

## **A Brief History of PSRI**

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Sir John Herschel in 1839 used the word “photography”, derived from the Greek word “photos” or light and “graphein” to draw, to depict a method to record images by light on sensitive material. From its inception, photography was both a scientific/technological and creative tool to create visual images and visual communication. The journey continues today with better equipment, more photo opportunities, better communications, and greater enthusiasm. Today, there are more photographs in the world than bricks.

This year marks the eightieth anniversary of PSRI. Our camera club was organized in 1927 by a group of engineers as The Camera Club of the Providence Engineering Society. Two years later, this young club started its long affiliation with The Association of Camera Clubs of America. In 1933, the Association, then comprising approximately 50 camera clubs from all across the United States, changed its name to Photographic Society of America. The aims of the PSA, as stated in the 1934 PSA Bulletin, is just as valid today as it was then: “The Photographic Society of America is an organization of individuals, clubs, manufacturers, dealers and publishers, united for the purpose of promoting photography as an art, a science, a business and a hobby. Representing no school or –ism, having no hidebound prejudices or fanatical ambitions, it is a common meeting ground for technicians, pictorialists, scientists, realists, romanticists, craftsmen, businessmen, and all others who are truly interested in photography.” The advancement of photography through interclub exchanges, Salon competitions, dissemination of information and as a forum to discuss current problems have been and continue to be an integral part of both PSA and our club, PSRI.

Thanks to Lincoln Smith’s collection of our club’s newsletter “In Focus”, we have a direct window into PSRI’s recent past. Those newsletters, spanning 25 years, coupled with the 1935 Journal of the PSA are fascinating reading to see not only how much photography has changed and evolved, but how similar club members’ concerns have been.

Even though our club has changed its name twice, to The Camera Club of RI in the 1970’s and then to Photography Club of RI in 1989 and our location twice as well, from Woodridge Congregational Church in the 1970’s to Lakewood Baptist Church in 1986, its essential mission of advancing the art and science of photography remains the same.

Competitions, both inter and intraclub, have always been the club’s major foci. In 1983, there were three categories-slides, color prints, and black and white prints-with three classes in each-AA, A, and B. Three club competitions were held each year, plus 1 selected subject competition, 1 assigned subject competition, and an all RI Invitational Salon. On the Saturday before each competition, slides were picked up from three different stations: Ritz Camera in Garden City, Adler’s Camera in downtown Providence, and Save-Rite Photo Dept on Newport Avenue, East Providence. By 1985, the number of competitions, now jointly slides and prints had increased to four. In addition to the competitions, the club held 6 lecture programs, arranged for 3 field trips,

as well as an interclub competition. Adler's and Save-Rite were still designated as pick up stations along with United Camera and the Woodridge Church Office. By 1986, pick up stations were eliminated and replaced by entry slips, one for each print or slide, that delivered to the committee chairperson on the night of competition. Entries were returned after the meeting, and ribbons were awarded the same night. In 1999, a new competition division was added, the Electronic Imaging Division or EID for color and black and white prints.

Today, PSRI holds competitions in the following categories: Slides (AA, A, B), Color Prints (A, B), B&W prints (darkroom A, B), B&W prints (alternative), Digital Art (A, B), Digital Realism (A, B), Digital Slide. Additionally, several field trips are held every year offering opportunities to hone skills in nature, landscape, macro and other types of photography. The programming during the year is very rich as well. Speakers from within the club as well as invited guests from outside make presentations on a wide range of topics

Technological advances in photography have always produced discussions, often labeled "strenuous", within the club as to the suitability of images for competitions. In the mid-80's, the use of a do it yourself commercial lab for color printing instead of a home darkroom was the focus of numerous discussions about their acceptability for competition. For those without home darkrooms, Creative Photography, Inc. provided access to a commercial color lab, with minimal professional assistance, for color printing and reopened the old Polaroid discussions about color printing methods. The board finally approved the use of such labs in January 1984. This discussion was reopened once more in 1988 when the board approved the use of commercially developed prints into competition. However the following year, a one point end of the year score reduction was applied for such prints.

Digital B&W and color prints have had their own category. Last year, 2007, the categories were further divided into digital realism, digital art, and digital slide, each division based upon the amount of image manipulation used.

Judging has always been a controversial topic, particularly in relation to judging standards and points allotted to each image. In 1983, the club held a "Judging Symposium", a discussion of "judges' rights", by Everett Wilson. He concluded his presentation with the following: "don't submit dusty slides; don't submit poor focus slides; and don't heckle the judge -until after the commentary."

Workshops to educate and improve photographic techniques have also always been a constant feature. One was entitled "Ask the experts". One session in particular focused on creative darkroom techniques. Seven of the club's best printmakers prepared an ambitious program: diazochrome film developed in ammonia fumes for slides, pan masking film used in contact with slides to reduce contrast in printing; posterization with the use of separation negatives made with Kodak ortho High Contrast film; tone separation prints; solarization and the Sabatier effect in printing and slides; flowers photographed in a fish tank; sandwiching slides; double printing in both color and B&W; ektachrome paper used with multiple exposures for an overall effect; printing on Cibachrome, Ektachrome and Ektacolor paper; imitation pointilism with tri-color printing in the darkroom; and black light photography with fluorescent paint and materials. That must have been an exciting evening!

The current “Early Bird Special” sessions provide members with a quick look at different aspects of photography, photographic equipment, and photographic processes. Recent segments covering tripod selection, photoshop techniques, digital photo books, printing papers among other topics have provided invaluable information to both experienced and novice photographers alike.

The In Focus newsletter’s format, in addition to competition standings and current regulations, also contained technical tips, quotes from various artists, such as Brassai, Steichen, Newman on photography, and copies of NY Times and other journal articles about cameras and photography. Some of the articles referred to techniques, such as Andy Grundberg’s NY Times article (Jan 11, 1985) “Tips About Cameras for a Cold Day”, and (Oct 30, 1988) “Condensation Can Cause Problems”. Other articles shed light on current discussions in the world of photography, such as Andy Grundberg’s article (April 17, 1988) “The Future is Here” on the new Nikon N8008 and his article (Jan 28, 1990) “Can the art of pictorial composition be learned without the club spirit of comradery?” The new world of digital photography and computers was approached by John Durniak in the newsletter’s Nov/Dec 1991 issue “New from Japan: Photographs You Can View on a Television Screen or Personal Computer” and discussed the Fuji X and Fuji IP.

By the mid 90’s, the newspaper article format was changed to columns written by club members. Dale Douthit wrote a column called “Desktop Darkroom” and Jim Barbieri had a column entitled “Viewpoint”.

Book reviews and suggestions for further reading were also a frequent aspect of the newsletter, ie the Top 10 Photo Books of 2000, and the current “Bookshelf Forum” on the PSRI Web site. The site also offers extensive content, reviews, news, shopping tips and discounts, a members’ gallery, and a discussion forum.

PSRI has had a long and colorful history and we keep getting bigger and better. With over 130 current members, PSRI holds more meetings than ever and offers more programs appreciating the traditions of photography while embracing the digital future. We are going out and shooting more... and loving every minute of it. We keep clicking, because when PSRI clicks shutters, the other clubs shudder!

Happy 80<sup>th</sup> birthday to PSRI, many happy returns of the day.