

Early photographer hit York, stayed

In the Winthrop College Archives is stored a small box of personal papers and a few hundred photographs of a little-known photographer, who for almost 40 years took pictures of South Carolina, its landscape and its people.

This is about all that remains of the work and legacy of John R. Schorb, one of America's first photographers.

John R. Schorb was born in Niederweller, Germany, in what was then the Grand Duchy of Baden. His German name was Johann Schorb, but later in the United States, probably when he came South, he changed it to John Schorb.

In 1834 young Schorb came to America, spending his first two years in Buffalo, N.Y. From Buffalo he went to Danton, Ohio, then walked 400 miles to Michigan City, Ind. He moved back to Buffalo about 1839.

Friends sent him to Rochester College Institute in Rochester, N.Y., to prepare him for college. The school must have been an excellent preparation for him because he entered Hamilton College as a senior. Here he came under the tutelage of Dr. Charles Avery, professor of nat-

Mary Stillman from that state.

Around 1848 he made his way to South Carolina, apparently staying in Charleston in 1849 and then moving to Columbia in 1850.

All the while, Schorb took pictures. Today, there must be many attics, closets and antique boxes in the states he visited which contain his daguerrotypes. South Carolina has a strong claim to being the adopted state of the country's first travelling photographer.

In John Schorb's time, it was very difficult to make a living as a photographer. Between 1850 and 1853, he moved to Winnsboro and got a position at Mount Zion Institute. Here he taught astronomy, chemistry and "belle-lettres." Schorb had time to get involved in community affairs and was a member of a drama troupe known as the Winnsboro Thespian Corps.

In 1853 he moved to Yorkville, now York, S.C., and began teaching at the Yorkville Female Academy. He also had a part-time position teaching at the Kings Mountain Military Academy. During this period, Schorb continued to take photographs.

About 1862 he became a full-time photographer, opening up a studio on his property on West Liberty Street. Schorb practiced photography until he was almost 90. He was also interested in art. He designed and constructed the scenery and backdrops that he used for his photography.

Schorb became active in the affairs of the Yorkville community, serving on the town council for two years and as the city's clerk and treasurer for eight years. He was ordained as a ruling elder in the Presbyterian church and played the organ at church services on Sunday.

He was well-educated, Greek, Latin, science and mathematics were his favorite subjects. When he had time, he used his knowledge and learning to tutor the neighborhood children.

On Nov. 5, 1908, at the age of 90, John R. Schorb died. He is buried in Rose Hill cemetery in York, his grave marked by one of the largest monuments in the cemetery.

Today, a traveling exhibition of Schorb's photographs is available on loan to interested organizations and institutions from the South Carolina Museum Commission.

South Carolina's

Story



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ural philosophy.

In 1844 he graduated from Hamilton College. Schorb did not go into teaching, which is what his college education prepared him to do. Instead, he took his camera and traveled. Evidence indicates that, in addition to travelling through New York, he went through New Jersey, Virginia and possibly Indiana and Connecticut. He likely visited Connecticut because he married Miss