



The following material is from the unpublished memoirs of Tim Holden, with a few additions from John Manser's Journal and the Graflex Historic Quarterly.

GRAFLEX MEMORIES OF TIM HOLDEN

After receiving my BA from Hamilton College in 1933, there were virtually no jobs available. I was able to enroll in a two-year Photo Tech course at Mechanics Institute (now RIT).

During the summer, after college, my Mother and I were attending a family gathering where a friend put on a slide show (large 3 x 4¼ glass slides which he had hand colored). Knowing that I had just graduated from college, he inquired about my plans. Since photography had been a hobby of mine all through high school and college, I replied that I was interested in taking a new course being offered at Mechanics Institute. He replied "That's interesting. I teach it." I enrolled at Mechanics promptly, sending them into a tizzy, since I was the first college graduate to apply for training. It was settled when I assured them that, if necessary, I would repeat what I had already studied.

In the Fall of 1934, I was in a co-op plan at Mechanics Institute. I worked one month at Kodak and the odd month I went to school, alternating with another student. I went to school in September and November and worked at Kodak in October and December. In the middle of December, I was called down to the Employment Department and told that Graflex wanted to hire me, starting in January. I had previously made contact with them in the Spring and was to report on January 2, 1935. By the time I got back to the sixth floor where I worked, the word had preceded me, and I was given congratulations. The previous May I had learned that Graflex was interested in hiring someone, and I decided not to wait for them to call the school and went over for an interview. I was interviewed and quizzed by G.C. Whitaker, and, in the end, I was loaned a Graflex camera to use over the weekend, which I had never even seen before.

I studied the instruction manual, which I found very inadequate, but never-the-less, I figured it out. I had been given a loaded film pack, so I was ready to go. At about 5:30 in the morning, the fire siren sounded, and I hopped out of bed determined to use the camera. The fire was in the second story (top floor) of a building at the four-corners. I went across the street and found a spot where I could take in the whole event. I used up the film pack and developed it in my basement darkroom. I seemed to have some good negatives and made a number of prints. Then I mounted four of them on a cardboard and the next day took them over to Graflex (only two blocks from the office). They made quite an impression.

It was determined that Graflex did not want to hire anyone else, so we figured out that I would alternate with myself at school. I would work January mornings, go to school in the afternoon, and the next month I would go to school in the morning and work in the afternoon. However, since my afternoon classes did not take up much of my time, and the company was at least three weeks behind in answering letters, I went to Graflex after classes, before train time. As a result, the folks at Graflex never knew whether I was on my own time or technically on the job. Oh yes, my job was to answer letters from customers seeking information about everything the company had ever made. I was the "Service Department" at the start. We were a small office. My boss reported to the President, and sometimes I did. That was interesting, since they were still responsible for cameras made back in the early 1900s, and that meant digging into old catalogs. To get much of this information required frequent trips into the factory, where I soon became well acquainted with all aspects of the manufacturing processes of the many Graflex products. Over the years, in emergencies, I was also given responsibility for the op-

eration of the repair department, which was often a source of my information anyway.

Not knowing anything about business letters, I was at a big disadvantage. Fortunately, I had a new secretary who had come from a legal office, and she sure helped me. I also carefully reviewed letters sent by Kodak to their customers who requested information about film and papers, which we did not handle. I very soon became very good friends with the two people at Kodak, who were responsible for answering letters sent to them by people who still thought that Graflex was part of Kodak.

Starting in 1940, Morgan and Lester published Graphic Graflex Photography, and I was given the responsibility of checking all copy before each of the many editions to make sure that references to Graflex products were accurate. I learned a lot about photography!

During World War II, Graflex made the 35mm Photorecord Identification Outfit for taking ID pictures which were required at all manufacturing plants and in all of the branches of the Armed Forces. A Signal Corps contract called for the camera, complete developing and processing equipment, as well as equipment and supplies for the making of non-alterable laminated cards - 1¼ million all told, and I was given the job of coordinating the entire project, as well as other duties connected with the war effort.

With the introduction of the Pacemaker Speed Graphic in 1947 and the general growth in photography, my department exploded to thirteen people, and we became responsible for instruction manuals. We also passed on design for new and revised products. In a sense, we represented the company to the customer and vice versa. It was a very busy time, and as I look back, a very exciting time.

Starting in 1939 until about 1970, I was active in the Rochester Technical section and also in the National Photographic Society of America. During the same time, I was present at the Graflex exhibits and numerous trade shows. I was an early member and participant in The Photographic Historical Society (of Rochester). In the 1960s and 1970s, I did some market research on a number of products, one of which was the Strobomatic Flash line and another which was ahead of its time, but eventually emerged as the Graflex Caramate.

As interest in the large camera wound down and the interest in the AV product increased, the Graflex Division of Singer gave less attention to the photo line. I retired in April 1973. The photo products were discontinued entirely at the end of the year – coincidence, not cause.

I was asked to develop (from scratch) an entirely new course at RIT – Mechanics of Photo Hardware. This was to acquaint those in the College of Business Planning to enter the photo trade with the entire field of cameras, lenses, shutters, flash, etc. By 1983, the need for technically trained personnel had been replaced by the need for market-trained people, and I again retired.

In the Spring of 1990, I was asked to update the manual which I had developed for RIT, so that it could be used to train photo store clerks. This was under the auspices of PMA as part of the Certified Photographic Counselor program. This was very challenging and rewarding. I called this my “third career.”

After retiring I worked with the George Eastman House in identifying Graflex cameras and have participated in various book projects and as a contributor to the Graflex Historic Quarterly.

Provided by the Graflex Historic Quarterly

