

Research notes: “The passing of the daguerreian era”

(keywords: passing of the daguerreian era, Henry Hunt Snelling, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography.)

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EWER ARCHIVE R0090003

Research regarding the passing of the “Daguerreotype era” (in America)

This file serves as the gathering of various citations deemed of interest by the editor regarding the demise of the daguerreotype that occurred mid to late 1850s (in the US.) These are research notes only and are not to be construed as complete, authoritative, or comprehensive. The editor may amend these notes at any time. The editor welcomes any comments or additional information on this topic

This topic was sparked by a question posed to me April 2009. The inquiry referenced a statement in Floyd and Marian Rinhart, *American Daguerreian Art* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1967): 61:

Some daguerreians had worn black armbands back in 1854 to mark the passing of the daguerreotype.²⁵

25. The daguerreotype continued to be made, but in declining numbers, into the 1860's.

The inquiry resulted in a search of both *Photographic Art-Journal* and *Humphrey's Journal* for the year 1854. No such reference was located. The only reference to the wearing of armbands known to this editor is for the observance of the death of Daguerre. (See “Death of Daguerre,” *Photographic Art-Journal* 2:2 (August 1851): 121, also p. 124.

While the year 1854 witnessed the emergence of other photographic processes, and while paper photography (in the US) was also maturing at this time, do contemporary texts indicate that the daguerreotypists of 1854 thought that the “daguerreian era” was over? If not 1854, when?

It has been the editor's sense that the “daguerreian era” was *not* over in 1854, (and that the Rinhart's statement is in complete error.) And though the glimmer may have started to fade in 1854, it has been the editor's sense that 1857 certainly marked the end of the daguerreotype's popularity.

But while we today can look back and reasonably argue a date as to “when” the daguerreian era was over, what was the perception of those who witnessed its passing?

1854

Humphrey's Journal (New York): 6:1 (15 September 1854): 169.

Photography on Paper, and the Daguerreotype.—We are daily in the receipt of letters, inquiring if in our opinion pictures upon glass and paper will ever entirely supersede the Daguerreotype. To these queries we invariably answer, *no*. In Europe, where the Art of Photography is best understood, and the most successfully practiced, there is a lively demand for Daguerreotypes, and there has never been a time when likenesses upon metal plates have been held in higher estimation than at the present; and “Daguerreotypes by the American process” are as highly esteemed as ever. As one of the best proofs of this, we are enabled to refer to our enterprising countryman, J. E. MAYALL, of London, whose establishment is thronged by the English nobility, and whose productions stand with the foremost in the Art.

1857

Photographic Notes: Journal of the Birmingham Photographic Society (Jersey) 2: 2:19 (15 January 1857): 23–24. (available from Google Books: <http://books.google.com/books?id=droaAAAAYAAJ>)

The Positive Collodion Process has not made much advance either on the Continent, or in America. It is essentially an English process. Nevertheless it has been transplanted to America, and is there beginning to take root under the title of “Ambrotype.” Ambrotypists indeed abound in the Broadway of New York, but they sail under false colours,—the practice with many of these gentlemen being, to take a Daguerreotype first, and then send it to be copied on glass by a competent artist. No doubt the glass positive will eventually supersede the Daguerreotype in America as it has already done in England, where the latter method appears to be nearly obsolete. For Amateurs, who do not like the trouble of printing, a Collodion Positive offers many advantages.

1858

Sunlight Sketches' or the Photographic Textbook: A Practical Treatise on Photography (New York: H. H. Snelling, 1858): 25–27.

O, sad fate of the beautiful daguerreotype! I would to heaven I could forget it. But it lingers in my soul like fond remembrance of a dear departed friend. Fifteen long years I revelled with it in its glory, and for four years past I have mournfully watched by its dying couch, flattering myself with a hope of restoration, and yet it is constantly drugged and kept in state of suspense between life and death, by a class of vulgar-mouthed avaricious filibusters who have scarcely sense enough to make the cheap ambrotype much more the beautiful daguerreotype.

But so it must lie. Kings are mighty, but dollars are more mighty!

Note the statement, "Fifteen long years I revelled with it in its glory, and for four years past I have mournfully watched by its dying couch. . ." Snelling has counted his years beginning with 1839. The inference is that Snelling began his mournful watch at the "dying couch" in 1854.

For full citation:

http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/B8580005_SNELLING_SUN-SKETCH_1858.pdf

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EDITOR'S NOTES:

The editor would welcome any comments and contributions regarding this topic

EWER ARCHIVE R0090003

URL: http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/research/R0090003_RESEARCH_PASSING-DAG-ERA.pdf

Document author: Gary W. Ewer

Creation date: 2009-05-07 / Last revision: 2009-08-25

Citation information: various sources

Prepared from: various sources

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