

Allen H. Bent, "Early Daguerreotypy in Boston," December 1922

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Early Daguerreotypy in Boston

TO THE EDITOR OF PHOTO-ERA:—In regard to the earliest photographs made in Boston the following notice, which appeared in the *Daily Advertiser*, March 28, 1840, may be of interest:

THE DAGUERREOTYPE.—M. Gouraud gave his first lecture at the Temple yesterday. He made a beautiful view of Park street, with the intervening trees, and part of the Common, covered with snow. The view was made, after placing the plate, in precisely ten minutes. His second lecture will be given on Tuesday. The third will be on Friday instead of Thursday, on account of the public Fast.

Two days earlier the same paper printed nearly a column on the "Manner of Making Portraits by the Daguerreotype." "We are indebted to M. Gouraud," the editor wrote, "for the following communication, which has been in our hands from the 16th inst., the publication having been deferred for lack of room." Here are some of the interesting things M. Gouraud wrote:

Within fifteen days after the publication of the process of M. Daguerre, in Paris, people in every quarter were making portraits. At first, they were all made with the eyes (of the sitter) shut. M. Susse was one of the first amateurs who succeeded in most satisfactory manner. . . . Everyone began to look about for some means to shorten the period of from fifteen to twenty-five minutes which M. Susse . . . had employed in making his pretty portraits—with the eyes shut. . . . M. Abel Rendu adopted an idea which seemed new and produced portraits with eyes open. . . . I immediately made a trial of this method. . . . The portraits I obtained were formed in from one minute to two minutes twenty-seven seconds. . . . I render it thus public . . . in order that they may know I am able to make the portrait of any person who wishes it. . . . A man should be dressed in clear gray coat, pantaloons of a little deeper hue, vest of fancy ground, yellow, orange if possible. . . .

By way of postscript M. Gouraud adds:

By adopting a confidential communication from M. D. G., the French Professor at Cambridge ... I think it is very probable that we shall succeed in obtaining a Daguerreotype portrait in much less time than by the process above described.

F. Gouraud appeared in the 1840 directory of Boston only. He boarded at 137 Tremont Street. His occupation was not given.

Feb. 3, 1841, the following advertisement appeared in the *Advertiser*:

DAGUERREOTYPE.

Mr. Plumbe, Prof. Photography, having at length succeeded in so far improving his apparatus, as to be enabled to produce a perfect Photographic Miniature, in any weather, and consequently, without using the direct rays of the sun, proposes to instruct a limited number of gentlemen in this beautiful and valuable art, who will be furnished with complete sets of the Improved Patent Apparatus, by means of which any one may be enabled to produce a likeness in any ordinary room, without opening a window, or requiring any peculiar adjustment of the light. Hitherto, it has been generally supposed that sunshine and an open window were indispensable to the production of Daguerreotype miniatures; but the important improvement just perfected proves that this is a mistake. The new apparatus costs only about one half the price of the other, and furnishes the ability to its possessor of securing an independence in a profession as honorable, interesting and agreeable as any other, by the expenditure of a mere trifle, and a few weeks of application. Can any other pursuit in life present the same advantages in furnishing the means of gentlemanly support, not to say fortune?

Miniatures made in beautiful style: terms \$3.

Daguerreotype Rooms, Harrington's Museum, 76 Court Street.'

This advertisement, with some changes, appeared from time to time throughout the year. In May, he moved to the spacious hall over the Whig Reading Room, Pemberton Square, and called his place the Photographic Institute. At the same time he changed his appeal so that ladies also might share in the chance to make a fortune. In February, 1843, his advertisement read, Plumbe Daguerrian Gallery of Patent Colored Photographs, 75 Court and 123 Washington Streets, Boston, Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, and Broadway, Saratoga Springs, constituting the oldest and most extensive establishment of the kind in the world and containing nearly a thousand pictures. Likenesses made every day at three dollars each.

May 15, 1843, Albert S. Southworth & Co. advertised Premium Daguerreotype taking at 5 1/2 Tremont How. Mr. Southworth says that he was the first to color daguerreotypes and that he received a premium last October at the Fair of the American Institute in New York for the best Daguerreotype and also at the Mechanics Fair in Boston in 1841. The advertisement has a strange wood-cut representing the sun, the sitter, and the portrait on an easel.

ALLEN H. BENT.

AUGUST 13, 1922.

[Having access to the Boston City Directories issued since their beginning, about one hundred years ago, and being greatly interested in the practice of photography in Boston during the early daguerreotype days, the Editor, personally, investigated the somewhat brief activities, in Boston, of M. Gouraud and finds that Mr. Bent is correct. It is not clear, however, whether M. Gouraud came to America from France for the purpose of teaching people how to make daguerreotypes, or whether he sought to make a living as a daguerreotypist. In any event, Albert Southworth is listed in the Boston City Directory of 1841, and of succeeding years, as a maker of Daguerreotype Miniatures. It is barely possible that he learned the art from M. Gouraud in 1840, although as early as 1839 Professor Draper made his famous daguerreotype-portrait of Dorothy Catherine Draper,

on the roof of the New York University building. It would be interesting to know what degree of success attended the efforts of M. Gouraud as an instructor in Daguerreotypy.—EDITOR.]

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

The article referenced in the third paragraph is F. F. Gouraud, "Manner of Making Portraits by the Daguerreotype," *Boston Daily Advertiser* 45:14964 (26 March 1840): n.p. [second page of issue].¹

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/N8400002_GOURAUD_BOS-DAILY-ADVERT_1840-03-26.pdf

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