

J. N. Taylor and M. O. Crooks "Fitzgibbon's Gallery," 1858

(keywords: John H. Fitzgibbon, electrotype, Armand Hippolyte Louis Fizeau, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography.)

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J. N. Taylor and M. O. Crooks, *Sketch Book of Saint Louis: Containing a Series of Sketches of the Early Settlements . . . Mercantile Houses . . . &c.* (St. Louis: George Knapp & Co., 1858): 311–14.

FITZGIBBON'S GALLERY.

CORNER OF FOURTH AND MARKET STREETS.

Mr. J. H. Fitzgibbon is celebrated throughout the Union as a skillful prosecutor of the Photographic art, and as the most uniformly successful artist in the country. He was one of the first, after the Daguerreotype process was given to the world, to take portraits from life, and during the progress of the art from its earliest introduction he has kept himself *au courant* of all the various improvements it has undergone. He is familiar the history of Photography from its dawn in the researches of Wedgewood, and with its subsequent development through the successive experiments of Talbot, Niepcé and Daguerre, and thoroughly understands the *rationale* of every process that has been in turn adopted and improved for delineating objects by the agency of light. Of his knowledge of Photography, in all its phases, his contributions to the various Photographic journals and the life-like pictures of his camera are undoubted evidences. But not only is he a thoroughly informed student of his art; he is likewise a skillful operator, and the great reputation he has acquired throughout the Union, in connection with Photography, is due in a great measure to the results of his own personal labors—specimens of which may be found in every city, drawing-room, or country cabin in the West. His Gallery—now the largest in the United States—bears testimony to skill, his liberality and his industry, and contains, beyond a question, the most beautiful and varied specimens of Photographic excellence ever collected, nearly all of which are the products of his own artistic efforts. This Gallery occupies thirteen rooms, and includes portraits of the most distinguished celebrities of the age, likenesses of chiefs of various tribes of Indians—admitted to be the best collection of Indian portraits in the country—and pictures of various sizes of private individuals.

Mr. Fitzgibbon commenced his career, we believe, in 1841, at Lynchburg, Virginia; but removed to St. Louis in 1846, where he laid the foundation of his present great reputation. He is one of the first, if not the very first, who re-produced a daguerreotype picture by the electrotype process discovered by Fizeau, and has ever been, during his residence in St. Louis, in the van of his profession in the adoption of all the numerous improvements that from time to time have been introduced in it. His labors have not however been confined to his studio in St. Louis. He has frequently made professional excursions into various parts of the country, and has twice visited the Indian Nations, bringing back with him each time admirable accessions to his unrivalled collection of

Indian portraits. Once he traversed the Territory of: Kansas and with his camera succeeded in obtaining a series of landscapes of that Territory, and a collection of specimens of Kansas life, which were afterwards embodied in a panorama that possesses the merits of accuracy and beauty, and has been pronounced a true representation of the country and its occupants. Indeed, we may add, that his Photographic illustrations of Western life and scenery have contributed more than any thing else to convey to those at a distance correct ideas of the West. His views of the St. Louis Agricultural Fair, published in Leslie's paper, have been circulated over the Union, and have been universally admired as exquisite specimens of Photography, and faithful representations of the objects depicted, and have served to give a celebrity and distinction to the occasion they illustrated which could have been derived from no other mode of publication. In fact we may say that the St. Louis Mechanical and Agricultural Association is indebted to his skill and liberality, as his pictures were taken gratuitously for the reputation they acquired abroad. In his Gallery, which has been for some years one of the most attractive popular resorts of this city, may be seen specimens of every branch of the Photographic art, of all dimensions, and prominent amongst them life-sized Photographs, colored with a taste and correctness and truth that can not be excelled by the works of many of the most celebrated oil painters of the day. Of the latter, his well-known full length portrait of Brooke, the tragedian, as Richard the 3d, is perhaps the most memorable, and is beyond doubt the finest colored Photograph ever executed. It may not be out of place to observe here that nearly every picture contained in this Gallery was executed by Fitzgibbon himself, who is reputed to be the best Photographer in the United States, and who, in the course of his professional career, has taken with his own hand upwards of 300,000 likenesses.

Mr. Fitzgibbon's ability has been well appreciated both by the citizens of St. Louis and by those who visit the city, nearly all of whom are in possession of portraits of his execution, while his skill has received the endorsement of the awarding committees of the Fair of St. Louis and the State Fair of Illinois in the years 1856 and 1857, obtaining at the State Fair of Illinois, in 1856, the first premiums for Daguerreotypes, Electrotypes and Photographs, and at the St. Louis Fair, of both years, the first and second premiums for different specimens on exhibition.

Many inducements have been offered to Mr. Fitzgibbon to transfer his labors to Europe, which he has so far resisted. He has it however in contemplation to pay a visit to Central America during the ensuing spring for the purpose of taking views of the ruins of Aztec cities, of the landscapes that have been so lauded by travellers to those regions and portraits of the people, in all their varied social relations, and in every grade. Such an enterprise would, we think, prove profitable to its author, and would contribute materially to the dissemination of correct information in regard to a country which at this time is attracting unusual attention throughout the civilized world. During his absence Mr. Fitzgibbon will continue to make contributions to his Gallery, and will leave the most competent artists in charge of its interests.

The following illustration appears on page 321 under a section describing “David Nicholson’s Grocery Establishment.” The structure was located on the northeast corner of Fourth and Market streets (nos. 118 and 120 Market Street.) Fitzgibbon’s gallery occupied the upper floors of the building.



[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

Another biographical profile of Fitzgibbon, with a portrait, is found in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (New York) 4:92 (5 September 1857): 213.¹

Fitzgibbon exhibited electrotype copies at the 1853–1854 New York Crystal Palace exhibition. See Horace Greeley, *Art and Industry as Represented in the Exhibition at the Crystal Palace New York —1853–4* (New York: Redfield, 1853): 171–77.² Fitzgibbon describes his process in Samuel D. Humphrey, *American Hand Book of the Daguerreotype* (New York: S. D. Humphrey, 1858 [fifth edition]): 67–68.

See also J. H. Fitzgibbon, "Daguerreotyping," *Western Journal, of Agriculture, Manufactures, Mechanic Arts, Internal Improvements, Commerce, and General Literature* (St. Louis) 6:3 (June 1851): 200–203;³ John H. Fitzgibbon, "Daguerreotypeing Simplified," *Western Journal, of Agriculture, Manufactures, Mechanic Arts, Internal Improvements, Commerce, and General Literature* (St. Louis) 6:6 (September 1851): 380–385.⁴

A three-stanza memorial poem for Fitzgibbon is in Richard Smith Elliott, *Notes Taken in Sixty Years* (St. Louis: R. P. Studley & Co., 1883): 204.⁵

William Quesenbury describes his visit to the Fitzgibbon gallery in "Trip to St. Louis," *South-West Independent* (Fayetteville, AK) 2:46 3 August 1855.

Additional information regarding Fitzgibbon is found in Bonnie Wright, "'This Perpetual Shadow-Taking': The Lively Art of John Fitzgibbon," *Missouri Historical Review* 76:1 (October 1981): 22–30. See also Delores A. Kilgo, "Fitzgibbon, John (1817–1882)," Lawrence O. Christensen, edit. *Dictionary of Missouri Biography* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1999): 301–2.

This title also includes a profile of J. J. Outley.⁶

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8570002_FITZGIBBON_BIO_LESLIES_1857-09-05.pdf
2. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/B8530001_GREELEY_ART_INDUSTRY_1853.pdf
3. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510017_FITZ_DAG-TYPING_1851-06.pdf
4. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/B8830001_ELLIOTT_SIXTY-YEARS_1883.pdf
5. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8510018_FITZ_DAG-SIMPLIFIED_1851-09.pdf
6. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/B8580004_SKETCH-BOOK_OUTLEY_1858.pdf

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