



Flexlume Sign Corp. Files come to ASM

Tod Swormstedt, Founder

In 2015, the more than 100-year-old Flexlume Sign Corp. based in Buffalo, NY was sold and placed under new leadership as its then-president (and good Museum friend) Paddy Rowell, Jr., set sights on retirement. Since then, the Museum has been able to purchase from the Rowell family various vintage sign components such as neon tubing and lightbulb caps.



Original Flexlume Buffalo storefront at 1401 Main Street

But there remained a great deal of archival material in which the Museum was interested, comprising hand-typed histories of the original Flexlume Sign Corp., numerous catalogs, original blueprints, and photo albums. The collection also included brochures and other literature for many early electric sign manufacturers and suppliers such as Rainbow Lights, Claude Neon, and Wiley Displays. The Museum can proudly announce that the Rowell family recently donated all of this amazing archival material.

The Rowell family also gifted the first ever neon sign to be installed in Buffalo, NY—a double-faced projecting sign reading simply, “GAS.” Designed for the Hygrade station once located on East Tupper Street and built by White Sign Corp (the precursor to the present-day Flexlume) the sign was installed on September 28, 1928.

Additionally, ASM staff were pleasantly surprised to learn that there was, in fact, a second collection of archival materials—an incredible compilation of more than 100 original opal glass letter blueprints, once used for custom-ordered signs. The Museum is humbled to receive this additional gift from the Rowells. The collection is an incredible account of a major force in the early years of illuminated signs. Currently, the opal glass blueprint collection is on loan to Brad Smith, a Museum friend who has restored several of the Museum’s opal glass pieces. Smith has spent many years studying the craft of slump-molding opal glass letters.

ASM appreciates the Rowell family for their contributions and support of our work in celebrating and preserving the rich history of American signage. We aim to make all such significant collections available as resources for researchers, students, apprentices, the broader sign industry as well as our communities.



Recently donated double-faced projecting “GAS” sign, 2023.0016.0001



Sampling of the recently donated Flexlume archival collections