

Nick Pavlik:

Good afternoon everyone. Welcome to the Jerome Library at Bowling Green State University and thank you so much for attending today's program, which is part of the local history publication award fall lecture series, sponsored by the Center for Archival Collections or the CAC. My name is Nick Pavlik. I'm the curator of manuscripts and digital projects at the CAC and I also serve as the current chair of the CAC local history publication awards committee. The CAC's annual local history publication award is an extension of its mission to collect, preserve, and provide access to historical and archival records relating to Northwest Ohio.

Nick Pavlik:

The award was established to encourage and recognize authors of outstanding publications about Northwest Ohio history with awards being given in both academic scholar and independent scholar divisions. Each division winner is awarded \$300 and a plaque and is invited to Jerome library to give a public talk on their work. It's my pleasure today to welcome Jim Semon Sr. and Jeff Brown to Jerome library, as the winners of our 2018 local history publication award in the independent scholar division for their book *Sandusky's Photographer: The Real Photo Postcards of Ernst Niebergall*, published by the Firelands Postcard Club.

Nick Pavlik:

There is a third author of the book who was also a winner of the award, [Roger Dickman 00:01:28], but he was unable to join us today, so I just wanted to make sure we acknowledge him. By way of introduction here for Jeff and Jim, Jeff Brown, who's here on the far left, my far left, your farm right, was born in Sandusky and grew up on Catawba Island, Ohio. A national merit scholar, he received his BA, magna cum laude in history from Muskingum College and an MA in anthropology and archeology from Kent State University.

Nick Pavlik:

He's now retired from running regional and archeological and historic preservation offices for the Ohio historic preservation office, serving as historic preservation administrator for the Stark County regional planning commission, and conducting section 106 field reviews under a contract for ODNr's abandoned coal mine reclamation program. Jeff is the author or a coauthor of books, professional journal, articles and papers and book reviews on subjects ranging from Eastern Ohio archeology to Myers Lake park, in Canton and the Lake Terminal Railroad in Lorain. And then Mr. Jim Semon Sr., was born in Detroit, Michigan and moved with his family at an early age to Sandusky, Ohio.

Nick Pavlik:

He's a 1958 graduate of Sandusky High School and studied industrial design at Kent State university and graphic design and typography at the Cleveland Institute of Art. Now retired from American Greetings Corporation and Henkel consumer products, Jim is an avid photographer of transportation subjects and enjoys collecting related

memorabilia. He is coauthor of three books, one on the Nickel Plate in Baltimore on Ohio railroads and a recent book on Clydesdale motor trucks and his photos have been published and transportation books, calendars, magazines and postcards. Jim is currently president of the Firelands Postcard Club and a trustee of the Erie County historical society.

Nick Pavlik:

As a final notes, in addition to today's program, we will also be hosting two additional local history publication award lectures later this fall. On Tuesday, October 29th, Dr. Rebecca Mancuso, associate professor in the BGSU Department of History will present on her article "The Finger Saga, One Museum's Quest to Turn the Macabre into the Meaningful," which is published in the *Public Historian*, the journal of the National Council on Public History.

Nick Pavlik:

And on Thursday, November 14th, we'll be welcoming our other independent scholar division award winners Patricia Beach, Susan Eisel, Maria Nowicki, Judy Szor, and Beth White for a talk on their book *Caps Capes and Caring: The Legacy of Diploma Nursing Schools in Toledo*, published by the University of Toledo Press. For more information on these talks, I encourage you to visit the upcoming events page on the University Libraries' website. But, and the final note, there are some items here on the tables.

Nick Pavlik:

Some are of course view only, but the items over here, the individual postcards are free to take for anybody who is interested. And on the far table, there are some additional copies of the *Sandusky's Photographer* book, which are for sale, I understand. So you could speak with Jim about that if you are interested in purchasing a copy after the talk. So but for now, please join me in welcoming authors, Jen Semon Sr. and Jeff Brown to Jerome Library.

Jim Semon Sr.:

Thank you very much Nick. It's a pleasure for us to be here. We had a lot of fun doing this last book on Mr. Niebergall. And I want to tell you a little bit more about myself first, and then we'll talk a little bit more about Mr. Niebergall and the book, and Jeff is going to cover the research we tried and actually worked very hard on, to make sure we had captions that were correct. We knew a lot of historians would look at it. We wanted it to be more than just a picture book of postcards. So Jeff will cover the details very carefully. I began collecting railroad Lake boats and truck postcards in 1966, along with my own photography, I was fascinated with transportation subjects and early, early age, as a young boy.

Jim Semon Sr.:

I remember driving to Cleveland with my mom and dad in the car and if we saw a train or a truck, I got pretty excited. Dad would have to stop or slow down. I first learned of Ernst Niebergall early railroad photos, in Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers weekly

newsletter, which was published April 6th, 1979. Before that, I didn't know a thing about Mr. Niebergall. I saved this, you can see it after the talk, but this is actually the two page spread of Mr. Niebergall's photographs. Now, the thing that was sad, they said, "A photographer" but they didn't identify who he was.

Jim Semon Sr.:

But when I saw that, and I had a friend at The Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers on [Beilock 00:06:28], that gave me that copy, I said, I got to learn more about this and who took those pictures. I was impressed. The early photographs of speeding trains that weren't blurred. And being a photographer, I knew that would be pretty difficult to do. My research took me to the haste library in Fremont. And I reviewed many of the transportation images there that Charles Frohman had donated to the library and had some of the prints that I saw made from my collection.

Jim Semon Sr.:

At that time, they've actually make me a glossy photograph from the negative that was there or they would copy it for me. Later I met Ernest Walbourn, who was the dock superintendent at the docks in Sandusky, Ohio. And Ernest was also a casual friend and Mr. Niebergall's and fact digress for a minute. On Sunday mornings after church, he would always stop by Ernst department and bring him a pint of ice cream and a newspaper. Now later on you'll find out, Ernst had very few friends, was always single and had no relatives. So he was befriended by Mr. Walbourn.

Jim Semon Sr.:

He gave me some original prints that he had gotten from Ernst and he also told me about his friendship with her in Ernst Niebergall. That's how I learned about the ice cream and the newspapers. Ernst creativity absolutely amazed me that you'll see on the back of our book, that's a kind of Canon camera he used and we'll talk about that a little bit later, I now own that camera. But to be able to go out and take speeding trains and not have them blurred to me it was just absolutely amazing.

Jim Semon Sr.:

Besides that, his vantage point, the shots he would take, he would try to V up, above the train, coming under a bridge for example, or get down low or even have a train go through, what we've known was the track pants, where they would scoop water on the fly and he would take photographs of that. Amazing, amazing. In my opinion. I purchased his camera in tripod from a registered class white ad in 1982. The seller was [Bob Franks 00:08:42], another one of his friends, casual friends.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And the photo is, as I said the photo of the cameras on the back of our book. I worked with Rex Rhodes, the editor of the Sandusky register on in an article entitled Ernst Niebergall 1976, 1954 on August 28th, 1983. In the article, I suggested a book should be written, 36 years later, be got it done. That was not part of the plan, but that's the way it worked out. I joined the Fireland's Postcard Club in 2006 have been president for

the last eight years and learned that the club members had many Ernst Niebergall cards, no surprise there.

Jim Semon Sr.:

We decided to give Ernst Niebergall, the recognition I felt and they felt he deserved four years ago and our club donated \$3,400 to 18 area local historical societies and museums, including the Hayes library, I might add from our book profits. So this was not for me, it was not for Jeff, this was something we wanted to give Ernst the recognition, admittedly quite late, but he got the recognition I thought he deserved and we thought it was a way to give back to the community. So we felt that that was really a good, good arrangement.

Jim Semon Sr.:

Little bit Ernst Niebergall, he was born in Cologne, Germany in 1876 immigrated to the USA in 1906, February 1st in 1906. And what's interesting, he came to the USA but he immediately, or at least soon went up to Montreal Canada and we think because his mother had a relative there, he did some photographic work with that relative. By the way, we also know he came to this country as an experienced, accomplished photographer.

Jim Semon Sr.:

He brought a lot of his equipment with him. So he had training in Germany before you came here. He came to Sandusky in 1908, he was 32 years old. The other big question that we've never been able to understand. Why did he choose Sandusky Ohio of all the places to go out of Montreal, why did he come to Sandusky? We still don't know the answer. Do we?

Jeff Brown:

No.

Jim Semon Sr.:

We tried to find it through all the files they have, which are wonderful at the Hayes, but we could not answer that question. Real photo postcards became very, very popular and we think to augment his commercial business, he went into the postcards, like you see the copies up here on the table. As an example, 1000 card blanks that could be exposed with a dark room, cost him \$6 and 76 cents. So he was selling cards for five or 10 cents, at the end of the day, still brought him some income. He never married, had no relatives, but did set up the commercial business.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And I'll talk a little bit about later about where he lived. His letterhead was very interesting. Photographs tell the truth. Photographs live forever. Very creative use focal plane shutters, I mentioned before, but read it appeared again. Photographs live forever, Photographs to tell the truth. On September 4th, 1918, the federal agencies, seized cameras, his photo equipment, and he had no US citizenship. He as we

understand it, he chose not to get us citizenship because his father had an estate that someday would be his, he didn't want to lose that. So by making that bad decision, he was out put out of business until after the war.

Jim Semon Sr.:

In the late 1920s, postcards declined and were replaced by printed color postcards. And by the way, Ernst never got involved with color photography. He was strictly black and white. He focused on commercial work, customers included [Heinen Dolk 00:12:40], GNC Foundry, Pennsylvania railroad, Laura Lake Dot company, Deluxe Outdoor Advertising, Great Lakes Dredge and Dock. He also did animal photographs for national geographic. And by the way, he loved his animal photographs and he did a good job of selling those images to national geographic.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And on the table right here is an example one that I was able to find, which is right here. It's a family with a cow and calf pass that one around. It's kind of neat, but that was something that he enjoyed doing. His total photography expenses from 1908 to 1940 was \$22,414. That's a long time. He lived a pretty meager lifestyle. How do you identify his real photo postcards? [Marilyn 00:13:43] probably knows, but there are four ways we know of. You want to say one?

Marilyn:

He'd write it out of the negative.

Jim Semon Sr.:

He'd write it out of the negative or it'd be exposed on the front of the card. Sometimes he put his name on the front of the card. Sometimes he would... and first of all, his printing style was very unique. He never misspelled English words. He was amazing. He didn't misspell anything. He used all capital letters. That's okay. His numbers are the front of the card were another indication he frequently would number what number card it was. I think that's so you could go back and reproduce that again.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And later on he had his name printed on the back of the cards. On the one edge. He always lived in rented apartments in Sandusky, four apartments that we know of. He was at 408 camp street. There's a photo in our book of a neighbor in 1910 and actually on page 113 of our book. Then he went to 533 Pearl street. And we know that from a 1914 newspaper advertisement that he had for his business, he went to 1022 Pearl street, we saw that on 1932 and 33 invoices, and then he went to 527 Decatur street, 1952 to 54 in the phone directories and also was listed as his, as his residence at his death.

Jim Semon Sr.:

On the onset of world war II. What do you think happened? His cameras and photo equipment were once again confiscated. At that point, we think he began to lose interest

in photography. As I said, he never worked with color photography. He did make some income with prints from old black and white negatives. We know he sold those. The other thing that kinda hurt both Jeff and I, when we discovered it, he would take the emulsion off of the glass plates and scrape it off and sold those glass plates to the Sandusky fire department to use in fire alarm boxes of all things.

Jim Semon Sr.:

So we often wonder what images were lost when he made that decision. Now there's still a lot of images that at Hayes, so everything's not lost we often wonder what is indeed gone. We also know that he took a job at [Cedar 00:16:09] point and we don't know what he did there. We don't think he was a photographer. But we do know during world war two, the reason they compensated his cameras, he was taking pictures of boats at Cedar point and that was a big no-no. And so they took his cameras everything away. I said before, he was very reclusive.

Jim Semon Sr.:

I have his last will and Testament. You almost want to cry when you read it because he died with very little. Most of the furniture was borrowed from someone else. And just led a very, very reclusive life. Without [Charles Stroman 00:16:51], a lot of his work would have been lost, but Charles donated that from Sandusky, was very good about that. And I mentioned earnest Walbourn and Bob Franks who were the other friends we knew he had. There are over 6,000 of his images at the Hayes museum and a lot of those are online.

Jim Semon Sr.:

If you've looked online there, they've done a nice job of making those available. He died February 6th, 1954 at 78 in Sandusky and he does have a gravestone at Oakland cemetery, in Sandusky on [Myelin 00:17:22] road and we're not sure who paid for it. Several people have investigated that. Somebody obviously stepped up, I suspect one of those friends or maybe all three of them got together, put a marker in the cemetery for him.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And there's a picture of that gravestone in our book as well. The graphics for the cover came from a 1910 Sandusky truck advertisement that I happened to buy about the time we were grewing this. And it worked out perfect for this. The only thing we thought was perfect photographer, camera, to me it was a complete picture. And this little panel on the back, this was one of his advertisements. It's actually in the frame over there that I borrowed and we put his advertisement right on the tripod of his camera.

Jim Semon Sr.:

But that's a story. That's how it happened. And it all happened quite by accident. If I hadn't seen that railway, the newsletter from the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, I probably wouldn't have known about him for a long, long time. And maybe until I ran into Jeff, he may have told me, but that's one of the things I like about life. The way

certain things come your way and then it's what you do with what you learn. And this is probably an example of that. So Jeff, I'm going to ask you to come up or sit down or whatever you prefer and you can tell them the research that we've done.

Jeff Brown:

I didn't tell Jim about Ernst Niebergall. Jim told me I've liked Jim. I've collected postcards almost as long as Jim has and had a variety of Ernst Niebergall postcards in my albums from the islands, from Sandusky, Fremont. Didn't really know anything about him and frankly it didn't pay a lot of attention to who the photographer was until I was in the postcard club. And Jim and Roger had already been talking about doing this book and recognize that I had images in my collection and said I'd be glad to help and they generously ended up signing me up as a coauthor.

Jeff Brown:

The thing that impressed me and initially about, as Jim has mentioned the quality of Niebergall's work and the wide range of it of subjects and areas. He never owned a vehicle. His transportation was entirely by inner urban, presumably railroad at times or the generosity of a friend with an automobile. So his area of operation the farthest East we found an image that he made was [Amherst 00:19:59] at a train wreck and the farthest West was the launching of the steamer put in Bay. And its initial trials in Detroit river in Detroit.

Jeff Brown:

Otherwise, pretty much the Sandusky Fremont over to Ruggles Beach East of Herron focusing, and the range of subjects I think everything interested in from Seagulls in flight. He would apparently feed the Seagulls down at the docks and Sandusky and then photograph these massive flocks of Seagulls in flight, trains as Jim mentioned at speed, Fremont floods, everything seemed to catch it, and of course that was an era when the technology was the promised a bright future and everyone was fascinated by the advances in technology. And I think equally so with Mr. Niebergall. I was retired as was Jim. I had worked as an historian and archeologist, but I grew up in the area.

Jeff Brown:

I had a lifelong interest in the area and it accumulated quite a number of books and resources. And it was a fun thing for me. I got to sit down over the course of the winter before publication and then drive my wife probably batty sometimes with it and spend hours going through books to find the little minutiae. One of the things that was interesting to me as we got into this was, there's a number of mistakes and published histories and they start, somebody will do a book on Sandusky history.

Jeff Brown:

They'll go back and they'll find a newspaper article and they'll, it'll state for instance that, that there was a waterline built from the [Cascadia 00:21:34] area to a brewery and Sandusky Dick take the crystal rock water to the brewery. Somebody will see that and they'll put it in a book. Well, the next person that writes a book sees it in the book

newspaper article perhaps and thinks that's gospel. So it gets repeated over and over and it ends up in three or four different books and everyone assumes that's history. It's not, as it turns out. And, and initially I swaddled that too.

Jeff Brown:

[Glen Keebler 00:21:58] who has done a book on the Cascadia history and is intimately familiar with the history of that area and his descendant from the owners of the Keebler brewing company and Sandusky and he said, "Think about it. He said, that's seven miles of building a water line through basically limestone bedrock. It didn't happen and the only substantiation supposedly for this was one picture one of the caverns of crystal rock and there's a little pipe sticking out of the rock and if you think about it, why would a pipe, there was no pump structure. There's nothing, there's no surface indication that any line was ever built, but it's just been accepted because it was printed in several books."

Jeff Brown:

Those kind of debunking some of those things was kind of a side benefit of doing some of this. In an area, it's likely soldiers and sailors home, there are old publications that were done at the time. It opened in the 1890s that are very detailed descriptions of the buildings they built and photographs of all of them. And being old tech, I didn't do as much online research probably as I should have, Jim sometimes set me straight on that.

Jeff Brown:

Glen Keebler, somebody like him was a terrific help in certain areas. We included the pictures that Mr. Niebergall had shot of when Mr. Keebler died that had run the Keebler brewing company, they put up a massive monument in the cemetery. Glen spend a lot of time doing the research to the point where it was made, how the stone was shipped from Cleveland to Sandusky, how it was erected, a tremendous detail and accurate history.

Jeff Brown:

The railroads were a particular interest. They've been a lifelong interest for both Jim and me. Jim did a lot of the research. He has an extensive memorabilia and timetable collection and Jim in particular was able to identify a particular train that was shown in a picture, sometimes Niebergall, would label it by a train name. Jim would pull off the timetable and we could add into the caption then. The actual time this train was supposedly arriving at Bayview station or Sandusky station, whether if it was at Bayview, what time it was due into Sandusky.

Jeff Brown:

I have a number of resources, the locomotive rosters and histories that are able to identify a locomotive when and where it was built and what its eventual fate became. So the railroads in particular, I think were a special interest for both Jim and me. The ships were also a particular interest and things like the old obeisance guides that are hard to come by.



Jeff Brown:

The ship masters guides, their fleet history series, the namesake series are all useful resources. Of course the collections here at Bowling Green are tremendous and I think anyone who's doing great lakes research ignores that, does it at their own peril. So a great resource. Of course Jim was a long time truck. I had nothing to do with the truck research. Jim handled all of that.

Jeff Brown:

The Herron docks where a particular interest, I went to High school in Herron. And over the years the Weed and Lake Erie built those docks, one time a great coal shipping port and iron ore was brought into the port and they had a variety over the years of unloaders and coal loaders for loading coal and unloaders for taking ore out of the boats.

Jeff Brown:

And to date those things, fortunately in that particular case, the nickel plate historical society had a publication and the whole publication is devoted to the Herron Docks. And it makes it much simpler to identify a particular Coal unloader as being erected in such and such a year. And it was torn down and replaced by a different mechanism and whatever succeeding near that happened when slips were altered or lengthened or added. Likewise with the inner urbans when they rerouted around here and instead of through it build or vice versa and build a new station.

Jeff Brown:

It was a lot of fun for me just to focus on an area that I was always interested in, had the luxury of a lot of time that I could sit down and pour through books and get diverted on things that weren't always related to the book. And it was over the course of a winter when we did most of that.

Jim Semon Sr.:

Couple of Winters really.

Jeff Brown:

Yeah. Yeah.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And you're in Kent and I'm in Westlake.

Jeff Brown:

We had a lot of meetings.

Jim Semon Sr.:

We had a lot of meetings.

Jeff Brown:

There's a restaurant down the street from Jim, called the Rustic. We had a lot of lunches there.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And a lot of body's pie.

Jeff Brown:

Yeah. Jim had mentioned to me one of the intriguing things about Niebergall and the thing that really deserved correction. His pictures have been widely reproduced. And if you look at almost any publication on local history in this Sandusky area, they are Niebergall photographs. And yet they're almost never credited to Niebergall. They're usually credited to the Hayes Museum. Froman made sure that most of his surviving negatives and images were donated to the Hayes Museum. And so they're usually credited to the Hayes Museum rather than Niebergall and if they're sometimes labeled with his name.

Jeff Brown:

His writing was, as Jim mentioned, was very distinctive and his S always has a downturn on the S, the K will have an extension below the normal line of the printing. He did his 7s in the European manner with a cross piece on the seven. So it's a very distinctive style of writing and once you've seen a few of them, they become very recognizable. I guess I'd mentioned the technical skill. He had a great sense of humor and Jim mentioned the animal pictures, but I wanted to read the... he would photograph... It didn't come across much, but let me find the thing. Where are they?

Jim Semon Sr.:

Which one are you looking for?

Jeff Brown:

I was looking for the animal pictures that he did.

Jim Semon Sr.:

Towards back.

Jeff Brown:

Yes. There's the seagulls, that must be in the next page. Multiple ones were sold to national register. Here's a soar with her piglets and his caption on it is, "Lunch at odd hours." This one with a double row of the piglets, he calls it, "A double Becker". He sold his photos. They were one of his main sources of income by that time. Apparently he likes St Bernards. He has a bucket full of puppies here and I just purchased a car Jim, to have them all lined up in a row.

Jim Semon Sr.:

Oh did they?

Jeff Brown:

Yeah. The other interesting thing I thought was, again examples of, I don't want to call it false history, but mistaken history sometimes, he shot a lot of flood photos in Fremont, and they're always labeled flood in Fremont. They're not dated usually, and they're always credited to the 1913 flood, the great statewide flood that caused such devastation and statewide killed over 400 people.

Jeff Brown:

They're not, and it's easy to do that, but they never dug into it. Apparently Fremont, in the preceding year also had a massive flood and in 1912, the river was jammed up with ice. And there are images he took of people lined on the bridge looking at the ice jams, and he labels them, the ice jams. That didn't happen in 1913. And as near as I can determine, I've never found an image that we've been able to verify was taken in the 1913 flood. And my assumption is just a pure guess was that the devastation was so bad that year that he was unable to get to Fremont to photograph that in the immediate aftermath of the flood. It's just a correction of mistaken history, granted it's a small point, but I think those things matter so that, I mean there's not a lot.

Jim Semon Sr.:

The only other thing you might want to comment on, the fact that we found two cards that Ernst sent, he himself signed and sent.

Jeff Brown:

Yes.

Jim Semon Sr.:

They're both in the book.

Jeff Brown:

They're both in the book. There was one...

Jim Semon Sr.:

And the one that he initialed is when we determined his middle name was Rudolph.

Jeff Brown:

Yeah.

Jim Semon Sr.:

E-R-N. We didn't know what his middle name was.

Jeff Brown:

This image of a cement works at Bay bridge, he was confirming an order from the Smith Novelty company in port Clinton that sold "Postals" souvenirs of local interested. It indicates his approach to the business that it says, "Any order of this kind, no matter how small will be executed." And in another card he quotes his price per card, something like 3 cents,

Jim Semon Sr.:

Yes.

Jeff Brown:

I think if you bought them wholesale. And he had certainly a sense of aesthetics I think, which to me was revealed in this picture taken at Bay point on the Southeast tip of Marblehead peninsula. And it's almost a still life and it's just, to me it kind of exudes serenity, the long bridge that the boat in shadow and faintly in the background is in the urbanized build up skyline of the city of Sandusky.

Jeff Brown:

And like any photographer, he has thousands of images and you'd come across ones that you'd think there's nothing special about that one. But his best work I think is equal to almost any contemporary of his time. And to see some of these images of steam trains running at 50, 60 miles an hour with a large format camera like that. And the clarity is... How did he stop that? It was highly unusual in railroad photography to have anyone do, usually if railroad photographs that you're opposed, the train would be stopped on the track. Sometimes the people would stand around the engine, but defined photographs of that quality really highly unusual. I think he was a much greater talent than has ever been recognized. Anything

Jim Semon Sr.:

Sounds good.

Jeff Brown:

That comes to mind that I missed Jim?

Jim Semon Sr.:

Nope. You'd be anxious to AOs, any questions or answers? We're glad to answer.

Marilyn:

What size glass plate was he using?

Jim Semon Sr.:

He had all different sizes.

Marilyn:

So he usually use by 10? [crosstalk 00:31:42] and the four by five?

Jim Semon Sr.:

You'll see the ones down here, four by fives. That was pretty much four by five and eight by 10 what most of it. But he also had several panoramic cameras. We haven't found any negatives for that. We know that that one shot was... the one soldiers home, was a panoramic camera.

Jeff Brown:

Yes.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And we know that he took, in later life, in the late thirties, he was doing a lot of work with organizations and groups where he had large groups of people at Jackson Junior High School for example, in Sandusky, which was relatively new at the time. He took a lot of photographs there and use that panoramic camera to get the entire group.

Jeff Brown:

And at one time, didn't he own 14 cameras?

Jim Semon Sr.:

Yes, he own 14 cameras.

Jeff Brown:

I don't know that he ever got them all back from the government.

Jim Semon Sr.:

I have one camera, that is-

Jeff Brown:

It's only known survivor.

Jim Semon Sr.:

I don't know of any others that exist, but that was just, and I'm not one of the persons that I... when we lived in Sandusky, I was not wanting to go through classified ads. So again, that had to be devine that I would open the paper and find that and get it. [Bonnie 00:32:49] couldn't believe I could find it that fast. And by the way, our wives are in the back and they've been very patient. They've heard this before, but they still wanted to be here today. So we thank them for being here. Bonnie and [Sue 00:33:00].

Jeff Brown:

Which was in their arms.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And I think they found the same colors to wear tonight and they kind of match.

Speaker 6:  
I have a question.

Jim Semon Sr.:  
Yes.

Speaker 6:  
I'd like you to discuss the writing process of your book. Who wrote what? or how did you do your page layouts for your photographs and composing your chapters or whatever.

Jim Semon Sr.:  
Very, very, very good question.

Jeff Brown:  
Yes.

Jim Semon Sr.:  
No.

Jeff Brown:  
Jim and I worked pretty much, the two of us did most of the writing on the actual book. Roger was a long time collector of Ernst Niebergall images and postcards and knowledgeable about them. And Roger and Jim were the two that originated the idea of the book, not me. [crosstalk 00:33:38]

Jim Semon Sr.:  
And Glen Keebler.

Jeff Brown:  
And Glen Keebler. I came in late on that process. But because I've written before and Roger had not, and Jim had written before and we worked by computer and together we would hold meetings every couple of weeks sometimes. And I would research a lot of the ships for instance of the Herron docks and we had the printer had given us copies of all the images and we had already figured out what images we were going to use and then researching the images.

Jim Semon Sr.:  
I think we need to stop there for a second.

Jeff Brown:  
Yes.

Jim Semon Sr.:

Because how we did all the contents of the book, we ended up with about, from our members and our own collections about 500 postcards. And we knew we weren't going to do a bit of that. We actually got more in the book than we had planned, but we took all those in groups, tried to determine where the commonality was, there were enough Sandusky, enough soldiers home. And towards the end of the book we still have a miscellaneous chapter. We had a few animals and a few things that we just couldn't categorize anywhere else.

Jim Semon Sr.:

So, that was the starting point. And then once we had the contents determined, that as Jeff said, we each started to work on captions. And it was interesting because I would sometimes do, I thought the perfect caption and then Jeff would say, "Well, there's a couple of things here." So we had enough time to work it out that the one I did do the biography in here based on the information I had gathered from the Hayes Museum primarily.

Jim Semon Sr.:

But I still had Jeff and Roger looking over my shoulder and Glen Keeper who is not close by, but they all had a chance to look at it and offer their comment and critique. This book was probably critique a lot and I know you and I critiqued it A lot.

Jeff Brown:

It was an ongoing process. I would write half a dozen captions and send them, emailed them to Jim. He would look at them and if he thought they were great, he would forward them on to the printer. We had already decided on the basic layout. We altered that a little bit as we develop captions and thought, now this fits better here. But for the most part we had a basic layout already. Roger and I pretty much did that ourselves. The printer was one [Atkins 00:35:55] printing in Lakewood is a tremendous outfit to work with or a small outfit, but-

Jim Semon Sr.:

They're small and they work everything electronically. So we changed things, was easy to make adjustments and changes.

Jeff Brown:

And we would make adjustments even between this thing went through three printings and small ones and every one had correction. You can look at something six times in your eyes, see what they want to see and you put it aside and then jumps out. Two days ago I found two things. They're very minor, but I thought, "How did we miss that for all these?" So Jim would look at a caption, he would send me things and I would do a little additional research or check them was a dual process.

Jeff Brown:

And we would get together pretty regularly at Jim's house usually. And review this and decided where we were going with some of it. There were what research needed to be

done. And I was fortunate. I mean I came in as the junior member of this, but I think Jim and I worked very well. I certainly felt fortunate in working with Jim. I've done some other books, coauthor, on my own. I have to say I enjoyed this process and to me it was a lot more rewarding than earlier things I had worked on.

Jim Semon Sr.:

One of the nice things about self-publishing, pretty much make your own rules. Want you want it to look like, we didn't have to abide by size or, I know we would've had trouble if we were limited to captions. I know that would have been a problem.

Jeff Brown:

It just wouldn't have flown.

Jim Semon Sr.:

The bottom line was, we wanted this guy to be recognized and the Hayes group has sold a lot of these books. They were very, very pleased to put it on their shelf because no one had done this before. In fact, the descendant of Charles Stroman was very, very pleased that we did this book. But it was really just something we felt needed to be done.

Jeff Brown:

In terms of laying it out, we would go up and meet with a printer and they would give us sample pages or even a draft when it got to the point of a draft and they were great to work with. So, "No, this is, we want this space like this. We want, this is, we want this image either craft or bigger."

Nick Pavlik:

Were there any photos that you really, really loved and wanted to include but ended up not being able to.

Jeff Brown:

Yes.

Jim Semon Sr.:

Yeah, that's for sure. Because there are a lot of things in my collection that I would like to have had in there-

Jeff Brown:

That are not posted on this.

Jim Semon Sr.:

... To be honest, Jeff and I both liked trains, but we knew we couldn't make those a train boat. We want to make sure it was balanced, because some people would've said,



"Why didn't you put more trains and more boats?" Well, "We would've loved to do that, but we didn't think that would present what the man did."

Jeff Brown:

This image of Jim's, I mean, I haven't seen this one before, but this was taken out on Sandusky Bay bridge, it's the old Lake shore at Michigan Southern later than New York central main line across. Still in operation, Norfolk Southern runs today and runs 127 trains a day on that line. And to me, and that's just a fabulous, that trains at speed. It wasn't stopped. The engineer wasn't more than an advanced or the fireman to start putting out a lot of smoke to make a spectacular picture, which they do on these traverse runs and things.

Jeff Brown:

I just think that's a great railroad photograph. It'd be nice to have if we'd had the luxury of doing a larger book to include more than as postcard, but because of the nature of the sponsor and the emphasis we were using on an image like this, we didn't use it because we've never found a postcard of that image.

Jim Semon Sr.:

You mentioned that Bay bridge, the other thing that really impressed me was the fact that there was in the book you'll see bridge that the train goes through [crosstalk 00:39:37]. He had to be on top of that bridge with a tripod and a camera. Remember, this isn't in digital image time. He had one shot, one glass plate. You don't get a bunch of shots of it coming and going. He had one good job.

Jeff Brown:

He's up on top of the bridge. Caught in his tripod and that huge camera, obviously the railroad had to have cooperated or at least the bridge tender cooperated with this there. This bridge had a bridge tender at the time.

Jim Semon Sr.:

Those trains were traveling through there fast.

Jeff Brown:

Fast. Lake shore was known for it's fast mail and they ran those trains at at least 60 miles an hour, I think, which was fast for that era.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And after the train went through what Niebergall looked like. I mean the smoke and the steam and-

Jeff Brown:

Cover with soot I'm sure. I think there's a copy of it here. And the New York central, they advertised their water level route. It went up through Albany and the Hudson River

Valley and then across it was unlike the Pennsylvania, their chief rival, which went over the mountains and had a lot of grades. The New York central, it's extensively advertised, their water liberal route, you can sleep, it's level and one of the ways they speed it up with time schedules of their passenger trains.

Jeff Brown:

One of the things that's in the steam era, engines had to stop every so often and fill with water, as the water got too low in the tender that the boiler blew up. So it was critical that they maintain enough water in the tender and what the New York central did, I don't remember the exact intervals, they built track pans and-

Jim Semon Sr.:

This one was at Herron

Jeff Brown:

... this one was at Herron. And the tenders had a scoop underneath the tender and the firemen would lower the scoop and they would slow the speed. If it was too fast and there was a water tank and a pump and a long trough in between the rails filled with water and they'd lower the scoop into the trough and refill the tender at speed. It's a bit of a technologies today you can see that you have to have overflow valves because of the tender gets full and you're not done. You're still scooping, you'll blow up your Tender with the water pressure or if you don't raise the Snoop in time and you hit the end of the pan, you're going to tear your scoop off the tender and cause all kinds of problems. So it was a bit... the idea was the train didn't have to slow down.

Jeff Brown:

It could pick this up a speed and maintain a tight schedule and for Niebergall to capture in that kind of clarity on the track pants just East of Herron, New York central locomotive on a fast passenger train scooping. One of the things... this is one of Jim's images, this is a smaller line. The Lake here in Western crossing, the main line of the old Lake shore, that's Sandusky and from a railroad photography standpoint, that's a beautiful image.

Jeff Brown:

It's perfectly composed just crossing the diamonds, a neat old engine and train and the alignment of the rails into the distance, his sense of perspective, his composition, and to capture it with this camera on a slow shutter speed at that exact precise moment that you want, to me speaks of an artistry and an expertise that really was quite rare for the era.

Jim Semon Sr.:

This picture glow it just an example, this is what normally [inaudible 00:42:45] the train would be stopped to be a portrait. And in this case you see there were very few portraits. He liked action.

Jeff Brown:

He liked.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And he was a master of that in our opinion.

Jeff Brown:

Yes.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And by the way, we did not crop anything. I mean this, whatever you see in the book is what the image was on the postcard. So in the age of digital photography and Photoshopping, as probably all of you know, you can really change things a lot and we chose not to do anything. We just reproduced what was on that postcard.

Nick Pavlik:

Could you say a bit about just some of the items that are on display over here?

Jeff Brown:

Sure. Go ahead Jim.

Nick Pavlik:

What those are.

Jeff Brown:

Jeff knows this as well as I, but I'll start at this end. When I bought the camera from Mr. Bob Franks, along with the camera came two of these cases. I'm sure these are cases he brought with him from Germany or out of Fiberboard, but there were all kinds of boxes for lenses and stuff. There's all kinds of slide. This is for film, but there's also for glass plates. I have got two of those along with a camera and there's a photograph up on the edge of the camera, which is in our basement. But I it just because of the bellows and stuff, I hate to carry it.

Jeff Brown:

There's some pinholes in it already. And I've never taken that out of my basement since I've had, I've kind of keep it there. Well over here are... these are all my original Niebergall cards. Not all of these are in the book, but they were ones I just picked as an example of what is work. Here's shaft through the bridge. Early aircraft, he took some interesting shots of those. We talked about the cement works, automobiles, the new fire truck and Fremont. That's a made and run. Real interesting things. At any rate, the one that really caught my eye, true story. Jeff and I both are bidding on that card on eBay. I didn't know he was bidding.

Jeff Brown:

We didn't know.

Jeff Brown:

I've paid way too much money for that card.

Jeff Brown:

I am bidding way too much. And I wouldn't have done it if I'd known he was doing. The only thing I could do on compensation, we both collect memorabilia and I had a free print, a Clerestory stained glass window from a Winning Laker he wouldn't pass in the card. And I felt so badly because I cost him so much money for this card. I gave it to Jim. I thought maybe this will ease the pain a little bit for...

Jim Semon Sr.:

We're still friends.

Jeff Brown:

Thank you Jim.

Jim Semon Sr.:

We're still friends. And anyway, that card didn't make the book because that came online after the book was published. So, but the reason people like those real photo cards and story is especially you can blow them up. This is a blow up of the same card. And we found this extremely interesting, if he had put a couple of negatives together, he was a master at it because there's no indication at all of that image that they were sandwiched.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And we believe since our normally were three boats here, we believe he went out on a boat with that tripod, knew this guy was coming. Prearrange I sure, and got a shot of it coming out. This was coming up Columbus Avenue in Sandusky, but it's an amazing, amazing photograph. And it was really expensive.

Jeff Brown:

Too expensive, too expensive.

Jim Semon Sr.:

Too expensive, but we got it. So-

Jeff Brown:

We got it.

Jim Semon Sr.:

... that story and-

Jeff Brown:

There are other pictures he did where he obviously climbed into a church steeple and probably set up in the Belfry to photograph an aircraft.

Jim Semon Sr.:

He was not afraid of Heights. He was not afraid of anything.

Jeff Brown:

No. He obviously not afraid of heights.

Jim Semon Sr.:

I was showing Jeff, this is a frame photograph that he gave to Mr Froman. He's written on the back as his writing. And [Paul Lanning 00:46:48], my High School English teacher gave this to me a long time ago. But this was something that he received from Charlie Froman who was a friend of his and I've had this displayed on my camera for a long time, but that's an original Niebergall enlargement.

Jim Semon Sr.:

And I think the rest of the things up here are some of his early photographs. We mentioned trucks. We all have a picture of a Clydesdale truck. I was pleased he went to Clydesdale and did some work. That's I think over at Bayview or is that?

Jeff Brown:

I think Bayview or Venice.

Jim Semon Sr.:

That's Venice.

Jeff Brown:

Venice.

Jim Semon Sr.:

That's Venice.

Jeff Brown:

Building or a bridge on the main line.

Jim Semon Sr.:

This was a later shot. This is in thirties of a group of men with the Lake shore electric. This was I think in 32 or 33. These are original prints of Niebergall's by the way. So these are things that I've collected over the years and have enjoyed having. But the real thing is that we're able to share this with other people. That's the benefit of this. And it's been fun.

Nick Pavlik:

Well, thank you very much gentlemen. That was fantastic. Please join me [inaudible 00:48:04] and please do, feel free to come on up and have a closer look at some of the items on display. And if you're interested in purchasing a copy of the book speak with Jim. Thanks again everyone for coming.