



PICTURING THE WATER

THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF ALICE AUSTEN

ON VIEW MAY 18 2023

PRESENTED AT
THE NOBLE MARITIME COLLECTION,
LOCATED ON THE CAMPUS OF THE
SNUG HARBOR CULTURAL CENTER
& BOTANICAL CENTER.

CURATED BY
VICTORIA MUNRO,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
ALICE AUSTEN HOUSE

WITH COLLECTIONS ASSISTANCE BY
KRISTINE ALLEGRETTI,
DIRECTOR OF COLLECTIONS
AND OPERATIONS,
ALICE AUSTEN HOUSE

PRINTED PHOTOGRAPHS BY
GERARD FRANCIOSA,
MY OWN COLOR LAB



"It is a place for dreams and musings,
this old house by the bay."

Harper's New Monthly Magazine,
A Spring Jaunt Around Staten Island
page 548. September 1878



“With the Narrows fifty yards from her front door, Alice naturally became a strong swimmer with absolutely no fear of the water.

Even when hampered by a long-skirted traveling dress, she did not give a moment’s thought to the obvious risk of crawling along a rotten log into the middle of a rapid stream in pursuit of the perfect photograph.”

— Ann Novotny, *Alice’s World*. 1976
(pg. 39–44)

E. Alice Austen, *Our party in stern of Wabun*, 1892.
Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Original glass plate negative.

(From left to right): Ralph Munroe, Alice Austen, a male crew member identified in other photos as “Butterball” (identified through research as Thomas Quincy Browne Jr.), and Nellie (Munroe) Austen are seated in the yacht *Wabun* on the water. The photographer’s initials are inscribed in the lower left corner of the negative: “E.A.A.”

Alice Austen captured hundreds of nautical views with her camera, including her friends at play, the fishing industry, immigrants arriving to their new homes in America, the development of New York City, warships, naval parades, and even the last voyage of the *Lusitania*.

One of America's first female photographers to work outside of the studio, Austen often transported up to 50 pounds of photographic equipment to capture her world. Her photographs represent street and private life through the lens of a lesbian woman whose life spanned from 1866 to 1952. Austen was a rebel who broke away from the constraints of her Victorian environment and forged an independent life that broke boundaries of acceptable female behavior and social rules.

From the harbor views of Austen's front doorstep to the international waters of her extensive travels, *Picturing the Water* explores Austen's deep connection to waterways and the vessels that traverse them. Collections research for this exhibition uncovered a rich archive of over 1500 images.

Austen was independently wealthy for most of her life and was widely considered to be an amateur photographer because she did not make her living from photography. However, in addition to completing 10 years of commissioned assignments to document the people and conditions of the immigrant quarantine stations in New York during the 1890s, Austen copyrighted, exhibited, and published her work.

Austen's deep fascination with documenting the water is little researched and the sheer volume of work indicates a committed professional interest in documenting not only the beauty of watery reflections and plays of light, but the technical workings of ships and their monumental presence both on and off the water.

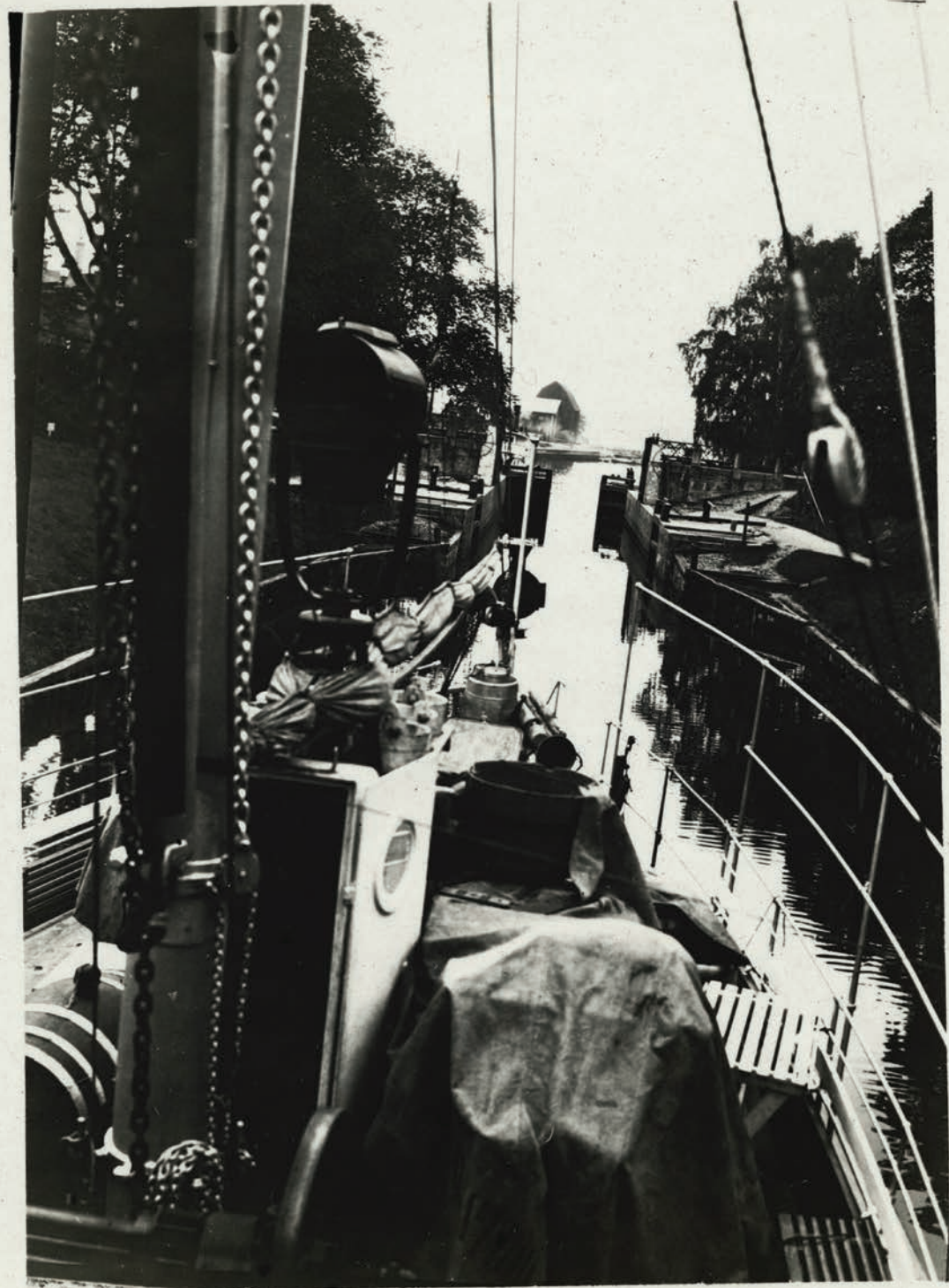
The newly printed photographs for *Picturing the Water* are mounted in John Noble's signature handmade frames and reflect on parallels between the artists' visions.

— Victoria Munro, Executive Director of the Alice Austen House

E. Alice Austen, *Canal Sodertelge*, 1912.
Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Original B&W print.

Austen's penciled inscription on back: "Cloudy / Canal / Sodertelge / 5.15 pm / Aug 16th / 1912."



Original B&W print.

Several sailboats on a waterway with
islands in the background.

Austen's penciled inscription on the back
of photograph reads: "Malaren / Lilla
Island / schooners loaded with / wood /
Aug 16th 6.30 pm."



E. Alice Austen, Malaren Lilla Island schooners
loaded with wood, 1912.
Collection of Historic Richmond Town.



E. Alice Austen, [Quarantine boat James W. Wadsworth alongside ship *Cyrene*], © 1901. Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Original B&W print.

The quarantine boat James W. Wadsworth is tied to the *Cyrene*, a large steamship; front view. Fort Wadsworth is visible in the background.



Original glass plate negative.

Front view of the hull of a shipwreck along the Staten Island waterfront.

E. Alice Austen, *Ribs of wreck*, 1896.
Collection of Historic Richmond Town.



E. Alice Austen, [**Steam yacht in New York Harbor**], n.d. Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Original B&W print.

Possibly Conelius Vanderbilt III's *North Star*, a steam yacht with passengers passes through New York Harbor on an overcast day (Manhattan skyline visible; Brooklyn Bridge visible in far distance).



E. Alice Austen, [Workers on steamboat *Alaska*], n.d.
Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Original B&W print.



E. Alice Austen, [Three girls on the beach], n.d. Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Original B&W print.

Three girls (backs to the camera) stand on wooden boards. Location unknown. Possibly Bay Head, New Jersey.



E. Alice Austen,
[Steamship "Quartermaster"], n.d.
Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Original B&W print.

End view of a steamship with an American flag in front and numerous small flags flying from the rigging. Sign on the front of the ship: "NOTICE. / THIS VESSEL HAS / TWIN SCREWS / KEEP CLEAR OF / BLADES". Inscription on the front of the ship: "QUARtermaster". Two tugboats are alongside. Location is probably New York Harbor; a small part of what might be a Staten Island Ferry gate is visible at bottom left corner of photograph.

E. Alice Austen, [Ship rigging and sea],
n.d. Collection of Historic Richmond
Town.

Original film negative.

Profile of a ship with the sea and clouds
at left, at sunrise or sunset.





E. Alice Austen,
[Boy in a rowboat], n.d.
Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Original film negative.

View of a rowboat, seen from an
elevated vantage point. Location and
date unknown.



Original film negative.

Portrait of Gertrude Tate, Caroline T. Lawrence, and Effie. Photo was taken aboard the ocean liner S.S. *Moltke* in transit from New York City to Naples; the ship left New York on June 12, 1906. Thick grey line along left edge of negative. Attached to Premo Film Pack, #3, with Austen's handwriting: "Group on deck / Miss Lawrence, G.A.T., & Effie / Fine - shade / June 14th 1906 / Sp 4 - / Stop 4 - / Slot 3/4."

E. Alice Austen, **Group on deck Miss Lawrence, G.A.T., & Effie**, 1906.
Collection of Historic Richmond Town



Original B&W print.

Two sailboats; location unknown.

E. Alice Austen, [Two sailboats], n.d.
Collection of Historic Richmond Town.



E. Alice Austen, [Steamships seen from Clear Comfort], n.d.
Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Original B&W print.

Two large passenger steamships (ocean liners) in the vicinity of Clear Comfort (Austen house). The ships are *Paris* (French line, left) and *Europa* (North German Lloyd).

E. Alice Austen, [Night image, moon shining through tree branches], n.d. Collection of Historic Richmond Town.

Original film negative.

This appears to be a night image, with the moon shining through clouds behind a large tree in bloom at the waterfront edge of the Clear Comfort (Austen's house) grounds; a large ship faces the grounds.



Picturing the Water: The Photography of Alice Austen

Presented by the Alice Austen House
and the Noble Maritime Collection

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aliceausten.org
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