

New book highlights work of Sandusky photographer

May 2, 2018 By TOM JACKSON, Sandusky Register

Want a book?

“Sandusky’s Photographer: The Real Photo Postcards of Ernst Niebergall.”

WHEN: The postcard club meets at 7 p.m. on the third Tuesday of each month

WHERE: Erie County Senior Center, 620 E. Water St.

COST: \$25 post-paid, from Firelands Postcard Club, P.O. Box 351, Huron, OH 44839; or pay \$20 at the postcard club meeting



Register photo/TOM JACKSON

The editors of “Sandusky’s Photographer.” From left: Jeff Brown, Roger Dickman and Jim Semon Sr.

SANDUSKY

Sandusky’s fire chief races to the scene of a fire — in a horse-drawn wagon. Southern belles in long dresses and large, elaborate hats stand next to a new statue of a Confederate soldier on Johnson’s Island. A speeding train races over the tracks of the Sandusky Bay bridge. The vivid images from many years ago were captured by German born photographer Ernst Niebergall.

A new book, “Sandusky’s Photographer: The Real Photo Postcards of Ernst Niebergall” features 246 photographs by Niebergall (1876-1954). Most of the historic photos were originally published as postcards. The Firelands Postcard Club published the book and is selling it.

The book’s authors — Jim Semon Sr., Roger Dickman and Jeff Brown — are all club members and enthusiastic postcard collectors.

In the year of Sandusky’s bicentennial, it’s time for Niebergall to get his due, the trio said during a recent interview with the Register. In fact, their determination to highlight Niebergall’s role led to a falling out with the book’s original publisher, Arcadia, which puts out many local history books. The authors were adamant the book’s cover would feature a photo of Niebergall.

Arcadia said ‘absolutely not,’” Semon said.

The authors had strong opinions, too. Semon even owns Niebergall’s old camera. So they took the book to printer Adkins and Co. in Lakewood, near Cleveland, with the postcard club publishing the book itself. “It ended up being a better book,” Brown said. “Even the size of it. Arcadia limits the size of their books.”

The book isn’t just about Sandusky. It also covers a large area of north-central Ohio. Sandusky gets its due, but the book also highlights the islands and much of the surrounding community. The editors hope Sandusky’s bicentennial celebration will help boost sales.

Niebergall never married and never owned a car. He also never became a U.S. citizen. He fell into suspicion during both world wars and his cameras were seized.

There's no evidence Niebergall was a spy or did anything wrong, Dickman said. He kept his German citizenship because he hoped to inherit a pension.

More than 6,000 of Niebergall's photos and records are preserved at the Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library & Museums in Fremont.

They've been a staple for historians for years, although, in some cases, Hayes gets the credit, and Niebergall's work gets lost.

The Firelands Postcard Club has 56 members. It draws 30 to 40 people at each monthly meeting, a good turnout for a club that has members as far away as Columbus.

All three of the authors collect postcards, and they all have specialties.

Dickman, for example, has postcards of local towns. He also collects Ohio courthouses, and that's a complete collection. "I have a fantastic collection of all 88," he said.

Postcards are found on eBay, in flea markets, in garage sales and other places. They can be cheap, or they can cost hundreds of dollars.

"Bidders go crazy sometimes," Brown said.

Reach reporter Tom Jackson at jackson@sanduskyregister.com and follow him on [Twitter@jacksontom](https://twitter.com/jacksontom).