



## Charles van Ravenswaay Photograph Collection (P0014)

**Collection Number:** P0014

**Collection Title:** Charles van Ravenswaay Photograph Collection

**Dates:** 1814-1975, bulk

**Creator:** Van Ravenswaay, Charles, 1911-1990

**Abstract:** Collected photographs and other visual materials, primarily documenting Boonville, Missouri, in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

**Collection Size:** 0.81 cubic feet  
(16 folders, 3 volumes, 4 oversize photographs, 7 glass plate negatives)

**Language:** Photograph captions are in English.

**Repository:** The State Historical Society of Missouri

**Restrictions on Access:** Collection is open for research. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Columbia](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at [columbia@shsmo.org](mailto:columbia@shsmo.org). Collections may be viewed at any research center.

Glass plate negatives are located in specialized storage. Researchers must use prints available in box one or digital reproductions in place of the original negatives.

**Restrictions on Use:** Materials in this collection may be protected by copyrights and other rights. See [Rights & Reproductions](#) on the Society's website for more information about reproductions and permission to publish.

**Preferred Citation:** [Specific item; box number; folder number] *Charles van Ravenswaay Photograph Collection* (P0014); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Columbia [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-Columbia].

**Donor Information:** The collection was donated to the State Historical Society of Missouri by Charles van Ravenswaay in multiple accessions, including accessions on December 29, 1975; August 31, 1976; February 22, 1988 (Accession No. 2687); May 31, 1988 (Accession No. 2694); August 25, 1988 (Accession No. 2710).

**Alternate Forms Available:** Selected digital reproductions of images from this collection are available online through [SHSMO's digital collections](#).

**Other Finding Aid:** Further description of the images is available in the SHSMO Photo Database.

**Related Material:**

*Charles van Ravenswaay Papers (C3873)*

*Charles van Ravenswaay Collection (C2668)*

**Processing Information:** Collection materials were previously dispersed, both physically and intellectually, in a subject-based arrangement with other materials of varying provenance. Provenance was reconstructed, and materials were reprocessed (2012-2015) and brought together as a single collection.

**Processed by:** Processed by Anne Cox, October 24, 2018

**Historical Note:**

Charles van Ravenswaay was born in Boonville, Missouri, August 10, 1911, to Cornelis and Betty (Lionberger) van Ravenswaay, the second of three sons. His father, a native of Holland, came to Missouri after completing his medical and surgical training in Europe; his mother was a granddaughter of Colonel William Talbot, who helped to settle Loutre Island, Missouri.

Besides attending Boonville public schools, Charles van Ravenswaay attended the Kemper Military Academy in Boonville for a number of years before moving on to Washington University in St. Louis to pursue his undergraduate and graduate studies in the liberal arts. Although his primary interest was in history, van Ravenswaay also attended all the art history classes then offered by the university, a study that was supplemented by a “leisurely tour” through Europe in the summer of 1931. He received his B.A. in 1933 and M.A. the following year.

Surrounded by the artifacts of Boonville’s Civil War history, van Ravenswaay called himself a “serious collector” from the age of fourteen. His reading of *East Coast* antique magazines gave way to independent study of both the architecture and the decorative arts of the Mississippi Valley. While in college van Ravenswaay studied not only the library resources available in St. Louis, but also many primary sources, such as personal interviews and the family letters and diaries of St. Louis’s oldest families. In 1933 van Ravenswaay joined with St. Louis photographer Auguste Piaget (and after Auguste’s death in 1937, with his brother Paul Piaget) to make a photographic survey of early Missouri buildings. This collaboration continued into the 1970s and eventually totaled more than 8,000 research notes and photographs of buildings, regional art, cemetery markers, and household items. This collection of photographs was donated to the Historic American Buildings Survey (H.A.B.S.) with the Library of Congress in 1984.

Following graduation, van Ravenswaay moved back to Boonville to become the business manager of his father’s medical and surgical clinic from 1934 to 1949. From 1938 to 1941 he also acted as state supervisor of the U.S. Work Projects Administration’s Federal Writers Project and co-authored *Missouri: A Guide to the “Show Me” State*. In 1942 van Ravenswaay entered the U.S. Navy and served four years in the North Atlantic and the South Pacific, achieving the

rank of Lieutenant Commander. During this time he continued his independent study of Missouri history, wrote numerous articles for magazines and professional journals, and became the leading authority on Missouri Creole decorative arts.

After his release from the service, van Ravenswaay was offered the post of director of the Missouri Historical Society in St. Louis, where he remained until January 1962. In this capacity van Ravenswaay expanded the Society's museum holdings and its public outreach programs, while continuing his study of regional architecture, art, and the decorative arts. This work resulted in pioneering studies of eighteenth-century Creole furniture, early nineteenth-century cabinetmakers, silversmiths, print makers, photographers, and glass manufactories. At the same time he became active in encouraging, and often assisting, the preservation and restoration of historic buildings, particularly in the St. Louis area. Among these accomplishments were the restoration of the Louis Bolduc House, St. Genevieve, Missouri, and the formation of the St. Louis County Historic Building Commission.

In 1962 van Ravenswaay accepted the post of president of Old Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge, Massachusetts, a position he held until 1966. In that year he was named director of the Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum and Gardens, in Wilmington, Delaware, where he remained until his retirement in 1976. In these positions van Ravenswaay expanded his understanding of American decorative arts and enlarged a growing interest in horticulture and botany.

In addition to the official duties related to his directorships, van Ravenswaay was also President of the American Association of Museums from 1961 to 1968 and served on national historical and horticultural committees, including the University of Delaware Library Associates; the National Trust for Historic Preservation; the Advisory Committee of the Eleutherian Mills-Hagley Foundation; and the Carostead Foundation (Tudor Place) in Washington, D.C.

Van Ravenswaay's list of awards and honorary degrees includes: an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Maryville College of the Sacred Heart, St. Louis, 1968; an honorary Doctor of Humanities from the University of Missouri, 1980; and the Conservation Service Award, granted by the U.S. Secretary of the Interior for "significant contributions to the preservation of this Nation's heritage," 1987.

In many ways Charles van Ravenswaay's retirement years were his most productive and personally rewarding. For the first time in his adult life he had the leisure to pursue topics of interest without the daily demands of the professional world. In these years van Ravenswaay published three books: *The Arts and Architecture of German Settlements in Missouri: A Survey of a Vanishing Culture* (University of Missouri Press, 1977); *A Nineteenth Century Garden* (Main Street Press/Universe Books, 1977); and "*Drawn from Nature*," *The Botanical Art of Joseph Prestele and His Sons* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984). These last two derived from an interest in gardening, which van Ravenswaay had nurtured since his Boonville, Missouri, days.

One book was published posthumously in 1991: *St. Louis: An Informal History of the City and its People, 1764-1865* (Missouri Historical Society). Three manuscripts remain unpublished: *Old Missouri*, a collection of photographs from the Piaget-van Ravenswaay Collection donated to the

Library of Congress, with text by architectural historian Frank L. Peters, Jr., *Andre Parmentier: America's First Professional Landscape Architect*, and *Those Wonderful Old-Time Apples: The North American Story*.

Charles van Ravenswaay died March 20, 1990, after battling lung and eye ailments for several years.

### **Arrangement:**

Collection materials are arranged by geographic location, date, and size.

### **Scope and Content Note:**

The materials in this collection were primarily acquired as part of van Ravenswaay's historical research. The original source of photographs pre-dating his life is unknown. The bulk of the images document Boonville, Missouri, from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century through the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The collection contains examples of photography by two avocational Boonville photographers, Dr. Charles Swap and Maximilian Schmidt, as well as professionals J.C. Macurdy and Rehmeier Studio and many unattributed photographs.

Images taken on and near the Niangua River (Camden County) depict camping and fishing trips to that region by Boonville residents. The collection also includes photographs from elsewhere in Cooper County, neighboring Howard County, and nearby historic Arrow Rock. Photographs taken on the U.S.S. John Swett originate from van Ravenswaay's military service.

Formats include albumen and silver gelatin prints in a variety of sizes, carte de visite, glass plate negatives, stereographs, postcards, and greeting cards. The albums have been removed from their original bindings for preservation; images and captions remain intact.

### **Container List:**

- |              |        |                                              |
|--------------|--------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Box 1</b> | f. 1-7 | Boonville                                    |
|              | f. 1   | 1850s-1870s                                  |
|              | f. 2   | 1870s                                        |
|              | f. 3   | 1880s-1890s                                  |
|              | f. 4   | 1900-1910s                                   |
|              | f. 5   | 1920s-1938                                   |
|              | f. 6   | 1969, 1975                                   |
|              | f. 7   | Postcards                                    |
|              | f. 8   | Niangua/Camden County Trip 1906              |
|              | f. 9   | Cooper County, circa 1870-1900               |
|              | f. 10  | Howard County, circa 1860-1932               |
|              | f. 11  | Arrow Rock, circa 1930-1950                  |
|              | f. 12  | Bethel Colony, circa 1931                    |
|              | f. 13  | Sailors on the U.S.S. John Swett, circa 1943 |

	f. 14	Postcards, greeting cards, ephemera
	f. 15	Photographs
<b>Box 2</b>	f. 16	Photographs
	v. 1	Album, 1895-1898
	v. 2	Album, 1901-1906
	v. 3	Album, downtown Boonville, no date
<b>Oversize</b>	f. 17	Photographs, oversize

**Index:**

Albany (Mo.)	14	Yes	
Arrow Rock (Mo.)	11	Yes	
Bagnell Dam (Mo.)	14	Yes	
Bell, Charles C., 1848-1931	5	Yes	
Bell, Frances	5	Yes	
Bethel Community, Shelby County (Mo.)	12	Yes	
Big Shoal Baptist Church (Clay County, Mo.)	15	Yes	
Boonville (Mo.)	1-7, 16	Yes	v. 1-3
Camden County (Mo.)	8	Yes	
Camping	8	Yes	
Central Missouri Horticultural Association	16	Yes	
Chouteau Springs, Cooper County (Mo.)	9	Yes	v. 1-2
Christian College (Columbia, Mo.)	14	Yes	
Circus	3-4	Yes	
Clinch, J.H.	5	Yes	
Cole, Jennie	3	Yes	
Cole, Samuel	3	Yes	
De Soto (Mo.)	14	Yes	
Fayette (Mo.)	10	Yes	
Fishing		Yes	v. 1
Fort de Chartres Site (Ill.)	15	Yes	
Glasgow (Mo.)	10	Yes	
Gmelich, Jacob F., 1839-1914	9	Yes	
Grand Army of the Republic, John A. Hayn Post, No. 240	4	Yes	
Kemper Military School and College (Boonville, Mo.)	7	Yes	
Kinney, Major	15	Yes	
Knights of Pythias	3, oversize	Yes	
Lester, Thomas P.	3	Yes	
Lora (Packet)		Yes	v. 2
Louisiana Purchase Exposition (1904 : Saint Louis, Mo.)		Yes	v. 2
Macurdy, J. C. (Photographer), Boonville, Missouri	1-4, 9		
Marven, Charles	3	Yes	

Meramec Springs	14	Yes	
Missouri Female College, Boonville, Missouri	1, 16	Yes	
Missouri Intelligencer	10		
Moberly (Mo.)	14	Yes	
New Franklin (Mo.)	16	Yes	
Niangua River (Mo.)		Yes	v. 1-2
Osage City (Mo.)		Yes	v. 2
Osage River (Mo.)		Yes	v. 2
Pilot Grove (Mo.)	9	Yes	
Rivercene, Boonville, Missouri	16	Yes	
Schmidt, Maximilian, 1865-1932	9	Yes	
St. Louis (Mo.)		Yes	v. 1
Steamboats	3-4	Yes	
Stephens, Joseph L., 1826-1881	1, 4	Yes	
Thespian Hall, Boonville, Missouri	1, 2, 4-6	Yes	v. 1
Tipton (Mo.)	14, 15	Yes	
Trenton (Mo.)	14	Yes	
Versailles (Mo.)	15	Yes	
Williams, Walter, 1864-1935	10	Yes	