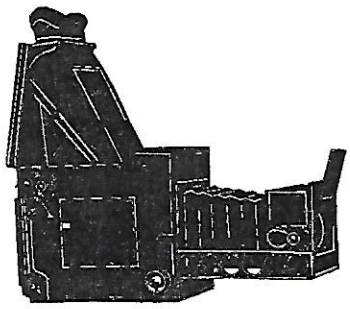
GRAFLEX HISTORIC QUARTERLY



VOLUME 7 ISSUE 1

FIRST QUARTER 2002

FEATURES

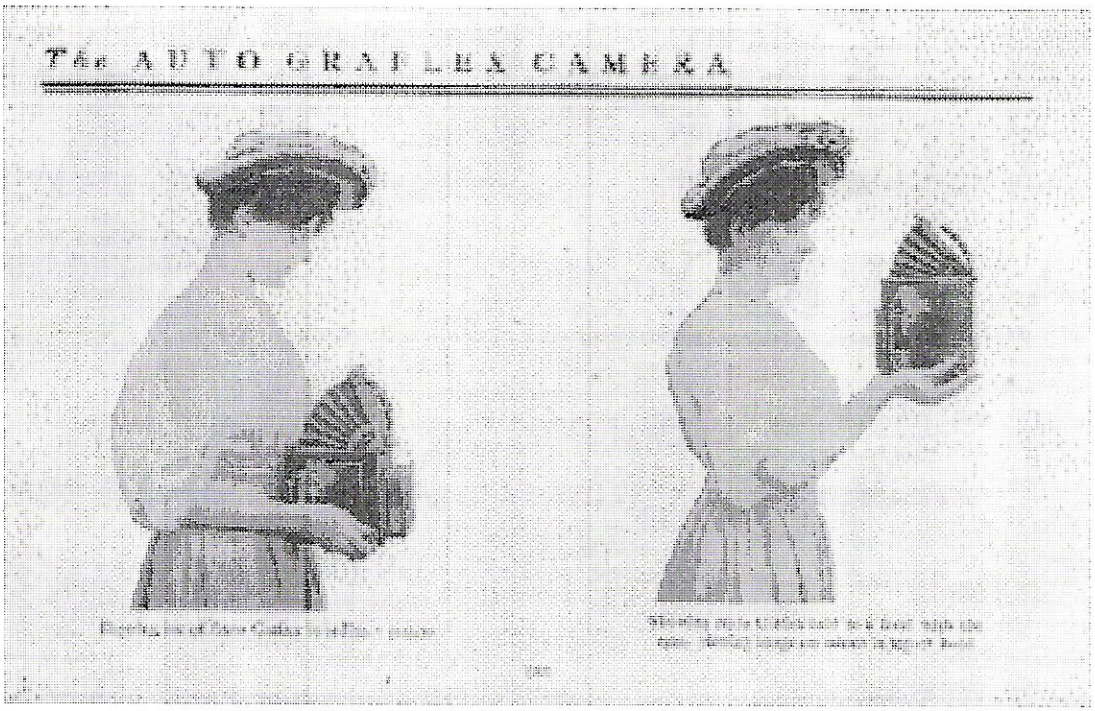
A New and Useful Improvement in Cameras - The Auto Graflex
By Ken Metcalf

Perhaps the most pivotal event in the life of Graflex was the introduction of the one-piece, continuous band focal plane shutter. The model for this was the Auto Graflex, which Ken has researched.
Most focal plane shutters before this, and even after, used a two piece shutter, which at that time was not as reliable as it is now. The Folmer shutter changed that and made the company prosperous. Other companies attempted to copy this idea, but it was vigorously defended by court action, and remained a main feature of the company's equipment for decades to come. -ed.

On May 22, 1905, William F. Folmer, a resident of Brooklyn, New York, applied for a patent for "..a new and useful Improvement in Cameras.." Specifically, "The purpose of the invention is to provide a special construction of focal-plane shutters in which a plurality of slits or transverse openings is produced having predetermined gradations as to width or depth and to provide [a] mechanism especially adapted to such shutter for setting the same as required, indicating at what point the shutter is set, and releasing the shutter for either instantaneous or time work and for regulating and indicating the tension for the shutter....A further purpose of the invention is to provide a simple and effective construction whereby it will be impossible to operate the shutter in any manner while the focusing mirror remains in its upper position or position for exposure, thus preventing an accidental second exposure of the plate through an untimely adjustment of the shutter."

When sales of this camera started, " AUTO GRAFLEX Folmer & Schwing Mfg. Co. New York" was prominently stamped on it. Curiously, literature introducing the Auto made no specific mention of the reason for the use of the name "Auto." The closest Graflex came to an explanation is in the 1906 catalog description of the Auto Graflex Jr., in which they said "The shutter is our new Auto Graflex. [model]" Also, its possible that it was simply recognition in writing that the mirror moved up and automatically released the shutter, which had been used on earlier Graflex cameras.

As no examples other than the 3 ¼" x 4¼" size are available between serial numbers 7945 and 8852, it would appear that this size was the first introduced and possibly was the only size manufactured, until serial numbers reached about 9100. As shown in the patent, this camera (along with the 3 ¼" x 4 ¼" Auto Graflex Jr., which was introduced in 1906) had a "bellows focusing hood" (now commonly called an "accordion" hood) and was manufactured until (according to information in catalog illustrations) 1910, when the folding-hood front hinge model was introduced.



3 ¼" x 4 ¼" accordion hood examples of the camera illustrated in that patent still exist with serial numbers 7945 and 8013. It is interesting to note that the slit and tension numbers in the patent and on these cameras are located on the shutter release side of the camera, and are not part of the plate used to set the curtain width and adjust spring tension. Except for differences in the length of the plate connecting the slit and tension indicators, and the difference in the curtain numbering system, the appearance of the number plate is the same on a variable aperture Folmer & Schwing Mfg. (F&S Mfg.) 4x5 Reversible Graflex (number 6685), and the variable aperture (c. 1902) accessory focal plane shutter. Thus it is reasonable to assume that the patented first version of the Auto used the basic form of the earlier slit/tension plates with the new body and one-piece curtain.

Still showing the F&S Mfg. name, 3 ¼" x 4 ¼" accordion hood examples of the Auto Graflex exist that have a second version of the hardware in which the round top plate is replaced with a scalloped corner version with the slit and tension numbers incorporated in the winding plate. Examples of this later form of camera are numbered 8725 and 8728.

Two 1906 catalogs, both issued by the Folmer & Schwing Company of Rochester, N.Y.., show the second version of this camera. Both catalogs also show the lens cover as sliding, although this feature was changed to a hinged door that opened when the front standard was moved forward. This feature was illustrated in the 1907 catalog and was available on a 5" x 7" example of the accordion hood Auto camera (serial number 9351). While discussing these catalogs, it is interesting to note that the commonly referenced 4 x 5 revolving back Auto Graflex was originally shown in one 1906 catalog as reversible (examples numbered 8496 and 8500), and in the other 1906 catalog as revolving (example numbered 10712). Though only mentioned briefly in the patent application, "At the rear of the exposure opening appropriate ways are provided for a plate holder," the "sliding lock" arrangement for attaching holders and other accessories was introduced. This simple yet effective device was used on the Graflex until about 1949, when the Graflok back was introduced.

Another piece of interesting information on the Auto is contained in the letter of 1905, attributed to Rudolph Speth, which was published in the Second Quarter 2001 issue of the Graflex Historic Quarterly. Item (5) states that three Auto Graflex cameras were sold to a specific company ("which I think the first ever sold"), and were "taken back some time in September and the new model delivered to these people in their place.."; also, "..he (Folmer) wants all the twelve of this kind which he sold to come back and be replaced." As much as I wish this letter did not exist, it does and needs to be addressed. It would be convenient to claim that the first version, based

No. 848,140. PATENTED FEB. 5, 1907.

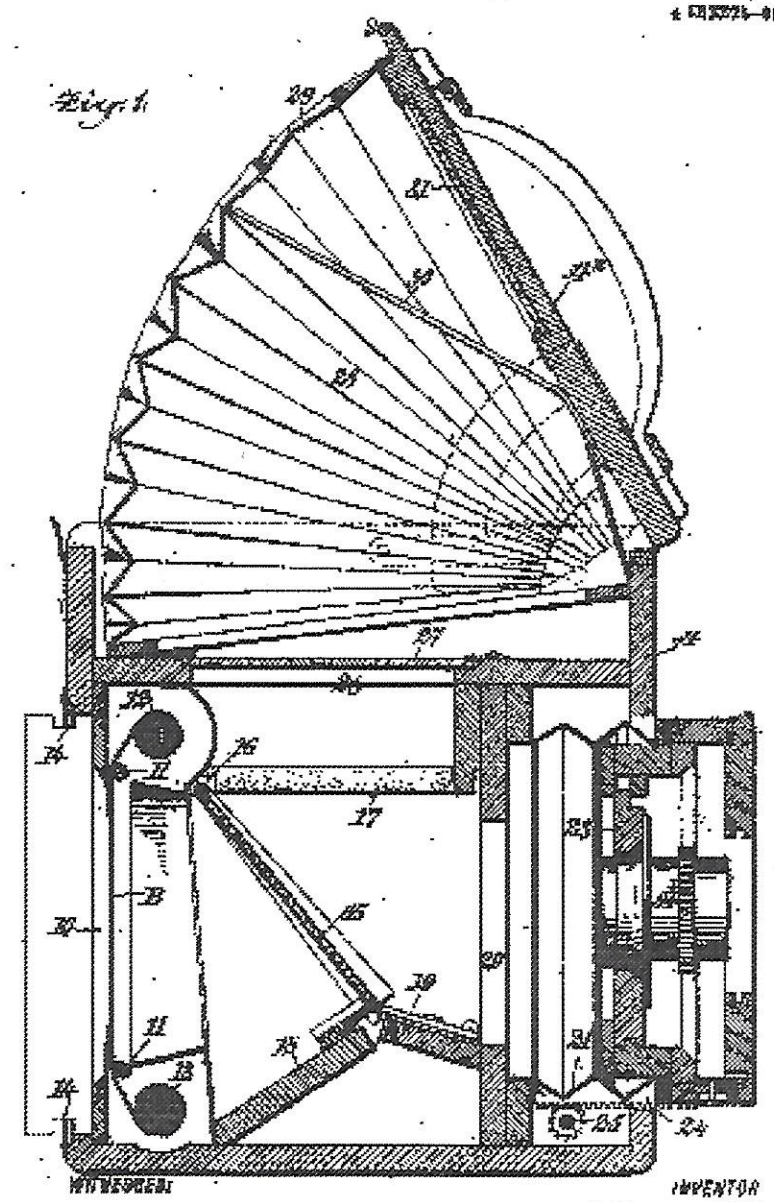
W. F. FOLMER.

CAMERA.

APPLICATION FILED MAY 16, 1905.

4 SHEETS—SHEET 1.

Fig. 1.



WITNESSES:

INVENTOR

William F. Folmer

BY

ATTORNEYS

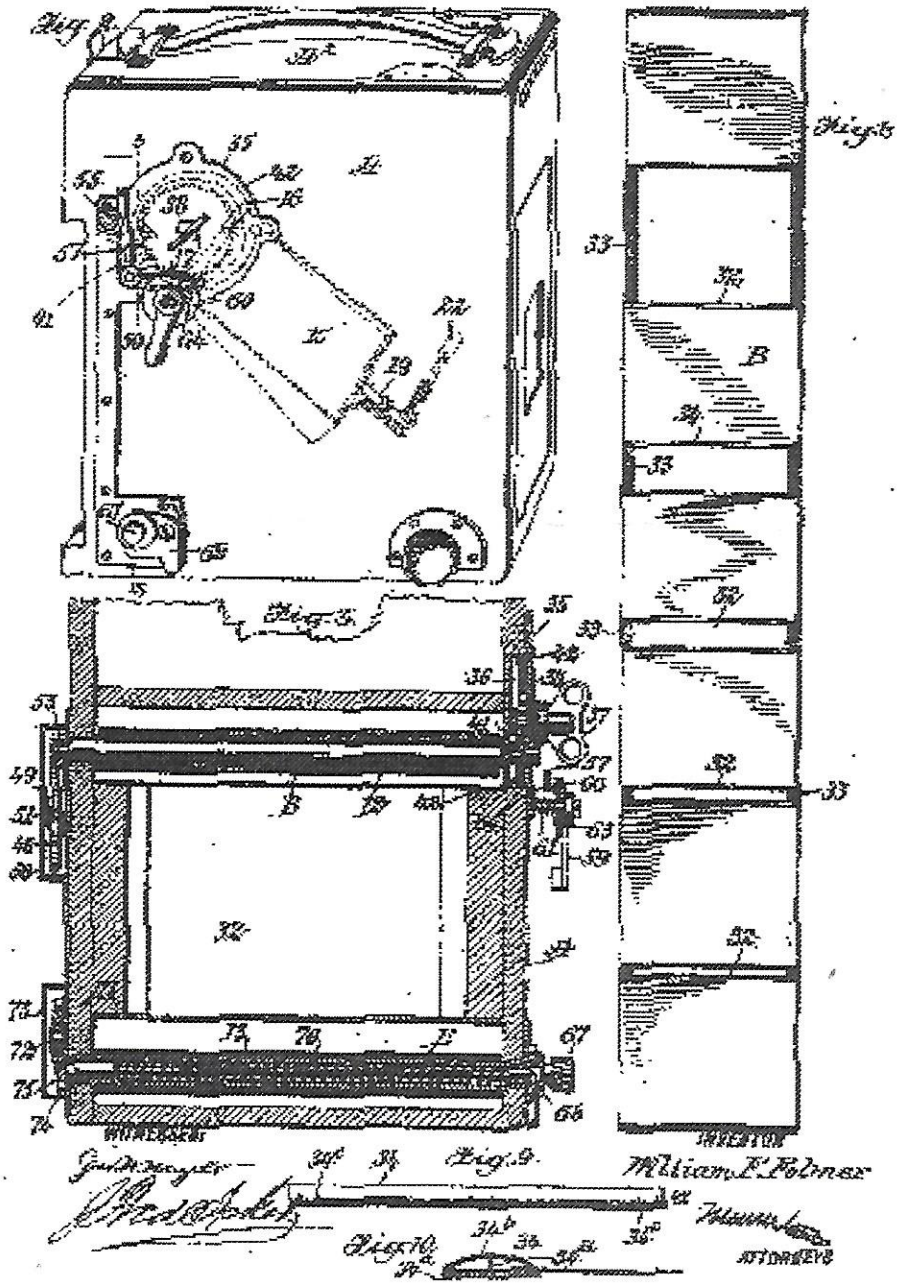
No. 843,140. PATENTED FEB. 5, 1907.

W. F. POLMER.

CAMERA.

APPLICATION FILED MAY 21, 1906.

4 SHEETS—SHEET 1.



on drawings in the patent, are the "twelve" cameras referred to in the letter, but it is highly unlikely that two examples from twelve have survived. My only explanation is that there must have been twelve prototype cameras produced prior to the camera set forth in the 1905 patent. According to the Speth letter, the plant was "removed to Rochester" in late August 1905, which suggests that September's "new models" probably were produced in New York City.

I believe it is reasonable to conclude that the Auto Graflex was invented by William Folmer and sold by the Folmer & Schwing Manufacturing Company in New York City in 1905, then manufactured and sold in Rochester, after they were purchased by Eastman Kodak. It appears that the F&S Mfg. name was used on the camera produced in Rochester until replaced by the F&S Co. name. From the range of serial numbers of sample cameras, it is also reasonable to assume that quite a few cameras (especially of the second version) were produced by F&S Mfg.

An interesting feature of the accordion hood Auto Graflex, which was discontinued in later models, was the use of a second mirror that was placed on the back side of the hood door. This simple feature allowed the camera to be viewed from eye level. Later versions of the accordion hood model were equipped with a lever release, which was used on all subsequent Graflex cameras.

Cameras mentioned in this article are from a list maintained for many years by Mr. Richard Paine (author of "A Review of Graflex"). Readers of the Quarterly who submit information on the Auto Graflex can have their cameras added to his list. In addition, Mr. Paine welcomes information on any camera. Data should include: model, serial number, manufacturer's name, lens (if believed to be original to the camera), and any features (such as flat or raised hardware, finish, etc.) that indicates a change within a model or a feature that is not generally associated with a particular model.

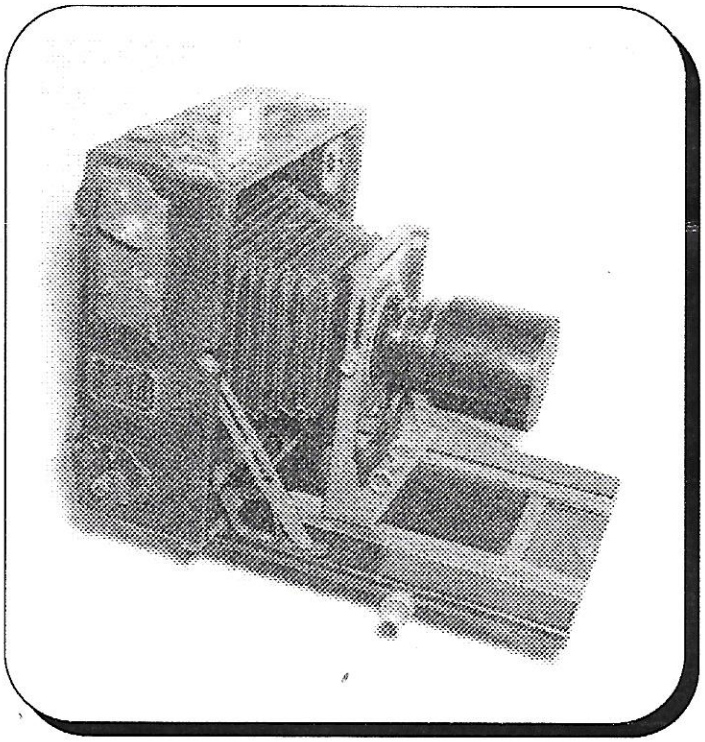
It should be noted that some conclusions are based on Graflex catalog illustrations, which were not always accurate or timely; thus, they are subject to revision if and when new data surfaces. Conclusions different from those presented in this article are welcome. Additional information about other catalogs from 1905 and 1906, information on other cameras produced during this time, and other source material is also welcome, and can greatly enhance the value of this research. Please send ideas and information to the Quarterly, and I will submit a follow-up article.

5"x7": The Forgotten Speed Graphic

by James Chasse

Having used a 2x3, 3x4, and 4x5 Speed Graphic during my picture taking career, I was not even aware of the existence of the 5x7 Speed Graphic. My first awareness of this format was in thumbing Dick Paine's Graflex book. Much to my surprise there was a 5x7" size; big and impressive. Probably not too many were ever made, as the Graflex SLR's of the time seemed to be very adequate for the photo coverage.

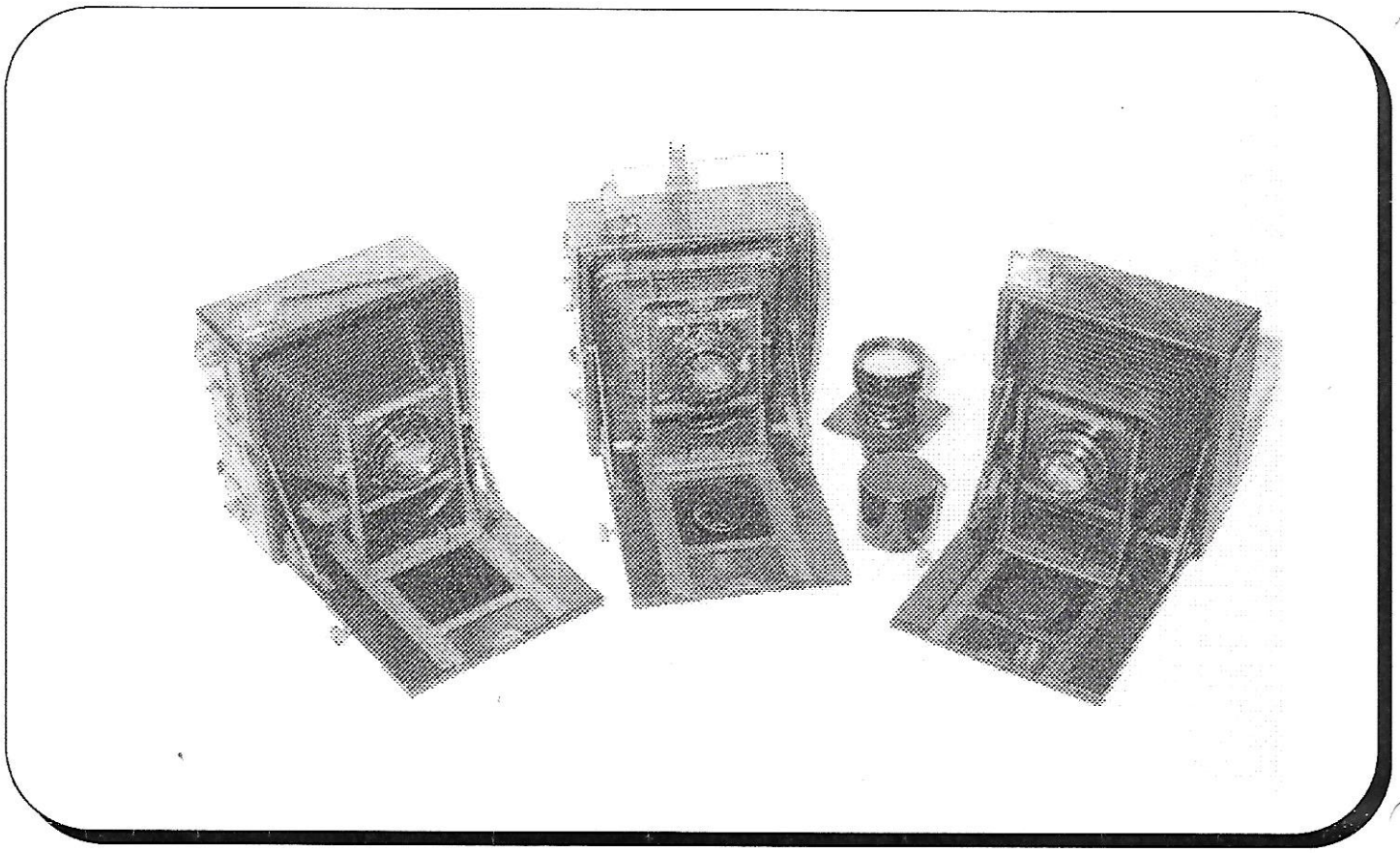
I then located a very early [SN 87,XXX] clean "Top Handle" body [no lens or bellows] for the Graflex collection, in a carrying case which had kept it as new; this was the best I would do for several years. Later I located a "parts" 5x7 which had bellows for rebuilding my earlier Top Handle. The lens was no problem - I already had a beautiful one in brass barrel with vintage leather cap.



5x7 Top Handle with Dallmeyer tele

I also acquired Jerry Laderberg's 5x7 Speed as pictured in Paine's book [p.58], and several parts from the above parts camera fit right on it. I now had a very early 5x7, and a very late one, too. This latter camera bore a B&L Zeiss Tessar Ic in Compound shutter.

Appreciating their rarity, I recently acquired a third 5x7, which looks as if it just left the factory. It has a 21 cm Zeiss



Jim's three 5x7 Speed Graphics

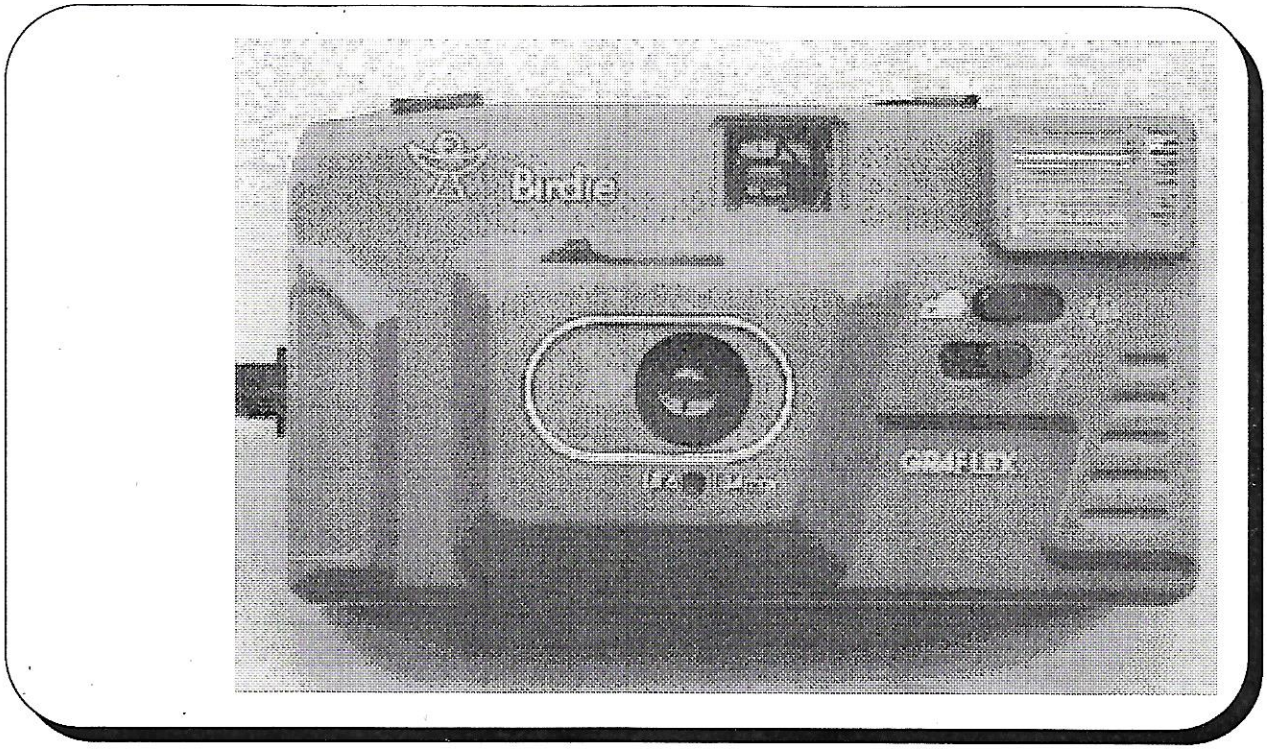
Jena lens. What prompted me to write this article was the surfacing of a 14" f5.6 Dallmeyer tele-Dallon with telescoping hood. I believe Graflex SLR's of this period had side curtains and lens doors which acted as lens hoods, and that the tele-Dallon was therefore intended for Speed Graphic-type cameras. I enjoy showing "old-time" pro's the 5x7 Speeds, and seeing the puzzled looks showing they were not aware of the forgotten Graphics.

for an interesting footnote to the 5x7 Speed story, see page 8

GRAFLEX AFTER 1973, Part 3:
THE AUSTRALIAN VENTURE
by Mike Hanemann

"Graflex is here again" was the heading of an article in the fall 1988 issue of The Journal, publication of the New England Photographic History Society. The article recounted the efforts of two brothers, Martin and Paul Hannes, who had purchased the rights to the Graflex name, to market a line of essentially point-and-shoot 35mm cameras. The brothers formed Graflex Pty., Ltd in Australia. The article further reports that a line of Korean made cameras was exhibited at the 1988 *Photokina.* The models were: Graflex Quantum 88 with auto exposure, Quantum AF, Quantum Tele, and AF 100, The prices ranged from $99.50 to $129.00. A less expensive group was the 35EL, 35B, and Graflex Dive. The firm's address was given as: Graflex Pty., Ltd, 390E Eastern Valley Way, Roseville, N.S.W., 2069 Australia. Two letters to this address remain unanswered.

To my surprise, at a local camera show, I happened to see a man with his young son walking by carrying a bright yellow and blue box with the magic name on it: GRAFLEX. I stopped him and inquired of the box. He explained that he wanted a "cheap" camera for his son. I offered to trade him a point-and-shoot Kodak, and he agreed. I was then the owner of a Graflex compact 35mm camera called *"BIRDIE."* The box showed an orange colored model, but the one actually in the box is gray (photo 1). The camera has a 34mm, f5.6 lens, fixed focus with 2 f-stops; a built-in flash; and a wrist strap. Unlike so many Asian-produced inexpensive cameras, the film plane is not curved. The instruction booklet in the box states it is for a KS35-HD, and the illustrations are the *"Birdie."* It's in English and French. The camera is new.

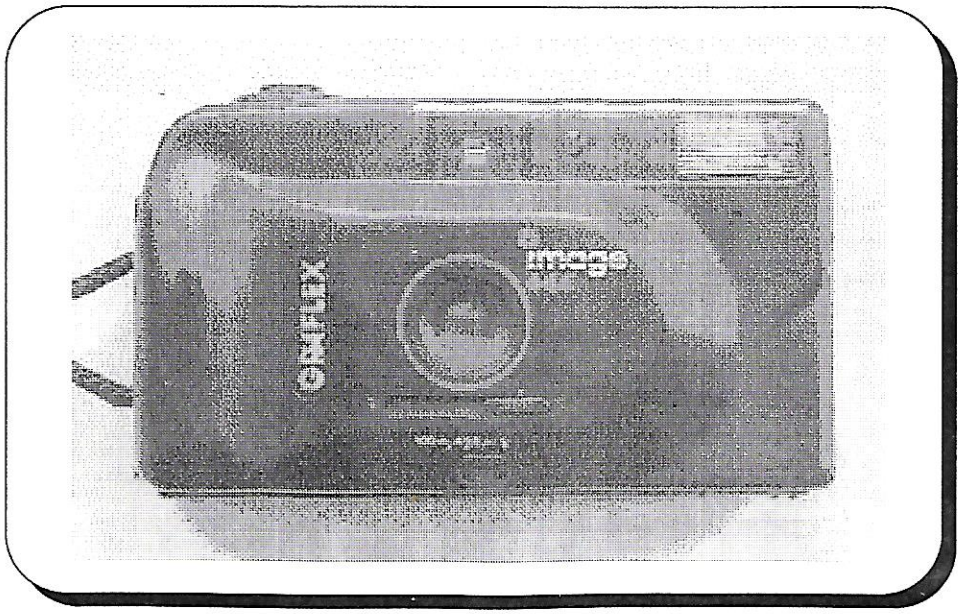


"Birdie," an Australian Graflex

5 years later I was cruising Ebay and found a listing for "GRAFLEX 444 Motor drive." It turned out to be a GRAFLEX IMAGE $$$ motor drive 35mm camera. Apparently no other collector saw it as I was the only bidder. The camera is unused. There is no lens data but you can set the ASA to either 100 or 400. It has an exposure counter, the lens is fixed focus, and flash is turned on by moving the ASA switch to the flash symbol.

Neither the 444 nor the Birdie appear on the 1988 list, and both resemble current cameras that are offered as premiums for various ventures, subscription, etc. Tim Holden supplied a letter from PHOTO MARKETING ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONAL, of Australia dated May 26, 1997 which states that this venture "..did not go well and eventually folded - in the opinion of many due to quality of the products."

A sad end? To a proud name!



"Image 444," another Australian Graflex

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Contact: Mike Hanemann
P.O. Box 22374
Milwaukee, OR 97269
Or J.C. Welch
1777 Lake Dr.
Eugene, OR 97404
e-mail hanemann @ europa.com
or equinox@webolium.com
(J.C.W's email)

Graflex Historic Quarterly

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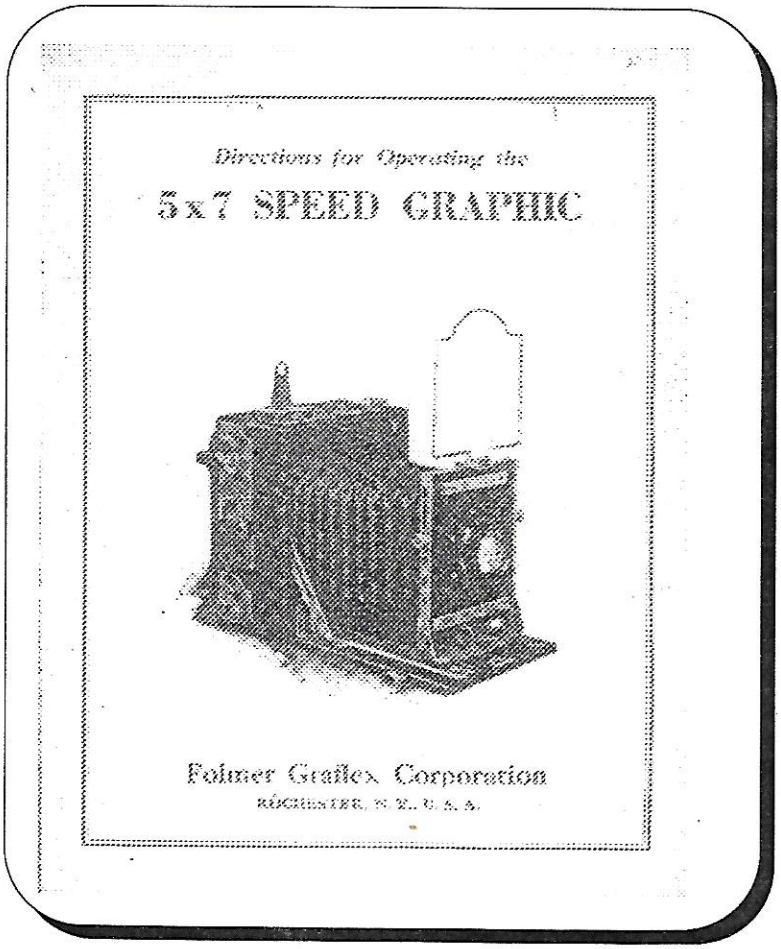

Copy of the front of the 5x7 Speed instruction book. Jim Chasse writes, "Note that ... a 5x7 is not pictured!"