

“The Pencil of Nature,” (mentions Professor John Locke) 7 September 1839

(keywords: Deguerre, William Henry Fox Talbot, Daguerroscope, Professor Locke, John Locke, Mr. Flash's book store, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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EWER ARCHIVE P8390026

Published in:

Botanico-Medical Recorder (Columbus) 7:25 (7 September 1839): 399.

“THE PENCIL OF NATURE.”

This is the fanciful designation of a most wonderful discovery recently made, almost simultaneously, in France and England, by which the picture of any object is transferred to paper, by the action of the solar light acting by means of the Camera Obscura, and the paper being prepared and endowed with certain chemical properties, will retain the impression for an indefinite length of time—thus producing *a perfect copy from nature*.

The discovery was announced in England, by H. Fox Talbot, a gentleman of great scientific acquirements. It appears that Mr. Talbot has for some years devoted much labor and attention to the perfecting of his invention; and, having brought it to a point deserving the notice of the scientific world, and while actually engaged in drawing up an account of it to be presented to the Royal Society, the same invention has been announced by M. Deguerre [Daguerre—edit.] in France!

The London Literary Gazette for February 2, contains a long and very interesting account of Mr. Talbot's experiments. He has produced a number of exquisite specimens, from which it appears there is a very considerable difference between the materials employed by him, the means used, and the results obtained, and those of M. Daguerre. At the Royal Institution, a variety of specimens were exhibited by Mr. Talbot, which differed from those of M. Deguerre, especially in this, that Mr. Talbot reverses the natural effect—representing dark objects light and light objects dark. Different preparations of silver are supposed to be used to effect this singular result—and Mr. Talbot has succeeded admirably in devising a method of fixing his drawing so that the sun can affect or alter them no more. He copies from engravings, by first getting them with the lights and shades reverted, and then again copying from the reversed impression.

In a paper relating to the transactions of the Royal Society, it is stated that pictures which Mr. Talbot has had in his possession for years, are now as vivid as when they were first produced. The image obtained is white, but the ground is beautifully colored, and readily obtainable, either skyblue, yellow, rose color, or black—green is excluded. Objects the most minute are obtained—the delineations of the leaves of plants, the most minute and tiny bivalve calyx—nay, even a shadow, is followed by the spell of the inventor, and remains perfect and permanent.

The French call this instrument by the name of its inventor, the Daguerroscope. It is also called, in poetical language, the Pencil of Nature. Mr. Talbot calls the process the rule of photogenic drawing.

In addition to the above, it affords us great pleasure to extract the following editorial article from the Cincinnati Republican. We have been long since satisfied that while such

men as Dr Locke live among us, Europe will claim but little superiority in discoveries in the arts and sciences.

Sunshine not Moonshine.—Some experiments on the subject of photogenic drawing have been made by Professor Locke, of the Medical College of Ohio, and with entire success. He prepared paper chemically for this purpose, and placed it under some astronomical diagrams which, when exposed to the sun's rays, the new picture was in a few minutes formed and removed, and a process used by which the figures were permanently fixed. The specimens which the Doctor has left in our hands are in every respect satisfactory. They look as though they had been most carefully engraven. It will be remembered that we published, a few days ago, a full account of the process which had been used in London, by a Mr. Fox Talbot; Doct. Locke informs us that he suspects the information conveyed in that communication, is somewhat erroneous, as his success here has not resulted from following the plan therein laid down. The difficulty of mystery connected with the matter, is to retain the picture which the light has formed upon the paper. This has been overcome, and the curious may satisfy themselves with what success, by examining a few small specimens which we left at Mr. Flash's book store.

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

None of John Locke's examples are known to be extant.

Further biographical information about Locke is found in M. B. Wright, *An address on the life and character of the late Professor John Locke, delivered at the request of the Cincinnati Medical Society* (Cincinnati: Moore, Wiltach, Keys & Co., 1857).

The following biography is provided in James Grant Wilson and John Fiske, ed., *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography* Vol. 3 (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888): 751:

LOCKE, John, physicist, b. in Fryeburg, Me., 19. Feb., 1792; d. in Cincinnati, Ohio, 10 July, 1856. He was graduated at the medical department of Yale in 1819, and afterward became geologist on the U. S. explorations of the northwest territories and on the state survey of Ohio. For many years after 1836 he was professor of chemistry in the Medical college of Ohio. Prof. Locke was one of the pioneers in the sciences of botany, geology, and electricity, making many discoveries in these branches, especially in terrestrial magnetism. He made various improved and original instruments for use in optics, physics, electricity, and magnetism, among which were the gravity escapement for regulator-clocks (1844), which has never been surpassed, and his electro-chronograph (1848), subsequently purchased for the U. S. naval observatory at an expense of \$10,000; also a spirit-level (1860), which is still in use among civil engineers. Prof. Locke contributed to the proceedings of various scientific societies and to the "American Journal of Science," and published text-books on botany and on English grammar.

A lengthier biography is provided in Howard A. Kelly and Walter L. Burrage, *American Medical Biographies* (Baltimore: The Norman, Remington Company, 1920): 710–11. (Available from Google Books: <http://books.google.com/books?id=GPssAAAAYAAJ>.)

EWER ARCHIVE P8390026

URL: http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8390026_BOTANICO-MEDICAL_1839-09-07.pdf

Document author: Gary W. Ewer

Creation date: 2009-07-02 / Last revision (proofread): 2010-12-16

Citation information: *Botanico-Medical Recorder* (Columbus) 7:25 (7 September 1839): 399.

Prepared from: imaged original text from *Google Books*.

(<http://books.google.com/books?id=nwqgAAAAMAAJ>)

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