

James F. Ryder, "A Reminiscence," 1887

(keywords: James F. Ryder, 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 P8870003

Published in:

American Annual of Photography and Photographic Times Almanac for 1887 (New York: Scovill Manufacturing Company, 1887): 144–46.

A REMINISCENCE.

AWAY back in '48 I found myself in a little village in Central New York, where a camera had never been seen or used before, and to the citizens of that quiet place it was as good as a brass band.

The prominent lady of the place, whose husband was merchant and post-master, welcomed me to her house, gave me her parlor (the finest in the village), for operating room, rent free, and glad to have me at that—board, two dollars per week, payable in daguerreotypes.

My little frame of specimens was hung upon the picket fence beside the gate, my clip headrest screwed to the back of a common chair, and the business of "securing the shadow ere the substance fade" (see handbills), was declared opened.

The people came in throngs, the dollars rolled in right merrily; no business in town equalled mine.

The good lady of the house was the possessor of a large cluster breastpin, which was kindly loaned to every female sitter that came, to the mutual satisfaction of lady owner and lady sitter; a great help to me as well, proving a capital point for aiming my focus.

After the day's work was done a saunter across the bridge and through the narrow path of the meadow, where was the pleasant odor of clover and the glad ripple of the brook. The home-coming farmer gave me friendly greeting. The boy with torn hat and trousers rolled half way to the knee, as he fetches the cows from pasture hails me with: "Take my likeness, mister?"

The country lasses, shy and sweet, give a modest bow as they meet the "likeness man." I was regarded with respect and supposed to be a prosperous young fellow. All were friendly and genial save one.

The blacksmith, a heavy, burly man, the muscular terror of the village, disapproved of me, said I was a blank lazy dog, too lazy to do honest hard work and was humbugging and swindling the people of their hard earnings. He, for one, was ready to help drive me out of the village.

The greater my success the more bitter his spleen, and in the abundance of his candor denounced me to my face as a humbug too lazy to earn an honest living, said he wouldn't allow me to take his dog; that I ought to be ashamed of robbing poor people, and other uncomplimentary things, which, in view of his heavy muscle and my tender years, I did not attempt to resent.

Well, I left that quiet village and brawny blacksmith one day and moved to another town a few miles distant.

A week later I was surprised at his calling upon me at the new place, to which he had driven to find me. He had a crazed manner which I did not understand and which filled me with terror.

He demanded that I put my machine in his wagon and go with him straight at once. I asked him why he desired it and what was the matter. Then the powerful man, with heaving chest, burst into a passion of weeping quite uncontrollable. When he subsided sufficiently to speak he grasped my hands, and through heavy weeping, broken out afresh, told me his little boy had been drowned in the mill race and I must go and take his likeness.

“A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind.” My sympathy for the poor fellow developed a tenderness for him in his wild bereavement which seemed to bring me closer to him than any friend I had made in the village.

To describe his gratitude and kindness to me after that is beyond my ability to do.

J. F. Ryder.

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

An expanded version of this anecdote is provided in James F. Ryder, *Voigtländer and I: In Pursuit of Shadow Catching. A Story of Fifty-two Years' Companionship with a Camera* (Cleveland: The Cleveland Printing and Publishing Co., 1902): 30–32.¹

1. <http://books.google.com/books?id=B1cpAAAAYAAJ>

EWER ARCHIVE P8870003

URL: http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8870003_RYDER_AM-ANNUAL_1887.pdf

Document author: Gary W. Ewer

Creation date: 2011-01-06 / Last revision (proofread): 2011-01-10

Citation information: *American Annual of Photography and Photographic Times Almanac for 1887* (New York: Scovill Manufacturing Company, 1887): 144–46.

Prepared from: photocopy from an original volume.

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.

© 2011, Gary W. Ewer. <http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org>
