

James Landy, "The Daguerreotype Art," 26 January 1896

(keywords: James Landy, Cincinnati, Edwin Forrest, Catherine Forrest, Catherine Sinclair, Charlotte Cushman, Anna Cora Mowatt Ritchie, of Edwin Booth, Laura Keane, Father Mathew, Ezekiel C Hawkins [Ezekial ?], Charles R. Rees, Meade Brothers, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography.)

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The Daguerreotype Art.

Landy, the Photographer, Talks of Early Days and of Famous Faces.

"It is just forty-six years to-day," said Mr. J. Landy, the veteran photographer, to a representative of the *Commercial Gazette* who paid him a professional visit last Monday, "that I began my career as a photographer.

"I was a mere boy, and photography was in its infancy, when I obtained a position in a gallery on the corner of Broadway and Reade street, in New York. I have remained faithful to my choice ever since, and acquired a thorough practical knowledge of the art. I say art, because photography, if properly understood and practiced, is art, no matter what prejudice against this view the inferior, unartistic work of many simple mechanical manipulators of photography may have aroused.

"Thirteen years later, on Feb. 1, 1863, I established myself in Cincinnati. My studio was then on Fourth street, opposite Pike's Opera-house. A few years later I had the house where my studio now is built, and from the day in 1867 when I moved into my new quarters, till to-day, I have never changed the location of my studio.

"Forty-six years is a long time, and I must say that, between the wonderful advance of science, and especially in photography, during that period, and various personal experiences with many hundreds of people, these eventful years have rolled by amazingly fast.

"How well I remember the early times, when all these modern improvements, which make photography comparatively easy in our days, were still unknown. The photographic galleries were few and far between even in large cities like New York. It was in 1839 when the news was received in this country that Daguerre and Niepce, two Frenchmen, had discovered a system of preserving the pictures of the camera obscura on a silver plate and of making them permanent. Soon experiments were made on this side of the ocean,

and a few enterprising men opened galleries, where they made 'sun-pictures' of whosoever was willing to sit for them and to pay a handsome price for his likeness.

"Nowadays people will scarcely understand what is meant in those days to sit for a picture. The photographic galleries were not as elegantly, almost luxuriously, furnished with all imaginable accessories and apparatus considered necessary for producing a good and artistic portrait. The galleries were rather primitive, and bare and the outfits usually crude. To sit for a picture meant to sit immovably, without even winking, for about half an hour, held in position by numerous clamps and braces, which had to be carefully arranged and adjusted, so as to keep them out of sight in the picture. The process of making a negative, from which an unlimited number of positives may be made, was as yet unknown. Every picture had to be taken separately, and if a person wanted a dozen pictures, he had to sit for each one at least once. Frequently the picture did not turn out as desired, and the sitting had to be repeated.



"The process of making the daguerreotypes was comparatively simple. A perfectly clean and highly polished silver plate was first exposed to the fumes of iodine, and thus covered with a sensitive film of iodide of silver. These plates were exposed in the camera, afterwards developed by mercury fumes and fixed by hyposulphite of soda. Great care had to be taken in handling those plates, because they were easily scratched. The only way to keep them in good condition was by covering them with glass.

"I have some excellent daguerreotypes of well known people in my possession. They were not taken by me, but I value them highly, and would not part with them.

"Look here," Mr. Landy said, placing a number of leather-covered cases on the table, which he carefully opened, showing to the writer the exquisite silver-pictures hidden in their velvet-lined interior.

"Here is a picture of Edwin Forrest, the great actor, taken by Hawkins, in the Melodeon Building, on Fourth street, in 1845. Forrest was then about thirty-five or forty years old, and the picture shows him in one of his most characteristic poses.

“This,” Mr. Landy continued, opening another case, “is the portrait of Mrs. Catherine Forrest, the wife of the great actor. The picture, which was taken at the same time as Forrest’s, is an excellent likeness. Mrs. Forrest, who wore a silk dress after the fashion of those days, shows a strong face, almost classic in its contours. She was the daughter of an English musician, named Sinclair, and died about a year ago in New York.

“You surely remember the famous divorce case between the Forrests. First he sued, and she brought a counter-petition, which, after a long and sensational trial, was decided in her favor. Her lawyer was Charles O’Conor, one of the greatest criminal lawyers of New York, while he was represented by the noted John Van Buren. The Courts awarded Mrs. Forrest \$3,000 a year alimony, but her husband refused to pay. Finally, when the accumulated amount he owed his wife had reached \$1110,000, he was compelled to pay her the sum in a lump. He was well able to do so, but was stubborn to the last.



PIONEER CINCINNATIANS AND THEIR GRANDSON—FROM OLD DAGUERREOTYPES.

“Here you have one of the most famous actresses of the forties, Anna Cora Mowatt Ritchie. The picture was taken in 1843, at the time when she played with Murdoch and created such furore.

“Here is another celebrity, the great Charlotte Cushman, as she looked in 1850. Look at here almost masculine features. She was the original Meg Merrilies, and one of the greatest Lady Macbeths that ever lived. She played Lady Macbeth here about fifteen years in the old Wodd’s Theater, and I remember well that she stopped at the Spencer House, which was at that time one of the prominent hotels.

“What do you think of this picture of Edwin Booth? Isn’t it excellent? It was taken in 1856, when he was about twenty-five years old. By the way, do you know that Booth’s full name was Edwin Thomas Booth? He was named Edwin after Forrest and Thomas after Tom Flynn, a well known theatrical manager of those days. I can show you a letter in Booth’s own handwriting, which is signed Edwin Thomas Booth.

“This is a portrait of Laura Keene, the famous red-haired actress, who was so popular in the early fifties. She first played at Wallack’s Theater, in New York, and then formed her own company, known as the Laura Keene Variety Company. This company played several seasons with great success at the old Metropolitan Theater, and later in Laura Keene’s Theater, named after her. She was the first one to introduce the most magnificent

scenery in her spectacular plays, and she imported a celebrated scenic artist by the name of Roberts, from England, to work for her.

“Here you have the famous Irish temperance apostle, Father Mathew, who, about fifty years ago, founded the first temperance societies in this country, many of which are still existing. He was a Catholic priest, and this picture, one of the best I have ever seen of him, was taken about fifty years ago.

“There is a beauty in daguerreotypes, which has never been reached in any other kind of photographs. They give a clearer and more lifelike portrait that could be produced in any other way. Another thing is, that each daguerreotype, requiring a separate sitting, is an original portrait, and of greater value than an ordinary photograph made from a negative, which may be used for an unlimited number of positives. It is like an etching, the plate of which was destroyed after one impression had been taken. Quite recently daguerreotypes have come into favor again, but it seems that the art of making them has been lost in the course of time. Tintypes, although to a certain extent resembling daguerreotypes, will never become as popular as the latter.

“When the collodion process was invented, in 1850, and the system of printing positives from the original negative on glass came into use, the daguerreotype soon lost ground, and finally was driven out of the field altogether. The collodion process was in use about twenty-five years, but in the latter part of the seventies was replaced by the dry-plate or gelatine-emulsion process, which is at present used all over the world. When the first dry plates came out, they required an exposure of ten to thirty seconds, while the modern plates do not require more than a fraction of a second, and are considered slow if they need an exposure of one or more seconds.

“During my career as photographer I have met hundreds of men and women, who were or are still prominent in politics, or in the professions, and I could tell you many an interesting reminiscence. My collection of portraits of celebrities, taken during the last thirty-five years, numbers many hundreds, and at present I am at work cataloguing them. They will be exhibited some time this year.”

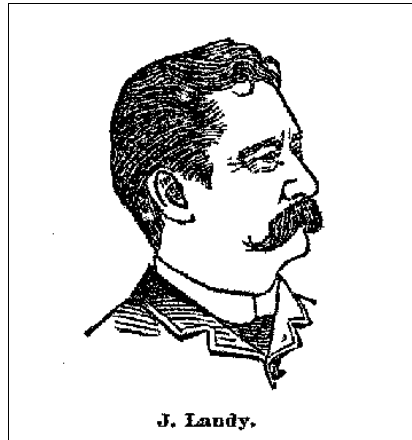
Mr. Landy has been exceptionally successful during his career, and many are the acknowledgments of the superiority of his artistic work which have been awarded to him. His series of seven photographs, representing Shakespeare’s “Seven Ages,” has become famous all over the world. A set of these pictures, tastefully framed, adorns the walls of the Shakspeare Memorial Library in Stratford-on-Avon, and a handsome letter of thanks from the Shakspeare Memorial Association is in Mr. Landy’s possession, and treasured highly by him.

At many exhibitions valuable prizes have been awarded to Mr. Landy for his excellent and artistic work. At the Chicago Exhibition of the Photographers Association of American, in 1887, he was awarded the Blair Cup for his “Man, Know Thy Destiny,” and at the Convention in 1888, in Minneapolis, his “Hiawatha” again won him the Blair Cup.

Besides the group of pictures made from daguerreotype in the possession of Mr. Landy, the readers will find a group of portraits of prominent Cincinnati citizens, also taken from daguerreotypes, kindly loaned for that purpose.

Published in:

“Prominent Businessmen of Cincinnati 1888–1889; A Souvenir of Our City's Prosperity During Her Centennial Year, With Short Sketches of Well Known Men Who Are Familiar to All Our Citizens.” *Commercial Gazette* (Cincinnati) (26 January 1896): 12.



The leading photographer of this city, who has established a national reputation in his art, is Mr. J. Landy, who has been located for a number of years on West Fourth street. He came here from New York, and has been in this city twenty-seven years. He lives in comfort and elegance on Walnut Hills. He is a Thirty-second Degree Mason, fond of art, literature and music, and has one of the best appointed libraries on the hill. He has been honored with several medals from societies with which he is connected, expositions and other public enterprises, and is known far and wide for his generosity and public spirit.

[End of texts.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

James Landy (1838–18 November 1897) began his life-long involvement with photography at about age twelve as an apprentice for Silas A. Holmes (1850). He is mentioned in an 1854 promotional pamphlet for the New York “picture factory” gallery of Charles R. Rees:

THE POLISHING DEPARTMENT in charge of Mr. Weeks, with his pupils, Masters Landy and McRea, occupies a prominent position in this establishment, preparing the plates by thousands for the pictures which are taken here and circulated in all directions, world-wide.¹

He subsequently worked as an operator in the Mead Brothers gallery, New York.²

His “Shakspeare’s ‘Seven Ages’” was highly successful, and appeared in the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. The work is known in three forms, a set of large prints, a set of seven cabinet cards in presentation frame, and in book form with tipped-in prints.³

As referenced in the text, Landy did issue a catalogue of the celebrity portraits in his collection. See James Landy, *J. Landy’s Catalogue of Celebrities: Comprising*

Photographs from Life, and Many Copies from Daguerreotypes, etc. (Cincinnati: Landy's Gallery of Photographic Art, 1898). WorldCat locates a copy in the Cincinnati Historical Society Library.

Examples of the cabinet cards by Landy of Edwin Forrest and Catherine (Sinclair) Forrest illustrated in this article are in the personal collection of the present editor. (They were acquired from descendants of William Henry Venable, Cincinnati, who was a personal friend of Landy.)

A daguerreotype of Edwin Forrest identical to the likeness in the article illustration is in the Harvard Theatre Collection, Houghton Library.⁵ The catalogue entry credits the daguerreotype to Landy, but this editor considers this in error as Landy's role as a daguerreotypist occurred subsequent to the stated (and likely) date of the original daguerreotype. The Harvard daguerreotype appears to be a copy daguerreotype, presumably from the original Hawkins daguerreotype.

This text is referenced in *Wilson's Photographic Magazine* with the declaration, "We expect to give some of the details of this interview presently, together with some other matter for ourselves, by Mr. LANDY."⁶ This editor, however, found no such text in subsequent issues of this publication.

For a graphic of Cushman as "Meg Merriles," see the Library of Congress Prints & Photographs online catalogue: <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cwpbh.03008>.

The editor wishes to add to these notes a declaration of philosophy by James Landy:

That to succeed in anything, your heart must be in your work; be sincere and conscientious in all you do; give all your time and thought to whatever you are engaged in; read and become familiar with the work of those who have made their mark. Always keep up the standard of your work, and compensation will surely follow.⁷

1. *Daguerreotype Directory, Reese & Co's German system of Photography and picture Making, No. 289 Broadway, New York* (New York: Oliver & Brother, Steam Job Printers, 1854): 22. (Please note the incorrect spelling of the last name, which is correctly spelled "Rees.")
2. "James Landy" [obituary] *Wilson's Photographic Magazine* 34:492 (December 1897): 556–8.
3. J. Landy, *Shakspeare's Seven Ages: Illustrated with Photographs from Life* (Cincinnati, R. Clarke & Co., 1877).
4. See:
http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/dags/D0000005_EDWIN-FORREST_PHOTO.pdf
http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/dags/D0000006_CATH-FORREST_PHOTO.pdf
5. The daguerreotype is viewable online via the Visual Information Access system of the Harvard University Library:
<http://via.lib.harvard.edu/via/deliver/deepLinkItem?recordId=olwork100827&componentId=FHCL.HOUGH:29456>
6. *Wilson's Photographic Magazine* (New York) 33:471 (March 1896): 144.
7. As quoted in A. L. Bowersox, "Photographers at Home and Abroad," *American Journal of Photography* (Philadelphia) 15:176 (August 1894): 347.

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