

UWO digital photo collection from 1930s, 1940s

by Kaylyn Dallman - Thursday, April 21, 2011

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/11246/uwo-digital-photo-collection-from-1930s-1940s/>

University of Wisconsin Oshkosh is currently featuring the photographic works of Nile Behncke, the first director of Oshkosh Public Museum, from the 1930s and 1940s in the University of Wisconsin Digital Collections Center (UWDC).

The Council of University of Wisconsin Libraries (CUWL) and UW System's Office of Learning & Information Technology created UWDC to provide access to digital resources that support the teaching and research needs of the UW community, uniquely document the university and State of Wisconsin, and provide access to rare or fragile items of broad research value. Each record speaks its own truth; highlights different people, places and accomplishments; and contributes a unique piece of the story, according to the UWDC website.

According to UW Oshkosh Archivist Josh Ranger, each college in the UW System picks a selection of photographs to be featured in UWDC, which was established in 2001. Some colleges picked the best photographs they found, but Ranger preferred to provide a more cohesive collection by one photographer.

There are over 370 photos featured in the collection showing sports, clubs and candid pictures of students on the UW Oshkosh campus.

“Nile would just walk around campus with his camera, so the photos really show the connection between the past and present including fashion sense, relationships and who the people were that went to this campus at the time,” said Ranger.

Who is Nile Behncke?

According to Megan Del Debbio, marketing coordinator of the Oshkosh Public Museum, Behncke was born in Oshkosh June 6, 1892, and was the son of Oshkosh artist Gustave Behncke. He was drafted into the Army on July 18, 1918 and studied to become an artist.

“He painted mostly in watercolors and was appointed as the first director of the Oshkosh Public Museum in 1924 and served until his death in 1954,” said Del Debbio.

Behncke's wife worked on campus as the chair of the art department, and his close relationships in the community allowed him to spend an extensive amount of time on campus.

Switching to digital

The process of "digitizing" photographs begins with the reformatting process at UW. They scan the negative, view the scan for quality to make sure its straight, in focus and cropped correctly, and assign a number to them. According to Ranger, they typically do not do try to perfect the flaws of the image by "image correct."

"The idea is that can be done by anyone latter to copies of that original scan. This process probably takes a few minutes per image," said Ranger. "On our end, we are responsible for the 'metadata' of the image."

Ranger's assistant Jennifer Bumann was responsible for the metadata of the images. She provided specific information about the photo, such as the name of the repository, the name of the collection and the number of the image. Ranger and Buhmann had to provide specific information about the photograph so that anyone can find it.

"If people are able to enjoy this content online, it minimizes contact with the original photograph," Ranger said. "The digital collection wasn't set up for the preservation of the original, but it's sort of a bonus."

According to Ranger their future plans for the next collection will probably consist of a building collection. The photographs will feature the built environment on campus and will be "much more edited than this earlier approach."

To access UW Oshkosh's photographs visit the [UWDC website](#) and click "Browse History of UW-Oshkosh" on the upper left hand side of the page.