Elizabeth Wilcox photograph collection

Elizabeth Wilcox photograph collection, 1950s-1990s (bulk 1957-1973)
25 cubic feet (56 boxes).
#M-0202

Biographical Note: Elizabeth “Libby” Wilcox (née Wilson) was born in 1916 to physician Gordon Wilson and Elizabeth Elliott Wilson in Baltimore, Maryland. She attended Bryn Mawr School in Baltimore.

A freelance photographer whose work in advertising and on assignment was published in *Time, Newsweek, Life, Ladies Home Journal, Parents, Saturday Evening Post* and other national publications, Wilcox became known for her work documenting health care at the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center (currently known as the Columbia University Irving Medical Center of the New York-Presbyterian Hospital) located in Washington Heights, New York City. Her work is celebrated for images of figures such as obstetric anesthesiologist Virginia Apgar and former U.S. President Herbert Hoover as a patient (1962).

Wilcox claimed that she took her first photograph after receiving a camera from her husband, Herbert “Bud” Wilcox, Jr. during their wedding trip, in which he bet her $20 that she’d never use it. She began photographing children and opened a studio in Baltimore while her husband was overseas during World War II. After he returned, they moved to New York City where she opened another studio in Riverdale, Bronx.[1] Although self-taught, she later participated in a workshop conducted by Ansel Adams in Santa Cruz, California and received a Polaroid Foundation grant and show at the IBM Gallery.[2]

Her work with medical subjects began in 1957 when she was hired to document the progress and treatment of childhood kidney disease at the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center where her husband was on the faculty. This led to other contracts and commissions, illustrating medical research, healthcare, and other activities associated with the Medical Center.[3] She became the “unofficial” photographer of the CPMC for the next 30 years. Some of her work was used in advertising for the pharmaceutical industry and Blue Cross Blue Shield.

In 1962, she accompanied Columbia University medical students abroad for the “Medicine in the Tropics” program in West Africa. During her trip, she was also on assignment for *The Episcopalian* magazine, Chase Manhattan Bank, and IBM World Trade Public Relations to document the use of IBM computers in Lagos, Nigeria.

In 1965, she took another trip to West Africa, partially funded by the Ford Foundation to document a program to teach locals the use of modern farming equipment. While in Liberia, she also photographed nurses from the Columbia School of Nursing working at the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company plantation hospital.
Wilcox was the only photographer initially allowed to photograph the birth of the William and Peggy Kienast quintuplets delivered at Presbyterian Hospital on February 24, 1970. Her photographs were published in the *New York Times* (March 28, 1970).

Elizabeth married Dr. Herbert B. Wilcox, Jr. in 1937. They had sons Herbert, Gordon, and Thomas. They resided in Riverdale, Bronx before retiring and relocating to Redding, Connecticut and later Massachusetts.

After receiving her collection, the Augustus C. Long Health Sciences Library at the Medical Center curated a 1993 exhibit of her work titled, “Reflected Moments …” An accompanying exhibition catalog of the same title was published under the direction Marvin J. Taylor, then head of Special Collections, and Pat Molholt, then Dean and Associate Vice President for Education and Scholarly Resources.

The Library hosted another exhibit: “Snapshots from the Past: Photos of the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center from the Elizabeth Wilcox Photographic Collection 1957-1990” held March 15-June 15, 2004, to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center.

Elizabeth Wilcox died in North Branford, Connecticut at the age of 84 on May 6, 2000.


Sources:


**Scope & Content:** The collection contains photographs taken by Wilcox, the bulk being 35mm black and white negatives, in addition to color negatives and slides, 120mm and 4 x 5 formats, contact sheets, vintage prints, and tear sheets from her published work. Some materials may retain Wilcox’s editing marks, particularly contact sheets.
The bulk of the photographs depict interior scenes within Presbyterian Hospital, Babies Hospital, Vanderbilt Clinic, Harkness Eye Institute, and other institutions in what is now the Columbia University Irving Medical Center, but also contains personal photo shoots. Wilcox captured myriad scenes of the inner workings of Presbyterian Hospital and its affiliated clinics and centers, showing doctors, nurses, medical and nursing students, administrative and facility staff, volunteers, and patients. Some faculty, students, and staff are affiliated with the College of Physicians and Surgeons, School of Nursing, College of Dental and Oral Surgery, and School of Public Health.

There are many views of patient care, including surgery, emergency care, and ward rounds. Wilcox documented blood banks, x-ray machines, and other medical devices, computers, and emerging technologies. A wide-range of events are represented, such as alumni reunions, commencements, nurses’ tea, and other staff events. She also documented other hospital functions including cafeteria workers, cooks, and custodians. Images of buildings and grounds capture the construction and demolition of the Medical Center, along with panoramas and aerial views of the Hudson River and George Washington Bridge.

Detailed descriptions of photographs are found in notes left on negative glassine sleeves and manila envelopes, along with indices created by Wilcox at the time of her donation (1991-1992). Due to the idiosyncratic nature of these sources, they can be researched internally with the aid of Archives & Special Collections staff.

Wilcox indicates that another filing system (EW) contained non-Columbia related images. Although she did end up donating some of these images—such as those taken in Liberia—most of her original negatives not related to CPMC and healthcare are not part of this collection.

ARRANGEMENT: The collection has been divided into 4 series: I. Negatives; II. Slides; III. Contact Sheets; IV. Printed Photographs.

BOX NUMBERS 1-24
The negatives reflect Wilcox’s filing system, with negatives arranged by job type and number. Each job number is usually contained in one small envelope. Each envelope usually contains more than one roll of film. Some contain multiple film formats, the bulk 35mm, 120mm, and 4 x 5. A smaller number contain printed photographs, slides, and contact sheets. The job numbers follow a rough chronological order.

The original glassine sleeves separated for preservation purposes have been retained due to the wealth of information written upon them.

Subseries are as follows:

Subseries 1.1: Old Presbyterian Hospital Volunteers (OPHV), 1957 (1 box)
Images depict volunteers and their work at Presbyterian Hospital, particularly Vanderbilt Clinic and Babies Hospital.
Subseries 1.1: Old Presbyterian Hospital (OPH), 1957-May 1960 (3 boxes)
The “OPH” photo shoots precede “PH” implying a simple reorganization of her filing system in May 1960. Both subseries depict personnel, patients and visitors to the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center, ranging in subject from facilities and custodial workers to associated Columbia University commencements and alumni events. These negatives appear to have two different numbering systems: “job” and frame number. The frame numbers correspond to the OPH contact sheets in Series II.1.

Subseries 1.2: Presbyterian Hospital (PH), May 1960-1991 (21 boxes)
The bulk of the negatives, “PH” photographs range in purpose and subject. Subjects depicted include Medical Center buildings and grounds, trustees, students, patients, nurses, doctors, social workers, therapists, technicians and other staff and administrators. Students and faculty represent departments such as Anesthesiology, Pathology, Radiology, Obstetrics, Physiology, Psychiatry, Orthopedics, Urology, Physical Therapy, Pharmacology, Dermatology, along with Tropical Medicine and the Parasitology lab. Spaces include Maxwell Hall, Harkness admitting unit, Babies Hospital playroom, tennis courts, Neurology operating room, P&S Library, cardiac and open heart recovery room, Squier Lab, Bard Hall, Dental Clinic, Delafield Hospital, and eye clinic among others.

Scenes and events more specifically include premature nurseries and newborn babies, surgery, Betatron oxygen radio therapy, alumni reunions, nurses and doctors caring for patients, staff portraits, retirement teas, entertainment in the pediatric ward, commencement ceremonies, Orthopaedic Surgery Christmas pageant and other Christmas celebrations, Babies Hospital’s “Doll’s Tea Party,” Red Cross nursing aides, food service and dieticians, hospital kitchen staff, oxygen tents, x-ray room, open heart surgery and pump, electron microscope, P&S Club students, bronchoscopy, Cystic Fibrosis Luncheon, cancer research experiments, iron lunch, tank respirators, Orthopaedic Auxiliary, nursing classrooms, Mary Harkness Auxiliary, electroencephalograms (EEGs), P&S medical school breakfasts, blood bank, microbiology lab, teaching in amphitheater, 25-Year Club, P&S Group Clinic, Dr. Dana Atchley Tea, Dental School admissions, Neurological Institute intensive care unit, art shows, hospital tours and volunteer teas, Department of Public Interest parties, candy strippers, and more.

These negatives correspond with the PH contact sheets found in Series II.3.

**Subseries 1.4: Other, 1957-1994 (1 box)**
Negative sleeved without an OPH, PH or BH number or those that were pulled for reproduction and then not labeled for re-filing fall in this subseries. This includes her work documenting Presbyterian Hospital nurses at the Firestone Plantation, Liberia in 1965. Also includes images for nursing brochures in the 1960s, and Elizabeth Wilcox’s portrait photographed by Deborah Rudolph in 1992 and published in the *Reflected Moments* exhibition catalog (1993).

**Series II. Contact Sheets, 1957-1991.**
**Box Numbers 25-32, 46**
These contact sheets represent Wilcox’s working proofs. They correspond to OPH, PH, and BH negatives, and show editorial marks in grease (wax) pencil on the images and notes on the back, often stamped with her copyright notice. Some contact sheets may contain multiple PH numbers. According to Wilcox’s notes, there should be a contact sheet for each roll of film. Frame numbers were hand-inked on film for 120mm negative film lacking frame numbers, the bulk from OPH negatives. Labels on individual contact sheets refer to job number, frame or roll number. Some OPH numbers repeat, possibly due simply to human error.

Wilcox wrote comments on the back of some OPH contact sheets to help identify the images. Therefore, the annotations may date decades later than the photographs.

**Subseries 2.1: Old Presbyterian Hospital (OPH) (2 boxes)**
These contact sheets correspond with the PH negatives found in Series I.2.

**Subseries 2.2: Babies Hospital and Nephrosis Clinic (BH/N) (2 folders)**
Organized by Wilcox’s own filing system, “BH” photographs were taken at or for those associated with Babies Hospital early in her career. She later filed images from Babies Hospital with the “PH” photographs. These contact sheets correspond with the BH negatives found in Series I.2 and I.3.

**Subseries 2.3: Presbyterian Hospital (PH) (7 boxes)**
These contact sheets correspond with the PH negatives found in Series I.3.

**Subseries 2.3: Other (2 boxes)**
Some of these are labeled “EW” and includes images of Africa. Contact sheets correspond with the negatives found in Series I.3 and I.4.

**Series III. Slides, 1960s-1990.**
**Box Number 33 (1 box)**
Consists of 35mm color slides in plastic or cardboard mounts. Multiple rolls are arranged at folder-level.

**Series IV. Printed Photographs, 1950s-1990s.**
**Box Numbers 34-47, Map Case Folder 8-9**
Photographs taken by Wilcox and printed prior to the Library’s acquisition of the collection. These vintage prints (approximately 1,110 items) represent only a small selection of her negatives and slides. Includes vintage prints and photocopies mounted to foam core related to the exhibition, “Reflected Moments,” held in 1993 at the Medical Center. Additional prints include those collected by Archives & Special Collection outside of Wilcox’s gift that have been digitized.

This series also includes tear sheets, clippings and whole publications representing her work in pharmaceutical advertising and for the Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center, the Episcopal Church, and the Columbia University School of Nursing. Publications include The New York Times, New York Doctors, SNC, P&S, Resident and Staff Physician, and Medical Times, among others.

Two unbound scrapbook pages, although appearing incomplete or unordered, were kept with plastic pages to retain non-adhered material in situ. One includes clippings from her published work in Lagos, Nigeria (1962) as featured in the article “Computers a Boon to Poor Lands,” (New York Times July 21, 1963), doctors and medicine in The Stethoscope and Medical World News, storyboards from a New York Blue Cross television commercial (1965), and illustrations for articles in the Ladies Home Journal. The second scrapbook contains vintage prints and captions in 29 numbered pages; the first is titled: “Linda: A Girl with a Hole in Her Heart.” An untitled sketchbook about a Babies Hospital patient contains vintage prints along with text in Wilcox’s hand.

**Series V. Glassine Sleeves, 1957-1994.**

**Box Numbers 48-56**

Original glassine negative sleeves that were removed for preservation purposes, but retained for the notes and marks written by Wilcox. Many are custom labeled, “Elizabeth Wilcox” or from a photography lab—usually ModernAge in New York City.

**Additional Physical Form:** Some printed photographs (Series 4) have been digitized and are held by Archives & Special Collections, Augustus C. Long Health Sciences Library.

**Language:** English.

**Access:** Digitized copies are provided for research before the use of originals. Because the records include Protected Health Information (PHI) as defined by the US Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), access is allowed only under the terms of Archives and Special Collections’ [Access Policy to Records Containing Protected Health Information](https://example.com). Some photographs may not be permitted to be published due to the provisions of the HIPAA Privacy Rule.

**Copyright:** Herbert & Elizabeth Wilcox ceded the copyright to her photos jointly to Columbia University in the City of New York and Presbyterian Hospital in the City of New York. Please contact Archives & Special Collections for information on using images from the collection.
Cite As: Elizabeth Wilcox Photographic Collection, Archives & Special Collections, Columbia University Health Sciences Library.

Related Collections: Additional photographic prints are found in other photograph collections held by Archives & Special Collections including an artificial collection called the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center Photograph Collection and in the photographs received from the Hospital’s Office of Public Affairs (accessions #2002.01.16 and #2006.12.20). Similar topics are found in the Center for Biomedical Communications Collection.

Other Finding Aids: Indexes authored by Elizabeth Wilcox are available within Archives & Special Collections. Glassine sleeves containing Wilcox’s original marks were removed for preservation purposes have been retained.


Processing Note: Original glassine sleeves were removed and negatives were rehoused in inert, archival sleeves. These sleeves were returned to the original job numbered envelope. Roll numbers were transcribed from the original glassines to the new sleeves. Printed photographs, contact sheets, slides, and other materials were rehoused and retained in the original envelope. Contact sheets were foldered in order by job number.

Subjects
Wilcox, Elizabeth – Exhibitions.
Babies Hospital (New York, N.Y.) – Photographs.
Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center – Photographs.
Edward S. Harkness Eye Institute – Photographs.
Firestone Plantation Company—Photographs.
Presbyterian Hospital (New York, N.Y.) – Photographs.
Sloane Hospital for Women (New York, N.Y.) – Photographs.
Vanderbilt Clinic (New York, N.Y.) -- Photographs.
Clinics – Photographs.
Emergency medical services – Photographs.
Health care professionals – Photographs.
Health facilities – Photographs.
Hospitals, Teaching -- New York City.
Hospitals -- Medical staff -- Photographs.
Intensive Care, Neonatal.
Medical laboratories -- Photographs.
Medical offices -- Photographs.
Medical personnel – Photographs.
Nurses -- Photographs.
Nurseries – Photographs.
Operating rooms -- Photographs.
Patients -- Photographs.
Physicians -- Photographs.
Surgery -- Photographs.
Exhibitions.
Medicine.
Physicians.

Portraits.
Black-and-white photographs.
Color photographs.
Contact sheets.
Black-and-white negatives.
Color negatives.
Color slides.