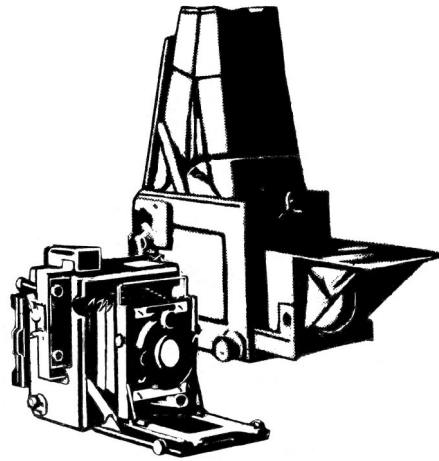


GRAFLEX HISTORIC QUARTERLY

Since 1996



VOLUME 12 ISSUE 4

FOURTH QUARTER 2007

FEATURES

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Figure 1

Graflex Custom Cameras

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From the beginning until the very end, Graflex either solicited or accepted orders for custom-built cameras. Many of the Division-era catalogs had a line stating such, and in the early days, they placed large ads touting their ability to make custom cameras. Through World War II, entries in the Serial Number Book clearly showed custom orders, and while they are rare today, there were a surprising number of them. After WWII the book lost its importance, and most of the custom-built cameras, probably military, were not listed, although Graflex still accepted custom work.

A 3¼ x 4¼ Revolving Back Crown Graphic...from 1915!

The first of two custom cameras I found was a special Speed Graphic. It came from an estate tied to the Louis Comfort Tiffany

family, but the man was also an avid camera collector, so there's no telling if this camera came from within the family or from an antiques store. It arrived with its original case and four of the original seven plate holders (Figure 1). After some study, I've come to the conclusion that this camera was a serious study in making a more versatile Speed Graphic camera. This camera has features that would not be seen on production cameras for decades, while other features never made it into production!

The camera wears serial number 50888, which makes it the earliest confirmed custom camera in existence today. The entry is on page five of the Serial Number Book, which dates to 1915, and states this is a "Special 3¼ x 4¼ R.B. Camera." While other custom-camera entries state the owner, such as Spencer Lens Company or Eastman Kodak, this one does not, suggesting it might have been made for a private owner.



Figure 2

The body is a standard 3¼" x 4¼" Top Handle (c. 1915) Speed Graphic body without the focal plane shutter and the tripod socket on the side (Figure 2). This is proof that the Crown Graphic concept existed early on. It just needed reliable between-the-lens shutters and flashbulbs to get it into production. The missing side tripod socket is more important than you might think. Certainly it's not necessary

and would be difficult to use with the rather stiff handle in the way. But the fact that it never existed, rather than being plugged, means this body was built for this camera, rather than one taken off the line. They placed the handle on the left side of the camera (as viewed from the back), suggesting this camera may have been meant for more candid, hand-held photography. Interestingly, it's not a Graphic-type, post-mounted handle, but a fat, strap-mounted SLR-type handle.

There is some evidence that a rear peep sight might have been mounted at one time. If so, it would have been a very early attempt. There is no evidence of a front-mounted wire frame, so how much hand-held use the camera got is debatable.

Inside the body are a host of features all working in concert to form



Figure 3

a full-featured, compact camera. The front standard has limited forward and rearward tilt and geared rise (Figure 3). It's interesting that there's significantly more rearward tilt than forward, but there's no secondary "dropped bed" position for the bed to use back tilt. The wood frame that holds the lensboard sits lower on the standard, so low, there is a rabbeted area to allow easier access to the pinch locks. The pinch locks seem to be custom, too, as their size falls

in between those found on 4x5 and 3/4 x 4/4 Speeds. The lensboard is small and custom-made, but close to the production lensboard for a Top Handle 3/4 x 4/4 Speed Graphic.

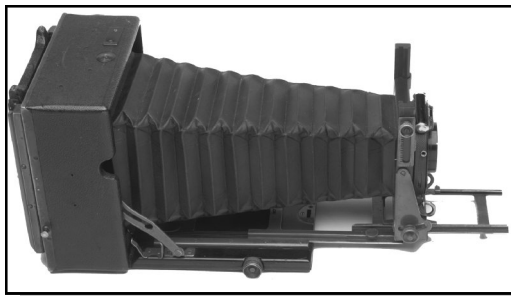
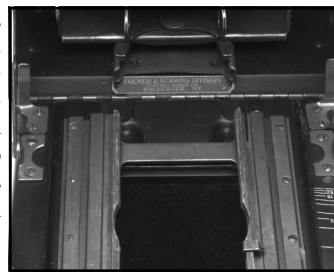


Figure 4

Connecting the standard to the body is a 13 3/4" bellows, which is 30% longer than the production model (Figure 4). To use this new bellows, a set of nested rails was designed. Production 3/4 x 4/4 rails support the front standard, while a custom set of rails fits between the standard rails and the bed, which is also custom-made. The focus knob is larger, similar to an RB Auto, and set farther up the bed, much like Anniversary Speeds. The bed is heavier than most, which along with the nested rails, created some critical space problems when the camera was closed. Not only are there routed cutouts for the raised inner rails in the bed, there are carved and softened dimples in the bed to accommodate the pinch locks. The original lens seems to have been quite large. Large enough to need slight cutouts in the rails in order to pass between them when closing the bed (Figure 5 right).



The rear of the camera is a clever mix of production Graphic and Graflex parts. The turntable came from a 3/4 x 4/4 RB Auto, while the ground glass assembly is from a standard 3/4 x 4/4 Speed Graphic. A custom wood frame fills the space in between. The frame that mates the turntable to the body is custom-made but close in size to the back of a 3/4x4/4 RB Auto (Figure 6).

While in excellent condition, it has been used and modified, which creates more mysteries. The lens shown here is a non-

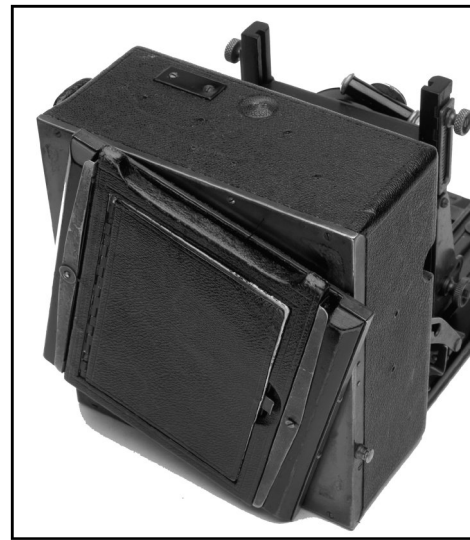


Figure 6

original 15cm Carl Zeiss Tessar, from the mid-twenties. The focus scale is for a 135mm lens, but seems to have been added later. Under this scale is evidence that a second scale existed at one time. Mounting screw holes for this scale show a lens longer than 135mm, perhaps 150-170mm.

There are also four pairs of screw holes on the body, three pairs on top, one on the right side. One pair is in the proper position for a rear peep sight, another pair for a flip-up finder, although neither fits standard Graflex hardware. To add to the mystery, there are no ghost-lines, common with this hardware. Two sets fit the size of an agent's or store's nameplate. The black celluloid rectangle on top seems to have no use--it has no engraving, nor does it cover any hole.

So, from a small camera made in 1915, we have the side-mounted handle of the Pre-Anniversary, the forward mounted focus knob of the Anniversary, the tilting standard and missing focal plane shutter of a Pacemaker Crown, and the rotating back of a Super Graphic.

A 3x4 Century View Camera



Figure 7

This camera came to me from an estate in Florida. According to the Serial Number Book, job number 6875 was for six

“Special 3 x 4 Rev. Back View Cameras.” This camera, serial number 78189, is the second of the six. It came to me in a pair of felt-lined, but clearly homemade, cases. The first housed the camera, the second contained four of the six original plate holders, the extension rails and a very nice 7" Verito lens in a Regno shutter, complete with original lensboard, lens cap, petrified hose and bulb.



Figure 8

After living with various view cameras from 5x7 to 11x14, this view camera is the canine equivalent of a Teacup Poodle. It's just so darn cute! While not nearly as innovative as the RB Crown, it's still fun to see that Folmer & Schwing Division of EKC could do most anything with wood and brass. And at 8¼" tall by 7¼" wide, it is a good deal smaller and lighter than the already small 4x5 Crown View (Figure 8). While small in stature, it is big in bellows. A full 21" could be had with the extension rails. That beats the Crown View, Graphic View, Graphic View II, and comes close to the 23" of bellows extension on a 5x7 2D! (Figure 9)

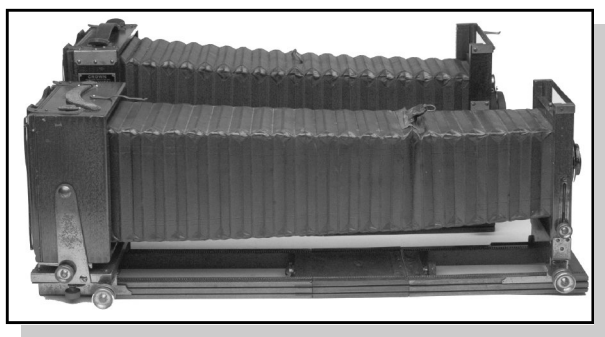


Figure 9

Although badged only with a “Folmer & Schwing Division of Eastman Kodak” tag, it's clearly designed and finished as a Century camera, with the lightweight frame and narrow, two-slot rails of a No.1, coupled with the geared tilt and shift capabilities of a No. 2 Century. The front standard is unique. Normally, the vertical styles would be directly above the rails. Here the rails are inset, and while it's not the most elegant design, it does give adequate finger room to both the front and rear focus knobs without extending the knobs unnecessarily (Figure 10).



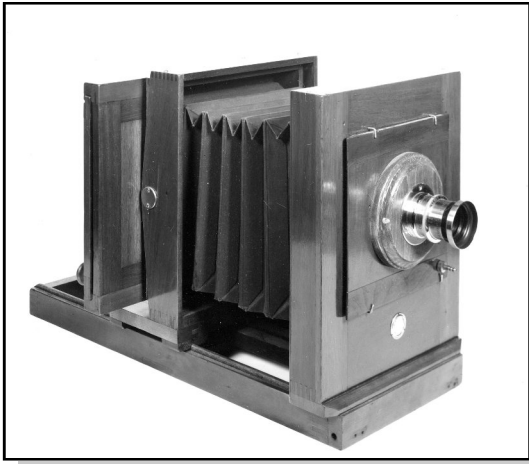
Figure 10

The camera back is a classic Century design, with lots of glowing cherry wood. It's interesting to see how this view camera design uses lots of wood around the ground glass, and yet a Speed Graphic, with its narrower springs and more efficient design, can fit the same format in nearly the same size body. I did a quick check, and a back from a 4x5 Graphic View camera is slightly more than 1/8" larger in both dimensions, So it wouldn't take much to have a 4x5 back fit this neat little camera.

Custom-built cameras span the gamut from cute 3¼x4¼ RB “Speedless” Speed Graphics to huge 20" x 24" Enlarging, Reducing and Copying cameras. Exactly how many of these odd cameras are in collectors' cases or in the attic of the camera store down the street is unknown, but they are out there--along with garage-made or -modified cameras that look like custom-built cameras.

Craftsmanship is the single best guide to separating a factory custom from a garage-modified camera. If it isn't first rate, it wasn't Graflex-made. Part of this craftsmanship comes with the equipment at the factory. It was easier for Graflex to make a body with finger joints than a garage mechanic to make a half-lap joint. On that same line, mahogany and cherry were expensive woods to a handyman, and he wouldn't use it internally. Graflex, on the other hand, had so much scrap mahogany from the main camera lines, they burned a lot of it for heat. Mahogany glue blocks would have been easy for Graflex, pine blocks would have been difficult.

Serial numbers are helpful but are not completely dependable. Always stamped in the wood in an inconspicuous place, serial numbers can help prove a camera is a real one, but not every custom camera got a serial number. So check those collections, and watch the estate sales--that strange looking Speed Graphic just may be a one-of-a-kind, factory-custom camera.



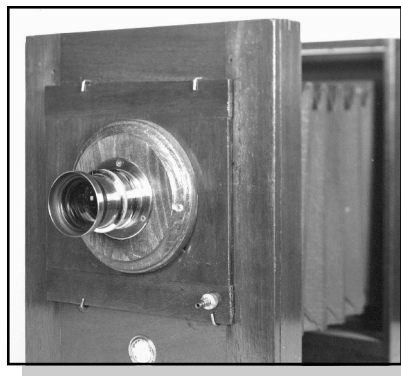
\$5 Century No. 5

By Ronn Tuttle

I seldom go to auctions. They are time consuming and seldom productive for me. It irritates me to see photographic items that belong together separated and scattered by auctioneers who know nothing about them, but always seem to have a story, accurate or not. As an example, several years ago before the onset of the digital age, an auction group sold off wooden negative carriers as picture frames, and then wondered why no one bid on the 5x7 Elwood enlarger...it baffled me, too.

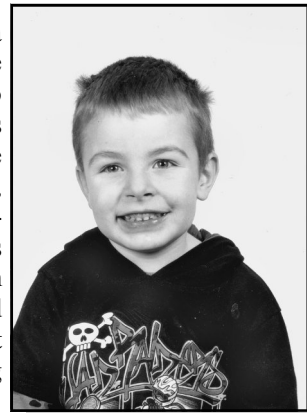
However, this auction was different. It was pretty well advertised as having "a thousand cameras and other photo items." The auctioneer had all of the cameras listed, numbered, and auctioned them in order, often several items in a group, but when something deserving individual attention came up, he recognized it as such. Very impressive for a small town general auction house. It turned out to be a good auction for me. I spent a total of \$37 and came home with two collectible wooden contact printers (\$1 for the pair), 20 8x10 sheet film holders in usable condition after some cleaning and re-taping, assorted other items, and the real jewel, a No. 5 Century Studio Camera. Yes, it was incomplete and ugly, but a real nice restoration project. Knowing there was nice wood beneath the black spray paint applied by a previous owner, I was pleased to be the high (and only) bidder at \$5.00.

Century No. 5

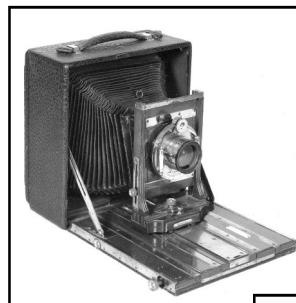


After refinishing the wood and polishing the brass, I replaced the missing ground glass and mask for the sliding dividing back. The original lensboard was there, but no lens. From my stash of old brass lenses, I chose an Emil Busch Rapid Aplanat Series D, f8/260mm. The hole in the lensboard was about twice the diameter of the Busch and looked like it had been cut with a dull axe...it was in otherwise nice condition. I normally try to restore things to as near original condition as possible, but in this case I went with the "street rod" route. I covered the hole with a round piece of wood purchased at the local Hobby Lobby store. Stained to match the rest of the Century, I think it is a very acceptable solution.

When mounted with a Packard shutter, the Busch lens turned out to be a nice choice for this camera. The quality of the photos of my grandson, Brandon, looks very acceptable to me. This was my first use of the 2 on 5x7 feature, and I do need a little work on the exact positioning of the sliding back.



Two other examples of Century cameras from my collection are a 6½ x 8½ or full plate field camera shown with a very attractive brass lens and shutter that I believe to be a B&L, and an 8x10 Century Universal, a model that was reputed to have been used by Edward Weston and Berenice Abbott. Weston supposedly called the Universal the finest 8x10 camera available. It folds up rather compactly, and I be-



Century Field Camera

Century Universal

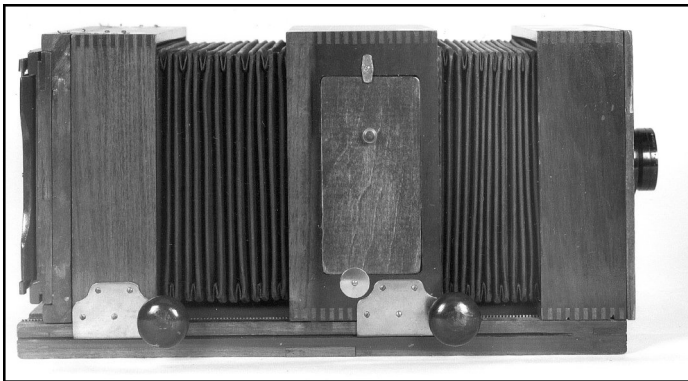
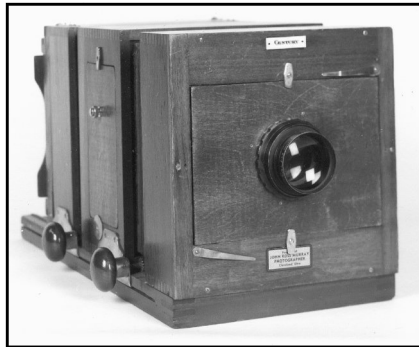


lieve it is of the triple extension design...very well made.

I have not used either of these two cameras, but they appear to be very capable, as do all of the Century products I have seen. I think these are two more examples of fine American craftsmanship.

Does anybody know who John Ross Murray, Photographer, of Cleveland, Ohio, is or was? I don't, but I have his camera. It is a Century Copying/Enlarging/Reducing Camera made from 1900 to 1910, according to McKeown's big book.

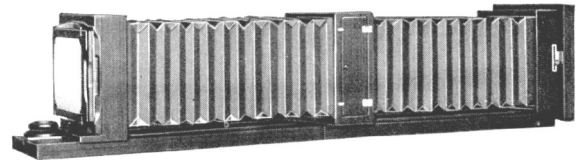
Century Enlarging, Reducing, and Copying Camera



mounted when copying an original glass plate (I assume) placed on the front where the lensboard would normally be. There are two brass spring clips to hold the plate in place. I also replaced the missing back with one from a B&J 5x7. It needed only slight trimming to fit.

If I ever have the need to do any copy work, I now have a handsome outfit to do it with. I hope John Ross Murray would approve.

The 8 x 10 Crown Enlarging, Reducing, and Copying Camera



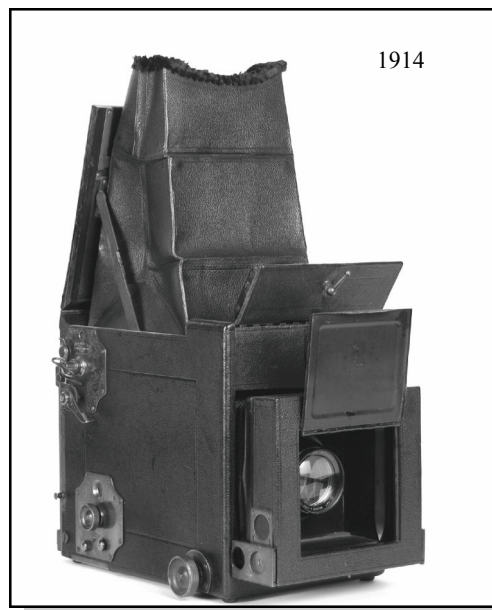
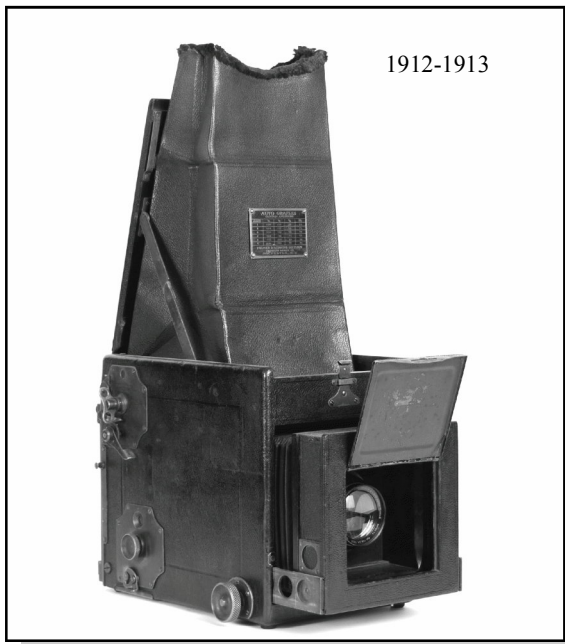
Professional Photographic Apparatus, 1937

I acquired it several years ago from a gentleman who said he had "an unusual wooden camera up in the attic." He really didn't know much about it but sent me a hand-drawn sketch of it that peaked my interest. The camera body was nice enough to need only a gentle cleaning with Murphy's Oil Soap and a coat of wood wax, thus preserving the decal proclaiming it to be the property of the aforementioned John Ross Murray. The bellows were stuck together but opened with no damage. I made a replacement lensboard and side cover, as these were missing. Since the camera was meant for copy work, I replaced the also missing lens with a 7½" f4.5-32 Kenro-Ilex Paragon process lens, no shutter. The side cover allows access to the center section of the camera where the lensboard may be

UPDATE

1. The next issue of the Graflex Historic Quarterly will be published free to anyone providing an email address to Ken at metcalf537@aol.com.
2. If you would like to receive a mailed copy of the Quarterly, the price will be US\$14 per year. As all subscriptions have been allowed to expire, those interested in receiving the Quarterly by mail should send \$14 to Ken. If the actual cost of printing and mailing is less than this amount, subscriptions will be extended.
3. Our affiliation with graflex.org will allow us to post the Quarterly on their web site following the electronic mailing. Also, readers will be able to enter comments on the web page.

There is much more of the Graflex story to tell. As always, the success of the Quarterly depends on reader comments and participation.



The Telescopic Revolving Back Auto Graflex of 1912-1914

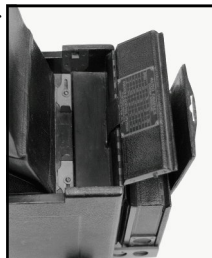
By

Ken Metcalf

A comparison of the 1912-1913 version (old model) (serial number 27429) to various early cameras suggests that the 1909 Revolving Back Auto Graflex may have been the inspiration for this model. The cases are of similar size, although the weight and focal capacity are less for the old model.

Why was this camera made? At this late date, there is very little chance that we will ever know. Although Graflex continued to make improvements to their cameras, they also continued to make changes that reduced production time and cost, although not usually compromising overall quality. This is not the case with the 4x5 Telescopic Revolving Back Auto Graflex. Surprisingly, the version shown in 1912 and 1913 lacks the premium features of the model made in 1914. Also, Graflex often used ideas, names or parts from earlier cameras, sometimes many years later. So it is with this camera.

The 1914 model (new model) (serial number 31384) has several premium features not present in the older model. First, the underside of the hood door is leather-covered, which had not been done since the early Tourist, original Graflex cameras, and the expensive Stereo Graflex. Second, the two-piece hood uses the double latch of the heavy Press Graflex. Common to both the old and new models (but no other Graflex) are two large slide bars that allow for easy removal of the hood for cleaning the ground glass.



1909 Revolving Back Auto Graflex, serial number 34028.

A comparison to the new model Telescopic Revolving Back Auto Graflex suggests that the Revolving Back Auto Graflex of 1906 may have been used as inspiration for this camera.



1906 Revolving Back Auto Graflex, serial number 10712.

According to the chart below, unlike the Series D, Tele and R.B. Graflex Junior, which used the same bodies as earlier cameras, modifications to the antecedents of the Telescopic R.B Graflexes were used. Also, Graflex significantly increased the weight of the new model, at no additional cost.



1898 Telescopic Graphic Special

double-hinged model has the late model (1913-1914) hood, hardware, but the 1906 model 3½-inch lensboard, beveled back and large front standard. Second, Jerry Laderberg's (serial number 31303) double-hinged camera has "Automatic lens shields," first introduced on the Series C, but with his camera, in cloth, similar to a focusing panel. Because the lens standard is deep, it is possible that the shields were added to accommodate a long-barrel lens. And third, a double-hinged camera (serial number 31384), fitted with magnifying lenses with a spring-loaded hinge.

Although the old model was listed for two years, more

	<u>R.B. Auto (1909)</u>	Tele. R.B. Auto (1912) <u>(Old Model)</u>	<u>R.B. Auto (1906)</u>	Tel. R. B. Auto (1914) <u>(New Model)</u>
Lensboard size	3¾ x 3¾	4x4	3½ x 3½	4x4
Focus range	7¾-18 inches	7*-12 inches	7¼-12½	7¼-12 inches
Weight	6¾ pounds	6¾ pounds	6¾ pounds	8 pounds
Price w/o lens	\$125	\$120	\$125	\$120
Dimensions	9½ x 6-1/8 x 8½	9½ x 6-1/8 x 8½	9½ x 6-1/8 x 8¾	9½ x 6-3/8 x 8

*It grew to 7¼ inches in 1913.

The use of the word "telescopic" is the unclear descriptive part of this camera. At least as early as 1898, Folmer & Schwing Mfg. sold a Telescopic Graphic Special (See illustration). Then, apparently at random, they added this word to various models of the Auto Graflex camera. Also, although listed in the catalogs as The Telescopic Revolving Back, the speed plate in all cases simply refers to the camera as an "Auto Graflex."

An alternate theory is that the early model, as well as the R.B. Tele, Series C and late R. B. Auto, were all designed by a tall person, as the hoods are tall.

Several cameras have been located with what appear to be factory modifications. First, Gene Miller's (The serial number, which has a period, not a comma, is 10.660.)

examples of the new model remain, suggesting more were produced and that it was possibly more popular. The reason it was marketed eludes me. Why was this camera discontinued? I think it was too heavy, too expensive to manufacture and lacked the features of the versatile Revolving Back Auto Graflex, which continued until 1941. I think their decision to stop production, especially for the collector looking for a "shelf queen," was the best decision.

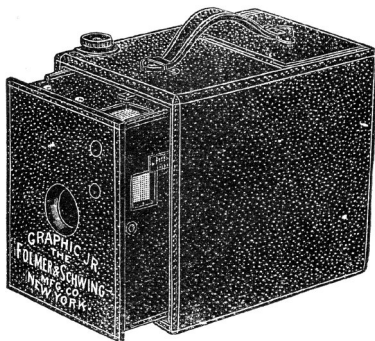
If you have one of these cameras, please let us know. The Quarterly maintains a list of cameras, by serial number, made by Graflex. This list, started by Richard Paine, is an attempt to document model changes and to supply information about cameras not listed on the Graflex serial number list, which does not start until about 1915.

Graflex Historic Quarterly

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