

A National Institution

Bachrach Photography has spent 139 years capturing historic moments

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John F. Kennedy

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Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, 1953

Edward Fox Photography is one of three 100-year-old studios in America we know of, including Strauss-Peyton Imaging in Kansas City, which is no longer family-operated. At 139, the oldest of the three is Bachrach Photography of Boston, founded in 1868, just a few years after Joseph Swan put his patent on the archival carbon printing process. Like Edward Fox, Bachrach has been family-owned and operated for four generations. Current owner and President Robert Bachrach also oversees satellite studios in Manhattan and Alexandria, Virginia.

The studio, well known for contemporary corporate, wedding, and family photography, also has a reputation for capturing historic moments and famous faces. Founder David Bachrach set the precedent at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, in 1863, when he captured the only photograph of Abraham Lincoln delivering his famous address. The speech lasted all of 90 seconds, just long enough for Bachrach's boxy wooden camera to make one exposure.

Succeeding Bachrachs have photographed every U.S. president since, and other luminaries as well, like Albert Einstein, Amelia Earhart, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, Lee Iococca, Joe DiMaggio, Duke Ellington, Eleanor Roosevelt, and John F. and Jacqueline Kennedy.

Louis Fabian Bachrach, David's son, expanded the business into 31 studios and a lab, employing more than 100 people. Things changed during the Depression, but the company continued to thrive. After World War II, Louis's sons Fabian and Bradford entered the business.

Robert Bachrach took the reins in 1978, fresh from college. The tradition of photographing both persons and personages continues, but Bachrach has brought innovations of his own. When he closed the lab facility and began outsourcing film processing to Burrell Professional Labs, it was a "revelation," he says. "Burrell has state-of-the-art capabilities way beyond the reach of a small, family-owned lab." (Bachrach was inducted into the prestigious Burrell Presidential Circle in 1999.)

For the high-end portrait client, the studio commissions artist Robert Alexander Andersen to create original oil paintings from Bachrach portraits. Digital post-capture enhancement is also available.

Bachrach Photography often lends works from its fabulous portrait collection to public exhibitions, and creates new works for specific projects. The Boston studio is working on a series of photographs for the Boston Public Library that will feature 300 contemporary intelligentsia, including Nobel laureate Franco Modigliani; economist John Kenneth Galbraith; Joel Moses, creator of artificial intelligence; poet laureate Robert Pinsky; Robert Seamans, NASA scientist; and Wolfgang Ketterle, 2001 Nobel laureate in Physics.

Exhibitions do bring referrals to Bachrach Photography, but the key to the company's longevity, says Bachrach, is "hard work, focus, and clear purpose." Nothing can replace word-of-mouth advertising, which in Bachrach's case has been gathering momentum for 130 years.