

John E. Palmer:

An Inventory of His Collection in the Photography Collection at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

Creator:	Palmer, John E., 1891-1964
Title:	John E. Palmer Collection
Dates:	ca. 1890s-1960s (bulk 1940s-1960s)
Extent:	25 boxes (ca. 2,600 items; 10.5 linear feet)
Abstract:	The collection is comprised primarily of studio portraits and informal photographs taken by Palmer which document the everyday life and social activities of the African-American community in Galveston, Texas, from the 1890s through the 1960s.
Call Number:	Photography Collection PH-00036
Language:	English
Access:	Open for research

Administrative Information

Acquisition:	Gift, 1988
Processed by:	Rebecca J. Altermatt, 1997
Repository:	Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin

Biographical Sketch

John Ellis Palmer was born in 1891 in Maney, Louisiana. Around 1916, Palmer moved to Galveston, Texas, where he lived for 48 years. Here he established the Palmer Studio where many of the images in this collection were taken or produced.

Little biographical information on Palmer is available, but it is known that he was a veteran of World War I, a Mason, and an Elk. Palmer served as President of the Texas State Lodge of Elks for at least the year 1944, judging from information contained in his correspondence, and he was a member of the St. Lawrence Lodge 258. He also received the 33rd degree in the Holy Royal Arch Masons. Palmer married, and his wife's name was Cleo. Palmer died March 7, 1964.

Sources:

The majority of this biographical information was obtained from Palmer's obituary as printed in the Sunday, March 8, 1964, edition of *The Galveston News*.

Scope and Contents

The John E. Palmer Collection is comprised primarily of studio portraits and informal photographs taken by Palmer which document the everyday life and social activities of the African-American community in Galveston, Texas, from the 1890s through the 1960s (bulk 1940s-1960s). The collection has been arranged into the following series: I. Palmer Studio, 1940s-1960s; II. Other Studios/Photographers, 1890s-1960s; III. Special Format Materials, 1900s-1960s.

Nearly one third of the collection consists of studio portraits. African-Americans make up the majority of the sitters depicted, but a few Hispanic and Caucasian individuals are also represented. Most of the individuals are not identified, but names written on the photographs have been compiled in the finding aid. Informal portraits document many activities such as weddings and funerals, as well as functions of fraternal organizations, churches, military groups, schools, athletic teams, and bands. Another one third of the images consists of candid shots of people in bars and restaurants. A smaller group of photographs documents occurrences such as automobile accidents, storm damage, and parades, presumably in and around Galveston.

The majority of the photographs are black and white gelatin silver prints, ranging in size from 1 x 1-1/8 to 11 x 14 inches, or 35.6 x 28 centimeters or smaller. Some color and hand-colored photographs are present, as are safety film and nitrate negatives. Some materials are matted or mounted.

A smaller group of early photographs, presumably not taken by Palmer, date from the 1890s through the 1930s and depict women, men, children, and families. Other photographers represented in this collection include The Teal in Houston, and Kibbes' Studio, Wallace Studios, and Witwer Studios, all of Galveston.

Materials other than photographs in the collection include a small selection of correspondence to and from Palmer, some business and financial records, a 1955 Central High School Bearcat yearbook, clippings, and other ephemera.

Series Descriptions

Series I. Palmer Studio, 1940-1960s (17 boxes)

Photographs in this series are presumed to have been taken by Palmer in the course of his studio business, although very few of the images actually bear his studio's imprint. This series has been arranged into the following six subseries: A. Studio Portraits, B. Personal Events, C. Social Events and Activities, D. School Photographs, E. "Bar" Photographs, and F. Informal Photographs. Within each subseries the photographs have been divided by subject, such as Women, Men, Children, Couples, Groups, etc. Within these groupings the photographs have been arranged according to size as much as possible.

Although a list of identified images is included in this inventory, researchers should be cautioned that these are the names as written on the verso of the images and are not necessarily authoritative identifications of the subjects of the images. There are many duplicate prints and these have been housed together either in a separate folder or envelope which is marked "dupes," or within a folder or envelope of other images of the same subject, depending upon how many duplicates there are in the group. Some images are filed with their negatives as this is how some of the prints were housed when they arrived at the Ransom Center. However, for the most part, the negatives are housed in the last three boxes of the collection or, if they are nitrate-based, in the Nitrate Vault.

Subseries A. Studio Portraits

The studio portraits comprise almost one third of the entire collection. Subjects of the portraits include women, men, children, couples, graduates, group and family portraits, men in military uniform, and entertainers. There are numerous duplicates. All subjects are in formal poses, sitting or standing, and prints range in size from 1-1/2 x 2 to 14 x 11 inches. Additional studio portraiture can also be found within the color and hand-colored photographs (Box 18) and matted and mounted prints (Boxes 19, 20). Two photographs in this subseries are not by Palmer; one is stamped Wallace Studios, the other is stamped Kibbes' Studio.

Subseries B. Personal Events

This subseries includes both studio and informal images. The majority of the photographs are of weddings, and some are of funerals.

Subseries C. Social Events and Activities

This subseries contains non-studio photographs of social activities that appear to be more formal or ritualistic in nature than those found in the "Bar" subseries. Included are formally posed church groups, photographs of groups of men and women, and images of pageants or contests that may be related to a fraternal order. Images of a United Service Organization dance, a group of men in military uniform seated around a football trophy, and the Regal Beer baseball team are also contained in this subseries. However, most of these images are unidentified.

Subseries D. School Photographs

This subseries contains images of children and teenagers seen in both formally posed pictures and engaged in school activities. Also included are team pictures of the football team from Central High School, action photos of a football game, an image of a marching band, and class group photos.

Subseries E. "Bar" Photographs

These images, mainly candid shots of people in bars and restaurants, comprise about a third of the collection. It appears that Palmer liked to take photographs of everyday life and social activities of the African-American community in Galveston. There are many images of individual women posing for the camera. Almost none of these images have any labeling or identification, although some may be dated from calendars or posters appearing in the images. The images also document beer brands and beer paraphernalia, as well as recording social practices in these establishments, such as the provision of "set-ups" with patrons furnishing their own liquor.

Subseries F. Informal Photographs

This subseries contains pictures of individuals and groups in settings other than bars or studios. Some images were taken outdoors, some in homes, and others in places of business. Included are views of Galveston (mostly buildings and businesses in the city), billboards, and a ferry. There are also photographs of automobiles and automobile accidents, and images depicting flooding and structural damages to Galveston. These latter images all have a Palmer Studios stamp which most of the other prints in the collection do not bear.

Series II. Other Studios/Photographers, 1890s-1960s (.5 box)

Included in this series are copy prints, some with their originals, by photographers other than Palmer. It appears Palmer may have used these prints for customer order information, as many of the original prints have sizes and prices written on their versos. Other photographs in this series appear to be originals but were taken too early to have been Palmer's work. Original photographers and studios are not identified on the images. These images are arranged by subject, such as women, men, couples, children, families, etc.

Series III. Special Format Materials, 1900s-1960s (7.5 boxes)

While the majority of the collection is made up of loose gelatin silver prints, this series contains images that have been matted, mounted, and/or hand-colored, as well as color prints, negatives, and other materials. The dates of these items seem to span from the early 1900s, in the case of some of the mounted and matted prints, to the 1960s. This series has been arranged into the following seven subseries: A. Photographic Greeting Cards, B. Color Prints, C. Hand-colored Photographs, D. Paper Mat Prints, E. Mounted Prints, F. Manuscript Materials, and G. Negatives. Within each subseries the photographs have been divided by subject, such as women, men, children, couples, groups, etc. Within these groupings the photographs have been arranged according to size as much as possible.

Subseries A. Photographic Greeting Cards

A few Christmas and New Year's greeting cards, either developed directly on or inserted into card stock comprise this subseries. The subjects are couples, families, and individual women.

Subseries B. Color Prints

A small collection of color photographs, ca. 1957-1963, these informal photographs contain images of Hispanic and African-American families and of a party attended by African-American and Caucasian women.

Subseries C. Hand-colored Photographs

These images include studio portraits as well as informal photographs. Some images are duplicates of unaltered images found in Series I.

Subseries D. Paper Mat Prints

This subseries includes matted studio portraits and informal photographs of women, men, couples, groups, and weddings. Other studios represented in this subseries include The Teal in Houston, and Witwer Studios in Galveston. Many of the mats have no studio name stamped on them; presumably these photographs were taken by Palmer.

Subseries E. Mounted Prints

Divided into Palmer Studio, Other Studios, and Unidentified Studios, these studio portraits and group photographs are mounted on matboard, and, in one case, directly onto a piece of glass. Images in the Other Studios category date from probably the early 1900s to the 1930s, and pre-date Palmer's studio work. Those comprising the Unidentified Studios category may have been taken by Palmer, but there are no identifying marks to verify this assumption. Subjects, including women, men, children, and groups (including a baseball team), are captured in studio portraits or formal group photographs. Of note in this subseries are a crayon enhanced gelatin silver print of a young boy (folder 20.4), and a photograph mounted directly onto glass which now appears to have adhered to the glass (folder 20.15).

Subseries F. Manuscript Materials

This portion of the collection contains correspondence to and from Palmer, a 1955 Bearcat yearbook (Central High School) with an inscription to Palmer from Principal L. A. Morgan, and an envelope of miscellaneous paper documents and copies of a 1957 Report of Transfer relating to Frank Palmer Moton. Most of the correspondence relates to the photography industry with a few items pertaining to Palmer's affiliation with the Holy Royal Arch Masons of Texas.

Subseries G. Negatives

Three boxes of safety film negatives are stored with the collection. Most of the negatives are from Palmer's Studio and many are labeled, but again the accuracy of the labeling and relation to the images cannot be assumed. Two boxes of nitrate negatives (and other negatives not labeled as safety film) are stored in the Nitrate Vault. One of these boxes contains negatives of a wide variety of subjects, mostly unidentified; the second box contains labeled envelopes of mostly studio portraits.

Index Terms

Subjects

African Americans--Texas--Galveston--Social life and customs--1890-1970.

Group portraits--1890-1970.

Portrait photography--1890-1970.

Places

Galveston (Tex.).

Document Types

Gelatin silver prints--1890-1970.

Series I. Palmer Studio, 1940s-1960sSubseries A. Studio Portraits

Women	Box 1 Folder 1-23
Women (cont'd.)	Box 2 Folder 1-17
Men	Box 3 Folder 1-20
Infants, children, teenagers	Box 4 Folder 1-19
Graduates	
Female	Box 5 Folder 1-5
Male	Folder 6-7
Men in military uniform	Folder 8-10
Couples	Folder 11-17
Groups (adults)	Folder 18
Families	Box 6 Folder 1-3
Entertainers	Folder 4

Subseries B. Personal Events

Weddings	Box 6 Folder 5-15
Funerals	Folder 16

Subseries C. Social Events and Activities

Fraternal societies	Box 7 Folder 1-8
Contests and pageants	Folder 9-12
Formal functions and activities, unidentified	Folder 13-17
Church groups	Box 8 Folder 1-3
Musicians and bands	Folder 4-5
"Drag queens"	Folder 6

Women's groups	Folder 7
Men's groups	Folder 8
Baseball team	Folder 9
Fishing	Folder 10
Military personnel	Folder 11

Subseries D. School Photographs

School activities and classes	Box 8 Folder 12-13
Sports	Folder 14

Subseries E. "Bar" Photographs

Women

Individuals	Box 9 Folder 1-12
Individuals (cont'd.)	Box 10 Folder 1-8
Groups	Folder 9-16
Groups (cont'd.)	Box 11 Folder 1-2

Men

Individuals	Box 11 Folder 3-9
Groups	Folder 10-14
Couples	Box 12 Folder 1-11
Groups	Folder 12-15
Groups (cont'd.)	Box 13 Folder 1-16
Groups (cont'd.)	Box 14 Folder 1-14

Subseries F. Informal Photographs

Women

Individuals	Box 15 Folder 1-5
-------------	--------------------------

Groups	Folder 6
Men	Folder 7-8
Men and women	Folder 9-10
Children	
Individuals	Box 15 Folder 11-12
Groups	Folder 13-14
Adults with children	Folder 15-17
Places of business	Box 16 Folder 1-2
Working women	Folder 3-10
Working men	Folder 11-12
Working men and women	Folder 13
Men in military uniform	Folder 14-15
Animals	Box 17 Folder 1
Automobile accidents	Folder 2
Automobiles and people	Folder 3-4
Hurricane damage	Folder 5-7
Motorcycles	Folder 8
Palmer, John E.	Folder 9-10
Parades	Folder 11
Views of Galveston	Folder 12-16

Series II. Other Studios/Photographers,1890s-1960s

Original photographs (some with copy prints)

Box 18
Folder 1-2

Copy prints

Women

Box 18 Folder 3-4

Men

Folder 5-6

Couples

Folder 7

Families/children

Folder 8

Large studio portrait, woman (damaged)

Folder
9

Series III. Special Format Materials, 1900s-1960sSubseries A. Photographic Greeting Cards

Christmas/New Year's **Box 18 Folder 10**

Subseries B. Color Prints

Studio portraits **Box 18 Folder 11**

Families and children **Folder 12**

Parties **Folder 13**

Personal events, weddings, funerals **Folder 14**

Subseries C. Hand-colored Photographs

Studio portraits

Women **Box 18 Folder 15-18**

Men **Folder 19-20**

Couples **Folder 21**

Children; informal photographs **Folder 22**

Mounted print in glass frame **Folder 23**

Large studio portrait, woman (damaged) **Folder 24**

Subseries D. Paper Mat Prints

Palmer Studio

Weddings **Box 19 Folder 1-2**

Women **Folder 3-5**

Men in military uniform **Folder 6-7**

Couples **Folder 8-9**

Children **Folder 10**

Groups	Folder 11
Other studios	
Teal (woman)	Box 19 Folder 12
Witwer (woman)	Folder 13
Unidentified studios	
Women	Box 19 Folder 14-15
Men	Folder 16-17
Couples	Folder 18
Graduates	Folder 19
Military	Folder 20
Groups	Folder 21-22
Store, interior	Folder 23

Subseries E. Mounted Prints

Non-Palmer prints	
Woman	Box 20 Folder 1
Children (folder 20.4 contains fragile item)	Folder 2-4
Family	Folder 5
Group	Folder 6
Baseball team	Folder 7
Unidentified photographer (possibly Palmer)	
Women	Box 20 Folder 8-9
Men	Folder 10-11
Couple	Folder 12
Men in military uniform	Folder 13-14

Photograph on glass (fragile) **Folder 15**

Subseries F. Manuscript Materials

Correspondence

Incoming, 1944, 1953 **Box 20 Folder 16**

Outgoing, n.d. **Folder 17**

Business cards, papers, 1946-1950 **Folder 18**

Clipping, pamphlet, 1921 **Folder 19**

Moton, Frank Palmer, 1957 **Folder 20**

Central High School (Galveston, TX) Bearcat Yearbook, 1955 **Folder 21**

Subseries G. Negatives

Safety

Unidentified studio portraits

Individuals

Women **Box 21 Folder 1-5**

Men **Folder 6**

Children **Folder 7**

Groups **Folder 8**

Unidentified informal photographs **Folder 9**

Concerts, audience **Folder 10**

Life Photographic Lab (for story "Decades VI"); Ellison, Austin /Palmer Studio photographers **Folder 11**

8x10" sheet film, weddings, groups, sports, group portraits, child **Folder 12**

Captioned Photographs

Men

Individuals	Box 22 Folder 1-3
Military	Folder 4-5
Groups	Folder 6
Individuals, couples, buildings	Folder 7
Individuals, in separate folders	Folder 8-23
Women	Box 23 Folder 1-2
Couples	Folder 3-4
Children	Folder 5-6
Adults with children	Folder 7-8

Nitrate

Informal and studio portraits, all subjects, some labeled, includes graduates, groups, men, women, and a corpse in an open casket	Box 24 Folder 1-11
Unidentified studio portraits, mostly graduates	Box 25 Folder 1-61

John E. Palmer Collection--Index of Identified Subjects

- Adams, Ada--5.1
- Adams, Robert Lee, Mrs.--16.14
- Alexander, Mrs.--1.3
- Allen, Williard W., Dr.--7.4
- Anderson--1.2
- Anderson, Bennie--3.1, 20.2
- Anderson, Freddie--5.1
- Anderson, Sylvester--5.6
- Anterine, Dorothy--1.1
- Armstrong, Helen Gladys--5.1
- Austin, Norman--18.1
- Backs, Edward--5.6
- Baker, Mary Bell--1.1
- Baker, Willie Mae--1.1
- Banba, Jack, Rev. --5.6
- Barfield, Helen--1.1
- Basset, Elbe--5.6
- Batiste, Boydetta--1.1
- Batiste, George--5.6
- Batiste, Idella--5.8
- Bell, Beatrich (Mrs. Thomas)--4.1
- Bell, Nettie Mae--5.1
- Bell, Vera Lee--5.1
- Bess, E., Miss--5.8
- Bess, Elizabeth, Miss--1.1
- Blackburn--5.11
- Blair, Clara Bell--5.1
- Bluit, Beulah--1.1
- Bob Golden Photographer--4.1
- Bradley, Arthur, Rev. and Mrs.--5.11
- Brooks, Emile and Mrs.--5.11
- Brown, Alfreid [sic]--1.1
- Brown, Chester--3.1
- Brown, Clarence and Melvia--5.11
- Brown, Clarence Eugene--5.6
- Brown, Doris Marie--5.1
- Brown, George--5.8
- Brown, Lenola--5.1
- Brown, Mildred--18.8
- Brown, Nannie--1.1
- Bunnough, Katy--6.1
- Bunse, Jessie--1.1
- Burnett, Blanch--5.1
- Byrelan, Alice--4.1
- Caldwell, P. L.--5.8
- Captain, Ira and Mrs.--5.11
- Carrington, Lee (also identified as Mrs. Annie Lewis)--1.1
- Carter, Annie Mae--5.1
- Carter, Mrs.--6.1

- Cassie--4.1
- Chaison, Philip--5.6
- Charles, Wilma--4.1
- Charlotte--18.12
- Cobbs, Rogers William--5.6
- Coleman, Lynell--12.1
- Coleman, Marie Antoinette--5.1
- Collier, Ven, Mrs.--1.1
- Collins--7.4
- Colvin, Minnie Mae--5.1
- Conily, Albert--5.11
- Conley, Annie Mae--12.1
- Crawford, J. C., and family--6.1
- Crawford, W. B., Mr.--12.1
- Crawford, Lucinda, Mrs.-- 4.1
- Crawford, Mary, Mrs.--1.1
- Crenshaw--7.4
- Davis [?], Dan Sanders Jr.--3.1
- Davis, Dave--5.6
- Dehart, Gladys Ruth--5.1
- Delbuln [?], John--5.6
- Dent--7.4
- Deshatie--5.8
- Diz, Belia--5.18
- Donahue, Zenobia--18.3, 20.1
- Doris--1.2
- Dupree--7.4
- Eddie--5.6
- Effie, Francis--5.1
- Ellis, Alfredia--5.1
- Ellis, Genevieve--5.1
- Elizabeth--1.4
- Ennis, Guy--5.8
- Estelle--1.4
- Esther, Ruth--5.1
- Etter--7.4
- Evelyn--1.4
- Ford, Ruth--1.1
- Franklin, Addie Mae--5.1
- Franklin, Ella Lucile--5.1
- Franks--18.1
- Free [?], Gl[oria] [?]-9.1
- Giles, Pleasant Edward--5.6
- Gillian, Mary--1.1
- Gobart, Helen--1.1
- Gobert, M., Mrs.--1.1
- Golden, Bob--*see* Bob Golden Photographer
- Goodew--4.1
- Graves--7.4
- Griffins, Jim--18.1
- Guarnels, Mary--4.1

- Guidey, Ester--1.5
- Guilley, Ruby--12.1
- Hall, Howard, Cpl.--16.14
- Hall, Dorothy--3.1 (torn in half)
- Hall, Ethel, Mrs.--1.2
- Hallet, Richard--5.11
- Hamilton, Bennie, Mr.--5.8
- Harris, Glossie Mae--1.2
- Harris, Myrtle--5.1
- Hawkins, Hattie--5.1
- Hawkins, Walter and Mrs.--5.11
- Haynes, Ardelia--5.1
- Haynes, Coppin--5.8
- Helen--1.4
- Herman, Robbie Lee--5.1
- Hill, Eva L.--1.2
- Hill, Robert L.--1.2
- Hilton, E.--3.1
- Holmes, Theodosia--4.1
- Holmes, Willie--5.6
- Howard, John Jr., Mrs.--1.2
- Howard, William--5.8
- Hughes, Mary Lucille--5.1
- Hunter, L.--5.8
- Hunter, R.--1.4
- Hynson, Eddie--3.1
- Irvin, Abron--16.14
- Isabelle--1.4
- Jackson, E.--5.8
- Jackson, J. I., Rev., and family--6.1
- Jaly, Mother, Jovino--18.1
- James, Hattie Mae--1.2
- James, O. V.--3.1
- James, R. C.--5.8
- Jasper, Mr. and Mrs.--5.11
- Jefferson, Arthur--16.14
- Jefferson, Corine--5.1
- Jefferson, Williams--5.6
- Johnson, E. D.--7.4
- Johnson, James--5.6
- Johnson, Marie, Mrs.--5.8
- Johnson, Robert--5.6
- Johnson, Vera Lee--1.2
- Jones--7.4
- Jones, Johnnie, III--5.6
- Jones, Alice--1.2
- Jones, Emanda--1.2
- Jones, Frankie Mae--5.1
- Jones, Freddie--3.1
- Justice, Rosie Mae--5.1
- Kelley--7.4

- Kibbes' Studio--4.1
- King, Etta--1.2
- Kirkwood, L. K.--3.1
- Kittling, Willa--5.1
- Law, Oscar B.--16.14
- Lee, Ruby--20.3
- Lewis, John G.--7.4
- Lewis, Leon--5.6
- Lewis, Roy--7.4
- Lockhart, L. L.--7.4
- Mark, Catell Lenora--5.1
- Marshall, Charles--12.1
- Martin, Filmore B.--5.6
- Mason, Gladys--5.1
- Masons--7.4
- Mather--4.1
- McCloud, Lois--5.1
- McDaniel, George--1.4
- McGrue--3.1, 18.1
- McKinney, Luther--3.1
- McMahan, Clo--4.1
- McNealy, Ernest--5.6
- Mennitt [?], Ruth--5.1
- Mickens, Mildred--5.1
- Miller, Daisy W.--16.14
- Moore, Beatrice--5.1
- Moore, Marie--5.1
- Nickerson, Gloria Vivian--5.1
- Norvel--19.1
- Olbera, Idel--9.1
- Omas and Oman [?]-18.1
- Palmer--7.4
- Pat--1.4
- Patterson, Cerise Michelle--4.1
- Paynes, O.--7.4
- Phillip J.--3.1
- Pitre, Rhonda--18.31
- Prater, Ada--1.2
- Queenclabre [?], Clara B.--18.15
- Radford, Glennette--18.3
- Reado, Geraldine--5.1
- Rico--20.10
- Robinson, B. R.--5.1
- Robinson, Charles M.--18.19
- Samuel, Beatrice, Mrs.--1.2
- Sanders, Bernard--5.6
- Scott--7.4
- Searcy, Gloria W.--5.1
- Shakesniden, Wilma--5.6
- Shiloh, Dave--2.7
- Shropshire--7.4

- Smith, Ardes--18.1
- Smith, Naomi--5.1
- Solomon, Mrs.--9.1
- Southern, Vernon--5.6
- Sowell, Dovzelle --5.1
- Stanley, Most N.--9.1
- Stanton--7.4
- Stevens, Alma--5.11
- Stevens, Mary Lee--5.1
- Taylor, A., Mrs.--3.1
- Taylor, Mrs.--18.18
- Texana, Joseph, Pvt.--5.11
- Thomas, Sidney--16.14
- Thompson, Verna Lee--5.1
- Valley, Joseph--4.1
- Vallie, Moody--4.1
- Walker, Maybelline--5.1
- Wallace Studios--5.1
- Ward, J. L.--7.4
- Ware, Maud Anna--9.1
- Ware, Sophie, Mrs.--1.2
- Washington, Lissimae--1.2
- West, Joe--5.6
- Whitehead, Gladys--1.6
- Whittington, Ervin--18.22
- Wilbur, Luther--18.1
- Williams, Allan--5.6
- Williams, Louise--1.2 (see also Williams, Mary C.)
- Williams, Mary C.--1.2 (see also Williams, Louise)
- Williams, Robert M.--5.6
- Wilson, Mary, Mrs.--20.8
- Woodard, Lettie J.--1.2
- Woods, Gerturde [sic]--1.2
- Wright, Veara--5.1
- Young, Sarah B.--5.1
- Young, Willie John--5.6