

“The Spelling Bee,” 1 October 1875

(keywords: pronunciation of the word daguerreotype, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

THE DAGUERRETYPE: AN ARCHIVE OF SOURCE TEXTS, GRAPHICS, AND EPHEMERA

The research archive of Gary W. Ewer regarding the history of the daguerreotype

<http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org>

EWER ARCHIVE N8750001

Published in:

Evening Star no. 3932 (Dunedin, New Zealand) (1 October 1875): np. Two related items appear in the non-paginated newspaper. The first appears in the second page of the issue; the second item appears in the third page of the issue.

THE SPELLING BEE [selected text]

The Spelling Bee and concert, in aid of the funds of the Dunedin Cricket Club, took place at the Temperance Hall last evening, and proved a thorough success in every way. The hall was crammed with people, and great interest was manifested in the proceedings. Mr. H. S. Chapman occupied the chair, and the examiners were the Rev. R. L. Stanford, Professors M'Gregor and Sale, and Mr James Anderson. . .

. . . “Daguerreotype” was a poser to one of our cricketers, and without attempting to spell it he shook his head mournfully and retired; the same word also sending the next speller to the right-about.

THE SPELLING BEE

To the Editor.

SIR,—I noticed at the spelling bee last evening that the Rev. Mr. Stanford in pronouncing the word daguerreotype gave it five distinct syllables, as follows:—Da-guer-re-o-type. Now, I think this is incorrect, and I am justified in my opinion by several orthoepists believing the correct pronunciation to be da-guerre-o-type, that is, a word of four syllables.

Perhaps you will kindly give us your opinion, and oblige.—I am, &c.,

B.

Dunedin, October 1.

[As the word is the name of an invention by one Daguerre, a word of two syllables, the addition of “otype” simply makes it a word of four syllables.—ED. ‘E.S.’]

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

The mispronunciation of the word began with the introduction of the term. In January of 1840, even Edgar Allen Poe incorrectly gave it five syllables:

This word is properly spelt Daguerreotype, and pronounced as if written Daguirraioetep. The inventor's name is Daguerre, but the French usage requires an accent on the second e, in the formation of the compound term.¹

Even in photographically-minded circles, the incorrect five-syllable pronunciation persisted. See Alfred T. Wise, "One Special Writer Retaliates," *Photo-Era: the American Journal of Photography* (Boston) 43:3 (September 1919): 160:

I attended a lecture on the history of photography, at the Polytechnic Institute, last winter, during which the speaker referred to the product of Daguerre's invention (discovery, if you like) as the daguerreotype, which, each time, he took pains to pronounce very plainly, "dah-gherr-oh-type," in *four distinct syllables*. The following day, I consulted all the English language dictionaries and other authorities in our Public Library, and found that the lecturer of the previous evening was absolutely correct. And yet I have not met a professional or amateur photographer who departs from that vile corruption—"deguerryotype," and in five distinct syllables, at that!²

For a contemporary source of the correct four-syllable pronunciation of the word "daguerreotype," see James H. Martin, *The Orthoepist: Containing a Selection of All Those Words of the English Language Usually Pronounced Improperly, with a Reading Exercise Following Each Letter*. . . (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1851): 33, 37–39.³

A review of searchable texts in Google Books reflects that the word "daguerreotype" entered into the ranks of "difficult" words suitable for a spelling bee around the time of this text. See *Nuttall's Spelling Bee Guide: Including a Repertory of Five Thousand Difficult Words of the English Language* (London: Frederick Warne and Co., nd [1876]): 42:

Daguerreotype, *da-ger'-ro-type*—a method of fixing images of objects on polished metal plates.⁴

To this day, this "difficult" word continues to be used in spelling bees.⁵

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8400008_POE_ALEX-WEEKLY_1840-01-15.pdf
2. <https://books.google.com/books?id=ixtLAQAAMAAJ>
3. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/B8510001_MARTIN_ORTHOEPIST_1851.pdf
4. <https://books.google.com/books?id=u2wCAAAAQAAJ>
5. See "SCS Senior Spelling Bee 2011 Complete"; https://www.learnthat.org/word_lists/view/7987

EWER ARCHIVE N8750001

URL: http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/N8750001_SPELLING-BEE_EVENING-STAR_1875-10-01.pdf

Document author: Gary W. Ewer

Creation date: 2016-03-30 / Last revision (proofread/edit): 2016-04-23

Citation information: *Evening Star* no. 3932 (Dunedin, New Zealand) (1 October 1875): 3.

Prepared from: imaged original text from the digital database, *Papers Past / National Library of New Zealand*. (<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/>)

Original spelling/punctuation/grammar generally maintained without correction. Any in-text corrections are bracketed.

The *source text* is Public Domain and may be freely quoted. As noted below, this document is copyright.

If citing directly from this document, please reference the Ewer Archive number and provide the following citation credit:

Gary W. Ewer, ed., *The Daguerreotype: an Archive of Source Texts, Graphics, and Ephemera*, <http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org>

THE NECESSARY DISCLAIMERS:

The document creator has made every effort to insure the accuracy of the transcription. However, the information provided in this document is provided without warranty, either express or implied. The document creator will not be liable for any damages caused or alleged to be caused directly, indirectly, incidentally, or consequentially by the information provided by this text.

The document creator assumes no responsibility for accuracy of fact; the text is prepared "as found." Factual inaccuracies of the original text are generally **not** noted by the document creator. If this text is used in academic papers, accuracy should be confirmed by consulting original sources.

The document creator also assumes no responsibility regarding the correctness, suitability, or safety of any chemical or photographic processes that may be described by this text. Many of the chemicals used in early photographic processes are extremely toxic and should not be handled without a **thorough** knowledge of safe use.

The opinions expressed in this text are solely those of the original author and are not necessarily those of the Archive editor. Some texts may contain derogatory words. Any such word is certainly one that would not be used today. The words remain in the transcription, however, to maintain truthfulness to the original text.

© 2016, Gary W. Ewer. <http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org>
