

## PIONEERING “SNOW-TOGRAPHER”



Wilson Bentley with the “apparatus” he created by connecting his camera with his microscope to allow the photographing of snowflake structure. He used the same equipment for the rest of his life. *Buffalo Museum of Science*

It is possible that some would argue it is a bit cliché, or a least overly stereotypical, to create yet another piece that talks about snow and Western New York. But here we are—doing just that—but with a bit of a twist.

This edition of Endnotes, however, isn’t so much about snow as it is about science, and a man’s quest to capture a small—very small—portion of winter’s majesty. This year marks the 140th anniversary of a pioneering scientific feat. On January 15, 1885, a 19-year-old by the name of Wilson Bentley created the first-ever microphotograph of a snow crystal. Having observed these wonders of nature under a microscope, Bentley was determined to capture their beauty on film. Using only basic tools that he fashioned to suit his purposes, Bentley would go on to create over 5,000 of these microphotographs, finding that no two were exactly alike, though his work was not given the attention it was due during his lifetime.

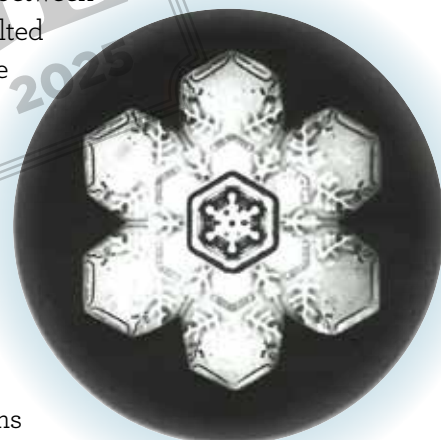
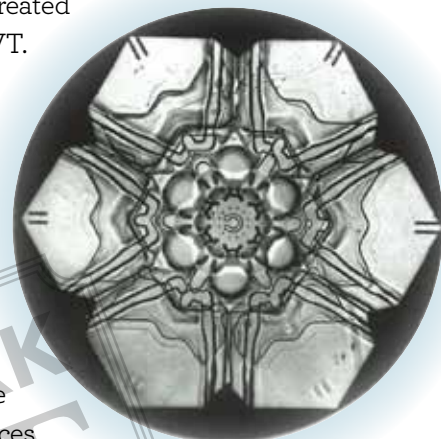
While Wilson did visit Buffalo on a couple of occasions to give presentations, the last one coming in 1922, he was not a Western New Yorker.

Rather, he spent his life—and created his images—in Jericho, VT.

But upon his death in 1931, Bentley’s niece offered his collection of thousands of photographic plates to the Smithsonian Institution, to be preserved for posterity. The Smithsonian refused them.

Fortunately, one Chauncey Hamlin, then president of the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences (the Buffalo Museum of Science), felt differently. Communication between Bentley’s niece and Hamlin resulted in the Museum of Science acquiring this incredible collection of over 10,000 plates in 1947. Along with the photographs came Wilson’s weather notebooks, as well as other associated items.

Perhaps it *is* cliché to end another winter issue with some mention of snow, but it seems completely fitting and appropriate that such an important collection of snow photography ended up here in Western New York. Our good friend, Anne Conable, first shared this story back in our Winter 2008 issue, but we thought the anniversary was a good time to revisit Bentley’s work. We still have a few copies of that issue for those who might wish to read the full story, but supplies are running low. Give our office a call 716-893-4011 if you would like to add one to your collection. **H**



A few of the 5,000 snowflakes photographed by Wilson Bentley during his lifetime. *Buffalo Museum of Science*