



Mobile: Photographs from the William E. Wilson Collection

Marilyn Culpepper

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Beautiful Mobile, Alabama, on the Gulf of Mexico, has a colorful history dating back to its founding in 1702. Few photographers have captured the essence of Mobile-its people, places, and events-to the extent of master photographer William Ernest Wilson. Wilson's photography vividly depicts Mobile life at the turn of the twentieth century and is the subject of this engaging visual journey. From nationally elected officials such as Theodore Roosevelt to local Mardi Gras royalty, from entrepreneur Gordon Smith of Smith's Bakery to Africa Town founder Cudjoe Lewis, from a stately cathedral to country churches, from thriving banks and theaters to lumber yards and banana docks, the people and places of Mobile are revealed through Wilson's camera as a kaleidoscope of life in a bustling seaport. Artistic shading and Wilson's innate ability to see beyond the lens give his photographs an air of the contemporary while reflecting a bygone era of simplicity. These images simultaneously reveal the height of Victorian photographic art and daily life in one of the South's first major cities. Covering the period from 1894 to 1905, the collection features personalities, street scenes, and architectural treasures of the past. Preserved on their original dry glass negatives, a significant portion of Wilson's Mobile photographs are collected and printed here in a single edition for the first time.

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