

**Abraham Bogardus, "The Days of the Daguerreotype," 30 April 1903**

(keywords: Abraham Bogardus, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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### **The Days of the Daguerreotype.**

ONE does not have to be very old to remember the time when a daguerreotype was the only photography. Yet to-day, when in the fraction of a second is made the negative from which hundreds of pictures may be printed, we seem very far removed from the days when a separate sitting was required for each pictures.

Abraham Bogardus, one of the first Americans to use Daguerre's process, once favored *The Companion* with some reminiscences—now first printed—that throw an interesting light on those "old times," which, after all, were not so very long ago. "Monday was always the best business day of the week," said the veteran.

"Why? Well, perhaps Sunday-night courtships had something to do with it. The interested couple would agree to exchange daguerreotypes, and Monday was sure to bring them both promptly.

"In the early days of the daguerreotype the frock coat was seldom seen. A man was well dressed when he wore a blue cloth dress coat with black velvet collar and plain brass buttons, his waistcoat being either white or light yellow, and double-breasted. The only time I ever saw Daniel Webster he wore such a coat and a yellow waistcoat.

"I often made pictures of old men in full ruffled shirt-bosom, and wristbands as well, and with hair in a queue. Some men still wore straps at the bottom of their pantaloons, Most of them, instead of twisting their mustaches, employed their hands to roll their hair over their ears.

"Indeed, a mustache was seldom seen, and it required considerable courage to appear with one. Young women would laugh, and street urchins were ready to ridicule the wearer.

"It was common for women to have their hair shaved at the parting, to make the forehead high. The higher and broader the expanse, the better the woman was pleased, and the greater was the number of her admirers, the high and broad forehead being supposed to betoken intellect.

"The pictures we made at that period were pretty severe. Every line and wrinkle would show. We had not learned the art of retouching, and the likeness was sure to be there—horribly correct, it sometimes seemed!"

"As for the retouching process, it is right to soften strong lines and remove frowns, but it is not right to remove a line when by so doing one destroys the contour of the face. I have had persons seventy years old ask if I could take their pictures 'so the wrinkles would not show.' My answer invariably was, 'Yes, but where will the likeness be?' A

photograph that is not a likeness seems to me not only a misleading but a senseless thing.”

[End of text.]

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**EDITOR'S NOTES:**

Abraham Bogardus was one of the daguerreotype's most vocal champions and continued to make daguerreotypes well beyond its fall from favor. In 1869, Andrew Khrono was described as “the oldest man in the photographic business in this country, still making daguerreotypes for Bogardus.”<sup>1</sup>

Later years would find Bogardus very active in both lecture and written reminiscences about his experiences with the daguerreotype. He is best known for his article “The Lost Art of the Daguerreotype,” *Century Magazine* (New York) 68:1 (May 1904): 83–91.<sup>2</sup>

Other writings by Bogardus in both photographic and popular press include: “Thirty-seven Years Behind a Camera,” *Photographic Times and American Photographer* 14:158 (February 1884): 73–78<sup>3</sup>; “A Day in the Sky-light” [a poem—ed.], *Photographic Times and American Photographer* (New York) 14:158 (February 1884): 86–87; a extemporaneous biographical speech recorded in “Photographic Section of the American Institute,” *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* (New York) 17:10 (22 May 1886): 310–14<sup>4</sup>; “Forty Years Behind the Camera,” *Photographic Times and American Photographer* (New York) (19 November 1886): 604–606 and (26 November 1886): 614–15; “Forty Years Behind the Camera,” *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* (New York) 17: 22 (27 November 1886): 679–81 and 17:23 (11 December 1886): 714–16<sup>5</sup>; “Trials and Tribulations of the Photographer,” *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* (New York) 20:5 (9 March 1889): 139 and 20:6 (23 March 1889): 178–81; “Trials and Tribulations of the Photographer,” *British Journal of Photography* 36:1506 (15 March 1889): 183–84 and 36:1507 (22 March 1889): 200–201; “Experiences of a Photographer,” *Lippincott's Magazine* (Philadelphia) vol. 47 (May 1891): 574–82; “The Daguerreotype,” *St. Louis and Canadian Photographer* 11:12 (December 1893): 534–38; “Early Picture Taking: Recollections of the Days of the Daguerreotypes,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* 54:332 (1 December 1894): 10; “Leaves From the Diary of a Photographer,” *St. Louis and Canadian Photographer* 13:1 (January 1895): 25–26; “The Days of the Daguerreotype,” *L'Abeille de la Nouvelle-Orléans* (New Orleans) (5 June 1903): 6; “Fifty Years a Photographer,” *Wilson's Photographic Magazine* (New York) 41:575 (November 1904): 483–87.

For a brief biographical profile of Bogardus, see “Abraham Bogardus, Photographer,” in *New York's Great Industries: Exchange and Commercial Review* (New York and Chicago: Historical Publishing Company, 1884): 113.

1. “Note,” *Philadelphia Photographer* 6:65 (May 1869): 169.
2. <http://daguerre.org/resource/texts/bogardus/bogardus.html>
3. [http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8840002\\_BOGARDUS\\_PHOTO-TIMES\\_1884-02.pdf](http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8840002_BOGARDUS_PHOTO-TIMES_1884-02.pdf)
4. [http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8860001\\_GARDN-2\\_ANTHONYS\\_1886-05-22.pdf](http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8860001_GARDN-2_ANTHONYS_1886-05-22.pdf)
5. Bogardus intended to publish “Forty Years Behind a Camera” as a book of “about 270 pages” with Lippincott as the publisher. See “Forty Years Behind a Camera,” *St. Louis and Canadian Photographer* 7:6 (June 1889): 253.

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