

Health Sciences Library exhibit to offer a glimpse of history and intrigue

“Rediscovering the Class of 1885,” a new exhibit at SUNY Upstate Medical University’s Health Sciences Library, celebrates the recent discovery of 25 19th century portrait photographs. The exhibit, which opens April 25, will be featured as part of the Carol M. Baldwin Cultural Crawl April 25 and 26. It will remain on display in the library for several months.

The exhibit offers glimpses of the lives of medical students in Syracuse in the late 19th century through photographs, medical instruments, student notebooks, exams and other original documents from the library’s Historical Collections.

“These recently found photographs are now the earliest original class pictures in the library’s Historical Collections,” said Elise Calvi, curator of Historical Collections in the Health Sciences Library.

“By telling the story of how these photographs were ‘lost’ for 60 years and then found, the exhibit also draws attention to the underlying question of how the historical record may be preserved—or lost—for future generations, and how our interpretation of the past may be incomplete, or faulty, if the picture itself is incomplete,” said Calvi.

According to Calvi, the photographs and their story were discovered in stages. “Don Jaeger of the Pathology Department was working in a storage room in the basement of Weiskotten Hall, where thousands upon thousands of microscope slides are stored, and found the 1885 photos and others on top of 10-foot tall cabinets,” said Calvi. “They were all individual portraits, but had thumbtack holes in all four corners, so I knew they must have been on display somewhere. But where and how?” she said.

Calvi’s answer came months later, when, going through some of the uncataloged negatives in the Medical Photography archive, she found a negative showing how the photographs were



Photograph courtesy of the Health Sciences Library Historical Collections

The remodeled carriage factory on Orange Street (later renamed McBride Street), above, was home to the College of Medicine from 1875 until 1896. The college moved into Peck Hall in 1896, which

served as home to the college until 1937 when Weiskotten Hall was built. The 1896 structure still stands at 309 S. McBride Street.

originally displayed. “But along with the answer to the mystery came a new intrigue, which, surprisingly, turned out to be quite relevant to the purpose of the Cultural Crawl,” she said. “Visitors to the exhibit will find out the answer to the intrigue, and see how the experiences of 19th century medical students are relevant today.”

The items on exhibit are drawn from the library’s Historical Collections, which includes several thousand books and journals published from the 16th through 21st centuries; documents,

photographs, printed and audio-visual materials, and artifacts documenting the history of SUNY Upstate and its predecessor schools; medical instruments; papers of distinguished faculty; and other materials documenting the history of the health professions in Central New York.

Visit Historical Collections on the second floor of the library and at <http://www.upstate.edu/library/history/>. For more information e-mail calvie@upstate.edu or call 464-4585.