

Columbia by Night

Photographs of downtown Columbia by Stephen Bybee
1998 - Present



Photographing downtown Columbia
by night since 1998

Areas of focus include Ninth Street,
Broadway, Hitt Street, Cherry Street,
Business Loop, Campus, and
Providence.

Utilizing black and white film and
color slide film from 1998-2010, and
digital capture from 2010-current.

Started as an artistic project, evolving
into documentary project.

Online at stephenbybee.com and
nightviewcolumbia.blogspot.com

Background, Education and Experience

Marshall High School, Marshall MO

Westminster College, Fulton MO—English and Philosophy—writing intensive, essay writing

US Forest Service, Southern CO 1994/95—Volunteer on Rio Grande Nat'l Forest

Columbia, MO in 1995—East campus, no air conditioning, odd jobs, much free time

Columbia College and MU in 1995—classes in art and photography

MU Art Department and CC Art Department—project based approach to photography, development of a framework and culture for practicing photography

Downtown Columbia—began exploring our city in 1995, an act of escapism, visual cataloging and flaneurism

MU and Columbia College—Oliver Schuchard and Ed Collings...both emphasized a straight ahead approach to photography with artistry being produced by the act of photography after effort and experience...outdoor photography, darkroom printing, and honing the final product through the use of darkroom skills and toning.

Professional Experience in Photography

Photographer at MU Recreation Services,
1999-2003

Photography Instructor at MSA/GPC Craft
Studio, 1999-2002

Member Ardentia Gallery, 2000-2001

Photographer MU Health Care 2008-2009

Photography Instructor Access Arts 2010-2013

Wedding Photographer 1998-???

Volunteer Photographer for True/False Film
Festival, Access Arts School of Service, Ragtag
Film Society, Missouri River Relief, Food Bank
for Central and Northeast Missouri, Boone
County History and Culture Center, Columbia
Historic Preservation Commission, County
House Branch Neighborhood Association,
Missouri Conservation Corps

What I do now

Missouri Conservation Corps—Project Director

Columbia Historic Preservation Commission—Presiding Chair

Columbia Tree Board—Member

Mayor's Task Force on McKinney Building—Member

Food Bank for Central and NE Missouri, Missouri River Relief, True/False Film Festival, Ragtag Film Society, Columbia Parks and Rec, Boone County History and Culture Center, Volunteer Columbia, County House Branch Neighborhood Association—Volunteer

Cultural influences on my photography

Other Photographers

Andre Kertesz, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Bill Brandt, Eugene Atget, Walker Evans, W. Eugene Smith, Harry Callahan, Minor White, Sylvia Plachy, O. Winston Link, David Plowden, Josef Sudek, Brassai, Edward Steichen, Luc Delahaye, Stephen Shore, Elliott Erwitt

Artists, Writers and Musicians

Cezanne, Camille Pissaro, Van Gogh, Andrew Wyeth, Chopin, Bach, Satie, Rimsky-Korsakov, Gershwin, Copland, Bill Evans, Charlie Parker, Ennio Morricone, traditional Japanese folk music, Faulkner, T.S. Eliot, Murakami, E.B. White, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Kerouac, Robert Frost, etc.



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POOR BOY
HOT DOGS
HAMBURGERS

5⁹⁹

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25¢

DRINK
Coca-Cola

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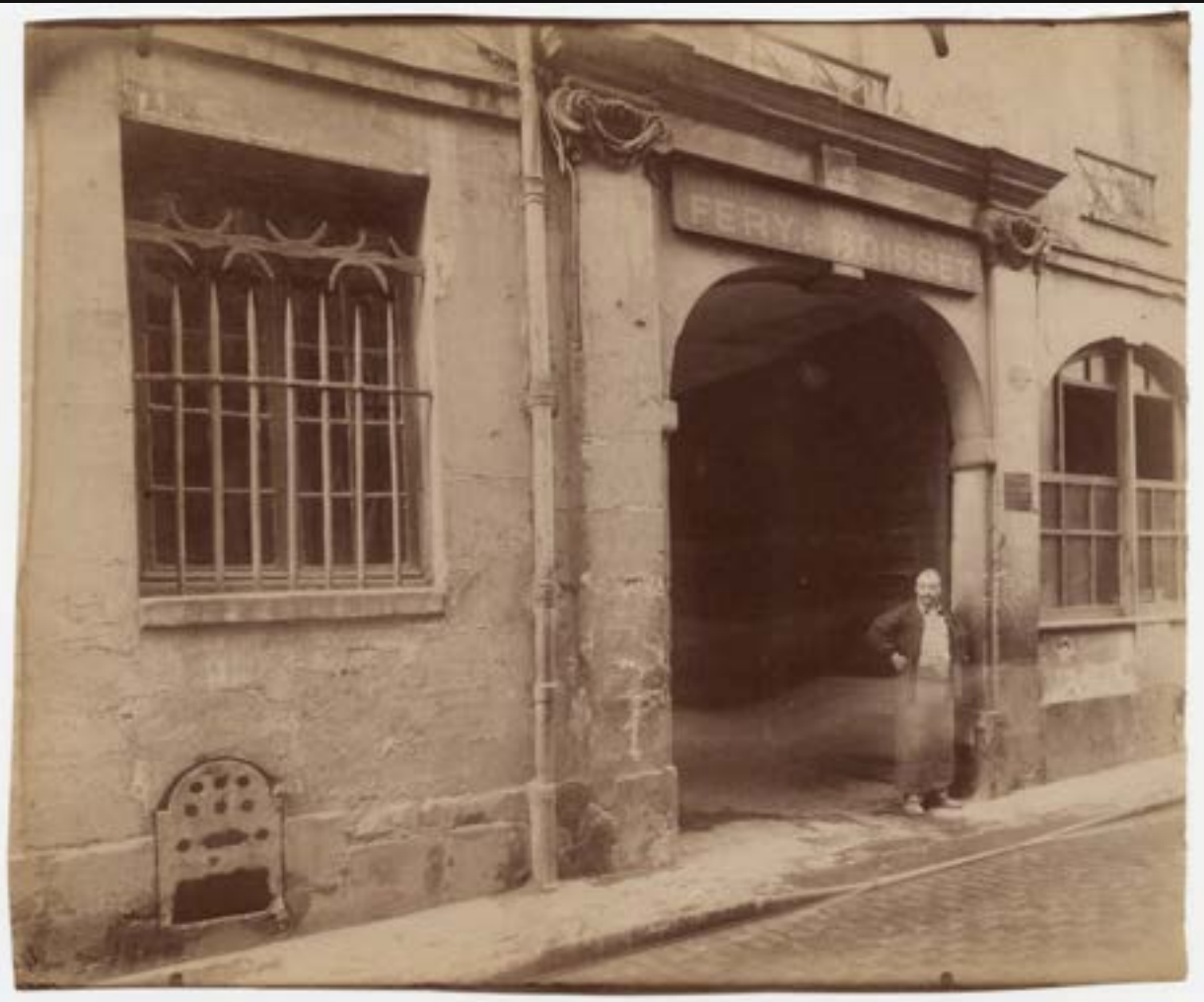
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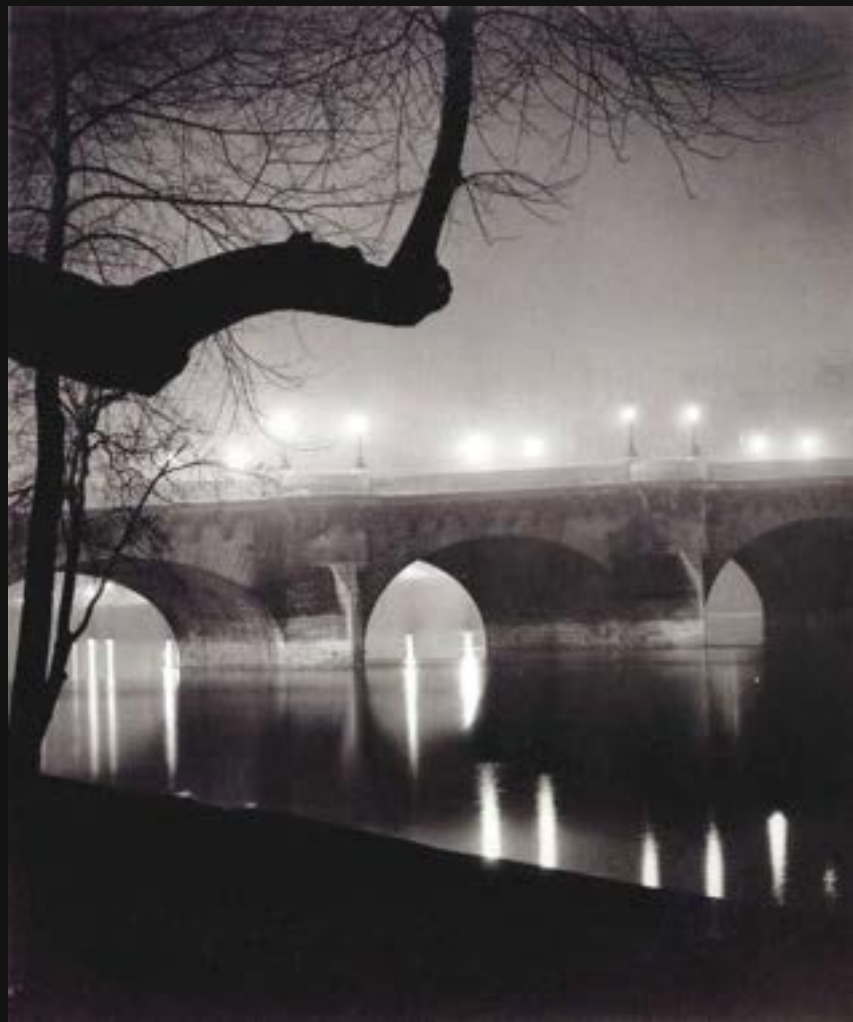


BRASSAI

PARIS BY NIGHT



FOREWORD BY PAUL MORAND







Boone County Historical Society (Mo.)



It was 25 years ago when I started photographing downtown Columbia in earnest. For reasons both pragmatic and creative, nighttime offered me the best opportunity to wander our city's streets in search of inspiration and vision. Equipped with a Nikon film camera, two or three lenses, and a tripod, I set out each week to photograph downtown Columbia during the late 1990s. My initial intention was not to document, but to artistically interpret the streets, alleys, bars, storefronts, and neon signs of this comfortable college town that I called home. Informed and inspired by the work of Brassai, Edward Steichen, Andre Kertesz, and Josef Sudek, my aims were artistic rather than documentary. I was captivated by the bewitching beauty and simplicity of a city at night, and I recognized the power of darkness to transform the quotidian into something elegant and mysterious.

I continued photographing Columbia in this fashion from 1998 until 2003, when life interrupted and took me to a new city. I moved back to Columbia in 2008, and in late summer 2009 I began to photograph the downtown area, once again bringing a film camera and tripod, but now with a new and compelling motivation.

Columbia's skyline and infrastructure were changing rapidly in 2009 and 2010, and because of this my approach to photographing our downtown took on a documentary purpose. Some of the buildings and houses I had grown familiar with were being demolished and replaced with high rise developments. The softly weathered bricks and familiar neon signs of my 1990s Columbia were becoming glass, steel, and concrete structures, imposing rather than beckoning. My goal was now very clear, and it was to document the Columbia I knew before it changed and disappeared. In 2011 I started photographing with a Nikon D700, my first attempt at creating black and white from a digital camera. Using the new camera transformed my approach to photography, moving me from tripod-based photography to a handheld approach. It also increased the speed at which I could document the changing face of downtown Columbia.













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Social media and website to share photography while incorporating writing, research, and local history

Glenn's Café Neon 1999 Jpeg #13

In 1999 this neon sign advertising Glenn's Café was still firmly attached to the southeast corner of the Ballenger Building on the corner of Ninth and Cherry. For some reason I wasn't as fascinated by this sign as I was by the neon on the Peking restaurant, so I really don't have any photos of this from earlier than 1999. Below the sign is the piece of graffiti that was also there for years before I photographed it, the white-painted bricks, the barred basement window opening to the sidewalk, the tree that cast a fantastic shadow in the long rays of autumn sun and in the less distinct light of a streetlamp on the other side of Cherry, and the second story windows above the sign. In one of these groups of paired windows the viewer can faintly discern the painted signage of The Missouri Press Clipping Bureau. I remember becoming interested in documenting this corner of Columbia in late 1999 and early 2000, but it was hard to find a night without parked cars blocking the view. This image was taken in late December 1999, during winter break, when downtown was a little less busy and the two or three parking spots on this stretch of Cherry Street were unoccupied. I have encountered several theories regarding the correct nomenclature for this beautiful corner building...the Troxell Building, the Ballenger Building, the J. Louis Crum Building, and the Paramount Building. My usage of Ballenger comes from research performed by architectural historian Deb Sheals. The G.F. Troxell Furniture Store was the first tenant after construction in 1892, but for me the most interesting and enigmatic tenant to ever occupy this corner of downtown Columbia was Rene Butel, a distiller and candymaker from France who emigrated to the United States. We know that Mr. Butel was born in Paris in 1844, spent some time perfecting his trade in New York City, with a focus on licorice making, and then owned a business in Toledo, Ohio where he worked as a distiller. I have found research suggesting that Mr. Butel owned a business in St. Louis with his wife Celina; Rene making and selling confections, and Celina selling perfume and boutique items for women. By 1877 Mr. Butel was running a soda bottling operation on this site, utilizing the free-flowing spring waters on site to create and bottle a range of ginger ales, birch beers, and champagne ciders. Rene Butel died in 1904 and is buried in St. Louis's Calvary Cemetery. Research on Rene Butel and his Columbia-based bottling concern is hard to find, and I have never encountered any city directory listings, newspaper items, or advertisements for his business. In 2003 a renovation was started on this building that has yielded a historically accurate and architecturally relevant corner of downtown Columbia.



RENE BUTEL,

MANUFACTURER OF

Soda Water, Ginger Ale,
Birch Beer, Champaign
Cider, Hop Tonic,

And all kinds of

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FOUNTAINS Charged.

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Office DEPOT

A black and white photograph of an Office Depot store at night. The store's name, "Office DEPOT", is prominently displayed on a sign above the entrance. The parking lot in the foreground is covered in a thick layer of snow, with several sets of curved tire tracks visible. A dark-colored car is parked on the right side of the lot. The sky is dark, and some distant lights are visible in the background.





COBEN











Stag

It's smooth. It's dry.



BULLPEN CAFE



A photograph of the Arrow Head Motel at night. The building is on the left, and a large neon sign on the right reads "Arrow Head MOTEL". The scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the neon sign and some interior lights from the building.

Arrow Head
MOTEL

A photograph of a neon sign for the Arrow Head Motel at night. The sign is illuminated with a warm, orange glow. The words "Arrow Head" are in a cursive script, and "MOTEL" is in large, block letters. The sign is mounted on a wooden post. In the background, a tall utility pole stands on a sidewalk next to a road. Light trails from passing vehicles are visible on the road. The overall scene is dimly lit, with the primary light source being the sign itself.

Arrow Head
MOTEL



A photograph of a neon sign for the Cottonwood Motel at night. The sign is illuminated with a warm, orange-red glow. It features the word "Cottonwood" in a cursive script and "MOTEL" in large, block letters. An arrow on the left points towards the left. The sign is supported by two wooden posts. The background is dark, with some distant lights visible.

← Cottonwood
MOTEL









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UPTOWN

A photograph of a brick building at night. The word "UPTOWN" is illuminated in white letters above the entrance. The building has a glass door and large windows. In the background, a white house with lit windows is visible, along with a yellow car parked on the street. A utility pole stands in the foreground, and a tree is on the left.





the blue note









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THE MARC

the MARC

A nighttime photograph of a two-story brick building. The building is illuminated by warm streetlights. A large, leafless tree is in the foreground on the left. A red pickup truck is parked on the street. A sign is mounted on the brick wall. The sign contains text in Chinese characters, English, and a phone number. A street lamp is visible on the right side of the image.

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Miracle

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Rural Churches of Missouri 1998-Present

