



# Photographica Digest

Western Photographic Historical Society

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January 2017

## MY KODAK RETINAS

*Matin Kebschull*

Ok, I'll just put it out there up front... I have a Retina habit. It probably ranks somewhere between an obsession and addiction. I find them fascinating. Just so as we are on the same page, I am talking about the small folding cameras, with names like Retina I, Retina II, Retina III, with modifiers a, b, B, c, C, etc.

Retinas were not something I had run across, until I started coming to club meetings. I had never seen, held, nor played with one before then. But it seems like I was seeing them all the time at the club sales. Their prices, even today, are high relative to many other cameras of the era, but have managed to collect about 15, from the 1930s, thru to 1960. None of these are particularly rare or valuable, but that isn't my thing anyway.

So, what is it about them? To me, they feel and operate like a small, well crafted, instrument, with just enough weight to feel substantial. Press the cover release, open the cover and it sets itself up for the shot. I am particularly fond of the earlier versions more so than the last versions.

I had a pretty good idea of the Retina story from online resources and McKeown. A couple of years back I came across a small Petersen booklet on Retinas. Petersen is better known for their line of automotive self help books. So, I was surprised by the depth of knowledge of the product line in this little book, especially the back stories. I will paraphrase some of them in the following.

Back in the early 30s, Kodak knew they could produce cameras at any sophistication level, but also that they would not be cost competitive beyond a certain point. They also saw that there was a significant market for a pocketable, well constructed, camera with good optics, at a cost below the high-end offerings of the day.

They found a partner in a small company in Stuttgart Germany named Nagel, for their founder of the same name. They were producing pretty much exactly the sort of cameras that Kodak was looking to sell stateside. Nagel originally worked for Zeiss before stepping out on his own. His reputation preceded him in the industry and was well thought of. A year after Nagel teamed with Kodak, work started on the new cameras his company would design and build for Kodak were

termed 'Retina'.

The cameras initially were not a roaring success in the early 30s, but they caught on slowly. New camera production was interrupted by WW2. In the run up to the hostilities, refugees brought large numbers to the US (one of the few pieces of personal property they were allowed to immigrate with). During the war, many came home with returning soldiers. Thus, there was a thriving used camera market in which these cameras were prized, and their reputation grew. When production was started up again, post war, Retina had a solid reputation. Although Nagel, himself had died during the war, his son carried on with the business.

As it happened they were among the first (if not the first) to use the new standardized 35 mm daylight loading cartridge (DLC) film cartridge. This evolutionary concept is based on others before. These cameras, and others, lead to the large scale public acceptance of the 35mm format. Strangely, Kodak didn't get that this was a great idea, till the late 30's, when the sales success of film packaged in that way, was hard to refute. (as opposed to the formats they were trying to push)

Design-wise the Retina takes full advantage of the smaller format. The optics did not need to stand off far as far as with medium-format-sized films.



This also extends to the problem of keeping the film plane parallel to the lens plane, as the distances are shorter, it is easier to accomplish. Nagel used an ingenious off-center scissor mechanism which was very robust, even with most well used cameras. Not foolproof though, as a fall, with the camera open, can upset the alignments to an extent that may not be obvious to the naked eye, but readily apparent in the images.

By the way, a while back I ran across a small folding camera with the name 'Nagel' on it, at one of the club meetings and snatched it up. As I had been reading up on Retinas, I recog-

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nized the name immediately. I remembered a brief blurb about the cameras produced in the time period between joining forces with Kodak and the roll out of the first Retina. This was one of them. Subsequently, I ran across another one as well.

I have a particular affinity both these cameras, but especially the smaller of the 2, a Volenda. To me it embodies every thing that the Retina became later. It just feels like an elegantly conceived small pocketable folding camera.

## AN OLD CONLEY

Ron Kuykendall

*Editor's Note: Last month, a draft version of this article was printed by mistake. The following article was the version Ron intended to have published.*

The club had just received a donation of a few severely damaged items- a box camera with the leather falling off, a light meter, some miscellaneous items and a folding plate camera with no obvious identity. I cleaned and polished the small items, adjusted the meter, glued the leather back on the box camera, repaired the camera strap and then took a look at the folder. The release button on the body released the hinged lensboard about 2 inches and jammed. With a small light I determined the lens board struts slid in a plate and could be locked in several positions – I was able to release the locks by wiggling them with my little finger inside the case. The lens board came down about 30 degrees! Obviously this was not an ordinary folder. The lens mount had vertical movement and the lens board could be adjusted 20 degrees raised and 30 degrees lowered. The plate holder in the back was for two glass plates and was 3 ¼ x 5 1/4 – postcard size. The lens board adjustments would allow for image correction for scenic buildings and other tall objects. Hidden under the collapsed bellows I found a nameplate – Conley and a knob-adjusted double extension bellows mechanism.



The shutter is not the usual Conley Safety or Wollensak Junior but the Wollensak Regno — a mechanical shutter with speeds from 1-100 T and B

The lens unit was a surprise also - Conley catalogues list similar cameras with Double Rectilinear or Orthographic lenses of F8

or F11. The lens on this camera was a Luxar Anastigmat F7.7 Eq Focus 6 ¾ in. if you could read the small print around the lens barrel. This was not a common bicycle or hand camera. The Conley catalogue uses several pages to tout the excellence of the Luxor lens- sharp corner to corner-good depth of field, fast 7.7, a four-element lens of exceptional quality. It was available on special order only for \$12 extra – the camera which, from the catalog, is a Conley XI, sold for \$9.95. This appears to be a professional camera for the raging postcard market of the early 1900's; this camera was made about 1900 to 1918.

The camera is made of African Mahogany beautifully dovetailed, with rounded corners and triangular reinforcement blocks inside. The covering is real leather and all metal parts are chromed brass. The bellows was double extension of Russian leather-advertised as red but this one is black. The leather was totally destroyed apparently by sitting on display for some time where the sun struck one side.

I haven't been able to test the lens fully but it appears to be sharp with good depth of field- very good for those postcard scenics. I hope to get a new bellows and will test further then. I might even try some 120 color pictures.

**Come  
Join Us!**



Hotel Tucson

475 N Granada Tucson, AZ

Hours: 9:30 to 2:00

Info: 520-544-7784

**March 19, 2017**

59<sup>th</sup> Annual WPHS

Camera and  
Photographica  
Sale, Swap, & Show

Admission

General Admission: \$5.00

Students/Military Free

with ID

## ATTENTION WPHS MEMBERS

The club is interested in purchasing your camera collection. Please contact me at:

Imre dePozsgay

520-544-7784

## THE WPHS PHOTOFORUM

Matt Cook

I recently accepted the responsibility to schedule programs for our meetings, and quickly realized there wasn't a way to communicate with most of our members, electronically. There are those of us who just don't want their email address floating around. This newsletter seems to be the only way to contact all our members, respecting personal privacy...

...until just now.

Because of the difficulties with setting up our website, and the greater difficulties communicating with our members, we're planning to open our website at our January meeting. Even a skeleton of a website will be valuable to us, because we intend to have a Forum.

A Forum allows members to contribute, ask questions, and even carry on Society business without revealing their email address, or, even their name, if they wish.

A Forum invites members to choose a topic of their own with which to initiate a conversation about an aspect of Photography.

A Forum invites non-members to view and possibly share in the conversation.

A Forum can grow our membership roll, if each of us who wishes to discuss a topic, puts it out there. Think of something you especially like, such as the sensation of sniffing and smelling the aroma of a fresh roll of film, when you opened the can. There are probably a million-zillion other photographers who feel the same. When you write or make a video to express your passion, you'll be surprised how many other photographers share your enjoyment, but no one ever thought anyone else would connect with their personal choice or practice.

And, a Forum can change the way we carry on business and how we vote. We can work out problems as they occur, because we'll probably be the only ones checking the Forum when we start up. But, it's better to start when you can: slip, stumble, and fall at the beginning, than to wait for perfection... which almost never really comes.

So, barring some unforeseeable brick wall down this road, at the January meeting we shall push the button and go live online.



## www.wphsociety.org

### Western Photographic Historical Society

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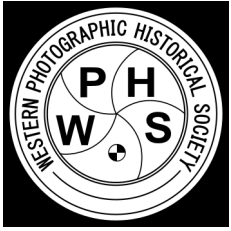
## Meeting Notice

We are meeting at the Ward 6 Tucson City Council offices at:

3202 E. First Street, Tucson.

The meetings, for the foreseeable future, will be normally on the first Thursday of the month.

**The next meeting will be on Thursday, January 5<sup>th</sup>.**



## Western Photographic Historical Society

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### UPCOMING EVENTS AND EXHIBITS

- Jan 5<sup>th</sup>     Monthly Meeting — Board Election  
Feb 2<sup>nd</sup>     Monthly Meeting  
Mar 19<sup>th</sup>    59<sup>th</sup> Annual WPHS Camera and Photographica  
Sale, Swap, & Show

We'd like your help in developing new programs especially product presentations. Please contact Robert Suomala, Program Chair, at 520-399-2796.

### MONTHLY MEETINGS

#### Next WPHS Meeting January 5<sup>th</sup>

Join us at a new meeting place, the Ward 6 Tucson City Council offices at:

3202 E. First Street, Tucson.

Consignment and member camera sales, show and tell and a brief program are featured every month (except the last two summer months). The meetings run from 6:00 PM to 9:00 PM with show programs beginning at 7:00 PM.

**All are welcome!**

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