

# Ganaway Captures Train's Spirit

King Daniel Ganaway's "Spirit of Transportation" captivated the media when it won the first prize in the 15<sup>th</sup> annual exhibition of photographs at Wanamaker's Department Store in Philadelphia in March 1921.

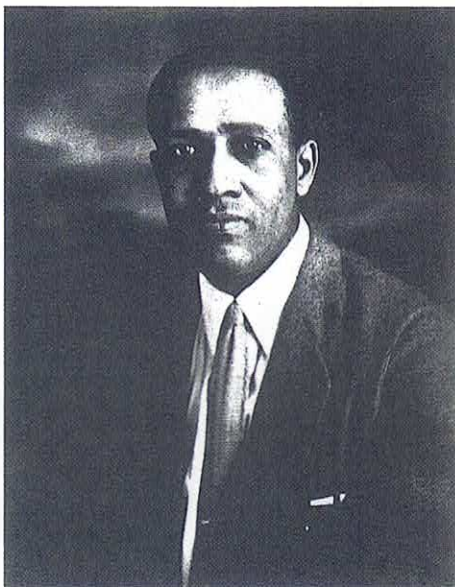
Jurors picked his photograph of two sections of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Limited arriving in Chicago on a cold day in February 1918 from about 900 entries. Ganaway (1884-1944), an African American butler, received \$100 for the view, coming out ahead of Edward Weston, Man Ray, and Paul Strand, all of whom became prominent figures in photographic history.

"Spirit of Transportation" appeared in the *Chicago Defender* (April 2, 1921) and later in such publications as the *Fort Dearborn Magazine*, Chicago, December 1921; *National Geographic*, March 1923; Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg's *The Trains We Rode*, volume 1 (1965), page 414; and on his letterhead, followed by the words "industrial and commercial photographs with the poster effect."

Almost immediately after winning the prize, he started selling photographs. The *Fort Dearborn Magazine*, the monthly published by the Fort Dearborn Banks, from 1921 to 1924 featured a wide range of his Chicago subjects. W. Frank McClure, editor for five years, considered him the "greatest photographer I ever knew." The *Chicago Daily News*, *Chicago Herald-Examiner*, Underwood & Underwood, industrial magazines, railroads (Illinois Central, for example), and public school textbooks used his photographs.

Ganaway's fame reached Christopher Morley, a columnist for the *Saturday Review of Literature*. In 1927, as the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Limited was about to celebrate its 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, he wrote: "I hear much of King Ganaway, the Chicago photographer who has done marvelous pictures of engines. I hope he'll do the Century as she pulls out of La Salle Street on the morning of June 15."

An art critic described his pictures as



King D. Ganaway, self portrait (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., LCMS-51615-9)

"the strongest, most masterful studies of commerce and industry ever produced by a camera," according to Edith M. Lloyd of Rauthraff and Ryan, a Chicago advertising agency. In an article in *American Magazine* (March 1925), she told about Ganaway and his photography.

Ganaway had visualized "Sprint of Transportation" for two years, and almost got thrown in jail for taking it during World War I. "Everything seem just right for the picture. It was a cold, snappy day, and the steam was forming into beautiful clouds: The sun was sending down big shafts of light, and, rarest of all, the two engines took exactly the position I had in mind. Just as I snapped the picture, a detective saw me and came running up, demanding to know what I was doing. I tried to explain to him; but he could not imagine why I wanted a picture of those trains. The more I talked, the more suspicious he became. Every minute I expected him to grab my camera and put me under arrest," he told Lloyd. "Finally, I pointed to the beams of light and said, 'Did you see anything more beautiful than the way the light falls on that smoke?'"

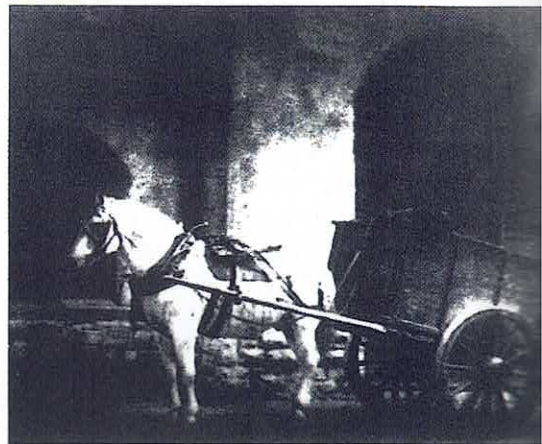
"I then showed him the main points of my composition, and exactly how the different masses balanced each other. In a few moments, he was just as enthusiastic about the scene as I was. When I was ready to go, he made no move to take my plate; but he warned me never to come back again."

"When I got home, I developed my last exposure, and found that I had just the picture I had been working for all the time!"

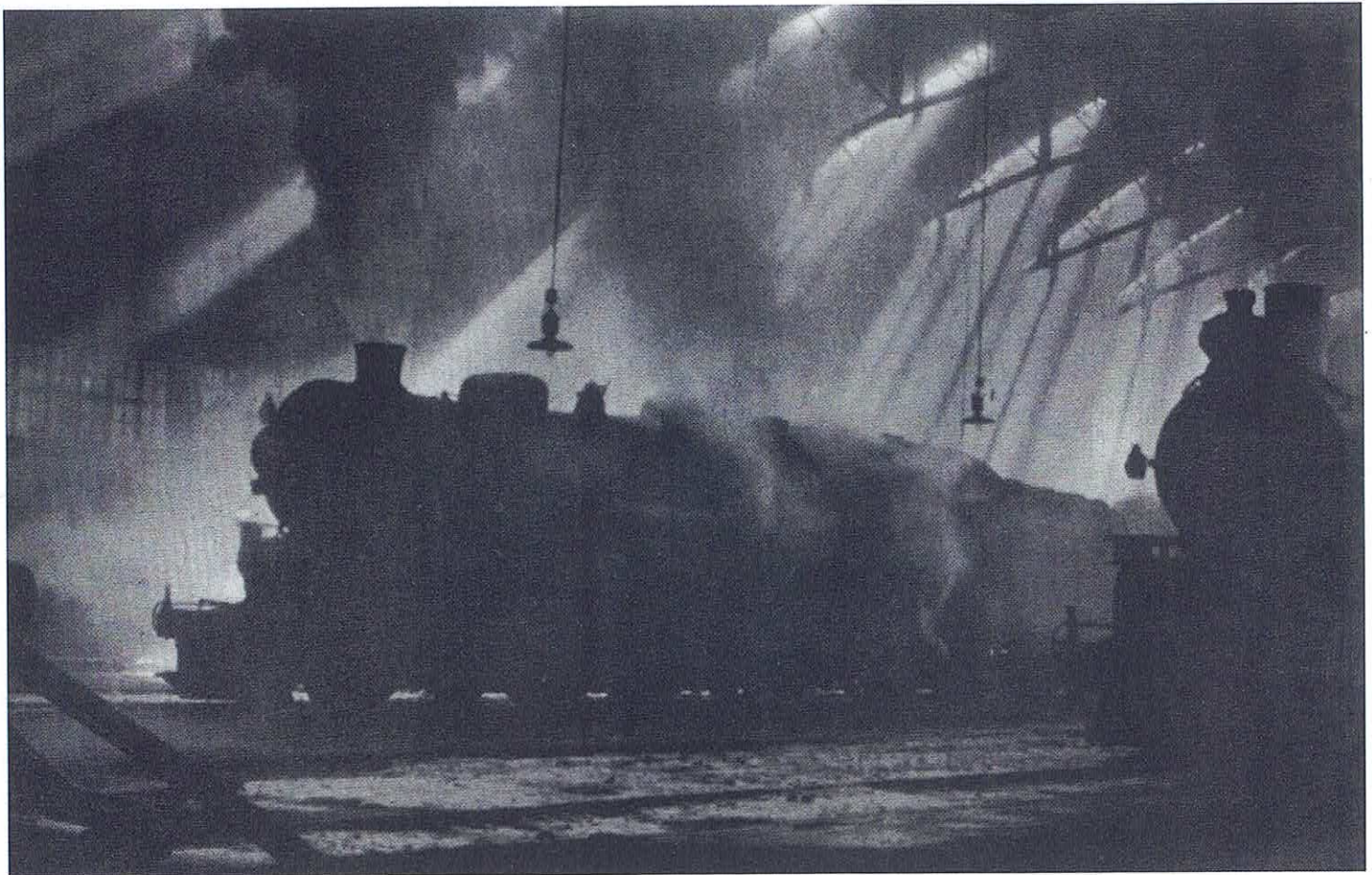
Ganaway, who was born in Tennessee and attended high school in Chattanooga, went to work as a butler in 1906 for Mary A. Lawrence (1838-1926), the widow of Edward F. Lawrence who lived on Lake Shore Drive, Chicago's "Gold Coast." Ganaway had been interested in drawing as a child. He tried to revive that interest in Chicago, but became disappointed and turned to photography. He developed the ability on his own, spending his alternate Fridays off work in the city perfecting his photographic skills.

"I see pictures and designs in everything," he told Lloyd. "As I am riding on a street car, I am constantly watching the changing lights and shadows along the street. Using the car window as a frame, I compose pictures as we move along. Often my pictures are made out of material, which

Ganaway shows a gardener's cart next to the German Building, a relic of the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. (National Archives, Washington, D.C., 200s-HN-Gan-2)







Ganaway's "Spirit of Transportation," a prize-winning view of the 20th Century Limited, is reproduced from the *Fort Dearborn Magazine*.

many photographers would discard as uninteresting. Then, too, I have had to take what I could get and make the best of what was close at hand, because of my limited time."

When the *Chicago Bee* was founded October 2, 1925, he left the butler's job to become the weekly newspaper's staff photographer and produce its rotogravure section.

Beulah Mitchell Hill, music and society editor of the *Bee*, in a nomination for the "William E. Harmon Awards for Distinguished Achievement Among Negroes" in 1929, said Ganaway's "genius displays itself in the taking of the common, almost sordid pictures of every-day life and making them into works of art." Letters of recom-

mendation came from Anthony Overton, publisher of the *Bee*; McClure, then vice president of Albert Frank & Company; and Lloyd. Alain Locke, a Howard University professor, called Ganaway a Pictorialist and a "most promising and serious craftsman." As a result of the nomination, four photos appeared in the Harmon Foundation's traveling exhibits in 1930 and 1931.

He also exhibited at the Art Institute of Chicago, 1927; the International Photographic Salon at the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago; Museum of Science and Industry, 1935; New Jersey State Museum at Trenton, 1935; and Texas Centennial, 1936. He was a member of the Chicago Art League and the Greater Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

During his boyhood, religion was his whole life, according to Lloyd, and in the 1930s his photos disappeared from the pages of the *Bee*. At the time of his death, he was a teacher at a local Unity Center.

Deborah Willis, curator at the Smithsonian Institution's Center for African American History and Culture, has included Ganaway in her extensive coverage of African Americans and photography and recognizes his importance in Chicago. In *Reflections in Black* (Norton, 2000), she writes that Ganaway "was intrigued with industrial life on the waterfront and equally fascinated with water, massive structures, angles, and elements of mysticism." Sadly, original prints of "Spirit of Transportation" are not available. *John Gruber*