

# CAPE ANN Museum

## Library & Archives

1+ 978-283-0455 x19

library@capeannmuseum.org

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### CHARLES A. LOWE NEGATIVES AND PHOTOGRAPHS COLLECTION

- Creator:** Charles A. Lowe
- Dates:** 1973-1981
- Quantity:** 27 three-ring binders, 3 document boxes, 1 oversize box:  
(32,000 monochrome images on negative film,  
100 monochrome 8x10 photographic prints,  
350 8x10 monochrome working contact sheets,  
50 offset litho printer's mat negative sheets,  
50 color images on 3x5 glossy paper,  
2,000 digital scans from additional negative film loaned  
by the Lowe family,  
500 sample prints from high resolution scans of  
individual frames)
- Acquisition:** Accession #: 2004.12 ; Donated by: Gloucester Daily Times /  
Eagle-Tribune Publishing Company; Lowe Family; Peter  
Watson, former editor of GDT
- Identification:** A36 ; Archive Collection #36
- Citation:** [Document Title]. The Charles A. Lowe Negatives and  
Photographs Collection, [Box #, Folder #, Item #], Cape Ann  
Museum Library & Archives, Gloucester, MA.
- Copyright:** Requests for permission to publish material from this  
collection should be addressed to the Librarian/Archivist.
- Language:** English
- Finding Aid:** Fred Buck, 2005; supervisor, Stephanie Buck, CAM Archivist.

27 Pleasant Street, Gloucester, Massachusetts 01930 USA

+1 978-283-0455

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## Biographical Note

Charles A. Lowe was born in Gloucester August 17, 1932 to Arthur W. and Anna Marie (Robishaw) Lowe. He attended Gloucester public schools and received his high school diploma while serving in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War. He did much of his training, including aerial photography, at the U.S. Navy Photo School in Washington D.C., and served as photographer's mate second-class. He graduated in 1957 from the Franklin Technical Institute in Boston, majoring in photography. He also studied color technique at the Professional Technical Center of the Eastman Kodak Company in 1969, and did further studies at the Montserrat School of Visual Arts in Beverly.

On September 5, 1957, at the age of 25, Lowe went to work at the Gloucester Daily Times, just as the newspaper was moving into its new building on Whittemore St. An article from the Times of Sept. 30<sup>th</sup> of that year written by Paul Kenyon describes the new employee and his duties:

“Part of the Times’ new look acquired in 1952 when the present publisher took over is a wealth of pictures – news and feature. Before this, every local picture had to be sent to an out-of-town photo-engraving plant for the making of a half-tone, usually called a cut. In 1952 a Fairchild Scan-A-Grave that made cuts from plastic right in the Times newsroom was leased. With the move into the new plant on Whittemore St., the latest machine for making plastic cuts was acquired. This is called the Klischograph. Operator of the Klischograph and first photographer in charge of the new dark room at Whittemore St. is Charles A. Lowe, a graduate of Franklin Technical Institute’s photographic course. Actually, he is the first full-time photographer and cut-maker the Times has ever had.”

Charlie Lowe’s friend and colleague at the paper, John ‘Doc’ Enos, wrote in his December 1981 obituary: “The first of his 20 photography awards – in sports, animal, feature, personality and news – came only months after he began work at the Times. The prize was for a waterfront fire picture. In 1970, he won four prizes in the New England United Press International Contest. In 1971, he won five prizes – three first place and two second place awards... He covered all the waterfront and big hotel fires in the 50s and 60s – including the fatal fire in the Bradford Building [on Main St.], the fire in the old Oceanside Hotel in Magnolia, the Hotel Gloucester on Main St., the Long Beach Inn, and the Good Harbor Beach Inn; also, the series of waterfront fires on Duncan St., the East Gloucester hotel waterfront fires, and the Cape Ann Fisheries building [on The Fort.] ... He also knew when news would happen. When Joe Garland of Eastern Point lost his boat, Cruising Club [once Howard Blackburn’s] last winter, Lowe knew that with the wind coming from the west it would be the boats moored off Eastern Point that would be in trouble. Making a photo run there, he saw Garland’s break loose and banged on Garland’s door to warn him. The picture he took was of Garland wading waist deep in the water trying to set an anchor while boatwright Larry Dahlmer clung to the bow of the boat. Later, he stayed to help Garland and friends salvage what they could of the wrecked boat.” [The complete

obituary and a later article by the same writer memorializing Charlie are included as an appendix to this register.]

Charlie Lowe grew up near the Oval playing field on Centennial Ave., a short walk from his future place of employment, and lived with his wife Christie and three children – Cynthia, Charles and Cedric - on Maplewood Court, and later back on Centennial Ave. in a house overlooking Newell Stadium and Gloucester High School. He died December 1, 1981, three months after being diagnosed with cancer.

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## Scope and Content of the Collection

The images in this collection are all output from Charlie Lowe's work as chief photographer for the Gloucester Daily Times, with the exception of a series of color images that formed the basis of an exhibition at the Sawyer Free Library in 1979. Although Charlie's employment at the newspaper lasted for almost 25 years, the negatives in this collection are primarily from the years 1974 to 1980, with significant gaps here and there through that span. Apparently, all of the negatives from the years prior to 1974 were damaged or destroyed by fire. Only a few dozen images from 1979 survived, and the first six months of both 1974 and 1980 are missing from the collection. There are a number of negative strips with identification codes on their original sleeves that differ from the system Charlie used 74-81. They appear to date from 1973 and have been provisionally identified as such. Reference to microfilm copies of the newspaper for that year should establish an accurate date of origin. Within the body of what seems to be a fairly intact sequence of negatives it has become apparent that negatives concerning specific areas of news coverage have been systematically separated and removed from the collection at some point during their storage at the Gloucester Daily Times. With very few exceptions, all police and fire events have been removed; coverage of St. Peter's Fiesta is missing, except for a few odds and ends; major weather events, coverage of the arrival of the Unification Church in Gloucester, and probably other subjects yet to be documented, have all been removed either as the entire output for certain dates, or just isolated negative strips dealing with the selected events. It is to be hoped that at some point in time this important aspect of Charlie Lowe's photojournalism will be reunited with the existing archive at the Cape Ann Historical Association.

The Lowe family's personal collection of negatives made available to CAHA for digital scans are a valuable addition, both as an illustration of his earlier work and by filling some of the gaps with other material.

Charlie's editor at the Times for many years, friend and colleague Peter Watson donated to the archive 100 prints used to make a posthumous book of photos he and others at the paper assembled for publication in 1983. Most of the prints are Charlie's personal darkroom output, and they are useful as a guide to how he might have printed negatives in the archive.

## Series Description

- I. Series I: 35mm negatives, 6 stripx6frame plastic sheet holders in three ring binders
- II. Series II: Photographic prints: monochrome 8x10, color 3x5
- III. Series III: Plain paper inkjet prints from digital scans (1200 dpi) in three ring binders
- IV. Series IV: Working contact sheets, date-coded glassine sleeves (original neg. containers)
- V. Series V: Offset-litho printer's mats of "Charles A. Lowe: Portrait of Gloucester", pub. 1983

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## Container List

### Series I – Negative Proof Sheets:

- Binder 1: 1974 - 7. undated; 1 January; 1 February; 2 March; 1 April; 3 June; 23 July; 21 August; 6 September
- Binder 2: 1974 – 21 October; 20 November; 20 December
- Binder 3: 1975 – 19 January; 16 February; 20 March
- Binder 4: 1975 – 22 April; 14 May; 17 June
- Binder 5: 1975 – 20 July; 24 August; 10 September
- Binder 6: 1975 – 32 October; 23 November; 33 December
- Binder 7: 1976 – 25 January; 17 February; 27 March
- Binder 8: 1976 - 18 April; 14 May; 23 June
- Binder 9: 1976 – 27 July; 14 August; 13 September
- Binder 10: 1976 – 24 October; 26 November; 29 December
- Binder 11: 1977 – 25 January; 22 February; 33 March
- Binder 12: 1977 – 22 April; 21 May; 18 June
- Binder 13: 1977 – 14 July; 22 August; 8 September
- Binder 14: 1977 – 20 October; 19 November; 18 December
- Binder 15: 1978 – 16 January; 17 February; 33 March
- Binder 16: 1978 – 16 April; 24 May; 19 June
- Binder 17: 1978 – 11 July; 28 August; 9 September
- Binder 18: 1978 – 16 October; 18 November; 18 December
- Binder 19: 1979 – 1 undated; 1 each every month except 0 February, 2 August  
1980 – 1 January; 1 February; 1 April; 1 June; 15 July; 29 August; 12 September
- Binder 20: 1980 – 22 October; 20 November; 19 December
- Binder 21: 1981 – 2 January; 5 February; 6 March; 5 April; 3 May; 8 June; 5 July; 1 August; 4 September

### Series II:

Box 1: 96 monochrome 8x10 photographic prints, most on heavyweight paper-base stock, some on resin-coated stock. 52 are back stamped "Charles A. Lowe

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photographer, 50 Centennial Ave. Gloucester Mass.” 44 remaining have no  
identification, prints made by several Times photographers during the process of  
assembling “Portrait of Gloucester” in 1982&3.

Box 2: 48 color 3x5 photographic prints, various subjects, from exhibit at Sawyer Free  
Library in March 1979

Series III:

Binder 1: Inkjet plain paper prints 8x10: 94 scanned images from Lowe family collection  
and 1973-4 CAHA negatives

Binder 2: Inkjet plain paper prints 8x10: 58 scanned images from 1975 CAHA negatives

Binder 3: Inkjet plain paper prints 8x10: 72 scanned images from 1976 CAHA negatives

Binder 4: Inkjet plain paper prints 8x10: 101 scanned images from 1977 CAHA negatives

Binder 5: Inkjet plain paper prints 8x10: 108 scanned images from 1978 CAHA negatives

Binder 6: Inkjet plain paper prints 8x10: 80 scanned images from 1979-80 CAHA  
negatives

Series IV:

Box 1: Contact prints on 8x10 photographic paper, most with editors’ grease pencil  
markings indicating frames to be enlarged; some with assignment sheets attached  
indicating subject of shoot. All from 1980: 28 January; 31 February; 26 March; 29 April;  
27 May; 14 June; 4 July; 2 August; 0 September; 21 October; 2 November; 2 December.

Box 2: 1500 (approx.) glassine sleeves in which negatives were stored at the Times,  
each date-stamped by photographer showing month/day; year; job number. Surviving  
contact sheets are stamped with number to match corresponding negative sleeve.

Series V:

Oversize cardboard container with printer’s mats from “Charles A. Lowe: A Portrait of  
Gloucester”, published by the Gloucester Daily Times in 1983, printed at Cricket Press in  
Manchester MA.

## Processor's Note

In the summer of 1969, my wife and I spent three months in Gloucester staying with my mother who had moved into an apartment on Fort Square a few doors down from poet Charles Olson, who was an old family friend from our days at Black Mountain College. Chatting in the street outside his house one day, Charles opened up a copy of the Gloucester Daily Times he was carrying and pointed to a photo on the front page. He said, "See that? That's Charlie Lowe's. You study that guy – he knows more about Gloucester than any of the scribblers in here..." I don't remember what the photo was, but I'm sure it was a corker. Most of them were. When we moved to Gloucester the following year I studied Charlie Lowe every time I opened the newspaper – not because someone told me to, but because his photographs were head-turners, and often had more to say than the thousand words that went with them. I went to work at the Post Office, eventually as a carrier, and in that line of work you get to know a town and its people in a way nobody else does. The deeper I came to know Gloucester, the deeper the impact Charlie Lowe's photos had on the way I saw the town. He inspired me to buy a modest 35 mm camera and start putting things on film. Eventually I took a darkroom class at the high school with a friend and got into the printmaking end of things. In the summer of 1974, my wife signed up to work one of the Victory Garden plots in the field behind the Huntress Home on Emerson Ave. Charlie had a plot close to ours and one day he took me with him in his old pickup to get some sea hay for mulch on Causeway Street behind Freddie Ercolani's restaurant. I was pretty impressed to be hanging out with one of the best photographers in the world, but swallowed my shyness enough to ask him about a photo of a fire in the Clark Cemetery that had been on the front page a few months before. I told him I'd love to have a print of it, and he laughed and said he wouldn't have a clue where the negative was. I asked him if he'd ever thought about doing a show of his photos and he replied yeah, he'd thought about it, but he was too busy to ever do anything about it. Someday, he said, someday... He did manage to put together an exhibit at the library of color shots, but I really wanted to see some of the ones that even as grainy halftones on newsprint just simply took your breath away. Charlie Lowe got stolen from us by cancer way too young, leaving too many photos still in that Nikon he loved – as he told his editor, Peter Watson, there was a Pulitzer in that camera that never got its chance to come out.

Charlie Lowe's negatives arrived at the Cape Ann Historical Association on March 26, 2004 in 12 Kodak photo paper boxes, in which they had rested more or less undisturbed for the better part of twenty years. I couldn't believe my dumb luck in being at the right place at the right time, recently retired from the Post Office, a volunteer in the Library at CAHA, and one morning in walks the pot of gold under the rainbow. If I was superstitious I might think Charlie set it up, maybe to pay me for helping him haul sea hay. Whatever the reason, I'm honored and utterly delighted to have spent the past year or more pulling images out of negatives some of which even Charlie himself never saw in any form other than a sloppy contact sheet covered in editors' markings and turning yellow from insufficient time in the fix bath. Darkroom photography has been squeezed by the digital revolution into the studios of artist/photographers, who themselves are having to go further afield and spend more money

simply to find the silver nitrate gelatin paper and chemistry to process it we amateurs took for granted not long ago. All of Charlie's negatives in the archive are Tri-x film, the photojournalists' workhorse. The grain is loose, but it's perfect for stop action shots and natural low-light situations where a flash is a no no. If you need to, you can push it to the limit by telling your camera the film's a lot more light sensitive than it's rated for, then adjusting to that level in the developer bath when you process the roll. You gain a legible image, but you pay for it with an even grainier texture. Charlie did that a lot, because he hated using a flash, and the shots where he had no choice are among the most boring of the 32,000 I've looked at.

Digital image manipulation confers on the lowly photographer a wizard's bag of tricks. After curbing my initial excitement, I spent a couple months laboriously assembling thousands of negative strips into their original sequence, putting them in archival sleeves, recording numbers, and putting them into binders. Only after all of that had been done (our Librarian is a stickler for those details, as all the best archivists have to be) did I get to the part where the fun began. I scanned each sheet into the computer at 300 dpi, assigned a file number identical to the 'date/job number' designation on the original sleeves, and began the wizardry of adjusting each individual frame for its optimal legibility. Anyone who has worked with darkroom photography can tell you this is flat-out impossible with chemical photography. The best you can do is find a happy medium exposure and print the sheet using that. The overexposed shots will come out mostly white, the underexposed mostly black. The ones where you don't screw up the exposure will be just ducky. You can get fussier, and dodge or burn sections of the sheet that need it, but by and large, a contact sheet is just to see which frames you want to make real prints of. That's what Charlie and his colleagues at the Times did, multiple times every day. The editors circle the frames they want for the article, you print those up quick and pass them on to whoever's setting up the page. That was then, this is now – every one of those passed-over, irrelevant, or illegible frames is significant in terms of the archive, be it historical, contextual or artistic. Photoshop software and a decent Macintosh computer make that a snap. As I went through each frame I kept notes on subject matter (names, places and events I could identify on the fly) and also made a list of frames to enlarge later. Scanning individual frames proved challenging, but I eventually succeeded in producing presentable images and printed a selection from those scans. Scans of the processed contact sheets and frames are stored on the library's computer and presently searchable by date. A further project is the creation of a database that will match subject matter with scanned material. It's to be hoped that in the not too distant future the Museum will be able to mount an exhibit based on the photos in the archive, and that some publication in book form will come about.

It's accepted that Gloucester and its people have been an inspiration to a long line of great painters. What is less well known is that since the 1850's, Gloucester has produced many gifted resident photographers, including Charles A. Lowe. It's my hope that he receives recognition as the true artist he was.