

# TAKE YOUR PICTURE?

*Submitted by Village of Richfield Springs Historian Harriett Geywits*

These days, we seldom think about our ability to take a picture of anything we choose, using whatever the most modern technology provides as a way to record our memories, travel events and everyday happenings. This wasn't always the case, however.

In the 1700s - early 1800s, if you wanted a family picture for remembrance, it would have been difficult to find this service available in the Richfield Springs area. Starting in the late 1800s, there were several photography studios in the village from which to choose. Summer visitors were their best customers and photographers had also developed the ability to take scenic pictures of the area. We are grateful to them for providing us with a visual history of the area in its early years.

By the early 1900s, 'new-fangled' cameras that could be used by the general public had been developed and were carried by our local pharmacies and stores. One of the first to appear locally was the brand made by the Anso Company, a manufacturer with an ever changing history of failure and success.

The company was founded in 1842 as E. (Edward) Anthony & Co. It was America's first producer of daguerreotype plates used in early photography and marketed photographic equipment and hand cameras long before Eastman Kodak. The company merged with Scoville Manufacturing which was originally a brass producer. As the photographic market grew, the company expanded

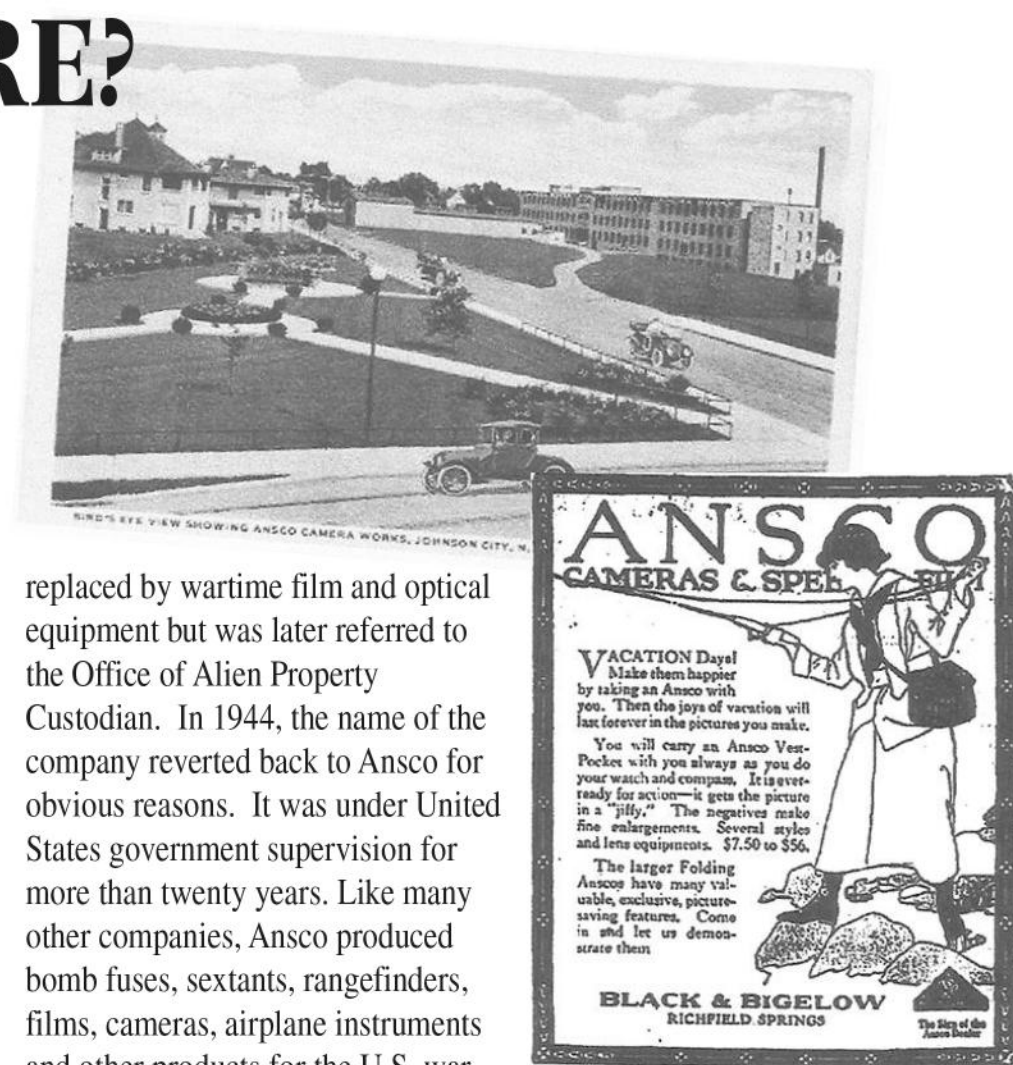
its operations to include manufacturing metal plates and supplies.

Apparently, George Eastman, being ambitious, was not content with selling another company's wares (he had previously served as a distributor for the Anthony plates) and began producing his own cameras opening a chain of stores exclusively featuring Eastman Kodak products, buying out independent suppliers.

In an effort to stay competitive, Anthony purchased the Goodwin Film & Camera Company in 1901 and began manufacturing something new for this industry. Hannibal Goodwin, an Episcopal priest, had invented a transparent film roll that served as a substitute for cumbersome glass plates.

Shortly thereafter, this company merged with Scoville Manufacturing in an effort to combat Eastman's market monopoly. The company name was changed to Anso and moved its base of operations to Binghamton, New York. Because of a 1902 judgement of five million dollars awarded to Anso for patent infringement by Eastman, the company had the capital needed to survive.

In 1928, Anso merged with Germany's Agfa. This strengthened the company in the lower-end camera market. The new company was honored for the production of infrared film but after the United States entered World War II, Agfa-Anso was seized because of its German corporate connection. Camera production was



replaced by wartime film and optical equipment but was later referred to the Office of Alien Property Custodian. In 1944, the name of the company reverted back to Anso for obvious reasons. It was under United States government supervision for more than twenty years. Like many other companies, Anso produced bomb fuses, sextants, rangefinders, films, cameras, airplane instruments and other products for the U.S. war effort. In the 1960s, a new headquarters was constructed in Vestal, New York.

Unfortunately, the post-war years still brought troubles to Anso as it continued to place second behind Eastman Kodak. By 1978, the trademark no longer existed as such when the company was sold to a Hong Kong enterprise which later made cameras under the Anso Photo-Optical Products Corp. division. The last Anso cameras were produced in the early 1990s.

Photography as a new hobby and obsession, fell into two categories - amateurs taking snapshots and professionals who worked with large view cameras in studios. Anso produced cameras for both groups.

Since these were usually a one-time purchase for the average customer, the market was limited. The money to be made came from purchases in the form of film processing, prints, and more film after the camera had been purchased.

Locally, the Anso products were advertised as being sold in the pharmacies and stores of: Crowe & Bigelow (1916); J. Jordan Black (1924); A. J. Victory & Son Variety (1950); Ehrmann's (1958) and Kitts (1970).

In spite of all its difficulties, Anso remained as an impressive company for nearly a century and there were many pictures taken locally by both residents and visitors with their 'new-fangled' Anso cameras.