

SPIER FALLS DAM CONSTRUCTION SLIDES: A Guide to the Collection

OVERVIEW OF THE RECORDS

- Repository:** Crandall Public Library
Center for Folklife, History, and Cultural Programs,
Glens Falls, NY.
- Creator:** Unknown.
- Title:** Spier Falls Dam Construction Slides.
- Dates:** 1900-1903.
- Abstract:** This collection of glass slides describes the construction of the Spier Falls Dam on the Hudson River, east of Corinth, N.Y. The slides show maps, plans, and views of the work site and follow the project from initial preparation of the site to completion of the work. The photographer is not identified, but may have been Seneca Ray Stoddard. Black and white reproductions have been made for some of the slides.
- Quantity:** 0.2 cubic feet (1 box, 61 glass slides)
- Identification Number:** Photographs

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Hudson River Water Power Company was incorporated in 1899 to build a dam over the Hudson River and a hydroelectric generator at the site of dam. Officers of the company were Eugene L. Ashley, president, Walter H. Trumball, vice-president, Elmer J. West, secretary, and E.H. Gray, treasurer. The chief engineer was C. E. Parsons of Glens Falls, N.Y. The dam site was at a waterfall on the Hudson River where the river passed between Mount McGregor and the Luzerne Mountains west of Glens Falls. The dam was named after Ashley's friend and former employer, William E. Spier (1848-1901), head of Glens Falls Paper Company. Work on the dam project began in 1900 and ended in 1903. The project employed 1,700 men.

The company built temporary buildings to serve as storehouses, barns, stables, blacksmith, machine, and carpenter shops below the dam on the southern bank of the river. Housing for employees and visitors was constructed one mile below the falls at a site called Cottage Park. Many of the Italian workers employed for the construction project lived below the dam in huts they build of available materials. To get to the work site the workers crossed the river on a footbridge, or by way of the company ferry.

The project began with the construction of a cofferdam made of timbers and earth. Towers were built to support a cable across the river. The cable was used to move large iron buckets full of solid debris to fill the cofferdam and to move buckets of rock, gravel, and stone excavated from the riverbed behind the cofferdam where the company planned to lay the foundation of the dam. The discovery of a large depression in the riverbed, "the hole," required a second and larger coffer dam in order to proceed with the excavation and pumping of water from the site before the company could lay masonry for the dam. Machinery was employed on site to crush stone, mix cement, and drill. Power came from hand labor, steam, and compressed air. The compressors were run off electricity. Stone for the dam came from two quarries near the dam site. The project was finished and power generated from the plant in September 1903.

SCOPE AND CONTENT OF THE RECORDS

The Spier Falls Dam Construction Slides is a collection of 61 glass slides, probably lantern slides, showing maps, plans, and views of the work site. The slides are colored and are four inches by three and one quarter inches. The photographer is not identified, but may have been Seneca Ray Stoddard. The slides follow the progress of the work from initial preparation of the site to completion of the project. They show how hand labor, horsepower, steam and electric power were all used on the project. The use of machinery is clearly depicted. The slides show the difficulty of the engineering task as well as the conditions under which the men worked. It is evident from the slides that local timber, rock and gravel were used on the project.

The slides were previously assigned numbers from 1 to 78, but several numbers are not present, indicating that this collection may be incomplete. It is not known where the missing slides may be or even if they ever existed. Black and white reproductions have been made for some of the slides.

ORGANIZATION OF THE RECORDS

The slides are numbered and are in roughly chronological order. A box list is available.

RELATED MATERIAL

The slides are reproduced in a book about the dam construction titled, *Story of a Great Enterprise: Hudson River Water Power Company*. Glens Falls Publishing Company, 1903, as well as reproduced in two photo albums in the Stoddard Collection at the Chapman Historical Museum in Glens Falls. These photo albums are attributed to Seneca Ray Stoddard. Further evidence that Stoddard made the slides comes from the foreword to *Story of a Great Enterprise: Hudson River Water Power Company* in which the author mentions Stoddard's work designing the covers of the book.

INDEX TERMS

- Topics:** Dams—Design and construction—Hudson River (N.Y. and N.J.)—
Photographs.
Hydroelectric power plants—Design and construction— Hudson
River (N.Y. and N.J.)—Photographs.
- Places:** Hudson River (N.Y. and N.J.)—Photographs.
- Organizations:** Hudson River Water Power Company (N.Y.)—Photographs.
- Form/Genre:** Photographs.
Lantern slides.
- Important People:** Stoddard, Seneca Ray.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

- Preferred Citation:** Spier Falls Dam Construction Slides,
Center for Folklife, History, and Cultural Programs,
Crandall Public Library, Glens Falls, NY.
- Accession Information:**
- Processing Information:** Arranged and described by Katherine P. Chansky

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE RECORDS

Spier Falls Dam Construction Slides

Container List – Slides

NOTE: Page references provided below are to *Story of a Great Enterprise: Hudson River Water Power Company*. Glens Falls Publishing Company, 1903.

1. Overview of Site, map, or plan
2. Spillway cross section
3. River Section Feb. 3, 1903
4. Power House Wheels & Generators
5. Power House Foundations Jan. 12, 1903
6. River flowing over temporary dam
7. Site of dam
8. Dry falls and river bed
9. Construction
11. View of river and "Cottage Park"
12. View below dam
13. Wooden bridge over dam in winter
14. Construction-workers on timber frame
15. Workers posed on timber frame
16. Dam near completion
17. Dam near completion
19. Dam construction
21. Spillway construction
22. Waterfall
23. Men in boat below dam
25. High water flow over dam
26. Men laying cable over river
27. Logs positioned above falls
28. Spillway construction
29. Construction
31. Workers below cofferdam
32. Bridge
33. Bridge
34. Bridge
36. Bridge
38. Bridge
40. Water over cofferdam
41. Logs in river
43. Waterfall over cofferdam
44. Spillway construction
45. Men excavating stone
46. Excavated hole

- 47. Hole in winter
- 48. Gravel dump using pulley/cable system
- 49. Men in hole (broken slide)
- 50. Cofferdam
- 52. Men at quarry (?) in front of a wooden building
- 53. Men, women, children posing on rocks with rock pulley system
- 54. Men on rocks
- 55. Construction
- 56. Construction
- 57. Construction
- 59. Masonry of overfall section, Spier Falls Dam
- 60. Construction
- 601/2. Construction
- 61. Dam from Saratoga Side pg. 58
- 62. Construction
- 64. Laying last stone on floor of excavation Oct. 9, 1902 pg.62
- 67. Penstocks located in canal wall pg. 69
- 68. Penstocks
- 69. Construction
- 70. Dam
- 72. Man posing under dam, water over dam
- 75. Dam construction in winter
- 77. Water flowing over dam.
- 78. Construction below dam

Container List – Negatives

Negatives exist in the Joseph Levy Photograph Collection for all slides as represented above with the exception of #'s: 10, 18, 20, 24, and 33.

Container List – Prints

Prints exist in the Joseph Levy Photograph Collection only for the following #'s listed above in the slides: 3, 25, 32, 41, 49, 54, 55, 68, 72, and 75.