
Guide to the Branson DeCou Archive, 1920-1941

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The University Library

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Note

Area, Interdisciplinary, and Ethnic Studies--African StudiesArea, Interdisciplinary, and Ethnic Studies--American StudiesArea, Interdisciplinary, and Ethnic Studies--Asian StudiesArts and Humanities--Arts--PhotographyHistory--African History History--Asian History History--Australiasian and Oceanic History History--Modern European HistoryHistory--Latin American HistoryHistory--United States and North American History Geographical (By Place)--AfricaGeographical (By Place)--AsiaGeographical (By Place)--EuropeGeographical (By Place)--North AmericaGeographical (By Place)--South AmericaGeographical (By Place)--AustraliaGeographical (By Place)--Pacific Islands

Guide to the Branson DeCou Archive, 1920-1941

Collection number: MS 38

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Visual Resource Collection staff

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Branson DeCou Archive,

Date (inclusive): 1920-1941

Collection number: MS 38

Creator: DeCou, Branson

Extent: 50 boxes,
8,000 lantern slides

Repository: University of California, Santa Cruz. University Library. Special Collections and Archives
Santa Cruz, California 95064

Abstract: Glass lantern slides, negatives, photographic albums, notebooks, travelogues, and miscellaneous artifacts that document DeCou's travels in five continents and subsequent travel lecture tours ca. 1920-1941.

Physical location: Stored in Special Collections and Archives: Advance notice is required for access to the collection.

Language: English.

Access

Collection is open for research

Publication Rights

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Preferred Citation

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Acquisition Information

Gift of Elsie DeCou, August 1971

Funding

In 1999 the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation of New York, <http://www.delmas.org>, provided a grant to support to preserve, digitize and catalog 1,475 lantern slides of Italy. More details about the *Dream Pictures: Branson DeCou Archive* digitization project can be viewed online <http://library.ucsc.edu/slides/decou/>.

Grants from the American Irish Foundation and the Friends of the UCSC Library have enabled small portions of the collection to be indexed and preserved.

Biography

Photographer and travelogue lecturer Branson DeCou journeyed the world for thirty years before his death in 1941 at the relatively young age of 49. He was born October 20, 1892, in Philadelphia, a city with a long history of photographic invention, from the pioneer Langenheim brothers to the work of Thomas Eakins. The city also has a tradition of collecting and publishing photographs--the Library Company of Philadelphia, American's oldest cultural institution, had exceptional holdings of photographic works well before 1900--as well as active associations for professionals and amateurs such as the Philadelphia Photographic Exchange Club and the Philadelphia Photographic Society.

DeCou's father was in the wholesale shoe business in Philadelphia, but the family relocated to New Jersey where Branson attended Blair Academy in Blairstown. Upon graduation in 1910 he entered the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken where he more fully developed his interest in photography. After a year, however, he left to initiate what would become a lifelong pursuit of touring the world.

The fabulous Panama Pacific International Exposition of San Francisco's 1915 World's Fair attracted an enormous number of visitors, including Branson DeCou, who in a series of photographs recorded the Fair's night effects so effectively that they were brought to the attention of Underwood and Underwood, a leading American photographic concern, for publication. The wide circulation of these images encouraged DeCou to begin his own work in travelogue lecturing, allying his interests in travel and photography. He embarked in a field that was widely popular at the time as a form of entertainment and education. Since the mid-1800s, public and private lantern slide shows were put on by photographers in clubs, schools, lodges, and museums on a variety of themes including world travel, religion, temperance, comic subjects, or literary retellings. DeCou traversed America speaking to local community organizations such as the Union League Club of Chicago, the New Jersey Orange Women's Club, and also lecturing in academic and cultural institutions such as the University of Hawaii and the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

In each venue the travelogue was illustrated with an average of 150 hand-colored lantern slides and the images synchronized to music. He called his shows "Dream Pictures" and advertised them as a "fascinating new form of entertainment." His promotional brochures exclaimed "with the aid of the dissolving shutter and double stereopticon exquisitely colored slides are projected perfectly synchronized to the music of the masters reproduced on the Victrola, the combination of the two inspiring emotions." DeCou was available for single engagements on selected subjects such as "Jungle Bound Angkor" or he could be booked for a complete series given in the form of a continuous trip "Around the Southern Hemisphere: South Africa, South America, Australia, Tasmania, and the South Sea Islands."

DeCou was apparently highly successful, as these testimonials from several engagements convey. "The slides were the most beautiful that we have ever had the opportunity to view. As for the lecture, you had them so spellbound that they forgot to get uneasy and restless even in the uncomfortable camp chairs. Your enunciation is clear and the little witty personalities that you inserted were very kindly received. You have the gift of side-stepping the stereotyped line of talk usual in travelogues," observed a reviewer for the Newark Camera Club of New Jersey. "You surely have reason for a swelling of the chest over that magnificent audience and its evidence of deep satisfaction with the evening," wrote Charles Atkins, Director of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. Each of the programs had its own title: "Alluring Bali: The Last Paradise," "Ever Captivating Paris," "The Garden of Allah: Algeria and Tunisia," and also its special music: Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C Sharp Minor for "Nature's Supreme Spectacle: The Grand Canyon of the Colorado," the second movement of Haydn's Trio in G Major for the "Wonders of San Marco."

In March of 1932 DeCou made a second marriage to Elsie Vera Stanley, a fellow lecturer. For the last nine years of his life they traveled extensively, and together they continued to present what then were called "musical travelogues, illustrated with masterpieces of art and photography." Often Elsie, in a booked two week long engagement, would lecture one evening on a specific country and Branson would perform on the next. For reserved single admission the price would be 75 cents, for a series ticket the cost was \$2.00. Ever the constant travelers, the DeCous appear to have established temporary residencies in several cities, including Hollywood, California, where they held screenings for cultural notaries. "I must tell you how delighted we all were with the lovely DeCou pictures and music. My guests included Rex Ingram, Mr. and Mrs. William DeMille, etc.--all of who enjoyed them tremendously," wrote Ruth St. Denis of Los Angeles.

Branson died of a heart attack on December 12, 1941, at the home of his mother, Mrs. Charles Berwin of East Orange, New Jersey. He had come to New Jersey after completing a lecture tour in the Eastern section of the country. Elsie continued to lecture for several years using Branson's slides. She lived in California in Carmel, Laguna Beach, and eventually San Marcos, where she died on the first day of January, 1997, at the age of 96. In the decades after Branson's death she continued to travel, often observing the changes in culture and landscape, and frequently commenting that the pollution of some world regions made her heartsick. Some of her correspondence, for example, notes that in 1984, at the age of 83, she had spent the winter in Europe, three months in Nairobi, and had also been to Manila and Hong Kong.

The days of lecturing with lantern slides were long over, however. Commercial color slides had been available since the 1940s, replacing the magical, hand-tinted and luminous lantern slides as a more accurate and expedient way to provide instruction and entertainment to viewers. Elsie, at the suggestion of fellow Carmel resident Ansel Adams, proposed that the newly inaugurated campus of the University of California in nearby Santa Cruz be the recipient of her late husband's photographic work. In 1971, UCSC's University Library received Branson's artistic inheritance of 10,000 photographic images. The works covered every part of the world: from Laplanders to South Pacific Islanders, from

Japanese pagodas to Egyptian pyramids. Through DeCou's vision we, who have inherited the images, can see life before industrialization, the destruction of World War II, the effects of urbanization, and the loss of local craft and cultural traditions.

Biography by Christine Bunting, Head of Special Collections and Archives.

Scope and Content

The Branson DeCou Archive consists of 8,000 hand-tinted 3-1/4" x 4" glass lantern slides used in years of travel lecture tours covering all countries of the world, from ca. 1920-1941. There are also accompanying negatives, 48 photographic albums, notebooks, travelogues, slide storage boxes, and two slide projectors.

The 8,000 lantern slides and projection hardware are cataloged and stored separately in the University Library's Visual Resources Collection.

The archive is divided into 7 series: Photographic Albums, Notebooks and Travelogues, Slides, Photographs, Negatives, Resource Material, and Artifacts. The majority of the materials are arranged into geographic divisions, by country or area.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

DeCou, Branson

Voyages and travels--Pictorial works

Africa--Pictorial works

Asia--Pictorial works

Europe--Pictorial works

North America--Pictorial works

South America--Pictorial works

Oceania--Pictorial works

Australia--Pictorial works

Ireland--Pictorial works

Italy--Pictorial works

Lantern slides

Series 1 Photograph Albums 1920-1941

Physical Description: 47 albums

Scope and Content Note

The first series contains the photograph albums. The black and white photographs found in the albums do not necessarily correspond with the lantern slides.

Arrangement

The material is listed in a donor order, following loose geographic divisions. The box numbers reflect the album numbers; Albums 1-8,46 Africa and Asia, Albums 8-32,47 Europe, Albums 29-34,36-42,44-45 North America, Albums 35,41-43 South America, Albums 44-45 Australasia

Box 1	Africa, California, Canada
Box 2	Algeria, Tunisia
Box 3	Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco
Box 4	Java, Singapore, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Mombassa (Kenya), Zanzibar, Tanganyika, Republic of South Africa, Natal
Box 5	Zululand (Natal), Bechuanaland (Botswana), Rhodesia, South Africa, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, West Indies, Martinique
Box 6	Hawaiian Islands, Japan, Korea, China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Cambodia
Box 7	Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Bali, Java
Box 8	Portugal, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Israel, Egypt, Italy, Japan, China, Philippines, India, Austria, Central Europe
Box 9	Ireland, S. S. Normandie (ocean liner)
Box 10	England, Scotland, Wales
Box 11	England, Holland, Germany, Belgium, France
Box 12	Switzerland, Germany (Rhine), Belgium, Holland, England, Ireland

Box 13	France, Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark
Box 14	France, Russia, Finland, Denmark, England
Box 15	Norway, Sweden, Denmark
Box 16	Iceland, Norway, Sweden
Box 17	Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, France
Box 18	Belgium, Holland
Box 19	Italy, Switzerland, France, Spain, Monaco
Box 20	Italy, Austria, Germany, France
Box 21	Italy
Box 22	Italy, England
Box 23	France, Switzerland, Italy
Box 24	Madeira, Morocco, Portugal, France, England, Holland, Denmark, Sweden
Box 25	Italy, Greece, Turkey, Syria
Box 26	Madeira, Spain, Italy, Capri, Sicily, Israel, Egypt, Rhodes (Aegean Sea), Turkey
Box 27	Syria, Israel, Egypt, Italy
Box 28	Spain, Morocco, Algiers, Carthage, Tunisia, Italy, Sicily, Yugoslavia
Box 29	Turkey, Russia, Greece, Bermuda, Canada (Quebec), California, Arizona, New Mexico
Box 30	Sweden, Russia, Denmark, France, West Indies, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands (U.S.), Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba
Box 31	New Mexico, California, Washington, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Madeira, Portugal, Spain, France, New England
Box 32	Arizona, Nevada, California, Utah, New Mexico, Madeira, Portugal, Spain, France, Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Denmark
Box 33	Alaska, Canada
Box 34	Canada, Wyoming, California, Montana, Washington, Oregon
Box 35	Mexico
Box 36	California
Box 37	California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Wyoming
Box 38	Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Utah, Oregon, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado
Box 39	Bahamas, South Dakota, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, California, Ohio, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Idaho
Box 40	California, Alaska
Box 41	California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Florida, West Indies, Curacao, Haiti, Virgin Islands (U.S.), Antigua, Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico,
Box 42	Peru, Argentina, Chile, Cuba, California, Arizona, Mexico
Box 43	Panama, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru
Box 44	Hawaiian Islands, Samoa, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia, Java
Box 45	Hawaiian Islands
Box 46	Unbound photo album containing Thailand, Cambodia, Japan.
Box 47	Unbound photo album containing Europe, architecture, sculpture, painting.

Series 2 Notebooks and Travelogues 1920-1941

Physical Description: 2 boxes

Scope and Content Note

This second series contains notebooks and travelogues covering the North American, Asian, and European countries. Most books accompany programs, pamphlets, and flyers on various lectures.

Arrangement

Material is arranged virtually in an alphabetic order.

Box 48-49	British Columbia and the Selkirks
Box 48-49	Canadian Rockies, v.1
Box 48-49	Canadian Rockies 1942
Box 48-49	China and Korea
Box 48-49	Egypt, Living Pageant of the Nile
Box 48-49	Granada and Alhambra (Spain), and France, notes
Box 48-49	Glorious Switzerland: The Spell of Lake Geneva
Box 48-49	Glorious Switzerland and Danzig and Zoppot, notes

Box 48-49	India
Box 48-49	Leningrad and Moscow
Box 48-49	Magnificent Iceland and Norway
Box 48-49	Mediterranean
Box 48-49	Our American Wonderland Series: Colorado
Box 48-49	Our American Wonderland Series: The Pacific Northwest and Glacier National Park
Box 48-49	Our Romantic California and our Pacific Coast
Box 48-49	Springtime Motoring in California
Box 48-49	Venice and Northern Italy
Box 48-49	West Indies
Box 48-49	Yellowstone Park

Series 3 Lantern Slides 1921-40

Physical Description: 8,000 items

Scope and Content Note

This series contains 3 1/4"-4" hand-tinted glass slides. The material is housed in the University Library's Visual Resource Collection. The Italian glass slides were the first set of images available online through a generous grant from the Gladys Kriebel Delmas Foundation in 1999. The funding enabled the preservation and digitization of close to 1,500 images depicting Italian urban and rural landscape between the time of the Great Wars. Since then the University Library has digitized the California, German, Russian and Irish glass slides.

Arrangement

The collection is first arranged by geographic divisions then alphabetically by country.

Africa

Asia

Europe

Germany

Note

Note: Images available for viewing at <http://library.ucsc.edu/slides/decou/>

Ireland

Note

Note: In process

Italy

Note

Note: Images available for viewing at <http://library.ucsc.edu/slides/decou/>

Russia

Note

Note: In process

Americas

California

Note

Note: Images available for viewing at <http://library.ucsc.edu/slides/decou/>

Cuba

Note

Note: In process

Mexico

Note

Note: In process

Oceans

South Pacific

Australasia

Series 4 Photographs 1921-40

Physical Description: 1 photo box

Scope and Content Note

This series consists oversized black and white photographs. Details to follow as archive is processed.

Arrangement

Arranged geographically into eight sections; China, Japan, Italy, Switzerland, Cambodia, Chile, Morocco, Capri

Series 5 Negatives 1921-40

Physical Description: 19 boxes

Scope and Content Note

This series consists of lantern slide negatives.

Arrangement

The negatives are arranged geographically.

Switzerland, Italy, Sicily, Germany, Alaska

Passion Play 1931

Series 6 Resource Material 1921-40

Physical Description: 1 box

Scope and Content Note

This series consists of books and old magazines on various countries, such as *Ireland of the Welcome* by D. L. Kelleher, and *Ireland: a guidebook*. More details to follow as the archive is processed.

Series 7 Artifacts 1921-40

Physical Description: 3 items

Scope and Content Note

This series consists of two slide viewing projectors and a slide carrying case. The items are currently stored in the Visual Resource Collection room.