

The Story Behind New Exhibit “Double Take”

AT THE ATWOOD

By Andrew and Jean Young

In the late spring of 2016, a visitor arrived at the Atwood House & Museum / Chatham Historical Society with a box of photographic negatives. Her name was Christine Padgett and she wanted the negatives to be kept as a memorial to her grandparents, William and Jacqueline Cotter. We asked where the negatives had come from and the answer was “Our grandparents found them in the attic of the Mayflower Shop when they owned the store.” The Cotters owned the shop from 1948-1954.

At first glance, the hearts of our archives team stopped as the box was full of panorama negatives - but that was only the beginning of the treasures that lay within. Although the name of the photographer for these images is not known, the Mayflower Shop was previously occupied by photographers Charles H. Smallhoff and Harold Sawyer at different times, and both were known for their picture postcards of the Chatham area. The glass plate negatives appear to date from c.1912. The panoramas include several of the Twin Lights. Since the northern lighthouse tower was moved to Eastham in 1923, the period of the photos appears to range between 1910 and 1922. But, in fact, it is difficult to date some of them.

A year later, with cataloguing complete, the Museum now has numerous glass plate and acetate negatives ranging in size from 3”x 4” to 8”x 10” and panoramas, generally measuring 3.5” x 11.5”. The panoramas are mostly views of Chatham, with a few of Harwich and other Cape towns, and a number where the locations are, as yet, unknown.

Portions of the William and Jacqueline Cotter Memorial Collection are on display in this exhibition, concentrating on the panoramic photographs. The vistas captured in these 100-year old photographs have changed significantly to the present day, most notably the number and style of buildings, as well as the abundance of trees and other vegetation. Certain panoramas have been replicated in a contemporary color photograph for comparison.

Thirty-eight of the panoramas were scanned for the archives and digitally restored for printing. Due to space limitations, new prints will be rotated through the exhibition over the course of this year.

Work on the remaining negatives is pending time and adequate funding. Enlarged prints of the restored photographs as well as the contemporary color images are available for order through the Museum. Inquire at the Museum Store for more information.

The Atwood House & Museum will open for the season with Free Locals Day on May 19 from 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Please come see Double Take and our just-refreshed exhibits, including the Lincoln Room, The Pendleton / Life Saving Service and the Atwood Store in the Tool Room.