



OBELUS

Reginald Peregrine Bellevue

an abbreviated history

aliases: *Reggie, Perry, Richard, Ricky*

b. ca 1887 — American?

d. possibly 1937 — unconfirmed

Reginald Bellevue could be described as a mild eccentric who managed to travel extensively without a steady income, pursuing his passion for photography as the ever-panglossian bon-vivant. He aspired to living in posh hotels but was somehow always short of cash. Without a constantly replenished allowance supplied by his well-to-do older brother, George, he could have easily ended up as a vagrant. He was always a bit of an opportunist or kleptomaniac, in an innocent but nevertheless self-serving way. His non-threatening sociopathic outlook contributed to his total unawareness of his own larcenous tendencies. His journals are careful and detailed and clearly illustrate his total self-absorption and lack of moral compass. From his journals, his surviving photographic work, and the anecdotal reminiscences of others, we can discover a seemingly well-educated, somewhat talented but completely unemployable, naive man-child.

Bellevue travelled in a lumbering converted delivery van with the sign "*Belleview*" *Photography* printed on the side. He spent his time creating a huge photographic archive of closed doorways and dark openings all over eastern North America. He referenced having been on the Continent, presumably doing the same thing. Some surviving examples seem to be from the N-Eastern USA, Southwestern England and possibly Spain. His photographic approach was a bit old-fashioned, even for the time, with Pictorial aesthetics dominating his strangely avant-garde documentary cataloguing approach.



*top—possibly SW England;
top-right—unknown location;
bottom-right—possibly Spata.
All gelatine silver prints, ca. early 1930s.*

Bellevue's surviving photographs include many views of doorways or windows. Most of his settings are weather-worn and are never populated. He seems to be attracted to ancient closed doorways or dark openings. Could it be a subconscious reference to his obsessive fear of being locked away, either as a patient or prisoner, or some other Freudian interpretation? The prints are small, detailed and well printed. They are contact printed from large format negatives and subtly toned to a warm black. Some are mounted on brown board with gold ruled lines framing the image, in a throwback to late-Victorian or Edwardian Pictorial aesthetics.



Final pages from the Personal Journal of Reginald P. Bellevue, 1937.
Handwritten in a fine steady hand within a small lined booklet: 7.5" x 5"

15 July -

Today I awoke feeling more refreshed than I had in a long time. It must be the air here. Or it could be the gin. I found that the hotel was unusually quiet this morning, or when I left after my usual light breakfast there was not a soul in the lobby, nor the desk clerk. This made it much easier for me to stow my equipment out of the hotel and into my automobile without the fuss of last week's little misadventure. I picked up a lunch from a tray someone seems to have left in the hallway (how considerate!) and drove south along the lake shore road, looking for the wooded drive gate I had seen yesterday. By 11:00 a.m. I had thought I wouldn't find it, so I pulled on a rat of beautiful old barn door ironbits. It looked like the structure would fall over at any time, so I dared not enter it at first. I sat up the canvas on the shadow side of the building and shot through its open door towards a window in the back wall. Through this one could see the open fields in the sunlight beyond. For once I made a striking view. I look forward to preserving the plates. There was a nice little park near the edge of town so I decided to occupy them for the night.

18 July -

The rain clouds have made a mess of today's photographic plans, so I thought I would spend time in the local museum. The museum was in an older stone building that may have once been a bank or Mason's lodge. It had magnificent front door steps, a wide flight of stairs. I was pleased to find that the museum was open, and that the odd, preoccupied lady, who smiles over the collections around once interested in the garment she was kneeling then in what I was doing. I was therefore able to actually handle many wonderful items. I especially liked the fine bird gloves that were sitting by a silk top hat. I made a mental note that I should buy a pair like that for driving. They fit quite well. They were so comfortable; I never noticed that I was wearing them when I left. Oh my. Maybe I should consider retaining them in a bag or two. I decided to check into a local hotel because of the inclement weather and spend the evening reading the few newspaper newspapers in this fine smoking lounge.

17 July -

I have heard that the weather was not going to clear for a few days, so after a business lunch I decided on a scheme to move on and tried to catch this night train to moon run. I checked out of the hotel, paid the personal man of 2 dollars for my brief but pleasant stay, built credit at once then on a few fine wondrous hotels in this country anyway. I forgot to leave a tip for the maid, but then, I suppose I could try to send something later. I purchased fuel for the truck, picked up a windshield and a hose and stored them in the truck with a block of ice in a nice tin bucket that I found out to the main station. I headed along the old mill road to where it connects with the highway east of Littleton. I managed to drive about 700 miles before tiring and found another fine little hotel on the outskirts of Longton. It had become quite fancy, so I sat up the canvas for a view of the moon above the post office. I wonder if they have a moon-view here as well. It may have a nice restaurant as well.

18 July -

Yesterday's supper may have been a bit off. I spent a good part the night in the hot down the hall. I hope no one else was in need of it. If they do the door, they may well have. I stayed in bed until almost noon in order to regain my strength. Since I had decided to stay an extra day, I went for a walk around the town looking for potential photographic opportunities. None presented themselves. I took an early night with a newspaper I found in the hallway, by Room 7.

19 July -

I was awoken early by the sound of doors slamming and heavy footsteps in the hallway. Someone shouted, "Stop" just outside my door. I was not too keen on packing my bed out of the door to see what was going on, but after a while when things were quiet I got out from under the bed and ventured downstairs to see what it was all about. Apparently there was a burglar in the moon down the hall. Someone had actually come in through the window and was caught going through the pattern's belongings. He ran off before anything could be done to stop him. I immediately worried about the museum equipment I had left in the truck parked out front. Luckily, it was all there when I looked so I decided to find another moon hotel. Little town further down the road. I simply cannot think better!

too unfortunatly. In my hurry to pack and leave this cozy little town, I think I forgot to pay my hotel bill. I will try to make a note of when it was so I can read them a check after I return home.

(135)

27 July -

Just off the main highway, I found a quaint little village with a wonderful little rooming house. There was a vacancy so I settled in for a stay. The area is quiet, the views are clear, and the food seems to be quite delicious, all for only 14 dollars a week. I promised to pay at the end of the stay, so I headed out to find a bank. This town is so small, that there was only a post office and a general store. I asked the kind gentleman at the desk if he would cash a check, and he seemed quite willing. Now I have enough funds for a few weeks, at least. I had better make sure bank to make them not to refuse the check, because I was planning to make a major deposit in a few days. I'm sure they will believe me one again. I decided to spend the day wandering the town's few streets and making photographs. It is quite un-fel here. I must remember to pack a lunch next time.

25 July -

It has been a wonderful week. I have made many friends, some of which were kind enough to loan me some money for supplies. At lunch, the landlady mentioned that the bank called her about my check. I assured her I would go down and straighten it out immediately. As I was driving out of town, and realizing that I had already packed all my photographic equipment and clothing in the back of the van, I decided it might be wise to alternate. I had forgotten my shaving equipment in my room, but it seemed like a good time to give a hand anyway. I will miss this town and the wonderful people here.

26 July -

The weather changed dramatically as I crossed the state line. It is overcast and cooler than yesterday. I packed in a bag-by and made a fire in a large iron barrel and for garbage. All I had to eat was a can of beans that I picked up last week. I must think when to go now. In the meantime I will continue to head in a southeasterly direction until a clear destination presents itself. At least it should eventually get warmer. Staying in the van is less comfortable than I like. I read the dramas in the various

lodgings that seem to always befall me on this journey.

27 July -

I think that my new head is making me look a little scruffy. I was actually chased out of a lady's yard today. I think that she actually accused I was stealing her vegetables! She accused a big beaver in my direction and called me a beaver! (Can you imagine? My actual was on duty. I dropped some of the acorns. Now my dirtbag to mind, too. I will have to find a nice little rooming house now, so I can clean up. I must check out the local doghouse for a nice shaving brush and comb. I hope I can find some more decent bottles as well, as there are becoming more than a little worn and tattered, let alone dirty!

28 July -

I spent a season and comfortable night in a local flophouse. The dick clerk insisted that I pay for the room in advance, so I saw a little short of cash now. I must give George for some more. I was accused to some extent some shaving equipment in the laundry down the hall. I wonder which just forgot it there? The food here was not up to standard, but I ate my fill anyway. When I returned to my room in the evening, there was a loud argument going on in one of the neighboring rooms. I thought I heard someone accusing the other of stealing his belongings. I couldn't make out the rest, but decided I should leave in the morning. I can't bear the tension of knowing there is a thief among us.

29 July -

I found a small white tin Mission office and wired George for some money. An electricity agent as long as I had my way back home immediately. I don't think he understands how important my work is, so I told him I would see him as I finished documenting the picturesque views I find in the towns along the route home. He seemed agreeable and said he would wire 100 dollars to the Guild Hall and Merchant's Bank in Haverbury, just a few hours from here. All I need now is gas enough to get there. I decided that the main station on the far end of town may need an assistant for a few hours which might pay for enough gas for the trip. When I asked the owner about this, he insisted that he didn't need help since business was slow. I told him I would wait sometime, hoping that things would pick up after lunch. When he was finally working in the back of

the man's bag. I helped two customers with their gas fill-ups. He didn't seem to notice, which is just as well, since I almost mindlessly accepted to give him the money. By lunchtime, I thought I had better leave and headed across town to buy my gas from someone else who wasn't too disliking. By 4:30 I arrived in Newbury but was too late to make it to the bank during operating hours. I managed to make a crisis of five photographic areas of the Bank's closed doors, so all was not lost. Without sufficient funds, I thought I would be forced to wear again look for less than desirable lodgings. My problem seemed serious, however, after a nearby policeman who had been observing my photographic activities accused I might be ... hear did he put it! ... "saving the joint". He obstinately insisted I accompany him to the local police station. I was treated with great indignity, being searched about roughly by two of the worst policemen. One had me in a headlock for an eternity while the other checked my pockets and applied checks. I jiggled wallet button on his nose surrounded my neck quite prominently. He gave me a headkicking to be accused my injury without an acknowledgment of his role in my receiving it. I cannot believe they think I ought to be a dangerous type. I was seen fingerprinted and photographed. How embarrassing! I was to spend the night. I was told, Luckily, there was an empty cell that was hopefully just right for a good night's rest and was without cut to me. Although very small, I managed to adjust to the claustrophobic space and was passed on the 1st and leaving within the hour. Unfortunately, by late evening, two dirty looking fellows were forced to join me in the same cell. I soon had to give up the cell to the worst scumfiest and was looking over. I have never seen. No words were exchanged, being left alone likely due to the foreseeable injuries my neck bandage attested to. I suppose they assumed I was a real tough guy, who had battled with the assistant officers! I wondered if they thought my journal writing was somehow threatening, so I decided to postpone my entries to the quiet time in the dead of night.

30 July -

This morning after an uneasy night on the floor of the Newbury jailhouse, I was certain I would be allowed to leave when the day guard arrived. Unfortunately, again, he seemed to think I was guilty of some rather major offense. I was very upset by the prospect of staying with the others in the tiny cell for much longer. He told me to stop blurting and dragged me out of the

cell. I insisted I was just there to drop it off or to let me go as soon as I convinced him I could walk a straight line. How gullible the said constable was! I was impatient to be on my way again so I went to the local bank as soon as it opened to obtain and cash my money order. Then I left town in a hurry, you can be sure! My vehicle was little when I had left it. After driving back towards the station state line for a few hours, I found a little village near the roadway and inspired at a evening hour in a slightly better looking neighborhood than I've been used to lately. I immediately set about to clean up, change my clothes and write my journals. I must have found a place to stop and somewhere to have my laundry. Fantastic! The evening hour propitiously just happened one that we could pay with both! For a fee, of course. What was supposed to generosity and kindness for strangers?!

7 August -

It has been a rather frustrating week, when few photographic opportunities presented themselves. This is very discouraging. I will be glad to return home, around some points, and to re-George. My pessimistic mood was but on the Continent where many picturesque drawings could be found at various times, Africa and England were especially rich. Here in America, most buildings are rather run down and less interesting to my discerning eye. Perhaps it is time to travel abroad once again. I must think with George regarding our finances. I see that GERMANY is a charming place, this days with lots of activity and prosperous growth.

.... [It is here that the journal comes to an end with a dozen blank pages following. There is no apparent reason for the abrupt cessation of RPB's entries.]



Mug shot, July 29, 1937 as age 49. No obvious surviving formal portraits are found of Bellevue other than this mug shot taken after his arrest for vagrancy and suspected theft. (See his journals for his version of the events in question). His obvious and extreme distress at the time caused the judge to go easy on him and he was released with the understanding that he would immediately leave the state, and preferably, the country.



Self-described as a photo of RPB (*above, on right*), Bellevue often produced this image as visual proof of his own daring and skill, pulling it out of his coat pocket at every opportunity to describe the event. Even though it is easy to believe that he would be headstrong enough to get involved in a duel (as a clearly argumentative and easily-offended sort), he was also clearly a coward, braggart, and liar and was never proven to be a good shot. His casual, distracted demeanor did not help. If genuine, this image of him should likely have been his last. He insisted that the photographer of this image was an assistant operating Bellevue's photographic gear. But the above image is actually a tintype from the 1870's and is therefore very wrong for the time he was describing (ca 1935). Bellevue stubbornly maintained that it was a true record of him in spite of this obvious anachronistic discrepancy.



Above, a rare self-portrait of Reginald Bellevue in front of his photographic van and mobile darkroom, ca 1937.

In 1937, a man (*purportedly Bellevue—below*) was caught on camera sneaking into a Greenfield, MA rooming house by the suspicious landlord. It is evident that he is very careful not to get his hands dirty. This may actually be the last photo of RPB since we do not have any records of him after this time. This particular landlord was a violent man and was eventually convicted of robbing and killing one of his tenants in 1940. There was no proof, other than this image, that RPB was ever a tenant, though. Some of RPB's personal effects were found at the local pawnshop. No evidence remains as to who brought them there. These effects included a portion of his photographic equipment, a small collection of his negatives and prints, and a few incomplete manuscript journals. Information about RPB's character and anecdotes of his behavior were collected through interviews with a few the locals with whom he had periodic run-ins.



This booklet is part of an ongoing series of mini-biographies compiled by the research staff of OBELUS Publishing and printed by DeadCar Press at the Residue Press Printshop. Much of the material herein is from THE LYRIC CRANIUM archives, and was originally collected and catalogued by the late Griff Hornan and his archivist, Asaph Saif al-Haq, in the late 1940s and early 1950s. All text, except where noted, is by David Morrish.

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