

Thomas Gushul

Thomas Gushul took a camera everywhere.

He had worked on the famed Canadian Pacific Railway Spiral Tunnels, and was almost killed in an explosion. His time as a coal miner opened his eyes to the hands and faces of working men. When he began to take photographs as a hobby, he realized that this skill could document the lives of people in the Crowsnest Pass.

Crowsnest Mountain captured his imagination, but he also photographed picnics, parades and miners at work. He wrote and read letters to help his neighbours; often he was asked to work as a Ukrainian translator at the courthouse. But his most vivid translations were glass-plate negatives.

On June 19, 1914, a series of explosions at the Hillcrest Mine killed 189 men – the worst mining accident in Canada. Thomas Gushul quietly recorded the reactions of the town, the funerals and the grief-stricken people.

The dangerous conditions in the coal mines, symbolized by that disaster, culminated in the formation of One Big Union. Gushul documented every step of that journey. His pictures still speak a thousand words.

Capturing the Crowsnest Pass

Every photo that left the Gushul Studio was imprinted with the Studio's name and address. Images documenting 50 years of faces and memorable moments filled family albums, portrait frames, and community newspapers throughout the Crowsnest Pass.



Thomas Gushul
Glenbow Archives NA-4279-4

The Gushuls were dedicated to their profession, often toiling until 2 a.m. in the darkroom. “...they call [good work] good business,” Lena Gushul said. “But they don’t know how long it takes to do good work and we never spared our time. We were proud we did good work and people said that we were the best.”

The Gushul Studio and Darkroom

Always innovative, the Gushuls figured out a process through which the newspapers could print photo-engravings. They built an enlarger out of an old lard pail. They fashioned a homemade camera using an old Kodak shutter, a winder from a watch, and a 16 mm movie camera lens. Long before the photograph became instantaneous, they successfully experimented with its complex technology.



Gushul family in front of their photographic studio, Blairmore, Alberta
Glenbow Archives NC-54-302

Born: 1889 – Died: 1962

Additional Resources

- **University of Lethbridge | Gushul History**
<https://www.uleth.ca/fine-arts/community/gushul-residencies/gushul-history>

Our Collections

Glenbow Museum

<https://www.glenbow.org>

Glenbow Western Research Centre | Glenbow Library and Archives

<https://libguides.ucalgary.ca/glenbowlibraryandarchives>

Glenbow Library and Archives | Digital Collection

<https://digitalcollections.ucalgary.ca/asset-management/2R340826N9XM?WS=PackagePres&Flat=1>