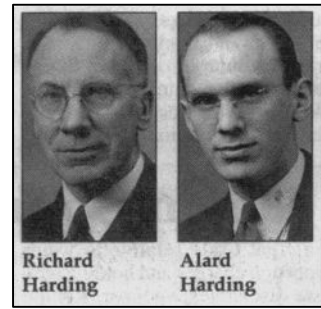


HARDING STUDIO
Cookeville's Past in Photography
By Jill Thomas
Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN
Sunday, 13 June 2004



In 1914 a young photographer from Indiana opened a studio in Cookeville, TN.

For the next 30 years, Richard Henry Harding made it his business to make Cookevillians look good. When he died in 1944, his son, Alard, continued the family business until 1974.

Now, some 65 of the more than 80,000 images taken by father and son at the Harding Studio between 1916 and 1974 will be highlighted in a new exhibit, *Images of Our Lives*, which opens Thursday at the Cookeville History Museum.

But the exhibit is not just about photos. Thanks to generous loans from the Tennessee State Museum, Tennessee Tech (which now owns the Harding Studio collection and photos) and to private donors, museum curator Larry Slaboda has been able to place on display the original turn of the 20th century equipment used by Richard Harding.

“I was flabbergasted at what they had (at the Tennessee State Museum). I envisioned a medium-sized studio camera or two, something boxy you could set on a table or hold in your hands,” Slaboda said.

Instead, he found himself displaying huge, mounted cameras and five-foot-long enlargers that practically took up all the display areas in the little museum.

Cameras featured in the exhibit include:

A Graflex Century Master Studio Camera and stand made by Bausch & Lomb, an optics company known today for contact lenses.

“It’s absolutely beautiful,” Slaboda said. “It looks almost new.”

The wooden gears and braces have a quality that 100 years has not lessened and a shine that has improved through age and handling.

All visitors to the exhibit will automatically get a close-up view of the camera since they have to walk around it to get to the rest of the exhibit. The only place Slaboda could find that was large enough to hold the camera was in the center of the room.

There is a revolving circuit camera.

“They didn’t have a wide-angle lens, so they used this to get the same effect,” Slaboda said.

The camera is set on a tripod on top of a sort of lazy-susan turntable. The people to be in the photo were placed in a semi-circle and the camera panned across them very slowly. When the photo was developed the semi-circle look was gone and everyone seemed to be standing in a straight line.

“There’s a photo in the archives of Tennessee Tech where the east dorm and the west dorm appear to be standing side by side,” Slaboda said.

The most familiar photo from many which illustrate the workings of the circuit camera is the one in the permanent collection of the museum showing Dibrell’s 8th Tennessee Cavalry Regiment. It pictures a line of men on horseback in a wide-angle view of the Civil War vets. Even knowing that the men had not been in a straight line, but in a semi-circle, doesn’t change the effect of the photo.

There’s an elegant studio camera from about 1890 with a brass-enclosed French lens donated by Caroline Lowe Brown of Cookeville.

There are many more cameras on display. Slaboda became so fascinated by the old equipment that he set up a “photographic time-line as part of the exhibit. Cameras in that part of the exhibit. Cameras in the display include a variety from early hand-held cameras to old Brownies to a 1960’s James Bond spy camera.

In addition to the old cameras, the Harding Studio part of the exhibit includes ancient wooden boxes and glass plates, carbon arc spotlights and assorted memorabilia that Mary Harding Johns – Alard’s daughter, now a Cookeville dentist – saved after the studio was shut down and then donated to the Tennessee Tech State Museum.

But the main things in this striking exhibit are of course, the photos:

Elegant black and white portraits of women in the fashion of the day with hair styles that date from the 1920’s through the 1940’s.

A team shot of the girl’s basketball team at the former Darwin School, a school for African Americans in west Cookeville, perhaps from the 1940’s.

A hand-colored photo of a child’s funeral done in pastels that make the situation look cheery and surreal:

One of the many aerial shots taken by Alard Harding as he lay on the floor of an airplane with friends holding his legs to keep him from falling out:

A Christmas photo of four happy children sitting on the hard floor in front of a Christmas tree, each with one gift a piece.

And on and on.

Who are the people in the photos?

We may never know.

“Richard Harding had his own filing system,” said Slaboda. “He filed photos under the names of the people who paid the bills, not the subjects of the pictures. We may never know who the people are in these shots,” he said.

“Some day I’d like to open this up and display everything and have the community come in and see if they can identify their relatives,” he said.

The photographic studio was a family affair with father and son behind the camera: Alard’s wife, Mary (called “Lovey” by family and friends), doing the hand coloring of prints and the oil backgrounds; and Alard’s young nephew, Richard, helped with the proofs during his high school years.

But the studio on Cookeville’s Westside business district was closed in the 1970’s when the photography industry began to go through so many changes and Lovey’s health was deteriorating.

For years, all the old glass plates and negatives, equipment and history were boxed up in the attic of the former studio on Broad St. Then the material was divided up and given to Tennessee Tech to borrow their collections,” Slaboda said.

“After that, putting it all together became a career!” he added.

“We could never have done this without the help we received,” he museum director Judy Dukes. “We were able to put this together with only \$4,000 and an additional \$1,000 that was donated by the Friends of the History Museum.”

“Everybody - - the Tennessee State Museum, TTU, private donors - - everybody donated so much. And vices department was invaluable in helping with the images. We can’t thank Mansil Johnson and Dean Carothers enough for their help,” she said.

The exhibit opens this coming Thursday, June 17, 2004, at 10 a.m. The Cookeville History Museum is located at 144 Lowe Ave. in Cookeville, TN, south of the Courthouse Square and across from the back of the Justice Center. Museum hours are Thursday, Friday and Saturday from 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. Call (931) 520-5455 for additional information.



Cookeville’s Past in Photography
Photo by Camille Fliss

Mary Linda Harding Johns, Alard Harding’s daughter and Steve Johns, both Cookeville dentists, and her cousin, Richard Harding, at right, who holds a photo of his and Mary Linda’s grandfather, the late Richard Henry Harding who founded the Harding Studio in Cookeville, TN.

Harding Photo Exhibit Opening
Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN
16 June 2004

Late 19th century photographic equipment and vintage photos taken in Putnam County highlight the new exhibit opening today at the Cookeville History Museum.

The exhibit is free to the public and features the work of father-son team who recorded portraits of the people and many of the goings-on in Putnam County from 1914-1974.

Early equipment owned and created by Richard Harding has been loaned to the museum from the Tennessee State Museum in Nashville and Tennessee Tech has loaned the museum photos from its collection of more than 80,000 photos negatives and pictures from the Harding Studio.

While the grand opening for the exhibit was to be held at 4 p.m. today, it may be viewed after today during regular museum hours – Thursday, Friday and Saturday of each week from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The Cookeville History Museum is at 144 Lowe Ave. in Cookeville, across from the Putnam Justice Center, TN.

Call: (931) 520-5455 for additional information.



At Cookeville History Museum
Herald-Citizen Newspaper: 20 June 2004-Page7
Photo by: Shawn Sidwell

Family members of the late Richard and Allard Harding, two generations of photographers who operated studios in Cookeville for 60 years, from 1914 until 1974, gathered last week at the Cookeville History Museum for the grand opening of a retrospective exhibit featuring the Hardingses' work and the equipment they used when photography was still in its youth. From left are Dr. Steve Johns; Mary Jennifer Johns; Chandler Johns; Dr. Mary Linda Johns, daughter of Alard and granddaughter of Richard Harding; Andrew Johns; Jucille Davis, longtime employee in the Harding Studio; Ruth Harding and Richard Harding, grandson of Richard Henry Harding; Donna Thomsen, a granddaughter, and Bill Thomsen; and Ursa Jean Burris, also a granddaughter, and Gene Burris. Hours for the museum, in a yellow house at 144 South Lowe Ave., across from the Putnam County Justice Center, are 10 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. each Thursday, Friday and Saturday; admission is free, and the public is welcomed. For information, call (931) 520-5455.

Alard Clark Harding – b. 4 January 1915, TN – d. 4 October 1980
(1st Lt. U.S. Army WWII)

Mary “Lovey” Harding – b. 25 December 1913 – d. 31 October 1986
Both Buried: Crest Lawn Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN

Donald Henry Harding – b. 24 July 1911, IN – d. 13 January 1956

Edith Palk Harding – b. 31 January 1916 – d. 12 December 1983

Both Buried: Crest Lawn Cemetery, Putnam Co., TN



Alard Clark Harding



Young Donald Henry Harding poses for his father, Richard Henry Harding early in the last century. Harding opened Harding Studios in the early 1900s and another son, Alard Harding took over and operated the studio into the 1960s.

Picture taken from the Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN on Sunday, 29 August 2004.

1920 Census: Ancestry.com

Name: **Richard H Harding**

Age: 37 years

Estimated birth year: 1882

Birthplace: Indiana

Race: White

Home in 1920: Cookeville, Putnam, Tennessee

1920 Census 1st Dist., Putnam Co., TN – Washington Ave.

Dwl: 246 Family: 277 Line: 54

Harding, Richard (H)enry Head M W Owns 57 Married Photographer Studio IN Canada Canada

Harding, Lisa (?) Wife F W 32 Married IN IN IN

Harding, Donald (H)enry Son M W 8 IN IN IN

Harding, Alard (C)lark Son M W 4 11/12 TN IN IN

(Alard Clark Harding, born 4 Jan. 1915, TN – died 4 Oct. 1980. He md Mary Lovey, born 25 Dec. 1913 – died 31 Oct. 1986, both buried in the Cookeville City Cemetery, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN).

Social Security Death Index:

Name: **Alard Harding**

SSN: 411-07-7151

Last Residence: 38501 Cookeville, Putnam, Tennessee, U.S.A

Born: 20 Jan 1915

Died: Oct 1980 State (Year)

SSN issued: Tennessee (Before 1951)

Name: **Donald H. Harding**

SSN: 408-76-3589

Last Residence: 37206 Nashville, Davidson, **Tennessee**, U. S. A

Born: 13 Jan 1951

Last Benefit: 37206 Nashville, Davidson, Tennessee, U. S. A



Alard Harding, Cookeville’s first Eagle Scout, entered the U. S. Army in the Spring of 1942. He took basic training at Fort Benning, GA, after which he was assigned to the 66th Armored Regiment. He served in France where he attained the rank of 1st Lieutenant in WWII. He was discharged in 1945. He held the Bronze Star and other decorations.

Died: 15 Dec 1997 State (Year)
SSN issued: Tennessee (1963)

Herald Citizen Newspaper:

(May 29, 1913) R.L. Harding has opened a photography studio here. He was associated for past two years with the W.S. Lively photographic business in McMinnville and has purchased the Baxter Studio here and moved his family to Cookeville. John Baxter is returning to his home in Delaware.



IMAGES COMMENDED
Photography in Cookeville, TN

Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN 2005

Lara Brossoit, at left, holds the 'Award of Commendation' presented recently by the Tennessee Association of Museums to the Cookeville History Museum for its exhibit, 'Images of Our Lives: The Harding Studio, 'designed and constructed by her father, Larry Slaboda, who died last June after completing the work. Clockwise around a giant camera from the studio operated in Cookeville by Richard H. Harding and his son Alard are, in back, Steve Johns; Richard Harding, grandson of Richard H. Harding; Mary Linda Johns, daughter of Alard Harding; Judy Duke, Cookeville museums administrator; and Madison Brossoit, Lara's daughter. The free exhibit will continue through May at 144 South Lowe Ave, Cookeville, Putnam Co., TN.



HARDING STUDIO

The Harding Studio had its beginnings long before it opened its doors on Broad Street in 1916. Five years earlier Richard Henry Harding, a young man from Logansport, Indiana enrolled at the Southern School of Photography in McMinnville. His instructor, a renowned photographer, W. S. Lively, thought so highly of his student that he asked him to run the Lively Studios there, which he did. Later, while still a student, he opened his own studio on Cookeville's City Square... He moved it to West Broad Street in 1916, a location that was to become home to two generations of the Harding family business, and a location that seventy five years later would be placed on the National Register of Historic Places, a lasting tribute to the contributions to local history preserved in the product of this business.. thousands of images recording the lives and times of those generations that they served.

Picture of Richard Henry Harding and information found at the Cookeville History Museum, Cookeville, TN.

Alard Clark Harding Obt.

COOKEVILLE – Alard C. Harding, who for many years operated the Harding Studio of photography on Cookeville’s Westside, died Saturday morning, Oct. 4, 1980, at his home here.

Funeral services will be conducted in the chapel of Hooper & Huddleston Funeral Home on Monday at 1 p.m. Mr. Harding was 65.

He was a veteran of World War II and a member of the First United Presbyterian Church.

The family will receive friends at the funeral home Sunday night from 7-9.

Officiating at Monday’s services will be the Rev. David Campbell. Burial will be in Crest Lawn Cemetery.

Survivors include his wife, Mary Wayenberg Harding; a daughter, Mary Linda Harding Johns; and a nephew, Richard Harding.

Memorial contributions may be made to the American Cancer Society.

Hooper & Huddleston Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements.

Herald Citizen Newspaper, Cookeville, TN: 5 October 1980.



Pictured is Alard Clark Harding (1915-1980). He became the first Eagle Scout of Putnam County on December 28, 1928. He had earned 28 merit badges at that point. Troop No. 12 was chartered in 1912 and later became Troop No. 108 as the districts were reorganized in 1930. Alard was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Henry Harding, who founded Harding Studio in 1913 and who took this photograph as well as numerous others in this publication. Courtesy of Dr. Steve Johns.

Source: Images of America Cookeville and Putnam County, TN, pg. 71.