

# TWILIGHT OF PHOTOGRAPHY AT THE SIDWELL COMPANY

Year 1960 was the beginning of Sidwell's adventure in Aerial Photography.

I joined the photo department consisting of Bob Nelson, Wesley Cummings, a Deardorft-Barrowdale enlarger, a Cessna 180 aircraft, 2 Fairchild WWII Aerial Cameras and misc. dark room equipment.

The first years were touch and go, until we got a large tax mapping job in Lorain County, Ohio. This was the beginning of Sidwell Studio (changed to The Sidwell Company in 1970) as a successful aerial photographic tax mapping company.

We got a project of photographing all of the Chicago metropolitan area and producing screen positives for NIGAS. Under the direction of Bob Nelson the technique of making these film positives was developed into an art. After we completed this project we felt we could compete with anyone in the aerial photographic industry.

In the mid 1960's, Chicago Aerial Survey sent one of their Zeiss aerial cameras to the Bureau of Standard for testing and it was lost on its return flight to Chicago. The camera turned up after the insurance company purchased a new one (camera) for CAS. Don Morhouse of CAS told me the name of the insurance company and I started negotiating with them to purchase the camera. We made a deal and got a \$25,000 Zeiss RMK/15/23 for \$6,000. We became one of the big players.

Years of 1970 saw many good tax mapping and aerial photographic projects, allowing us to purchase more Zeiss cameras and a twin engine Aero Commander. Our photo lab acquired more enlargers, film processors for aerial film and large film and paper.

In the Spring of 1978 we set a record for aerial photography. We had three of our aircraft, Walt McFadden from Florida and Ed Toler from Texas helping us. We used 50 rolls of 9 1/2 inches x 500 feet, that's 25,000 feet of film - almost five miles! Again, Bob Nelson did a great job of developing and checking this film for coverage so we could make reprints if necessary.

Our next great adventure was into photogrammetry with a purchase of a Kelsh Plotter. We learned how to make topographic maps with our Kelsh, then moved up into optical plotters with the purchase of the Kern PG-2.

Our first experience with computers involved getting a minimum of field control and with a surveying computer program extended this information for use in our plotters saving expensive field work. It was also at this time that we entered into orthographic photography (i.e. the removing of perspective distortion found in conventional photography) by converting one of our Kelsh type plotters into an orthophoto printer.

This was also the beginning of the digital computer era. We knew that sooner or later, the

computer would take over the mapping business.

Some of the company was against aerial photography and photogrammetry but thank goodness a few of us saw what was coming and knew that photogrammetry was going to be a major player in it.

The 1980's saw the beginning of COM/CAD (Computer Aided Drafting/Design) followed by GIS county wide mapping. The hand writing was on the wall, so a small unit was established within company to get us into the computer age.

I retired in 198<sup>3</sup>~~7~~ and the flying, photo lab and topographic departments were moved under the direction of the tax mapping Vice-President. There was always an element at The Sidwell Company that never wanted this part of the business because they didn't fully understand it and couldn't control it. So a long process was begun to dismantle it.

It took 27 years to do it, but wasn't done by anyone in the company. It was accomplished by technology; i.e. GPS, digital cameras in stabilized mounts, scanners, printers, computers, CAD/COM and GIS programming.

It was a great 49 year run and I wouldn't <sup>have</sup> missed my part of it for anything. We started small and became one of the big players.

Thanks Bob and Dan.

Bob Meiborg, May 29, 2009