Prior to the introduction of the digital camera, photography was essentially a chemical process. Though the Oesper Collections do not explicitly collect photographic equipment, a number of items of interest have come our way over the years and it is the purpose of this, and the succeeding two installments of Museum Notes, to highlight some of these acquisitions. We will begin with cameras, then continue in the September/October installment with apparatus and chemicals for development and printing, and conclude in the November/December issue with film and printing papers.

Starting with the introduction of the collodion process in 1851, most photographic processes for the remainder of the century, with few exceptions, made use of glass plate negatives. Figure 1 shows a circa 1901 glass plate camera made by the Wollensak Optical Company of Rochester, New York.

However, by the 1890s glass plate negatives were being gradually replaced by flexible roll film, first introduced by George Eastman in 1885. Initially the film was photo-sensitized gelatin on paper. By 1889 this was replaced with nitrocellulose film, which was unfortunately highly}

Figure 2. A circa 1902 Model 3A folding “pocket” Kodak camera using flexible cellulose nitrate roll film. Made by the Eastman Kodak Company of Rochester, NY, with Bausch and Lomb lens. The large film size was designed for taking photos for picture postcards.

Figure 1. A circa 1901 “Junior” model glass plate camera made by the Wollensak Optical Company of Rochester, NY. On loan from S. Jensen.
flammable and susceptible to decomposition. These problems were finally solved via the introduction of cellulose acetate film in 1909. Figure 2 shows a circa 1902 folding Kodak Model 3A “pocket” camera. The large size of the film roll is because this camera was specifically designed to take picture postcards. The resulting large negatives allowed one to print the photo-sensitized postcards directly without having to use an enlarger.

Figure 3. A circa 1948 Kodak Duaflex Camera with flash attachment made by the Eastman Kodak Company of Rochester, NY.

Figure 4. A circa 1966 Exakta camera made by the Ihagee Kamerawerk of Dresden Germany.

Figure 5. A circa 1976 K1000 Pentax camera made by Asahi Optical Company, Ltd of Japan.

Figure 6. A circa 1980 modified Polaroid Instamatic Camera with a trigger shutter adapted for photographing oscilloscope screens.

Figure 7. A circa 2001 Sony Digital Mavica Camera with 1.3 megapixels.

Figure 3 shows a circa 1948 Kodak Duaflex camera with a flash attachment, whereas figures 4 and 5 show two high-quality cameras from the 1960s and 1970s, one made in Germany and the other in Japan. Figure 6 shows a modified Polaroid Instamatic with a trigger shutter designed to be mounted over the screen of an oscilloscope. Lastly, figure 7 shows an early digital camera of the kind that led to the demise of all of the above cameras.