

US Steel Gary Works Photographic Collection on exhibit September 15 – December 9, 2007

On loan from Indiana University Northwest Calumet Regional Archives

The collection comprises about 2,200 black & white images of the construction and operation of USS Gary Works and the City of Gary, spanning the years between 1906 and 1971. The bulk of the collection, however, ranges from 1906 to 1931.

It is the understanding of Steve McShane, Archivist/Curator for the Calumet Regional Archives at Indiana University Northwest, that during the U.S. Bicentennial Celebrations in 1976, U.S. Steel's Gary Works offered tours of the mill for the residents of Gary and beyond. As part of that commemoration, Gary Works enlarged a number of its historical photos for display in the Gary National Bank at 5th and Broadway. When the celebrations ended, the corporation decided to donate the original 8x10 glass plate negatives to the Calumet Regional Archives at IU Northwest in Gary, where I hired in as the archivist in 1982. The Archives was able to secure additions to the collection from various sources, including some of Professor Gary Wilk's students and other contacts, in the years following the original donation.

In 1986, we were able to secure funding from the Indiana Humanities Council to make prints from those original negatives. Gary Wilk undertook this project, making contact prints from over 1,800+ negatives. More additions came into the Archives in subsequent years to boost the holdings to around 2,200 views of the mill and the city. In 1990-1991, Gary Wilk and I collaborated on a traveling exhibit of selected photos entitled, "Steelmaker-Steeltown": Building Gary, 1906-1930." The exhibit traveled around the State of Indiana and included a beautiful catalog of the photos (copies of which are now scarce). For that project, Gary Wilk again provided his talents to create a variety of sizes of the prints for the display. He reprised and expanded that work for another exhibition of the photos in 2004, entitled "Lake Michigan's Steel Shores," here in the IU Northwest Gallery of Contemporary Art.

Documentation on the photographers remains largely a mystery. However, some of the images appear to have been created by The Crose Photo Company of Gary, Indiana. Our guess is that both company and contract photographers took these pictures over the course of most of the 20th century.

About five years ago, the Digital Library Program at IU Bloomington secured funding to digitize the entire collection of US Steel Gary Works photos. You can find more information and take a tour of the collection at the DLP website:

<http://www.dlib.indiana.edu/collections/steel/>

The above information was provided by Stephen G. McShane, Archivist/Curator for the Calumet Regional Archives at Indiana University Northwest.