

“Daguerreotypes in Oil,” 14 October 1851

(keywords: William H. Butler, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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The article appears under the header, “City Intelligence.”

DAGUERREOTYPES IN OIL.—A process has been recently discovered of transferring a daguerreotype impression to a metallic surface, that admits of its being finished in oil colors, equal in beauty to the finest miniature painting. It is said that a single sitting, of a few seconds only, is required for a portrait of a cabinet size. The discoverer of this new art is Mr. Wm. H. Butler, a Daguerreotype Artist, of New York city.

We saw, yesterday, one of the portraits, received by a gentleman in this city, by the last steamer from New York. It combines all the detail of the daguerreotype, with the finish of the miniature painting; and we are informed that they can be finished at a price much less than the common miniature on ivory. This system will take the place of all the other modes of taking daguerreotype miniatures

[End of text.]

EDITOR’S NOTES:

Butler’s involvement with the daguerreotype began at least by 1840. Two ca. 1840 daguerreotypes in the collection of Dennis A. Waters exhibit a hallmark by Butler.¹ A ca. 1840 daguerreotype camera, with complete array of apparatus, is in the collection of Matthew R. Isenburg. Butler would become a principal operator for the entrepreneur, John Plumbe, and in 1847 purchased Plumbe’s New York gallery. He continued to operate at the 251 Broadway address for some years.

See also an 1842 advertisement for Butler: “Daguerreotype Apparatus,” *Brother Jonathan* (New York) 1:12 (19 March 1842): xlviii (of “advertising cover” pages).²

It is likely that Butler’s “system” was nothing more than a standard daguerreotype painted with oil coloring (rather than the powder coloring typically used to provide tints to daguerreotypes):

In addition to what we will call the Daguerreotype proper, just described, are numerous other processes which have been more or less successful and popular; the principal being the Daguerreotype on Ivory, the Crayon Daguerreotype, the Cameo Daguerreotype, the Daguerreotype in Oil, the Talbotype or Calotype, the Crystalotype, &c.

The Daguerreotype on Ivory, introduced by Mr. Brady, we believe, consists in the substitution of the material from which it derives its name in the place of a metal plate, and the photographic image is then transferred to a painter in oil colors. This process, which owes its beauty as much to the skill of the artist as to the fidelity of the Daguerreotype, is very much admired. The Daguerreotype in Oil is precisely the same as the above, with the exception of an ordinarily prepared metal plate being used in the place of ivory

"Photography in the United States," *New-York Tribune* (semi-weekly) 8:825 (22 April 1853): 1.³

Butler's "daguerreotypes in oil" are specifically mentioned—rather unfavorably—in a review of daguerreotypes at the Fair of the American Institute:

In connexion with this peculiar art we may mention the style known as "*daguerreotypes in oil*," on exhibition by Mr. Butler. They are indeed very fair specimens of small cabinet portraits in oil. But as far as being daguerreotypes with all the faithfulness so peculiar to them they are no more to be compared to them, than a rushlight is to the noon-day sun, from which our beautiful productions emanate. Their whole beauty and truthfulness is destroyed by entirely covering the expression, as indeed the whole plate is painted over by the hands of the artist.

"Daguerreotypes at the Fair," *Photographic Art-Journal* (New York) 4:4 (October 1852): 258–60.⁴

1. <http://www.finedags.com/dating/datingdags2.shtm>
2. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/advert/P8420001_BUTLER-AD_BRO-JON_1842-03-19.pdf
3. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/N8530001_PHOTOG_US_NY_TRIBUNE_1853-04-22.pdf
4. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8520011_DAGS-FAIR_PAJ_1852-10.pdf

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