

Peter E. Palmquist



1936 ~ 2003



Peter E. Palmquist

Peter Eric Palmquist died January 13, 2003, in Oakland, California at the age of 66. While out walking his dog, Max, in Emeryville, he suffered a severe head injury after a speeding car struck him in a crosswalk on January 11. He never regained consciousness and died surrounded by his family.

Born in Oakland on September 23, 1936, Peter and his parents moved to Ferndale in the fall of 1944. He attended Williams Creek School, a one-room schoolhouse where total enrollment was eight students. He graduated from Ferndale Union High School in 1954, along with 26 classmates. As a teenager he hiked the surrounding hills and, with two friends, climbed to the top of Mt. Shasta. He was an avid tennis player, learned fly-tying for trout fishing adventures, and explored the tactile mysteries of amateur woodworking. He drove the racetrack water truck for the Humboldt County Fair, and as a Boy Scout, he earned many merit badges and was designated a Life Scout. As an adult, he was known for his quiet demeanor and great sense of humor, and especially, for his outrageous puns.



Peter's parents, Carl and Blanche Palmquist.



Peter while stationed in Paris.

Peter was a professional photographer for more than 50 years. He enlisted in the United States Army where he worked for Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE). Stationed in Paris, he photographed many heads of state as well as famous stars of stage and screen. In 1957, while overseas, he married Sally Forward, of London, England. After his enlistment ended in 1960, the couple returned to California with their young family.

Peter graduated from Humboldt State University in 1965 with a B.A. in Art while serving as the university photographer. He retired in 1989 after 28 years in that position. He had also supplemented his income during that time by photographing over 750 weddings in Humboldt County and doing other commercial photography.

In 1971, Peter stopped by an antique store in McKinleyville, where the owner asked him what he collected. His response? "Nothing." She asked him what he did for a living. When he explained he was a photographer, she gave him "a fist full" of old photographs taken by local photographers completely unknown to him.

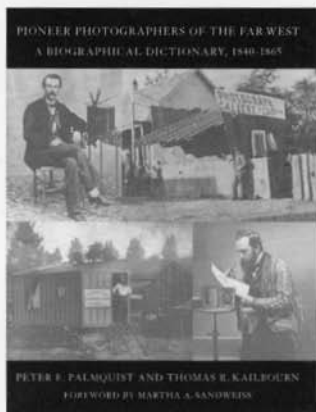
That fistful of photographs blossomed into a passion and an obsession. At his death, Peter had amassed more than 250,000 images, including scores of rare images from the earliest days of western American photography. With tremendous enthusiasm, he recently transferred his extensive collection of images and research materials to the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.

For thirty years, Peter was an independent historian of photography. His principal interests were the American West, California and Humboldt County before 1950, and the international history of women in photography. He liked to say that his most recent project, in collaboration with Suzanna Urminska and Thomas Kailbourn, was an intergalactic study of women photographers before 1871. He curated scores of exhibitions and delivered hundreds of lectures on these subjects. He also served as a consultant and researcher on such projects as Ken Burns's television documentary, "The West." He was the founding editor of the "Daguerreian Annual," past president of the National Stereoscopic Association, and founder and curator of the Women in Photography International Archive. Peter consulted for countless museums and libraries including the Getty Museum, The Huntington Library, the Amon Carter Museum, and the Bancroft Library. He was respected throughout the photographic community as a generous and collaborative historian.

A resourceful and indefatigable writer, Peter published over 60 books and monographs and 340 articles. He wrote and lectured extensively on California photographer Carleton E. Watkins. In 2001, he and Thomas R. Kailbourn won the Denver Public Library's prestigious Caroline Bancroft Western History Prize for their book, *Pioneer Photographers of the Far West: A Biographical Dictionary, 1840-1865* (Stanford University Press, 2000). At the time of his passing, Peter and Thomas had just completed the manuscript of the second volume of *Pioneer Photographers*, a series that he hoped would eventually include all of the United States.



Peter and Sally with Alison, Libby and Anna at Peter's graduation from Humboldt State, 1965.



*Pioneer Photographers of the Far West:
A Biographical Dictionary,
1840-1865 (Stanford University Press, 2000)*



*Peter, Bekah and Pam at Mina and Hideki's
wedding in Japan, 2002.*

“For more than a quarter of a century, Peter pursued with rare passion the history of photography in the nineteenth-century West,” said George Miles, Curator of Western Americana at the Beinecke Library. “The result is an extraordinarily rich collection that tells us how photography insinuated itself into every aspect of American life. I’m unaware of anyone else who lived and breathed the history of photography as Peter did. He made his collection to share with others, not to hide away. We feel privileged that we will be able to contribute to fulfilling his goal.”

Martha A. Sandweiss, Professor of American Studies and History at Amherst College commented: “Like the best of friends, Peter inspired through his generosity and support; like the best of teachers he inspired through example. What Peter cast into the world, through his books and through his spoken words, will long reverberate with his friends and colleagues. He established new ways of pursuing the history of photography, and with his collections and research notes soon to be accessible at Yale, he will be speaking to and inspiring new generations of students and researchers forever.”

Locally, Peter was on the Board of Directors of the Clarke Memorial Museum and the Humboldt County Historical Society for many years. He was elected to the Board of Directors of the Humboldt Arts Council in 2001, and he was enjoying his involvement there tremendously.

Peter was an avid backpacker, and he especially enjoyed leading trips for the AFS foreign exchange students. He loved working in the garden and renovating his home. He and his brothers took great pleasure in working together on their cabin in Trinity County to prepare for gatherings for family and friends. In recent years, he and his lifetime companion, Pam Mendelsohn, traveled extensively to such places as Corsica, England, France, Italy, Malta, and throughout the United States. In June, he, Pam, and his stepdaughter Rebekah spent two weeks in Japan as the guests of their foreign exchange student, Mina Tomioka. In the past few years, Peter took up his camera again and was preparing for a retrospective of his own work in 2005. Rebekah, who is currently getting a PhD in photographic history, will curate that exhibition.

Peter took enormous pleasure in his family. He will be sorely missed by his partner of 26 years, Pam Mendelsohn. The couple had planned to marry in April and to host a wedding celebration in July. He leaves a great void in the lives of many: daughter Alison Mary Lander and her husband Michael of Tumwater, Washington; daughter Elizabeth "Libby" Palmquist-Cochran and her partner Andy Cranfill of Freshwater; daughter Anna Louise May and her husband, Garland "Butch" of Eureka; stepdaughter Rebekah Elizabeth Burgess of Cambridge, Massachusetts; brother John Frederic Palmquist of Arcata; brother Carl Edward Palmquist and his partner Janina Shayne of Arcata; grandson Erik Michael Jonte and his wife, Lisa, of Palo Alto; granddaughter Amanda Alison Jonte of Tumwater, Washington; granddaughter Sarah Marie Barnes of Eureka; granddaughter Amy Lee Barnes and her partner, Javier Euevan



AFS foreign exchange students preparing for backpacking.



Pam and Peter.



Rebekah and Peter, 2002.



Carl, Erin, Peter, Max and John, 1999.

of Eureka; niece, Erin Jessica Palmquist of Berkeley; former wife Sally Palmquist of Surrey, England; former son-in-law David Cochran of Eureka; and his beloved Corgi, Max, of Arcata and Emeryville. He is survived by uncles: Gerald Ernest Evans of Fortuna; Clarence Everett Evans of Citrus Heights; Arthur Leland Evans of Rohnerville; Raymond Charles Evans of Olympia, Washington; and Vernon Leroy Evans of Windsor. His aunts include: Alice Margaret Brooks of Windsor and Frances Geraldine Willey of Blocksburg. Peter will also be missed by his collaborators, particularly Thomas R. Kailbourn, Martha A. Sandweiss, and Suzanna Urminska.

Peter was preceded in death by his parents Carl Eric Palmquist and Blanche Lucille Palmquist, uncle George Wesley Evans of Rio Dell and aunt Ida Mae Petersen of Loleta.



*Top: Carl, Janina, Erin,
John, Anna, Sarah, Libby,
Alison, Pam, Peter
Bottom: Blanche, Amy,
Amanda, 1994.*



Top left:
*Alison, Mike, Sally, Carl,
Lisa, Erik, and Peter at Lisa
and Erik's wedding, 2002.*



Top right:
*A family gathering in
Redwood Park, 1995.*



Bottom left:
*The river trip on the island
of Shikoku, Japan, 2002
after Mina's wedding.*



Bottom right:
*Top: Libby, Anna,
Alison, Pam, Sarah, Peter.
Bottom: Amy,
Amanda in 1994.*



Peter in 1947.



Peter with some of his pottery in the mid 1960s.



Peter in Paris, 1957.



Peter visits the Malta Camera Club, 1999.

In his own words...

“My obsession with collecting photographs began unceremoniously in the spring of 1971 when, by chance, I found myself in an antique shop in McKinleyville, California, only a few miles north of my Arcata home. The store’s proprietor contemplated my aimless browsing for a few minutes before inquiring: “Anything in particular?” “No,” I replied. Undaunted, she continued: “What do you collect?” When I mumbled, “nothing,” she persisted: “What is your occupation.” “I am a photographer,” I replied. “Ah,” she said, smiling knowingly: “Well, surely you should collect photographs!”

A short time later, just as I was about to leave the store, she presented me with a double-handful of “old” photographs with the cheerful admonition:



Peter Palmquist, archive storage 1991; photograph by Mary Katherine Brown.

“These will get you started.” Even before I reached my car, I had already begun to wonder about one of the photographers—“Grant, Arcata, Cal.”—seemingly an important photographer among the photographs provided by the well-intentioned shop owner.

How could I have known that, thirty years later, that double handful of images would multiply into a collection numbering approximately a quarter-million photographs? In the beginning, I really hadn’t a clue. As it turned out, the original handful of photographs had all been taken during the nineteenth century in my hometown of Arcata, two hundred and seventy miles north of San Francisco. They were also all identified as to the photographer

that had taken them. Unfortunately, in those first months of collection, I did not know a carte de visite from a daguerreotype, nor had I ever heard of any of the photographers listed.

Although I had already spent more than twenty years behind a camera, I had never experienced the photography of my long-ago predecessors. Thus, while I immediately began to collect photography on my own, I lacked direction. Within a few months, I had assembled an unremarkable hodgepodge of items, including cameras, miscellaneous photographic ephemera, and piles of vintage photographs of all kinds. Not surprisingly, I had tumbled headfirst into the most common of all pitfalls that con-



Unknown maker [Gambler?] Sixth-plate daguerreotype, c. 1854

fronts a fledgling collector—an emphasis on collecting volume, rather than a focus on particular elements within the whole.

Part of the collecting incentive was that photographs were generally cheap. A fine daguerreotype went for less than ten dollars, and many could be had for under three. Portrait photographs were seldom sold for more than fifty cents, and it was not uncommon to see large numbers of them as cheap as ten cents apiece. Tintypes were commonly fifty cents, while the lavish, Victorian-era, family albums were usually less than fifteen dollars. Outdoor photographs, especially town scenes, were another matter. These, along with stereographs, had already begun to interest local collectors. Nonetheless, it was unusual for a fine town view to fetch more than ten dollars, while twin-imaged stereographs rarely surpassed one dollar apiece. This it not to say that these artifacts were “dirt” cheap during the 1970s, but they were most certainly a bargain by today’s standards. It also helped, that I was apparently the only person in Humboldt County that seriously collected old photographs.

As I became more deeply involved in searching for photographica—a catchall term for all types of photography and photographic artifacts—I also began to realize that there was a growing trend towards collecting photography, and that it was already underway in other parts of the world. There had even been a few articles on the subject in photography magazines. By the early 1970s, there were several networks of collectors underway, and by the mid-1970s several of these had already begun to organize and publish specialty newsletters, primarily in the area of collecting cameras and/or stereographs. I joined a couple of collectors’s organizations and soon began to receive catalogues offering photographica for



Tintype from Peter’s book
Frozen in Iron



Amasa P. Flaglor
[Studio portraits]
Enameled cartes de visite
c. 1874 - 1875

sale. Before long, I found myself beginning to understand the jargon of the photo-collecting field—photographic processes were described, desirable characteristics of objects and images noted, and prices established.

Nonetheless, I found myself increasingly drawn to the unknown photographers of my hometown. I had never conducted research of any kind and had no previous interest in history. One day, a kindly reference librarian suggested that I have a look at the cache of early-day local newspapers available on microfilm. The *Humboldt Times*, it turned out, began in 1854 only four years after the discovery of Humboldt Bay and the beginnings of white settlement had gotten underway. The *Arcata Union*, it turned out, had ample evidence concerning Grant, the photographer whose name had previously caught my eye. Using every spare minute, I began to devour the newspapers looking for mentions and notices of photographers that I began to list. Before long, some names became familiar to me, and in some cases the fabric of their personal lives began to be restored. I learned, for example, that Grant's full name was Martin Howe Grant. Another intriguing photographer had signed his photographs "A. P. Flaglor" and I was amused to discover that "A. P." stood for "Amasa Plummer" Flaglor. I was also surprised by how many local photographers there had been before 1900.

As my interest deepened, I met many wonderful individuals who were eager to share their family photographs with me. In each case, I took notes, which I added to my growing documentation about local photography. I also made many copy negatives of images to add to my ever-expanding files documenting local photographers. Today, there are thousands

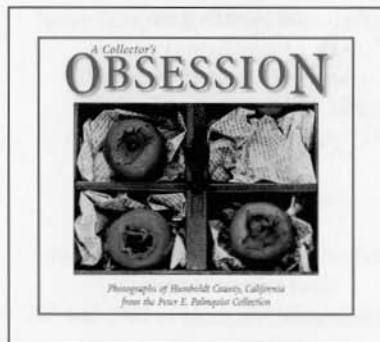
of files on local photographers, nearly seven hundred and fifty of which, represent female photographers.

By 1973, I had become somewhat of an expert on Humboldt County photographers. I also began to want to share my knowledge with others. Since I did not know how to write effectively, my first four articles were written by others—three by a Humboldt State University graduate student named David Smith, and the fourth by journalist Al Steen, who also edited *Pacifica Magazine*. It was at about this time that I became acquainted with A. W. Ericson's photographs and decided that it was time to write a book, *Fine California Views: The Photographs of A. W. Ericson* (1975), that was my first attempt at narrative writing. Although the book was well received, my naiveté and lack of writing prowess was painfully evident. By this time, however, I was absolutely hooked on my need to search out the lives of pioneer photographers, a search which quickly expanded to include all the rest of California and finally the American Far West.

Today, some thirty years after that fateful visit to the antique shop, I continue to collect, research and write—some sixty books and more than three hundred and thirty articles—documenting the photographers of yesteryear. A chance encounter had led to an obsession.”

Peter E. Palmquist
January 12, 2001

Reprinted from the introduction of "A Collector's Obsession:
*Photographs of Humboldt County, California from the Peter E.
Palmquist Collection*" with permission of the Peter E. Palmquist Estate.



OBSESSION cover photo by Dar Spain.

Thank you to ...

The Guardian Angels

Roberta Rothman
Shana Muwakkii
Byron Fong
Romney Rhodes
Jack Porter
Jenny Kern
Erica Goode
Tiffany Fujita
Jane Hill
Silvia Mazzone-Clementi
Stephen Burgess

And...

Janina Shayne
Cindy Graebner & Steve Catton
Masha Oguinskaya
Carl Mautz
Cathie Leavitt
Jan Kraepelien
Steve Gompertz & Deborah Fitzgerald
Jack & Peggy Irvine
Thomas Burns
Glennis Kovacovitch
Dorothy Klein
Jean Ferro
George Miles
Martha Sandweiss
Sheila Marks
Mary Nessel
Tom Kailbourn
Jerry Carter
Elletta Tripp
Cheri Swan
Liz Finney
Andrew Schmidt
Suzanna Urminska

Natalie Urminska
Olga Urminska
Alex Smeloff
Craig Allmendinger
Matt Lasner
Ben Donner
Tara Macneil & Zachary Veitch
Laura Bouman
Alex Lykidis
Mike Price
Kara Finck & Mark Humowiecki
Valerie Yeakel
Rita Carole
Abby & Michael Proulx
Marc & Sisi Rothman
Nickee Shaw
Kim Sichel
Harry Levine
Steve Berman
Marilla Pivonka
Joyce Hough & Fred Neighbor
AFS, North Coast Chapter
Pacific Park Plaza Staff &
Homeowners Association

Thank you to ...

Jim Crain for coordinating the search for the driver of the car and for raising the \$10,000 reward.

Thanks to all those involved in supporting the search:

John Carpenter, San Leandro
Jim Crain, San Francisco
Dorothy De Mare, Petaluma
Mead Kibbey, Sacramento
Marcelline Krafchick, Emeryville
Carl Mautz, Nevada City
John McWilliams, Los Altos
Graham Pilecki, Albany
William Schaeffer, Chester, CT
Joseph Silva, Lafayette
Lester Silva, Sacramento
Leonard Walle, Novi, MI
Detective Jason Bosetti, Emeryville

*Contributors to the Peter E. Palmquist
Memorial Fund for*

Historical Photographic Research:

Richard & Phyllis Stanewick, Arcata
Tracey Baker, Roseville, MN
Joseph Young, Alameda
Naomi & Walter Rosenblum,
Long Island City, NY
Carole & Harry Glauber, Portland, OR
Margaret & Ron Polito, Newtonville, MA
Peter Burgess, M.D., Eureka
Lois & Paul Levine, San Carlos
Gina Blumenfeld, Los Angeles
Adele Clarke & Allan Regenstreif, San Francisco
Lisa Hoffman, San Francisco
J. Paul Levine, Los Angeles
Ira & Therese Heyman, Berkeley
Larry West, New York
Janice Haugan, Berkeley
Margo Metegrano, San Francisco
Terry Abraham, Moscow, ID
Barbara Tannerbaum, Akron, OH
Beverly Blatt & David Filipek, Alameda
Carl Mautz, Nevada City

Dan, Helen, Sarah, & Ben Horowitz,
Northampton, MA

Pam Mendelsohn, Arcata
Laura Muir, Cambridge, MA
Fraenkel Gallery, San Francisco
Heinz Henisch, State College, PA
Paul Hertzmann, San Francisco
Martha Sandweiss, Pelham, MA
Elinor & Earl Caustin, Palo Alto
Roberta Rothman, San Francisco
John Irwin, Denver, CO
Susan Schapiro & Charley Kopp, Lafayette
Peter Pennekamp, Arcata
Dorothy DeMare, Petaluma
Richard Rudisill, Santa Fe, NM
Chicago Albumen Works
Housatonic, MA
James Crain, San Francisco

*For further information about the Fund,
contact: Alexandra Reid,
707-442-2993 or alexreid@hafoundation.org*



Photo credits:

Front cover: *Peter with Jean Paul Sartre in front of the old National Library, Paris October 2001. Photo courtesy of Pam Mendelsohn.*

Inside front cover: *Close up of Peter, 1977. Photo courtesy of Rebekah Burgess.*

Inside back cover: *Peter and Max in Jenner, 2002. Photo courtesy of Pam Mendelsohn.*

Back cover: *Peter in the redwoods, 1979. Photo courtesy of Rebekah Burgess.*

