

Horace Engle

He lived in Marietta and took pictures of the town through his button

One of the world's first candid photographers took these round pictures of Marietta in 1888 and 1889. Using an ingenious button-hole camera, Horace Engle snapped these shots thru the front of his coat, by pulling a string in his pocket.

Engle, about 27 years old at the time he took these photos, was a man ahead of his time in both photography and other fields: he invented mining techniques, hydroelectric schemes, and worked in Thomas Edison's laboratory, besides taking candid photos 50 years before the invention of the 35 mm camera allowed anyone to do it. (Today's standard 35mm was originally called a "miniature" camera, and often used surreptitiously—people who were used to huge box cameras didn't even recognize them for what they were.)

Engle's camera had a lens designed to look like a button. The camera was hidden behind.

Engle's work was recently discovered by professor Edward Leos of Penn State, who was shown some of Engle's photos by a student

in one of his photography classes, Jeanette Engle, a grand-niece of Horace. Jeanette found Horace's negatives in a corncrib.

Horace Engle's father was a noted scientific horticulturalist Henry Engle. His mother, Lizze Musser Engle, was a writer. The Engles were members of the "River Brethren" (Brethren in Christ) Church.

Despite his inventiveness, intelligence, and family background, Horace Engle was something of a failure. Never married, he spent his best years pursuing a series of unsuccessful business ventures in attempting to implement his schemes. These forays were conducted around the Roanoke, VA area, where he moved after living in Marietta. He died in obscurity at Bangor, PA in 1949, aged 88.

Thanks largely to professor Leos' research on Engle, his early photographic work has now been recognized. The Museum of Modern Art in New York has added several of his prints to its collection. Leos will soon publish a book about Engle, containing about 100 of his photos.



Market Street, 1889:
the sign says "Times Printing Office."



Temperance meeting in Marietta.
Engle was very involved in this
in the year 1888.



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