Ward Morgan, Digitized Photographer

By Sharon Carlson, Director, University Archives and Regional History Collections

The Morgan Photographic Collection is one of the cornerstone collections of the Western Michigan University Archives and Regional History Collections with its nearly 27,000 4x6 black and white photographic negatives. The Ward Morgan Photograph Collection reflects the people, industries, built environment, and commercial activities that resulted in Kalamazoo's being called the "Window City of America" in the 1950s. While the ordinary has been broken by some events, such as the unprecedented decision to construct the first pedestrian mall in the heart of Kalamazoo's business district in 1959, more often than not, Kalamazoo was celebrated for its typical qualities. In 1958, the United States Information Agency selected Kalamazoo as a typical American City. A pictorial exhibit, "Kalamazoo—And How It Grew," was shown in Manchester, London, Birmingham, Sheffield, Coventry, and Hull, England; and Cardiff, Wales, and Edinburgh, Scotland. The United States Information Agency also selected Kalamazoo to represent the United States as the major American contribution to the Berlin Free Fair in 1958.

Although Kalamazoo was at times known for its paper and later for pharmaceuticals, the community always depended on a multitude of middle-sized and small businesses. Kalamazoo's working class labored at paper, sheet metal, and within the service sectors of the community. The Ward Morgan Collection documents the people, processes, and products of the community from the 1940s through the 1980s.

Ward Morgan was himself a product of Kalamazoo. Born June 23, 1907 in Kalamazoo, Morgan spent all of his adult life in the community. His father, Ernest Morgan, worked for a variety of attorneys over his career. Much of this section includes photographs of roads and damaged automobiles!

The Ward Morgan Collection as part of The Making of Modern Michigan will benefit scholars, students learning about Michigan history, and free-choice learners of all ages. To date, 500 images have been prepared. To preview the Collection, see the web site at http://mmm.lib.msu.edu/search. Although The Making of Modern Michigan project has been completed, the regional center is actively seeking additional funding from other sources to continue the preservation and digitization project associated with the Ward Morgan Collection. The breadth and depth of this collection, as well as a myriad of other digitization projects in southwestern Michigan, are a strong justification for the Regional Digitization Center at WMU.

And, for Ward Morgan, the digitized collection will provide a permanent archive of a unique individual's view of a "typical" midwestern community.