

Olive Pierce Photographs, 1963-2014

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Cambridge Public Library Archives and Special Collections

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Summary Information

Repository:	Cambridge Public Library Archives and Special Collections
Creator:	Pierce, Olive
Title:	Olive Pierce Photographs, 1963-2014
ID:	045
Date [bulk]:	1963-2014
Physical Description:	3 Linear Feet
Physical Description:	.8 Cubic Feet
Physical Description:	3 boxes 1 half Hollinger and 2 oversize
Physical Description:	95 Items
Physical Description:	77 Photographic Prints
Language of the Material:	English

Preferred Citation

Please use the following format when citing materials from this collection: [Identification of item], Olive Pierce Photographs, 1963-2014, 045, [Box#, Folder title], Cambridge Room, Cambridge Public Library Archives and Special Collections.

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Biography

Olive (Robbins) Pierce was born in Chicago, Illinois in 1925 and grew up in the suburb of Lake Forest. Pierce attended Vassar College to study English and graduated in 1945 through an accelerated wartime program. In 1948, she took a position as a secretary for a United Nations medical mission in Poland where she began taking pictures. It was the experience of photographing war-torn Warsaw as well as the concentration camp, Auschwitz, that inspired Pierce's interest in photography.

In 1951, Pierce married George Pierce and settled in Cambridge, Massachusetts. They had three children Laurence Pierce (b. 1952), Anne Pierce (b. 1953), and Elizabeth Pierce (b. 1956). Pierce returned to

photography, mostly taking portraits of children, and under the tutelage of Berenice Abbot and Paul Caponigro began her professional career.

Pierce was a Bunting Fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study from 1965 to 1967. Here she began to focus on documentary photography rather than portrait work. These early photographs centered on her children and the environs of her summer home on Vinalhaven, a small island in Midcoast Maine.

Pierce began to explore documentary photography more fully and the city of Cambridge, Massachusetts became her subject. She spent the next decade as a freelance photographer, working for the Cambridge Chronicle, while embarking on two major documentary projects.

Her first project was to discover the local democratic process. Every Monday night between 1970 and 1972, she photographed Cambridge City Council meetings. The newly elected City Council fired the city manager – despite much protest, was pressured to establish of rent control, and was charged by members of the city’s black community of unfair treatment by the police. A turbulent time in the city’s history, Pierce captured tensions between citizens, elected officials, and the police.

Pierce’s next project focused on Jefferson Park, a public housing project located in North Cambridge. From 1973 to 1975, Pierce went to project’s courtyard and took photographs of the children who lived there. Once a week, she returned with prints that the children purchased for 25 cents.

In 1977, Pierce was hired as a substitute teacher in the Art Department of the Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She then went on to create the school’s first photograph program, which she headed for ten years. In 1986, she published *No Easy Roses: A Look at the Lives of City Teenagers*, featuring photographs she took of students during her tenure. The book includes excerpts of testimonies or oral histories that Pierce recorded, asking the students about their home lives, future plans, and dreams.

After leaving her teaching position, Pierce once again turned her attention to Maine. This time she documented the difficult lives of those living in a small fishing village in Waldoboro, Maine. Beginning in 1987, Pierce spent ten years getting to know the Carter and Harvey Families and their community that she describes as “rural, insular, and interdependent.”[1] She rented a cottage near the families and spent a year photographing their lives and work - clam digging, scalloping, shrimping, pogeing, lobstering, home making, and childrearing. Pierce received another Bunting Fellowship in 1991 and 1992 to work on a book featuring the fishing community. Her photographs were exhibited at the Farnsworth Museum in Rockland, Maine in 1989 and at Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1992. *Up River: The Story of a Maine Fishing Community* (coauthored by Carolyn Chute), the book resulting in this documentary project, was published in 1996.

A lifelong political activist, Pierce was particularly affected by the first Gulf War in 1990. As a political protest against the economic sanctions imposed on Iraq, 73 year-old Pierce traveled illegally to Baghdad and Basrah in 1999 under the auspices of *Voices in the Wilderness* to witness children’s live under duress. She returned with photographs that were later made into postcards produced by the *Art of Compassion*. At the outbreak of the second Gulf War in 2003, Pierce photographed demonstrations of pro and anti-war supporters on the Newcastle Bridge in Damariscotta, Maine.

Pierce received the 2001 Peace and Justice Award from the City of Cambridge. In 2002, she was featured as part of the series, *Maine Masters Project*, for her career as a documentary photographer. In

2014, Pierce published the first of a four-part memoir, *Out of the Midwest: A Memoir in Four Parts, 1925-1948*. Pierce's photographs have been shown in galleries in Massachusetts, Maine, and Illinois. Her work is in the permanent collections of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the Portland Museum of Art, the Addison Gallery of American Art, and the Farnsworth Art Museum.

[1] Pierce, Olive, "Up River: The Story of a Maine Fishing Community," University Press of New England, Hanover, NH, 8.

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Collection Overview

This collection contains photographs, books, moving images, audio cassettes, and ephemera from several projects that Olive Pierce worked on during her 40-year career as a documentary photographer. The photographs include the following:

1. Portraits taken during the 1960s, featuring the environs in and around Vinalhaven in midcoast Maine.
2. Cambridge City Council Meetings (1970-1972), featuring images of politicians, police, witnesses, experts, and citizen spectators taking part in the city's democratic process during a turbulent time.
3. Portraits of the Jefferson Park Housing Project in Cambridge, Massachusetts (1973-1975), portraying children and their lives in the project.
4. *No Easy Roses* (1982-1985) has two components. Pierce took candid photographs of students at Cambridge Rindge and Latin where she worked. She also took headshots to accompany oral histories she recorded of students. These photographs were published in *No Easy Roses: A Look at the Lives of City Teenagers* in 1986.
5. Photographs of a fishing community in Waldoboro, Maine (1987-1993) that were later published in *UpRiver: The Story of a Maine Fishing Community* in 1996.
6. Portraits taken of Iraqi children in Baghdad and Basrah in 1999.

All titles and descriptions are written by Pierce on the back of her photographs. Each photograph is a taken on black and white film and is either a fiber print or a resin coated print.

The collection also contains books that Pierce wrote:

1. Pierce, Olive, *No Easy Roses: A Look At the Lives of City Teenagers*, Cambridge, Mass, 1986, signed, paperback, Thomas Todd, printer.
2. Pierce, Olive, *No Easy Roses: A Look At the Lives of City Teenagers*, Cambridge, Mass, 1986, signed, red cloth hard cover with embossed rose, Thomas Todd, printer.

3. Pierce, Olive, *Out of the Midwest: A Memoir in Four Parts, 1925 – 1948; Part I: Childhood, 1925 – 1939*, signed, self published , 2014.

4. Pierce, Olive, *Up River: The Story of A Maine Fishing Community*, University Press of New England, 1996, signed.

Also included is an audio cassette of the oral history interviews Pierce conducted for *No Easy Roses*; a DVD, *Maine Master: Olive Pierce and Olive Pierce: Children of Iraq*, Maine Masters Project, 2002; and postcards of the photographs Pierce took in Iraq.

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Organization of Collection

This collection is organized into 9 series:

Series 1: Cambridge City Council, 1970 - 1972

Series 2: Jefferson Park, 1973 - 1975

Series 3.1: *No Easy Roses* Testimony Head Shots, 1982 - 1985

Series 3.2: *No Easy Roses*, 1982 - 1985

Series 4: *Up River*, 1987 - 1993

Series 5: Coastal Maine, 1963 - 1968

Series 6: Iraq, 1999

Series 7: Books, 1986, 1996, and 2014

Series 8: Audiovisual Materials, ca. 1985 and 2002

Series 9: Ephemera, 2003

Approximately 77 items grouped alphabetically by title within series.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Cambridge Public Library Archives and Special Collections

Cambridge Public Library
449 Broadway
Cambridge, MA 02138
617-349-7757
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Custodial History

Collection donated by Olive Pierce in August, 2014.

Access to Collection

This collection is open to research.

Conditions Governing Use

The material in this collection is subject to copyright and intellectual property restrictions. It is the responsibility of the researcher to understand and observe copyright law and to identify and satisfy the holders of all copyright. Researchers must obtain written permission from the copyright holder(s) if they wish to publish materials from this collection. Questions concerning copyright and permission to publish should be directed to the Cambridge Room, Cambridge Public Library Archives and Special Collections.

Processing Information

Processed by Alyssa Pacy in May, 2015.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Baghdad (Iraq)
- Basrah (Iraq)
- Jefferson Park Housing Project (Cambridge, Mass.)

- Vinalhaven (Me.)
- Waldoboro (Me.)
- Atlantic Coast (Me.) -- Social life and customs
- Children and war -- Iraq
- Fishing -- Atlantic Coast (Me.)
- High school students -- Massachusetts -- Cambridge -- Attitudes
- Local government -- Massachusetts -- Cambridge
- Photography of youth
- Police misconduct -- Massachusetts -- Cambridge
- Urban poor -- Massachusetts -- Cambridge
- Urban schools -- Massachusetts -- Cambridge
- Audiocassettes
- black-and-white prints (photographs)
- Book
- DVDs
- Matting (supporting)
- Photographic postcards
- Resin-coated paper
- Rent control -- Massachusetts -- Cambridge
- Pierce, Olive
- Cambridge (Mass.)
- Cambridge (Mass.). City Council
- Cambridge (Mass.). Police Department
- Cambridge Rindge & Latin School (Cambridge, Mass.)

Collection Inventory

Series 1: Cambridge City Council, 1970-1972

Description of Contents

This series contains photographs Olive Pierce took of Cambridge City Council meetings between 1970 and 1972.

Organization of Series

17 photographic prints and an artist statement arranged by subject (i.e., city councillors, rent control, police brutality hearings) and then chronologically.

Title/Description	Instances	
Artist Statement, 1972	box 3	folder 1
Cambridge City Councillors Edward Crane and Thomas Danehy, 1970	box 3	folder 1
Cambridge City Councillor Edward Crane, 1970	box 3	folder 1
Cambridge City Council, the firing of City Manager James Leo Sullivan, 1970	box 3	folder 1

Cambridge City Council, crowd protesting the firing of City Manager James Leo Sullivan, balcony, May 1970	box 3	folder 2
Cambridge City Council, spectators, 1970	box 3	folder 2
Cambridge City Council, Janet Rose, Cambridgeport resident (left), Bay Street resident (center), Byrle Breny, League of Women Voters (right), 1970	box 3	folder 2
Cambridge City Council, the Pledge of Allegiance, (left to right) Secretary to the Mayor Paul Morris, City Clerk Paul Healy, and Mayor Alfred Vellucci, 1970	box 3	folder 3
Cambridge City Council, gentleman sitting in the hall outside the chambers, 1971	box 3	folder 3
Cambridge City Council Rent Control Hearings, 1970	box 3	folder 3
Cambridge City Council, Police Brutality Hearings, balcony, January 1971	box 3	folder 4
Cambridge City Council, rent control advocate, December 1970 (left) and Cambridge policeman (right), 1971	box 3	folder 4
Cambridge City Council, police blocking the doors to keep people from a meeting abolishing rent control, December 1971	box 3	folder 4
Cambridge City Council, Police Brutality Hearings, Civil Rights lawyer William Homans (top left), Sandra Graham (bottom left), and Joanne Pelham (bottom right), January 1971	box 3	folder 5
Cambridge City Council, Police Brutality Hearings, George Greenidge (right) and friends testifying to police beatings, January 1971	box 3	folder 5
Cambridge City Council Hearing at Rindge Tech auditorium on the death of Larry Largey, young people from the Roosevelt Towers area, October 1972	box 3	folder 5
The Riot Squad on Cambridge Street after the Death of Larry Largey, October 1972	box 3	folder 6
Cambridge City Council Hearing on the death of Larry Largey, Mrs. McCartney speaking, November 1972	box 3	folder 6

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Series 2: Jefferson Park, (1973-1975)

Description of Contents

This series contains photographs Olive Pierce took of residents of the Jefferson Park Housing project in North Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Organization of Series

12 photographic prints grouped alphabetically by title.

Title/Description	Instances	
Bobby & Roscoe, 1973	box 2	folder 1
Boys in Doorway, 1973	box 2	folder 1
By the Tracks, 1973	box 2	folder 1
Friends, 1974	box 2	folder 1
Car Full, 1974	box 2	folder 1
Hanging Out, 1973	box 2	folder 1
Kids, 1973	box 2	folder 2
Newborn, 1975	box 2	folder 2
Over the Tracks, 1974	box 2	folder 2
Rico, 1974	box 2	folder 2
Sabrina and the Wheel, 1975	box 2	folder 2
Sawyer Brothers, McCrehan Pool, 1973	box 2	folder 2

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Series 3: No Easy Roses, (1982-1985)

Series 3.1: No Easy Roses Testimony Head Shots, 1982-1985

Description of Contents

This series contains the head shots Olive Pierce took of students at the Cambridge Rindge and Latin School during her tenure as a photography teacher there. The head shots accompanied taped testimony or oral histories of each student. Transcripts of the audio and the photographs were published in 1986 in Pierce's book, *No Easy Roses*.

Organization of Series

17 photographic prints grouped alphabetically by title, which is the students first and last name.

Title/Description	Instances	
Alexandro Levins Morales	box 2	folder 3
Aliya Wali	box 2	folder 3
Ari Miller	box 2	folder 3
Chris Towski	box 2	folder 3
Clinton Evans	box 2	folder 3

Ella Powe	box 2	folder 3
Fred Owens	box 2	folder 3
Karen Booth	box 2	folder 3
Tynika Terez Booth	box 2	folder 3
Kenny Berube	box 2	folder 4
Kira Enge	box 2	folder 4
Laura Madrigal	box 2	folder 4
Mark Agard	box 2	folder 4
Nilda Rosado	box 2	folder 4
Nora Zhang	box 2	folder 4
Paul Batista	box 2	folder 4
Sarah Wheelock	box 2	folder 4

Series 3.2: No Easy Roses , 1982-1985

Description of Contents

This series contains photographs Olive Pierce took of students at the Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School during her tenure as a photography teacher there. The photographs were published in 1986 in Pierce's book, *No Easy Roses*.

Organization of Series

10 photographic prints grouped alphabetically by title

Title/Description	Instances	
Basketball Game, 1985	box 2	folder 5
Before the Football Game, 1984	box 2	folder 5
Between Classes	box 2	folder 5
Body Builders, 1984	box 2	folder 5
Dance Class, 1983	box 2	folder 5
Glynis and Natasha, 1983	box 2	folder 5
Psychology Class, 1983	box 2	folder 5
Senior Prom	box 2	folder 5
Track Meet, 1983	box 2	folder 5
Welders, 1983	box 2	folder 5

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Series 4: Up River, 1987-1993

Description of Series

This series contains photographs Olive Pierce took during a 10-year association with two related families of fishermen, the Carters and the Harveys, living in mid-coast Maine. The photographs were published in Pierce's book, *Up River: The Story of A Maine Fishing Community*, in 1996.

Arrangement of Series

6 photographs grouped alphabetically by title.

Title/Description	Instances	
Amanda, 1987	box 2	folder 6
Beth and Christopher, 1987	box 2	folder 6
Early Morning Fog, 1990	box 2	folder 6
Nate and the Bluefish, 1988	box 2	folder 6
Rebecca, Madeline, and Jocko, 1988	box 2	folder 6
Sea Urchin Diving, 1993	box 2	folder 6

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Series 5: Coastal Maine, 1963-1968

Description of Series

This series are photographs Olive Pierce took of her children and the island where her family has a summer camp.

Organizatton of Series

5 photographic prints grouped alphabetically by title.

Title/Description	Instances	
Aunt Edie's House, Vinalhaven, 1968	box 2	folder 7
Bluff Head, Vinalhaven, 1965	box 2	folder 7
John Hildings, Vinalhaven, 1968	box 2	folder 7
Overtured Boat, Loud's Island, 1968	box 2	folder 7
Winter Harbor, Vinalhaven, 1963	box 2	folder 7

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Series 6: Iraq, 1999

Description of Contents

This series contains the photographs Olive Pierce took of children when she traveled illegally to Iraq in 1999 under the auspices of Voices in the Wilderness.

Organization of Series

10 photographic prints arranged alphabetically by title.

Title/Description	Instances	
Amarah Iraq, Mother and Daughter, Amarah Hospital, 1999	box 2	folder 8
Baghdad Iraq, Girl Selling Seeds, Safaafeer Market, 1999	box 2	folder 8
Baghdad Iraq, Porters Safaafeer Market, 1999	box 2	folder 8
Basrah Iraq, Boy and Beggar, Jumhuriyah Neighborhood, March 1999	box 2	folder 8
Basrah Iraq, Classroom, Boys, Center for the Internally Displaced, 1999	box 2	folder 8
Basrah Iraq, Classroom, Girls, Center for the Internally Displaced, 1999	box 2	folder 8
Basrah Iraq, Five Children, 1999	box 2	folder 8
Basrah Iraq, Mothers and Childrens, Basrah Pediatric Hospital, March 1999	box 2	folder 8
Basrah Iraq, Recess, Elementary School, Center for the Internally Displaced, 1999	box 2	folder 8
Baghdad Iraq, Waiting for Medicine, Baghdad General Hospital, 1999	box 2	folder 8

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Series 7: Books, 1986, 1996, and 2014

Description of Contents

This series contains two books based on Olive Pierce's photographic work and a memoir.

Organization of Series

Group alphabetically by title of book.

Title/Description	Instances
No Easy Roses, Paperback and Hardcover, 1986	box 1

General

Pierce, Olive, No Easy Roses: A Look at the Lives of City Teenagers, Cambridge, Mass., 1986, paper back, Thomas Todd printer.

General

Pierce, Olive, No Easy Roses: A Look at the Lives of City Teenagers, Cambridge, Mass., red cloth hard cover with embossed rose, Thomas Todd printer.

Out of the Midwest and Up River, 1996 and 2014

box 1

General

Pierce, Olive, Out of the Midwest: A Memoir in Four Parts, 1925 - 1948: Part I: Childhood, 1925-1939, self-published, 2014.

General

Pierce, Olive, Up River: The Story of A Maine Fishing Community, University Press of New England, 1996.

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Series 8: Audiovisual Materials, ca. 1985 and 2002

Description of Series

This series contains the tape recordings of student testimonials that were used in Pierce's book No Easy Roses: A Look at the Lives of Teenagers and a DVD created by Maine Masters, featuring Pierce' work. The DVD contains two documentaries on Pierce: Olive Pierce: Maine Master (running time: 26:50 min.) and Olive Pierce: Children of Iraq (running time: 18:48 min.)

Title/Description	Instances
Maine Masters (DVD) and No Easy Roses (Cassette), ca. 1985 and 2002	box 1

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Series 9: Ephemera, 2003

Title/Description	Instances
Postcards, Iraq Photo Series, 2003	box 1

Description of Material

One packet of twelve (12) postcards and an artist statement from Olive Pierce's Iraq photo series, produced by the Art of Compassion.

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