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Lou Smaus 1916–1990 • Niagara Part 2

Remembering Louis and Jewel Smaus

When NSA Board Chairman Louis Smaus died Nov. 22, 1990 (only a few months after the death of his wife Jewel) the news spread quickly among his many friends in both photographic and other organizations. Stereo World was able to include only a brief notice in Vol. 17 #4. The loss of such dedicated and caring people calls (at the very least) for some written tribute and yet makes writing ANYTHING difficult to begin and harder to finish with any feeling that justice has been done to the subject. One member who was able to put his thoughts on paper was photo historian and Louis and Jewel's close friend, Peter Palmquist.



Jewel and Louis Smaus helping represent the NSA at the 1983 Congress of the International Stereoscopic Union in Buxton, England.

In many ways the National Stereoscopic Association represents a confederation of friends linked together by their passion for stereoscopy, both past and present. Yet, among these friends, none were better champions of the NSA than Louis and Jewel Smaus. They were also wonderful and compassionate friends on a personal level; steady, generous and considerate to a fault.

My first contact with Louis dates back to the mid-1970s when we exchanged letters concerning our mutual interest in Yosemite photographers. My correspondence from that period reveals the type of person he was; well-organized, knowledgeable and above all – enthusiastic. Over the ensuing years our contact has been almost constant – by letter, telephone and personal visit – and I owe Louis perhaps the finest compliment that one can bestow; he was “a true friend.” Who can forget the happy evenings spent at the Smaus home following regional NSA meetings, a topic frequently mentioned during recent encounters with mutual friends.

During the past few weeks I have had the sad task of assisting Bob and Rick Smaus as they sorted the artifacts of their parent's creative lives. Jewel's writings and

collected notes have already been deposited where other scholars can use them. I am trying to do the same for Louis's collected papers.

I wanted to make the existence of these papers known – they will go to the Oliver Wendell Holmes Stereoscopic Research Library – and to mention the extent of the humanity exhibited by this material. It is truly amazing how many different people corresponded with Louis over the years, likewise, the wide range of topics discussed. Louis, it turns out, never threw any of these letters away. His handwritten notes and thoughtful comments were also preserved. Details concerning the early years of the NSA are there, as well as his meticulous notes concerning stereoscopy in general. Yosemite, and information on the preservation of wilderness also predominate.

Less well-known, perhaps, is his early commitment to photography. It seems clear that, given another life to live, he probably would have spent it *behind* the camera, especially one with two lenses. We of course well remember his outstanding stereoscopic photographs presented as masterful 3-D slide shows.

Louis also loved railroads and trolley-cars. (He often devoted what little spare time that he had to the restoration of trolleys at the San Jose Historical Museum.) He was an avid collector of *anything* relating to stereoscopy. His historical interest, obviously, was mainly Yosemite. Yet, he could not resist a bargain opportunity to pick up stereo (and other) cameras, viewers and miscellaneous items of all kinds. He also collected pertinent literature. In fact, I don't think that he ever discarded any information related to his various collecting passions. (He probably kept every sale catalog that he ever received.)

As I write, these valuable materials are on their way to the NSA Library. It will take the Holsteins much time and effort to evaluate and organize the “Louis Smaus Papers” but their long-range historical value is self-evident. I find that I cannot truly express my warm personal feelings and recollections of Louis and Jewel Smaus. They will be missed, and happily remembered, as long as I live. I am equally certain that any of you who knew them (even in passing) will know what I mean.

– Peter E. Palmquist ■

