

Photography Timeline

The MGH Photo Lab made this booklet to share some history of the lab, the hospital and the photo industry. It isn't a complete view.
We hope you enjoy learning something new!





1846

Daguerreotype photography

Documenting operations

On October 16, 1846, dentist William T.G. Morton and MGH surgeon John Collins Warren, used anesthesia when operating on Gilbert Abbott who later said "he had felt a scratching sensation, but no pain."

There are no photographs of the first pain-free surgery. To document it, the following year, the procedure was recreated and photographed by Albert Sands Southworth and Josiah Johnson Hawes.

What was it like to be in the room? Exposure times of early photos were long - from 20 seconds to 15 minutes! - requiring subjects to stay completely still.

Processing the daugerrototype plate was a toxic task that included the chemical mercury before sealing the image behind glass.

1839: Daguerreotype invented by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre



Daguerreotype of **Louis Daguerre** in 1844 by Jean-Baptiste Sabatier-Blot

In 1839, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre perfected the daguerreotype - a copper plate exposed to light created an image.

The French government bought the patent in 1839 as a gift to the world and in return, gave Daguerre a pension for life.



Ether Dome operations represented with daguerreotype photography.



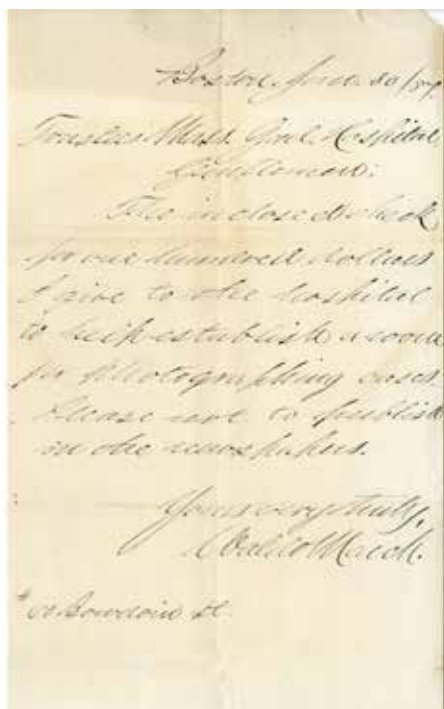
1887

Clinical photography begins

A \$100 gift, priceless

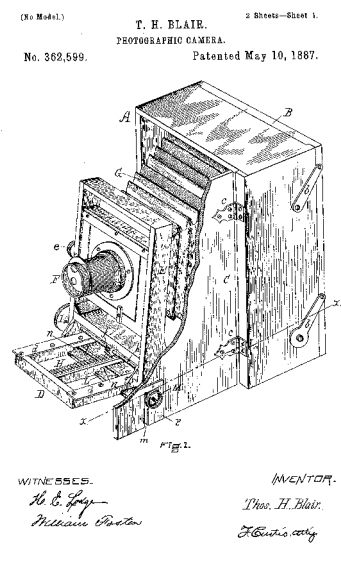
In 1887, "a gift of \$100 was received from Mr. Waldo March to help establish a room at the Hospital for photographing cases."

Cameras at the time were big and bulky. A room in the hospital to photograph cases changed how photography could be used at the hospital. By 1890, to keep up with demand, the Kingsley Studio was built. It stood near the western end of the Bulfinch Building, until razed about 1900 to make way for new construction.



March's original note sent with the \$100 check.

Dry plate camera invention makes photography mobile



1887 patent for the Thomas H. Blair dry plate camera.

This camera was like the iPhone of its time! No more wet plates to prep before taking a photo.

Photographers could take out a piece of dry film when they were ready to take a photo. No liquid, no chemicals. Just take the photo.



Apothecary + Photography

It wasn't unusual for an apothecary to also be a photographer. Taking photos of hospital patients and cases was part of the job. This is how **Walter J. Dodd** started out at Mass General Hospital.

Born in England in 1869, he moved to America at the age of 10. He went to public school and by the age of 13, he was a janitor at a Harvard lab where he listened in on lectures. He later attended medical school and became Walter J. Dodd, MD.

When Dodd became the MGH apothecary, he also started his experiments with X-ray technology. In 1896, his experiments were at the Neurological Outpatient Department, part of the now-demolished Gay Ward. Dodd worked closely with radiation causing health issues throughout his working life.

Between 1887 - 1908, Dodd worked with other clinical staff including William A. Cameron and Charles H. Sampson.



Early x-ray circa 1897.

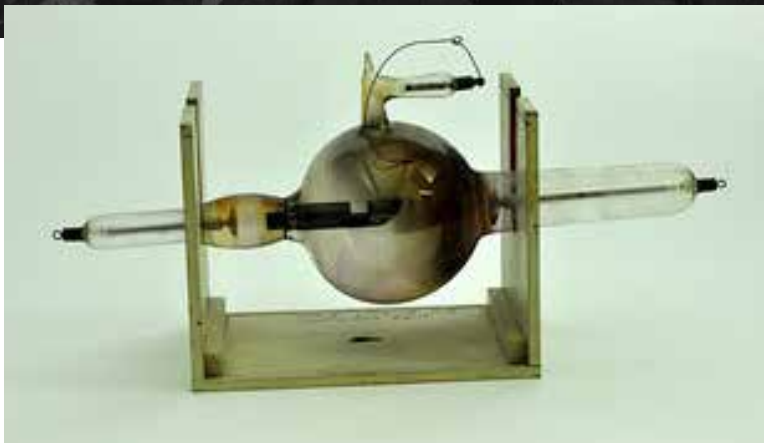
Walter J. Dodd's handwriting is on the mount around the film.

1892

Early X-ray photography



X-ray photography pioneer
Walter J. Dodd

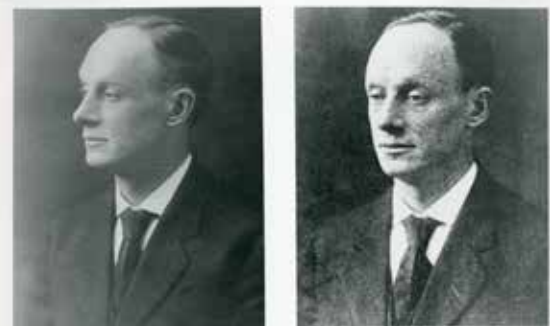


X-ray tube used by Walter J. Dodd.

From the archives:

"It was like a square cubicle....as I remember it, hung with black curtains, and I was frightened. I didn't understand it at all. And when he came in, I saw by the light that his face was completely marked with blue marks and that his hands were enclosed in a sort of mittens, as far as I could see. I couldn't see any fingers."

– Miss Jackson from a 1914 visit for a chest x-ray.



WALTER JAMES DODD
Pioneer Roentgenologist at the M.S.U. and Martyr to Humanity 1889-1916
On the right is the only known unretouched photograph of Dr. Dodd showing the extensive radiation damage to the skin of his face. On the left is a retouched photograph taken the same day. (J.W.D., 1977)

Radiation burns and scars.

Dodd had many scars on his face from radiation burns and by 1914 had lost many of his fingers from skin cancers.

Photographs of Dodd were retouched to minimize scarring on his face. The unretouched photo on the right shows Dodd's radiation damage to his face.



1930
First medical photographer

Medical photograprer hired

Historically, the apothecary was also the hospital photographer because some skills from pharmacy were translatable to darkroom photo development. But by the 1920s it became clear that there was too much work at the hospital for one person to do both roles.

The MGH Board of Trustees, influenced by the technical advances of photography and an increased volume of clinical photography when the new Baker Memorial Hospital opened, voted to establish a photography laboratory in 1927.

In 1930, Mass General Hospital hired photographer **Wilbour C. Lown** to be the hospital's first full time staff medical photographer. A studio was created in the Bulfinch basement to meet the hospital's needs, which included photographs for medical records and journal articles, medical textbooks, and slides for lectures.



Mrs Achrie, admin for Mr Lown.



From the archives:

"Mr. Judson Niece came to the hospital in about 1933 as a patient of Dr. Paul White's. In return for laboratory privileges, he helped Mr. Lown, and gradually took a good share of the scenic pictures of the hospital, groups, parties, etc. He died in December 1939."



Photographing a surgical specimen with a copy stand, lights and medium format camera.

1936

First color photography

Color transparency film



Eastman Kodak introduces Kodachrome color film.

In 1925, the German company Leica sold a **35mm camera**. The 1(A) model is credited revolutionizing handheld photography.

The development of powerful **flashbulbs** in 1929 helped with low-light situations outside of a studio.

Color film, easy-to-transport 35mm cameras and flashes meant photographers could control exposures outside of the studio.

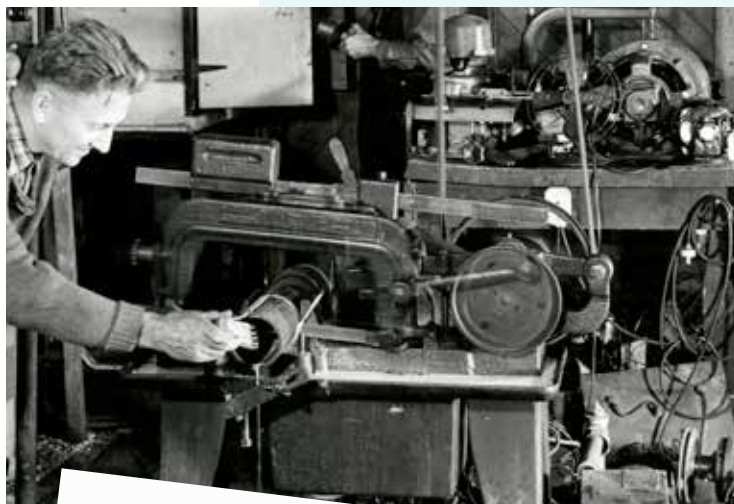


1942

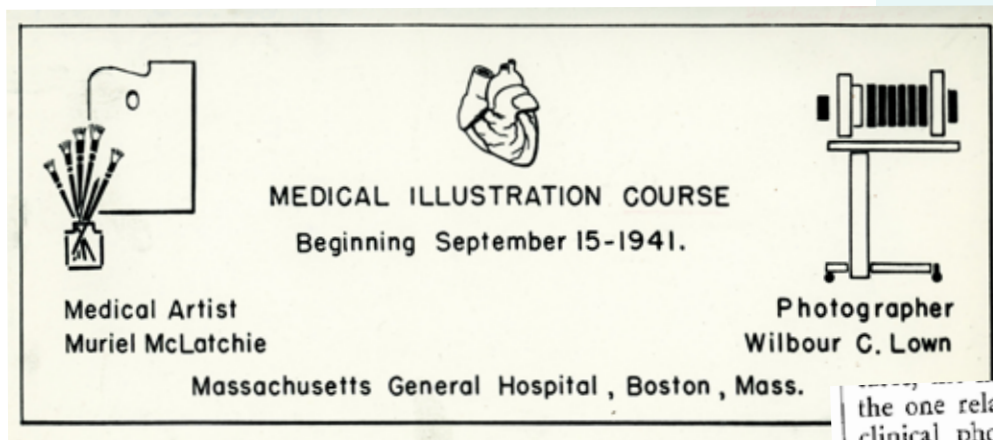
Maintenance Photography

Photographing the MGH Community

More mobility, greater control of camera gear and lighting outside of a studio meant MGH photographers were on the move. In 1942, the MGH Photo Lab spent time with Buildings and Grounds documenting daily work life.



Tony Maggionta and crew.



Medical Art Department

From the archives, May 1948:

"During the months of April and May, the Medical Art Department and the Photographic Laboratory is presenting a serial pictorial story of the activities of their respective departments. The purpose of the exhibit is to assist the members of the hospital by giving information on the techniques in Medical and Photographic Art, together with cost of engraving and types of paper used in reproduction."

the one related directly to the patient — clinical photography being a useful adjunct to medical care. In the field of education, a student of photography is often taken under wing; in addition, 7 or 8 students from the MGH School of Medical Illustration are given photographic instruction during their course. With respect to community relations, the services of the Photo Lab are often utilized

Visual classes

In the 1940 and 50s, **medical illustrations and photography worked together**. The teams provided visual classes for the MGH community.



1948
First Nikon Camera

Nikon's first camera, Nikon Model 1

The Nikon Model I was released in 1948. While this 35mm rangefinder camera wasn't sold in America, the Nikon S model and M did make it to U.S. stores. Up until 2024, the MGH Photo Lab used Nikon brand cameras for photography.



1952

First Medical Photographer

Introducing Mr. Withee, our Medical Photographer and head of department

"Today the photography department is trying to keep pace with Medical Science. This is no small order. Requests range from photos of anything from brain waves....to showing blood cells flowing through ...vessels. This department has worked with closed circuit TV, showing a group of doctors making rounds on the wards."

In the 1950s, photographing clinical specimens for medical journals and various other books was much of the work. In the studio, pathological specimens, patients, and research equipment was photographed. Motion pictures were even being made!

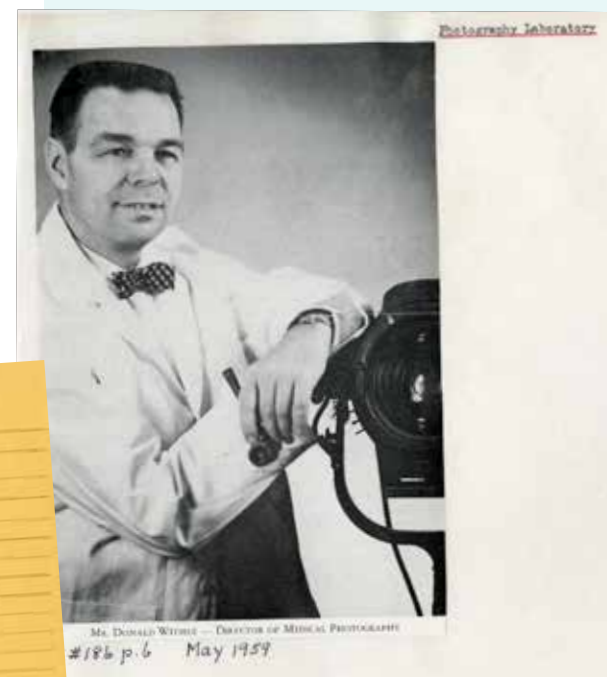
From the archives:

"When Mr. Lown joined the Armed Forces in 1944, Richard St. Clair was appointed head photographer and Donald C. Withee his assistant. Mr. St. Clair was replaced by Mark J. McCann in 1947. Mr. Withee succeeded McCann as department head in 1952, and since that time his staff has grown to 5 assistants and associates."

Miss Gerdi A. Loeser is the department's expert on 35mm transparencies. The 2 young ladies who greet callers with a smile are Miss Mary T. Burke, secretary, and Miss Dorothy R. Gabardi. They follow each order from its initial requisition form to final delivery of the finished product."

No.	Dr.	Date
Prints	Slides	Translites
Drawings		
Graphs		
X-Rays		
Typing		
Books		
Photo-Micro		
Copy		
Misc.		

**Medical Photographer
Donald Withee, May 1959**

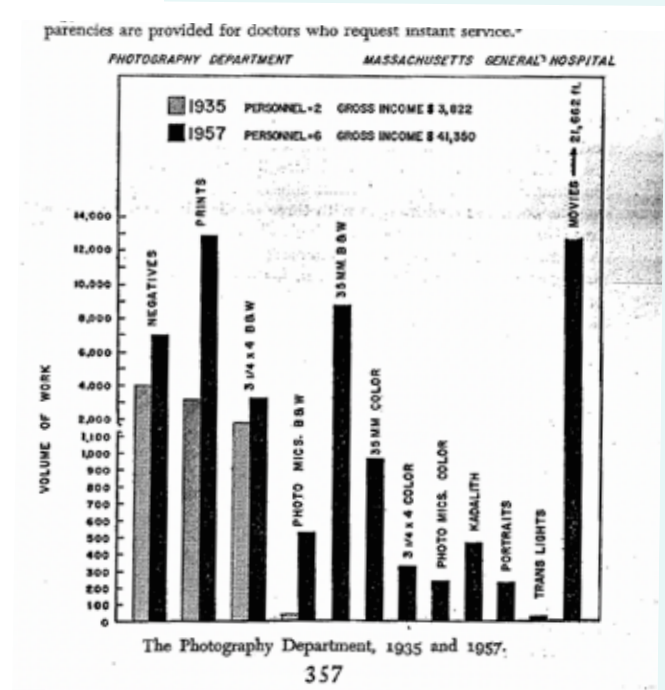


The **MGH Photo Lab** used intake envelopes to process film, make slides and keep track of customer requests. This practice continued well into the 2000s.

From the archives, May 1959:

"Present-day medical photography requires elaborate equipment and materials, and in the MGH Photo lab use is being made of 8 types of camera and 20 types of film. The production of black-and-white prints has increased about fourfold during the past 2 decades, many of them being reproductions of charts, diagrams, tables, and radiographs to accompany published works. During the past year, about 22,000 35mm. slides were made, both in color and in black and white, largely for use as illustrative material for lectures and conferences.

Motion picture photography is largely the province of Mr. Withee. In 1957, almost 22,000 feet of film were made, ranging from the time-lapse to the highspeed categories. Many sequences on 16mm. color film are taken in the operating rooms."



Work volume comparison between 1935 and 1957.



1960

Kodak Instamatic Camera

Kodak releases the Instamatic, the first point-and-shoot camera

This camera was easy to load and low cost to consumers. Photography was becoming more accessible to the general public. With simpler technology, professionals could spend more time telling stories than prepping gear.



Holiday cheer

From the archives, February 1950:

"The Medical Art Department, in planning the Christmas card display, discovered so much hidden talent in the hospital that we decided to have a series of one-man shows in the Brick Corridor during the winter and spring."

MGH
PRESENTS
A

NEW YEARS EVE
WEEKEND
IN
NEW YORK CITY

SATURDAY - SUNDAY - MONDAY
DECEMBER 30, 31, and JANUARY 1
1967 1968

\$39.95
PER PERSON ALL INCLUSIVE

Send Tour organized by
GARDEN CITY TOURS
1252 Bayshore Street, Boston, Mass. 02215
Congress 7-7020

YOUR TOUR INCLUDES

- * Round trip transportation - BOSTON/NEW YORK/BOSTON by private train (guaranteed), with stops at Back Bay, Route 128, Attleboro, and Providence.
- * Box lunch and cocktail party en route to New York.
- * Two nights at the luxurious STATLER HILTON Hotel.
- * Breakfast at the hotel on Sunday and Monday mornings.
- * Sightseeing tour of New York on Sunday afternoon.
- * Dancing to a 10 piece Orchestra at the hotel on New Year's Eve. (No cover - No minimum.)
- * See in the New Year in a carnival atmosphere in Times Square.
- * All tips ... All taxes.
- * Services of Tour Conductors.

DETAILED ITINERARY

SATURDAY, December 30
Leave by private train at 8:00 AM for New York. A box lunch will be provided, and you will enjoy cocktails on the way. Arrive in New York (Penn. Station), and proceed directly upstairs to the Statler Hilton where your luxurious rooms will be waiting for you. Balance of the day is free - shopping, seeing the decorations, or browsing around.

SUNDAY, December 31
Breakfast over, the morning is free for church services; in the afternoon you may wish to relax for the festivities ahead. This evening get into a festive mood with dancing to a 10 piece orchestra in the hotel ballroom - then, later in the evening, move uptown to join the holiday crowd in Times Square, and welcome in the New Year in the traditional New York manner.

MONDAY, January 1
Extra hour's sleep this morning, and breakfast at your hotel. Relax this morning - in the afternoon you will be taken on a sightseeing tour of New York, including a drive along Fifth Avenue, a visit to the Financial District, the Bowery, Chinatown, and other interesting highlights. Return to your hotel in time to board your private train for your trip home.

Looking forward to being able to welcome you on this exciting trip. In any case we wish you a very ...

HAPPY NEW YEAR

Statler Hilton

Rate of \$39.95 per person based on double or triple occupancy. Single rate is \$4.00 extra. Reservations definitely limited.

RETURN TO:
MRS. M. ROBERT PERSONNEL DIRECTOR
Moseley I ext 2215

Deadline:
Enclosed please find \$_____ to apply as deposit for _____ persons. (Please list every name in the party.)

☐ (\$15.00 Minimum Deposit Per Person)
Check here for single accommodation. (\$9 extra.)
Complete Balance Due by December 8, 1967

Make Checks payable to Garden City Tours

NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
PHONE _____
NAME _____
ADDRESS _____
PHONE _____

RESERVATIONS DEFINITELY LIMITED

Makes returned as full up to December 8, 1967. Beyond that date substitution of qualified groups will be allowed. Booking limit will be maintained, & there is no substitution available to replace the cancellation after December 8, 1967, and charges incurred by Garden City Tours in connection with this reservation will not be refunded.

100M

In 1967, for \$39.95, MGH staff could travel to New York City for a weekend!

From the MGH News archives

April 1978

The pictorial needs of medical investigators cannot be relegated easily to an independent commercial studio. "Researchers must ally themselves closely with people who understand the complexity of the studies and can also deliver the services needed with speed and absolute accuracy," explained Mr. Stanley Bennett, who directed the MGH Photography Department for 17 years.

Aided by a staff consisting of Robert Crivello, Joel Salhanick, Marlene Fuchs and Kathleen Grady, Mr. Bennett's laboratory [since 1977] has processed a record 11,500 orders from more than 300 MGH staff personnel.

"Our dollar volume has more than tripled since 1961, Mr. Bennett said. "This can be attributed to new techniques and new films which have allowed us to consistently turn out products faster and better than before."

"We raised prices only once, in 1968. The increase in our volume alone has kept us abreast of inflation. In fact, we recently reduced the price of two much sought items."

1978 Price Comparison

MASSACHUSETTS GENERAL HOSPITAL PHOTOGRAPHIC LABORATORY PRICE SCHEDULE			
EFFECTIVE OCTOBER 1, 1946			
DEVELOPING FILM		LANTERN SLIDES	
35mm		Single	\$4.75
Roll Film	3.50	Double	1.50
Plates & Cut Film	.25	Triple	2.25
Film Packs	1.00	Quadruple	3.00
CONTACT		PRINTS	
Using 5x7 paper	.25	ENLARGEMENTS	
Using 8x10 paper	.50	Using 5x7 paper	.40
Using 8x11 paper	.50	Using 8x10 paper	.75
Using 8x13 paper	.50	Using 8x11 paper	.75
		Using 8x13 paper	.75
		Using 11x14 paper	1.25
		Using 14x17 paper	2.00

Example of 1946 pricing.



Dr. Richard J. Smith, Chief of Hand Surgery in the MGH Orthopaedic Service, outlines his photographic needs to Miss Kathleen Grady, Administrative Aide in the MGH Photo Lab.



Flower power

Abram Bekker has a long history with Mass General Hospital. In 1991 his career began at the MGH Photo Lab. Over the years he photographed many people and events - and clowns!





1991

Abram Bekker



Paul Batista, left, and **Abram Bekker**, right, in September 2003.



Price List



MASSACHUSETTS
GENERAL HOSPITAL

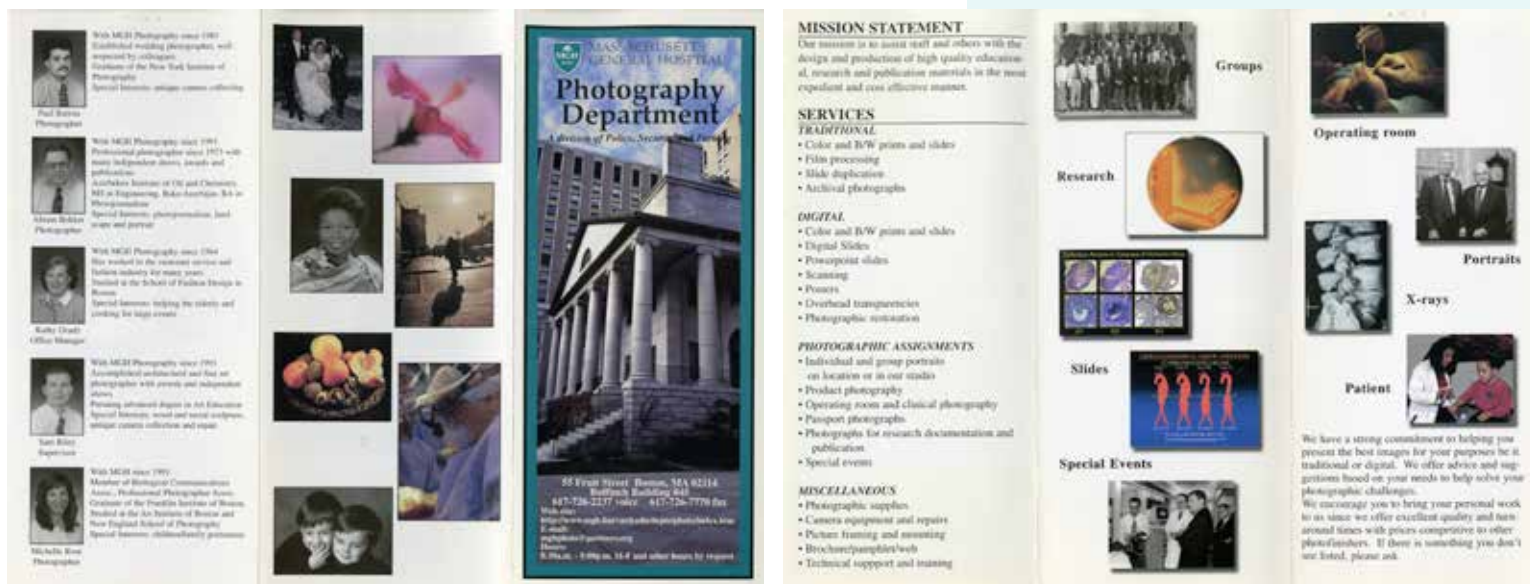
Photography Department

Internegatives

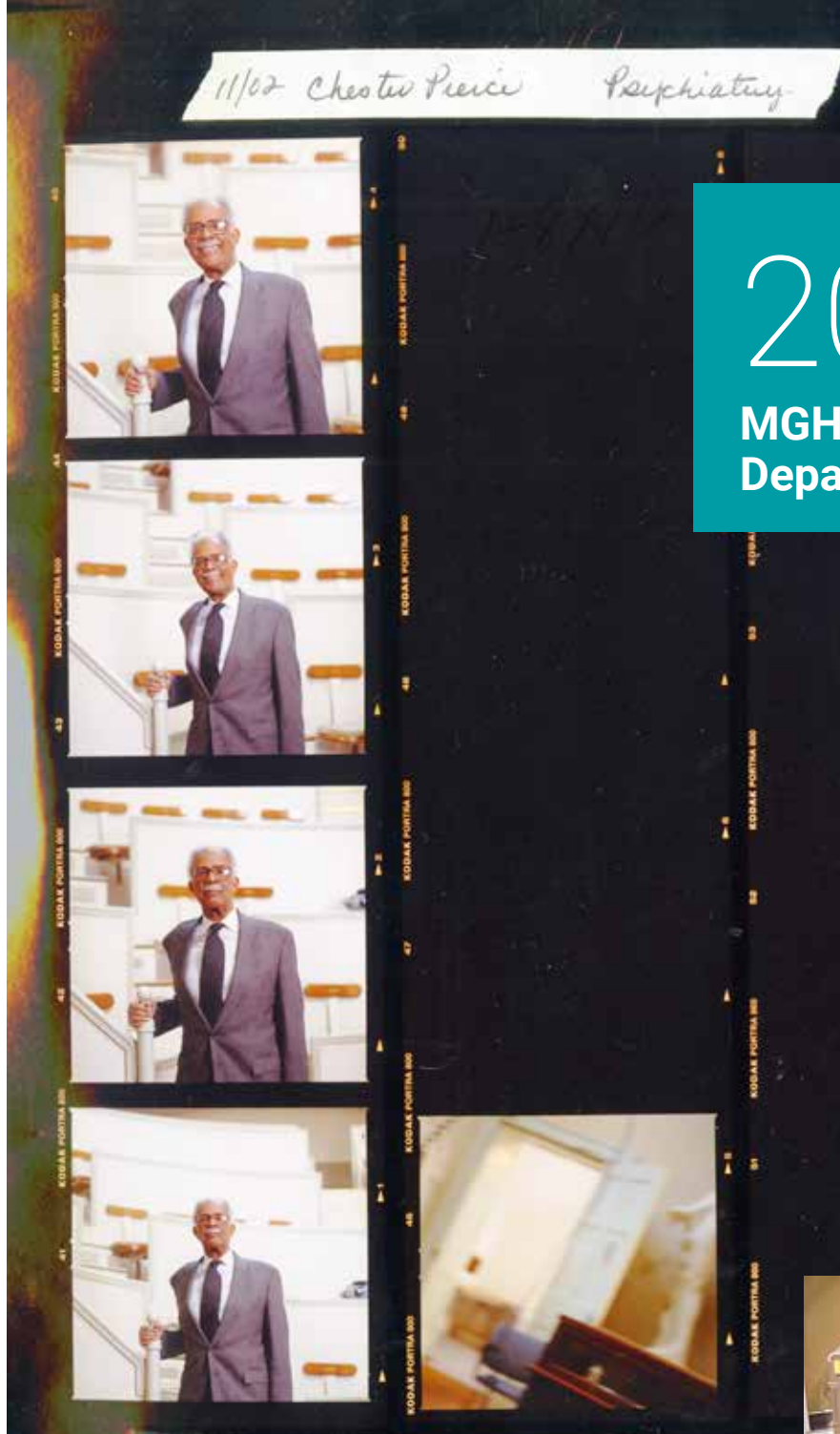
Changing photography services

The department's strategy is to move and shift with the hospital community's needs and keep up with industry technology. Innovation is an essential strategy in healthcare.

Examples of services from 2000 that are discontinued or redeployed elsewhere: x-rays, internegatives and microscopic photography.



A trifold brochure circa 2000.



2000

MGH Photography Department

Chester M. Pierce, MD

Chester M. Pierce, MD dedicated his career over six decades to reducing suffering associated with mental illnesses. In 2009, The MGH Department of Psychiatry named the Global Psychiatry Division in his honor.

The 2002 contact sheet is now considered vintage. The department was digital by the mid-2000s. Now we are more likely to print digital contact sheets on regular copy paper.

New digital technology

Digital cameras shook up the photography industry starting in 1991 with Kodak's "portable" digital storage unit that attached to a film camera. By 2002, the digital still camera (DSC) was more compact with better image quality. Within years, professional photographers stopped using film and opted for digital cameras.



Early Kodak DSC examples.

Photo credits:
John - Flickr: Early digital!
GcG commonswiki



Photo staff in the studio and office in 2009.



Kathy Grady.



Michelle Rose.



Paul Batista, Abram Bekke.

2009

MGH Photography Lab Team

Office refresh

In **2008-2009**, the MGH Photo Lab did major construction to the current Bulfinch basement office space. It was designed to maximize space for – at the time – a new service: large scale printing. With multiple machines and people, the space was optimized multiple workflows.

Photography and Printing



Kathy Grady at the front desk.



Paul Batista
trimming a poster.

Keeping Pace

In the *The Massachusetts General Hospital 1935-1955* book in a section about 'Photography and the Medical Art Department,' Mr. Withee is quoted saying: "Today the photography department is trying to keep pace with Medical Science. This is no small order."

Its worth repeating because throughout the decades, innovation, efficiency and collaboration are what drives the MGH Photo Lab to be the most effective partners to the hospital community.



Printing

The newest service in the early 2000s was large scale printing to support research posters, photo prints, brochures and copies.

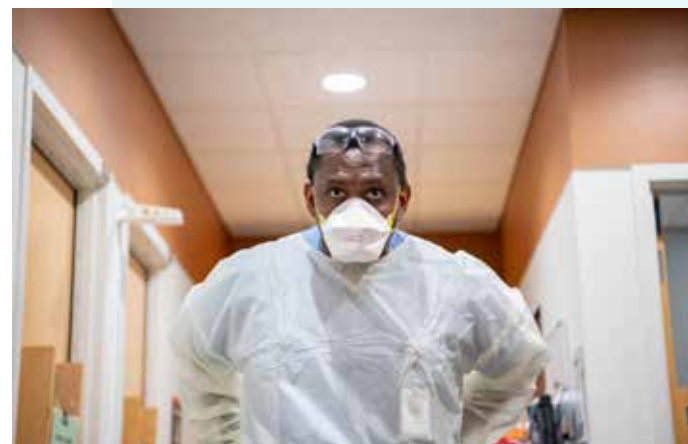
LOCAL NEWS

Massachusetts General Hospital's battle against coronavirus

On the front lines of the fight, as documented by MGH photographers



Tim Cheng, MD and Jessica Spencer, RN give each other a physically distanced high-five as nurse practitioner Jennifer Rouvina, RN looks on in the background. Photo Courtesy MGH Photography Department.



Documenting on-site

With the 2020 pandemic, the MGH Photo Lab staff was on-site every day. While we all had pandemic-related photo and video assignments, staff photographer **Kate Flock** initiated a project to document the hospital's response across multiple departments.

In the print shop, MGH Photo Lab staff routinely printed 5,000 copies of new protocols, created video guidelines, and printed wayfinding signs.

2020

COVID-19 Pandemic



Kate Flock in 2020.



Robotic surgery, brain research,
first xenotransplant.



International and regional photo and video awards:

In the last three years, we've won multiple awards for multimedia.

- BioCommunications (portrait, feature and medical)
- New England Lamplighter Awards (photo and video)

2025

Team work and innovation

Creative and innovative

The **MGH Photo Lab** focuses on five creative workflows: photo, video, animation, printing and framing.

Our aim is to collaborate within the Mass General Brigham community to provide cost-effective, purpose-driven content and quality products. Our commitment is to tell stories and document the incremental moments.

We will see you out and about.

Some weekly average stats:

8-10 photo assignments

2 videos

35-40 posters

5 frame requests



Nurses, instrument check, NICU holiday babies, group photo.



