my surprise at getting the phone call notifying her of the donation," she said.

Some mystery still surrounds the photographs. Seyl said Clarence Winter took over the Kiser brothers photography business in 1916. His firm specialized in scenic views of the Gorge. But no one knows what happened to his firm after 1930.

"It's a mystery," said Russell. "Someone will come out of the woodwork to fill in the links, we hope."

The exhibit will remain in the Vancouver office for several months and is open to the public on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. tours for groups can be arranged by calling the office.

The Clark County Chapter of the Friends of the Gorge was organized in anticipation of increased development pressure on the gorge when the Interstate 205 bridge is completed in December, Russell said.

KISER BROTHERS INFO FROM 20 VOL. FISHWHEEL RESEARCH BOOKS

by IVAN DONALDSON

Jan. 16, 1983

Vol. 14 An undated letter from Bill Sams, probably about 1964; long letter giving much history of the Gorman Orchard and the beginning of the Kiser Bros. (later photography).

Page 352 Sam Gorman Ranch on Oregon shore: ___ "The first renter was E. E. Gooding family, wife and three girl: Ida, Florence and Mabel. Sam Gorman had a big bay window and so did Gooding and they could not stand too close or their bellies would touch. Sam had a lot of debts and his creditors were about to take everything on the ranch so he (Gorman) gave Gooding a bill of sale, whereupon, Gooding proceeded to strip the place clean and sell everything. He sold Dad the apples, I think for \$3 or \$4 (Gorman has also planted an orchard. Some of the trees are still there around Mrs. Bellart's House). Dad and I were picking the apples and a very sorry looking Sam Gorman was there, but Gooding was walking around happy as a lark.

Kisers followed Goodings as the next renters. There were Mr. and Mrs. Kiser and two boys, Fred and Oscar. While the Kisers were on the (Gorman) ranch the Banker, Wm. Sargent(??) Ladd had a house boat with a motor boat to tow it. It was called the Pyro-Craft and was fitted up for picture taking and was in charge of a Pearl White and somehow Fred Kiser made connections and I think that started them on their picture taking. (Pearl White had a wider frame.) I think Fred was the main one, though, as after the Pyro-Craft returned to Portland it was tied up above the Morrison Bridge on the west side and Oscar was going aboard one night and "fell"(?) off the gang plank and was drowned. So the story goes. Dad always said he was pushed off. But anyhow, the Kisers had the ranch for two or three years about 1902, hence I would say the pictures were copyrighted in 1902 were taken about that time. I think there was a Kiser studio on the west, about 20th and Pettigrove, am not sure of the location, but have passed it on the way to Montgomery Ward some years ago (*on Vaughn Street*).

There is a considerable amount of information about the Gorman place in this letter:

Page 355: "Sam Gorman sometimes used to act as a salesman for some of the canneries. So maybe I should add a little story which he told on himself: He had a shipment of canned salmon (I think it was in New York) and the sample they opened was not very good. So the buyer asked him (Gorman) if he would eat it and Gorman said sure. The buyer said if he would eat the fish he (the make buyer) would buy the lot. So Sam said it was up to him to make good so he bought a bottle of catsup and a bottle of pepper sauce and doped the can of fish and although it nearly killed him, he ate it and made the sale." P356

Here is a carefully printed note by Bill Sams: P304, Vol. 14 Fishwheel research.

This is important because one of our active members has never believed me when I told him about the Warren Fish Railroad from Fishwheel 3 on Washington shore down to Garrison Eddy where the landing was (situated). There was a platform on top of the bank at rail's end. A chute led down to the boat landing (a float of logs floored over with posts to tie the boat to). By throwing water on the chute the fish would slide down to the float to be loaded on the boat. They had a small car and the fish were put in boxes on the car. The motive power was a horse. I assume from this that since a boat could not dock or land in the exceedingly swift and turbulent water near Wheel 3, (1982 Interpretive Site) the fish were hauled from Wheel 3 down to Garrison Eddy and near Wheel 20, at the upper end of Hamilton Island where the fish were skidded down the chute to the steam launch pick up boat, the *Nerka*. I can show this note to any Missourian any time! The next landing above Wheel 3 was the Thomas Moffett Landing, a few hundred feet downstream from the Bonneville Dam Spillway, Washington shore. This site is above Greenleaf Slough, across which, with its spring flooding, a fish railroad would have been difficult to maintain.

Page 358 Fishwheel Research. Two pages of info about the woman mystic: Pearl White, and info re: The Kisers'. 10 Dec. 1969.

"Bill Sams observed her (Pearl White) as she arrived at the Gorman farm or **Columbia Beach Ranch** (now The Bellart's(?) place, 18 Dec. 1969) about 1901 with a propeller craft pulling a houseboat named the *Pyrocraft*. Pyrocraft in large letters on the side of the scow houseboat. Apparently, she associated with the Kiser family at **Columbia Beach** and although the two Kiser sons may have been into photography before, they, Fred and Oscar, Fred especially, began photography seriously and put out the 77 photographs *Pacific Coast Scenes*, 1903. Oscar drowned or was drowned about 1904 when he "tripped"(?) on a rope across gang plank while visiting Pearl White at the west end of the Morrison Bridge, where her boat was moored.

Page 540 Vol. 2, Fishwheel Research from the Oregonian: ". . . We find nothing in our clipping files concerning the Kiser Bros."

For additional information go to OHS or Multnomah County Library. I think that the Kiser Bros. took the famous photo of Carl Lindstrom and his sailboat (see page 18 of Fishwheel of the Columbia.) You will recall that we had some correspondence with his daughter (an artist) in Utah. Seems like she sent some money for some kind of memorial fund. Carl Lindstrom was operating the boat which capsized Jan. 1907 (?), drowning several people.

Pacific Coast Scenes, 1903 was loaned to me by Earl Henry, now age 94, San Diego, CA.; I copied many photos but I had to return this valuable reference. Earl Henry later gave it to the Cascade Locks Museum -- I believe -- a pity.

Please not enclosed Col. Gorge page. RE: Kiser photos in Vancouver.