

“Daguerreotype,” 17 March 1840

(keywords: David G. Seixas, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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Published in:

Daily National Intelligencer (Washington, D.C.) 28:8451 (17 March 1840): n.p. (third page of issue).

DAGUERREOTYPE.

Messrs. EDITORS. I called to-day to see Mr. Seixas' daguerreotype drawings, and was astonished both with the drawings and explanations, as given by Mr. Seixas. They are imprints drawn by Nature herself and by her most ethereal agent, Light. The perspective of a landscape—of every object—is re-produced with mathematical exactness; no occurrence, no feature, even though unperceived by the human eye, can escape the pencil of the [illegible] painter, for it produces the image of Nature, and fixes it permanently upon its tablet. It is a new art bursting forth in sun-like splendor, an art which will constitute an era, and be preserved as a title of glory to its discoverer. Mr. Seixas intends to lecture and demonstrate the process of fixing these drawings, and he is well calculated to make any subject plain which he touches. I for one will not fail to be there.

MARCH 14, 1840.

A FRIEND TO THE ARTS.

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

This notice certainly speaks of the exhibitor / lecturer who placed a notice in the *Daily National Intelligencer* (Washington D. C.) 28:8444 (9 March 1840): n.p. (fourth page of issue).¹ Seixas also exhibited and lectured in Baltimore in April–May 1840.

David G. Seixas (1788–1864) was the son of Shearith Israel's famous minister, Gershom Seixas.² The historian John Craig informs the present author that Seixas was “an inventor and teacher of sign language, many aspects of his non-photographic life are reported at the website of the American Jewish Historical Society. (<http://www.ajhs.org>).”

Accompanying a seven paragraph biography of Seixas is the summary:

David G. Seixas, one of the New York hazzan's several sons, manufactured sealing wax printers' ink, and enamel-coated visiting cards. He opened a brewery, pioneered in making crockery, and experimented with daguerreotype photography. There is no question that he was a skillful technician; it is equally true that he was egregiously unsuccessful in everything he undertook.³

Seixas is also discussed in Clifford Krainik, "National Vision, Local Enterprise: John Plumbe, Jr., and The Advent of Photography In Washington, D.C." *Washington History: Magazine of The Historical Society of Washington, D.C.*, 9:2 (Fall–Winter 1997–98): 11–13.

It has been suggested that Seixas may have learned the process from Daguerre. The present editor finds nothing to support the suggestion but leans toward the possibility that that Seixas learned the daguerreotype process from François Gouraud.

Seixas is included in an 1840 silhouette of the Kursheedt family by the noted artist, Aug. Edouart. The silhouette is reproduced in Norman L. Kleeblatt and Gerard C. Wertkin, *The Jewish Heritage in American Folk Art* (New York: Universe Books, 1984): 50.

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/N8400003_DAG_NTL-INTEL_1840-03-09.pdf
2. Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Freethinker, the Jews, and the Missionaries: George Houston and the Mystery of 'Israel Vindicated'" *AJS Review* vol. 5 (1980): 112.
3. Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry: 1776–1985* vol. 1 (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1989): 186; entry for David G. Seixas: pp. 433–36.

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