This exhibit is representative of the work of four photographers during those years in one Columbia studio. They were not the only photographers in Columbia at that time, and they are not the only photographers whose work is in the Boone County Historical Society’s photography collection of 500,000 glass plate and plasticine negatives. However, these four men: Joseph L. Douglass, Henry Holborn, Wesley Blackmore, and John Francis Westhoff, all worked out of one location during those 54 years, each one of them retiring and selling their portrait photography business to the next. And with each sale to the next up and coming and enterprising photographer, they passed down the ownership of their work, creating the majority of the massive collection that is in the vaults of the Boone County History & Culture Center today. David Haberstich, Curator of Photography at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Museum of American History, said of the collection in February 2019, “Your collection is undoubtedly one of the largest collections of a cumulative aggregation of community photography in the nation.”

It is important to note the collection and this exhibition represents the citizens of the entire county and not just Columbia. This exhibit features only 92 pieces of work but Faces Found celebrates a phenomenal photographic history of Boone County that brings alive the sublimely beautiful, proud and honest personalities as revealed in our forbearer’s stoic, winning, pensive, thoughtful, and sometimes handsome, grinning and confident faces.
Joseph Lewis Douglass was born in August 1865, near Harrisburg in Boone County, Missouri, the son of a successful law enforcement officer and military man. His father, Gen. Joseph Beeler Douglass, was born in Boyle County, Kentucky and moved to Boone County in 1827. He married Joe’s mother, Miss Nannie Wirt of Boone County, in 1849. He became a deputy sheriff in 1848 and was elected county sheriff in 1850. He went on to serve in the state legislature, as clerk of the county court, and during the Civil War was first commissioned a colonel then a brigadier general. In his History of Boone County 1882, William F. Switzler says of him, “He was of much service to the citizens of this county, protecting their lives and property. (He) was severe on men in arms, especially bushwhackers…”

This was the environment the future photography artist was born into in 1865. Joe was one of six children, but four of his siblings died prematurely; two in infancy, and a brother at age 23 and a sister at age 28. Joe’s mother died in 1875, when he was only ten years of age. Joe and his only remaining sibling, a sister named Fanny, went on to make their mark on Columbia’s history together. And not surprisingly, given how many times death had visited their family, they remained remarkably close for the rest of their lives, both at and away from work.

Joe attended the University of Missouri and found his love for the relatively new art form of photography. In 1886, by the age of 21, he opened his own photography studio in Columbia at 910 ½ East Broadway (sometimes referred to as 910-A in telephone directories and other record books). This same, second-floor studio saw Columbia history recorded through the work of three subsequent professional photographers, culminating in 1954.
Very quickly, Douglass was noticed as a superb talent and gained a regional, and then a national reputation. Wilson's Photographic Magazine (see right), said, “in all of the pictures that we have seen from Mr. Douglass (and there are many), there seems to be that feeling of ease, which is so hard to secure, but which nevertheless is always so acceptable in a good portrait.” It was clear that Douglass’ peers across the country saw in his work something natural and honest – a portrait style that would not become universally desired and expected of portrait photographers until the 1960s and through today.

The masterful work of Joe Douglass lives on to this day because hundreds of his glass plate negatives have survived nearly a century in often less than ideal conditions. His efforts and talent over the 24 years he operated his studio have left for us a treasure trove of the faces of Boone Countians in the 1880s, 1890s and early 1900s.

Douglass would win many awards at state and national photography exhibits and became President of the Missouri Photographers Association. He was regularly called upon by the editors of the University of Missouri’s yearbook, the Savitar, to provide photography of all manner to its pages for many years.

Douglass would retire in 1910 and hand over his business, including a 50% stake in it to his sister, Fanny. Fanny had been, at minimum, an assistant in the business for many years, and listed her occupation in the census as a photographer. It’s likely that she was behind the camera for many appointments and assignments. Exactly how many, we’ll never know for sure. Douglass died on July 18, 1911 and left specific instructions in his will about 50% of the studio being left to Fanny. Fanny was a single woman for all of those years – what was known then as a ‘spinster’ – and perhaps for that reason Joe left her a means of income. After Joe’s death, Fanny would sell at least a stake of the business at 910 ½ E. Broadway to a new photographer in town – Henry Holborn of St. Louis.
Two months after Joe Douglass died in July 1911, the Douglass Studio was turned over to Henry Holborn, an Englishman who had operated a studio in St. Louis for many years. Since Douglass left instructions that 50% of the business remain with Fanny, it’s unknown what percentage of the business was sold to Holborn.

The ‘Open Letter’ advertisement that Holborn took out in the Missourian newspaper is evidence he was aware there were big shoes to fill. He had to have known of Douglass’ national reputation and perhaps it was the desire to see if he could measure up to Douglass that prompted him to move to Columbia and purchase the studio. He makes a point in his advertisement to say he learned the business as an apprentice and that his father was still the leading photographer in his native Bristol, England.

Holborn was born in 1859, came to St. Louis in 1880, and was already 51 years old when he arrived in Columbia. One can imagine that a gentleman arriving in Boone County with an English accent would have been quite the topic of conversation in September 1911. Out of Holborn’s respect for Joe Douglass – or possibly as a requirement of his purchase of the studio – he does not change the name of the studio for more than four years.
Holborn operated the studio at 910 ½ E. Broadway for almost 10 years, which included remarkable events in the community, nation, and world. The first World War began and eventually concluded, the suffragette movement was ongoing and would eventually culminate with the passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920. More Boone Countians rode in automobiles, silent motion picture theaters and vaudeville were all the rage, and both the Daniel Boone Hotel & Tavern and the Boone County Hospital were built.

Holborn’s work did not display Douglass’ talent for obtaining naturalness nor Douglass’ creativity. But Holborn’s work indicated he was a solid, if not spectacular photographer. However, one very interesting thing stands out in the Holborn collection – something not found as often in the work of the other three photographers prior to WWII. He produces portraits of people of color, and of many who appear to be immigrants from eastern and southern Europe. It’s evident Mr. Holborn, originally of Bristol, England, had no issues with the race or social standing of those who would pay for his services.

Henry Holborn retired in April 1921 at approximately 61 years of age and moved back to St. Louis after selling the studio to Wesley Blackmore. He would live to be 86 and died of old age in a rest home in St. Louis in 1947. And just as Douglass had left a portion of his work to him (we know that thousands of Douglass negatives were mysteriously stashed elsewhere), Holborn gifted Blackmore with his entire glass plate negative inventory. The gesture of selling the years of work and preserving it for the future had now twice been accomplished.

(Source: The St. Louis Post-Dispatch, July 9, 1947; Columbia Evening Missourian, April 30, 1921)
Wesley Raymond Blackmore was a photographer in St. Joseph, Missouri, when he purchased the Holborn Studio at 910 ½ E. Broadway and moved to Columbia in 1921. He would own the studio until his death in May of 1936.

Like Douglass and Holborn before him, Blackmore would earn the trust of the community. The University of Missouri’s *Sawlar* year book, Christian College (now Columbia College) and the Columbia Public Schools would all make use of his talent. However, now there was more local competition. A photographer named Paul Parsons opened a studio directly across the street from Holborn in 1919. Parsons would remain in business for over 25 years and in 1922 joined the Blackmores to attend and exhibit their photos at a national conference in Kansas City.

Blackmore must have appreciated all the opportunities the decade of the 1920s brought to him. Long gone were the Victorian styles found in Douglass’ early work, and the pre-WWI Edwardian fashions of Holborn’s early work in Columbia. Men, and especially women, were making bold fashion statements in the 1920s, and Blackmore’s photographs are testament to the fact he encouraged them to do so.
Blackmore was a native of Lawrenceburg, Indiana and had worked as a photographer in Horton, Kansas, where he met his wife Laverne. In 1912, he sold his small Kansas studio and he and Laverne moved to St. Joseph, Missouri, to open The Bahlman Photography Studio. The Blackmores never had children and by early 1921 he heard about the opportunity to buy the Holborn Studio in Columbia.

Records indicate that Blackmore and his wife took a cruise to England and the Mediterranean in August 1927. They traveled on the White Star Line's HSS Homeric round trip; New York to Cherbourg to Southampton to the Mediterranean ports, and back to Southampton, Cherbourg and New York. The 1930 Census listed their home at 1325 Anthony Avenue in Columbia and Laverne was listed in the same census as an “Assistant Photographer”.

Blackmore contracted the flu the day after Christmas in 1935. He was one of many in the area who were victims of a minor epidemic at that time, according to the Columbia Missourian news article that reported on his death. He was hospitalized in Boone County Hospital for four months, as the influenza created more health problems, including a weakened heart. He finally succumbed to a heart attack on the morning of May 11, 1936. He was just nine days shy of his 54th birthday.

It’s probable that Laverne Blackmore knew of the vast collection of the combined compilation of a portion of the Douglass collection, Holborn’s work, and her late husband Wesley’s work, when the business was sold to a twenty-nine-year-old photographer named J. Francis Westhoff.
John Francis Westhoff, known by J. Francis or just Francis, was born in 1907 in Glasgow, Missouri. After working for about seven years as an assistant at another studio, he purchased the photography business at 910 ½ E. Broadway from the estate of Wesley Blackmore and began his own business there in 1936. He operated the studio for almost 35 years, becoming Columbia’s preeminent photographer. His clients included the University’s Savitar yearbook, several local businesses, university and college presidents, and a large portion of Mid-Missouri’s prominent citizenry.

The studio at 910 ½ E. Broadway had witnessed nearly 70 years of work by photographers Joe Douglass, Henry Holborn, Wesley Blackmore – and now Francis Westhoff. About 20 years into his ownership – in the mid-1950s – Westhoff moved the studio to 1106 E. Broadway. He took over the space formerly used by Algert Peterson for the Peterson’s photography studio.

Interestingly, a Peterson’s Studio opened in the former Westhoff space at 910 ½ E. Broadway shortly after. The Boone County Historical Society also owns the Algert Peterson photo collection. Over and over again, and spanning several decades, Columbia photographers would exchange or buy out spaces that had already been operating as photography studios.
Westhoff’s new studio space was located on the second floor of the well-known and admired Central Dairy Building. In 1960, Francis and his wife Iris, purchased the entire 1940 east-side addition to the local landmark from Clyde and Evelyn Shepard. Shepard (1891 – 1961), along with Dot Sappington, was the co-founder of Central Dairy in 1920, and built the original west-side portion of the building in 1927. Westhoff would continue to work in a building he now owned throughout the rest of his career.

In 1970, Francis and Iris decided to retire. He suffered from rheumatoid arthritis and was advised to move to a drier climate. He sold the building he had owned for 10 years, “lock, stock and barrel”, including his collection of nearly 500,000 negatives that dated back to Douglass and included all the Holborn and Blackmore inventories, to the Eugene Benedict family. Westhoff moved to Lake Havasu, Arizona, and died later that year on October 7, 1970 in Needles, California.

Westhoff is due tremendous credit for maintaining the hundreds of thousands of negatives that represented the work of at least three local photographers. Westhoff knew that the combined collections depicted a huge part of Boone County’s history, and he entrusted the Benedict Family to ensure their survival.

(Source: National Register of Historic Places Registration Form - Central Dairy Building, dnr.mo.gov)