

The Shipler Photographs of the Utah State Capitol Construction

Four generations of Shiplers took photographs of Salt Lake City and the Great Basin. James Wilson Shipler (known as J.W.) arrived in Utah in 1890. He was 41 years old. He had left parents and a wife in Pennsylvania in 1872 and for the next 18 years made extended stops in Denver, Montana and finally Utah in pursuit of a fascination with accounts of life in the West.

J.W. opened his commercial photography store on Main Street and First South in 1903. For the next three quarters of a century the Shiplers – father, son, grandson and great grandson – operated the business under a motto J.W.’s son Harry (who merged his competing business with his father’s in 1909 and subsequently managed the company) wrote as a caption on promotional photos: “I’ll go anywhere to photograph any thing.”

Harry secured a contract as the official photographer of the Utah State Capitol construction in time to document the groundbreaking ceremonies in 1912. The Shipler Commercial Photographers Collection, or simply the Shipler Collection, contains more than 100,000 glass negatives and prints of remarkable quality documenting every aspect of life in the Great Basin generally and Salt Lake City in particular. After James’ great grandson William Hollis closed the retail store in 1988, the collection was donated to the University of Utah. The Utah State Historical Society provides access to Shipler’s superb visual essay of the original Capitol construction; the Utah State Capitol website (www.utahstatecapitol.utah.gov) has a link to the photographs. A pictorial biography of the Shipler family, by archivist Allen Barnett with a forward by former Salt Lake City mayor Ted Wilson, called *Seeing Salt Lake City: The Legacy of the Shipler Photographers* was published by Signature Books in 2001.

