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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

By Clyde R. Beaver III, freelance writer

New Book Reveals the Photographic History of the Shoals

The Landrum Collection of Historical Photographs by Patricia Landrum Counts

FLORENCE There's a good chance that you've seen photos from the Landrum Collection. Since the 1950s, the Landrum family has made numerous historical prints available to the public through display in many of the city's businesses. Most notable are the selections displayed at the Marriott Shoals Hotel and Spa, which dedicated its only boardroom as the Landrum Boardroom. Other selections can be found at well-known establishments such as Legend's Steak House, Knight & Humphries, Inc. and the Keystone Business Center, among other locations.

The Landrum Collection is the only collection of photography that extensively documents the growth of the Shoals area from the early 1900s to the late 1950s. Happily taking on this responsibility was G.W. Landrum. As a young man in his early twenties, Landrum worked in the paint shop of the Florence Wagon Works. But after observing a traveling photographer who visited the factory to take several group photos, he was bitten by the shutterbug. Landrum inquired about the camera, and the photographer offered to sell it to him. Landrum made the deal, beginning his lifetime dedication to the art.

G.W. Landrum opened his first studio above Kreisman's Clothing Store on the corner of Court and Tennessee Streets, where he took his first documented photograph in 1906. By 1918, his success allowed him to sell his Florence studio and start a new studio venture in Sheffield. Several years later, Landrum returned to downtown Florence where he opened Landrum's Studio, specializing in group and family photographs.

His son, Jerry, assisted his father regularly as a young boy. After college, the newly married photographer's son returned to Florence where he joined his father's studio in 1931. After over a decade with his father, Jerry opened his own studio. The two maintained a friendly competition until G.W. Landrum's death in 1955. Jerry Landrum continued in photography for another 27 years, until his retirement from Jerry's Studio in 1982.

For over 50 years, photographs documenting the area's evolution were quietly taken by G.W. Landrum and inauspiciously cataloged. He sold only a small number of these photos in his lifetime. The existence of these treasures was widely known among Landrum family and friends, but it took over 100 years and the dedication of a devoted granddaughter to bring a substantial portion of the collection to the public.

Patricia Landrum Counts, a self-proclaimed history buff, dance instructor, traveler and now author, began her journey in early 2009. "Since I inherited the photographs, I have really wanted to do a book with as many historical photographs as the book would hold. This is truly our family legacy. I wanted my grandfather, my father and my mother to be recognized for those beautiful photographs, and I thought the best way to do it was to create a book that gives everyone access to the collection," said Counts. She had decided in early 2009 that it was time to share with the public the photos that had brought the family so much joy over the years. The book, entitled the *Landrum Collection of Historical Photographs* is an unparalleled photo essay marking the city's growth over the first half of the 19th century. From visits by historical figures such as Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Thomas Edison and Henry Ford, to the remarkable construction of Wilson Dam, the book portrays the city in the light of growth and progress.

When asked about special memories, Counts recalled, “I remember the story of Thomas Edison and Henry Ford coming to the Shoals. That is one of my favorite photographs. They were in Sheffield on the back of their private railroad car. Since they both were such famous people, it was significant to this area for them to even come here. They were here to buy property, which they did. They were also here to take a look at Wilson Dam, which they were considering purchasing. They, of course, did not. My father was with my grandfather on that day, and always enjoyed telling the story of seeing such historical figures. I think the reason I like this photo so much is because I know that the photograph is in the Ford offices in Detroit.”

The hardcover book features 235 photos from the 400-photograph collection, and is substantial with 200 pages. The photographs are displayed as they were originally produced, in black and white, as was customary of the time. The book retails for \$29.99.

The book was a painstaking effort according to Counts, who upon brief reflection, estimated that the effort took at least eight months. “It’s been a dream of mine for quite a number of years, and I still can’t believe it’s finished! I am so, so proud of it,” she said.

When asked what she hoped the impact of the book would be, Counts responded, “I think that for the younger generation that’s coming along now, this could be a great learning experience. It’s amazing how many young people are interested in these prints, at least the ones that were available to the public prior to the book. Now they can really explore the history of the city. For the older generations, I hope that this book will hold a lot of memories, because they can look back and say, ‘Hey, I remember when...’ I hope it does bring back a lot of great memories.”

Counts will introduce her new book with a book signing at the May 7th First Fridays event in downtown Florence from 5-8 p.m., next to Ricatoni’s Italian Grill. “I thought it would be appropriate to introduce the book in the heart of the city – a place that was the subject of so many photographs,” said Counts.

If you would like to read excerpts from the *Landrum Collection of Historical Photographs*, visit www.vlantoine.com/landrumcollection.html. If you would like to purchase a copy of the book, call Patricia Counts at 256-765-1979.

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