

Kodak 10A Century Studio Camera and 1A Semi-Centennial Stand



This is a Kodak No. 10A Century Studio Camera (8"×10" format size) mounted on a Kodak No. 1A Semi-Centennial Stand, manufactured by the Folmer & Schwing Department of Eastman Kodak Company in late 1925 or early 1926.

THE CENTURY STUDIO CAMERA

History

The Century Studio Camera line was introduced by Century Camera Company in about 1902. Various models were manufactured (by successor companies), with little change in basic design, until about 1940, and the camera was a mainstay of upscale portrait studios through the first half of the 20th century. The camera was made in various format sizes, of which the 8"×10" and 11"×14" sizes were the most common.

In 1907, Century was absorbed into Eastman Kodak Company, which continued to offer the Century Studio Camera through 1940. Kodak manufactured the camera itself through 1926. From 1927 on, it was manufactured for Eastman Kodak by The Folmer Graflex corporation (a firm newly formed that year to take over certain operations of Eastman Kodak that the company was forced to sell under the settlement terms of a federal anti-trust suit).

The No. 10A version of the camera (8"×10" format) was the final design of the series, introduced in mid-1925.

Design and features

The camera is of the *tailboard* subtype of the *view camera* genre, meaning that the front standard is fixed to the front of the bed, all focusing being done by moving the rear standard. This is advantageous in that the front standard can be made strong and rigid, well suited to carry the large and heavy lenses often used on such cameras. It also makes for a tidy appearance of the front of the camera, considered attractive to the subjects, and facilitates the focusing operation (done while viewing the image on a ground-glass screen at the film plane).

The rear standard travels on metal wheels in V-shaped tracks in the bed. Focusing is done by a single rack-and-pinion arrangement, with a clamp to hold the adjustment once made.

The bed of the camera is made in two telescoping sections. This permits the length of the bed to be extended when required for the use of longer focal length lenses (especially in closeup work), while preventing unused bed length from intruding into the photographer's working zone in other cases.

At the front of the bed extension there is a bellows support that prevents sagging of the bellows at long extensions (when the bed has been extended). The bellows is of the square-cornered style, straight (not tapered), made of rubberized cloth.

The camera is built on a rather large "chassis" considering its format size, substantially larger than typical 8" × 10" field cameras (another subtype of the view camera genre), such as the Eastman 2-D. This is in part to accommodate the sliding back carriage arrangement (discussed below).

It has also been suggested that another motive for the generous dimensions of the camera was so that, in the case of portrait photographers who had adopted the more economical 8" × 10" format rather than the 11" × 14" format often used in more upscale studios, the clients would not perceive that they were being photographed by a less-than-serious camera.

Of the classical view camera movements (other than focusing), the camera only provides *back swing* and *back tilt*. These movements cater for the situation in which the objects we wish to be in best focus lie in a plane not perpendicular to the camera axis. The back swing and tilt are each controlled by a worm-and-sector arrangement, allowing fine adjustment of these movements. Fiducial marks are provided to indicate the "zero" position of each movement.

The movements *rise/fall* and *shift* (lateral), found on many view cameras for the front standard, the back, or both, are not provided here. These movements are used for perspective control. Prior to the latter half of the 20th century, studio portrait technique rarely called upon perspective control.

The front standard and backhouse are made of mahogany, and the bed of cherry. In the later models of the line (including the 10A), the control knobs are of wood, considered more stylish than the brass knobs used on many other cameras of the class.

The camera was normally supplied with a sliding back carriage, which would accept backs of various format sizes (interchangeable with those used on the 8" × 10" version of the Eastman View Camera 2-D). These backs are of the "Graphic" type (often called a "spring back"), and accept double-sided dark slide film holders (or plate holders, if desired). The back can be installed in either the vertical or horizontal orientation.

The sliding carriage allows an 8" × 10" back in horizontal orientation to be operated in two off-center positions so as to allow two separate 5" × 7"

images to be taken on one sheet of 8" × 10" film. (A special 5" × 7" aperture plate is fitted to the back carriage for this operation.) Some versions of the carriage would also allow two 3½" × 5" images to be taken on a single sheet of 5" × 7" film.

Materials and finish

The camera standards are made of mahogany, with the bed of cherry wood.

The "A" suffix on the model numbers indicates that the camera and stand have the newer "dark" finish, probably introduced about 1921.

THE SEMI-CENTENNIAL STAND

These large, heavy cameras were often sold in "outfits" that included a serious camera stand, typically with a crank-operated elevator mechanism. The most elegant of these was the inexplicably-named Semi-Centennial stand, introduced by Century about the same year as the Century Studio Camera, and manufactured through the life of the camera.

The two-post configuration permits the elevator mechanism to lower the camera platform to within 14" of the floor, "an especial advantage in child portraiture", the catalog points out; maximum platform height is 49". A torsion spring counterbalances the weight of the platform and camera to facilitate height adjustment. A second crank allows the camera platform to be tilted up or down for aiming.

The stand travels on three swivel casters. A ground jack, operable by foot, locks the stand in place at the rear caster, but lateral movement of the front of the stand on its two casters is still possible for aiming. In some of these stands, the casters were equipped with felt tires (to provide for silent operation on wood studio floors without the risk of leaving rubber tire scuffs).

THIS SPECIMEN

We see here a No. 10A Century Studio Camera, serial number 145502, made by the Folmer & Schwing Department of Eastman Kodak Company in 1925 or early 1926. According to serial number records, it was about the 203rd 10A ever manufactured.

It is mounted on a No. 1A Semi-Centennial Stand, of the same manufacture and presumably contemporaneous with the camera.

The back

The camera is provided, as is normal for this model, with a sliding back carriage of the type allowing two 5" × 7" images to be taken on a single sheet of 8" × 10" film. The "wing" mask, however, is not on hand.

Both 8" × 10" and 5" × 7" backs are on hand. The 5" × 7" back is marked "Folmer Graflex Corporation", and thus must have been made later than 1926.

Plate holder

The camera is exhibited with an 8" × 10" Eastman Portrait Film Holder No. 1 (double-sided).

Lens and shutter

The camera is currently equipped with a Rodenstock Apo-Ronar lens, focal length 480 mm (19"), maximum aperture f/9. It is a "moderate telephoto" lens at this format size, giving a long-dimension field of view equivalent to that given by a 70-mm lens on a full-frame 35-mm camera (well suited for portrait work). This lens was originally intended for "process" use (copying of illustrations, etc.), and thus would be expected to exhibit very low geometric distortion and good flatness of field. Its performance is said to be optimal for moderate distances—again, well suited for portrait work.

The camera is equipped with a Packard Ideal No. 6 shutter with a 2¾" opening (5" square case). It is mounted to the rear of the lens board, and is operated pneumatically with a rubber bulb. Through proper bulb manipulation, the shutter can provide the Instantaneous mode (with an uncalibrated exposure time of about 1/25 sec), the classical Bulb mode for moderately-long exposures, and a long-exposure mode functionally equivalent to the classical Time mode.

The stand

The stand is believed to be wholly authentic except that the casters are not original.

Provenance

The camera and stand were bought at auction in late 2006 from Cezary ("Caesar") Biencyk of Warren, Michigan.

The lens was bought at auction in late 2006 from "Prime Junk Jim" of Snohomish, Washington.

The shutter was bought at auction in early 2007 from Roy Baker of Troy, Ohio.

The lens board blank was supplied with the camera and was fitted and finished here. It appears to have been of Baltic birch modelmaker's plywood.

Accession code name

During accession, this camera and stand were referred to as "Polish Century", a good-natured reference to the seller, who is of Polish ancestry.