



News Release—April 2008

## Beinecke Acquires Iowa Prints from New Haven Photographer David Ottenstein

The Yale Collection of Western Americana at the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library has agreed to purchase from New Haven photographer David Ottenstein 300 exhibition-quality prints of the architectural landscape of rural Iowa, of places where, in the photographer's words, "the built environment meets the natural landscape."

Ottenstein's photographs, part of a project that began four years ago, document the dramatic, ongoing transformation of the Iowa countryside in which industrial farmsteads consisting of thousands of acres are replacing traditional family farms of a few hundred acres. As agri-businesses accumulate large tracts of land and operate from centralized bases with larger, highly efficient modern machinery, he observes, "traditional farmhouses, barns, silos, corncribs, sheds and other farm buildings that populated the Iowa landscape are left empty. Structures are disappearing gradually but steadily as vandals and nature take their incessant toll." The simultaneous proliferation of discount retail giants has transformed the state's small towns, where family-owned stores once dominated main streets. Ottenstein's photographs capture for posterity his perspective on the physical changes that accompany the dramatic social and economic trends of 21st-century America. George Miles, curator of Western Americana, observes "Mr. Ottenstein combines aesthetic and documentary impulses in ways reminiscent of Walker Evans, Margaret Bourke-White, and other American photographers of the 1930s, but with a contemporary sensibility that avoids sentimentality. The camera and photography are, for him, a means of exploring, organizing, and finding meaning in the world."

David Ottenstein graduated from Yale College in 1982. His senior project, a photographic study of New Haven harbor with a text on the history of the city and the harbor, was awarded the annual prize for best undergraduate essay in American Studies. A long-time resident of New Haven's Beaver Hills neighborhood, Ottenstein has run an independent photographic studio for over a quarter of a century,

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Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library  
Yale University, PO Box 208240, 121 Wall Street, New Haven, Connecticut 06520-8240  
[www.library.yale.edu/beinecke](http://www.library.yale.edu/beinecke) 203-432-2977

*For more information, including image use and credit*

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“Vanishing Landscape”

An exhibition of photographs

by David Ottenstein

On display through May 10, 2008

Exposure Gallery

One Whitney Avenue

New Haven, Connecticut

specializing in architectural photography. Over the last decade he has explored the way that nature has begun to reclaim part of New England’s industrial landscape, a project that has allowed him to “explore issues of beauty amidst decay.” He works predominantly with a 4 x 5 camera and traditional black and white photographic film, but has recently begun to create his prints digitally from scanned photographic negatives. Ottenstein’s photographs have received awards at numerous juried shows and been the subject of solo exhibitions throughout Connecticut. His collaboration with The Center for Prairie Studies at Grinnell College, *Photographs of Iowa: The Vanishing Architectural Landscape of the Midwest*, has been awarded a grant by the Iowa Arts Council. His Iowa images have been exhibited at the Olsen Larsen Galleries in West Des Moines, Iowa, and a selection of images from the project can be seen at Ottenstein’s website: [www.davidottenstein.com](http://www.davidottenstein.com).

At the Beinecke Library, David Ottenstein’s photographs join a rich collection of books, manuscripts, and photographs concerning the history of the American West, including extensive photographic collections by 19th-century American photographers Carleton Watkins, Timothy O’Sullivan, William Henry Jackson, and 20th-century photographers including David Plowden, Carl Mydans, Eve Arnold, Robert Giard, and Miguel Gandert.

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