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## Guide to the Branson DeCou Archive, 1920-1941

### Collection number: MS 38

The University Library  
Special Collections and Archives  
University of California, Santa Cruz  
Santa Cruz, California

#### Contact Information:

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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

Branson DeCou Archive. MS 38. Special Collections and Archives, University Library, University of California, Santa Cruz.

#### 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/>.

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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

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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	<b>Africa, California, Canada</b>
Box 2	<b>Algeria, Tunisia</b>
Box 3	<b>Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco</b>
Box 4	<b>Java, Singapore, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Mombassa (Kenya), Zanzibar, Tanganyika, Republic of South Africa, Natal</b>
Box 5	<b>Zululand (Natal), Bechuanaland (Botswana), Rhodesia, South Africa, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, West Indies, Martinique</b>
Box 6	<b>Hawaiian Islands, Japan, Korea, China, Hong Kong, Vietnam, Cambodia</b>
Box 7	<b>Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Bali, Java</b>
Box 8	<b>Portugal, Spain, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Israel, Egypt, Italy, Japan, China, Philippines, India, Austria, Central Europe</b>
Box 9	<b>Ireland, S. S. Normandie (ocean liner)</b>
Box 10	<b>England, Scotland, Wales</b>
Box 11	<b>England, Holland, Germany, Belgium, France</b>
Box 12	<b>Switzerland, Germany (Rhine), Belgium, Holland, England, Ireland</b>
Box 13	<b>France, Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark</b>
Box 14	<b>France, Russia, Finland, Denmark, England</b>
Box 15	<b>Norway, Sweden, Denmark</b>
Box 16	<b>Iceland, Norway, Sweden</b>
Box 17	<b>Germany, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, France</b>
Box 18	<b>Belgium, Holland</b>
Box 19	<b>Italy, Switzerland, France, Spain, Monaco</b>
Box 20	<b>Italy, Austria, Germany, France</b>
Box 21	<b>Italy</b>
Box 22	<b>Italy, England</b>
Box 23	<b>France, Switzerland, Italy</b>
Box 24	<b>Madeira, Morocco, Portugal, France, England, Holland, Denmark, Sweden</b>
Box 25	<b>Italy, Greece, Turkey, Syria</b>
Box 26	<b>Madeira, Spain, Italy, Capri, Sicily, Israel, Egypt, Rhodes (Aegean Sea), Turkey</b>
Box 27	<b>Syria, Israel, Egypt, Italy</b>
Box 28	<b>Spain, Morocco, Algiers, Carthage, Tunisia, Italy, Sicily, Yugoslavia</b>
Box 29	<b>Turkey, Russia, Greece, Bermuda, Canada (Quebec), California, Arizona, New Mexico</b>
Box 30	<b>Sweden, Russia, Denmark, France, West Indies, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands (U.S.), Jamaica, Haiti, Cuba</b>
Box 31	<b>New Mexico, California, Washington, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Madeira, Portugal, Spain, France, New England</b>
Box 32	<b>Arizona, Nevada, California, Utah, New Mexico, Madeira, Portugal, Spain, France, Ireland, Scotland, Norway, Denmark</b>
Box 33	<b>Alaska, Canada</b>
Box 34	<b>Canada, Wyoming, California, Montana, Washington, Oregon</b>
Box 35	<b>Mexico</b>
Box 36	<b>California</b>
Box 37	<b>California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, Wyoming</b>
Box 38	<b>Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Washington, Utah, Oregon, California, New Mexico, Arizona, Colorado</b>

Box 39	<b>Bahamas, South Dakota, Wyoming, Utah, Arizona, California, Ohio, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Idaho</b>
Box 40	<b>California, Alaska</b>
Box 41	<b>California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Florida, West Indies, Curacao, Haiti, Virgin Islands (U.S.), Antigua, Venezuela, Colombia, Guatemala, Mexico,</b>
Box 42	<b>Peru, Argentina, Chile, Cuba, California, Arizona, Mexico</b>
Box 43	<b>Panama, Colombia, Equador, Peru</b>
Box 44	<b>Hawaiian Islands, Samoa, Fiji, New Zealand, Australia, Java</b>
Box 45	<b>Hawaiian Islands</b>
Box 46	<b>Unbound photo album containing Thailand, Cambodia, Japan.</b>
Box 47	<b>Unbound photo album containing Europe, architecture, sculpture, painting.</b>

**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	<b>British Columbia and the Selkirks</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Canadian Rockies, v.1</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Canadian Rockies 1942</b>
Box 48-49	<b>China and Korea</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Egypt, Living Pageant of the Nile</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Granada and Alhambra (Spain), and France, notes</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Glorious Switzerland: The Spell of Lake Geneva</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Glorious Switzerland and Danzig and Zoppot, notes</b>
Box 48-49	<b>India</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Leningrad and Moscow</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Magnificent Iceland and Norway</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Mediterranean</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Our American Wonderland Series: Colorado</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Our American Wonderland Series: The Pacific Northwest and Glacier National Park</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Our Romantic California and our Pacific Coast</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Springtime Motoring in California</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Venice and Northern Italy</b>
Box 48-49	<b>West Indies</b>
Box 48-49	<b>Yellowstone Park</b>

**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.