

“The Daguerreotype—Its present Position,” 1 January 1862

(keywords: Charles A. Seely, Abraham Bogardus, Rufus Anson, Jeremiah Gurney, Charles H. Williamson, Marcus A. Root, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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The Daguerreotype—Its present Position.

Mr. SEELY, of New York, in a recent article, says:—

“Ten years ago we had here only daguerreotypists—now, not one. The daguerreotype had many friends, but it was doomed; we shall not hear of it again—peace to its ashes! What we talk about to-day was, in the practical art, almost a novelty only a year ago—the card photograph. The series of fashions we had in the art are steps of progress—the daguerreotype, ambrotype, four-fourth photograph, stereoscope, and, at last, the card portrait. In our judgment the card portrait is a climax and summation of the series. It is the style of picture to command the praise of good taste and utility for centuries to come.”

Now, we maintain that our cotemporary is entirely wrong in his representations. So far from “the daguerreotype being doomed,” the fact is just the reverse. We often hear it spoken of with approval, as being, “after all, the neatest and prettiest picture out;” this is particularly the opinion entertained of them by the fair sex, and who so good judges in matters of taste as “lovely woman?”

There would be a much greater demand for daguerreotypes if one in twenty operators throughout the country could take a decent one; but the fact is patent that only a small proportion of artists now-a-days make them in any shape, and none but a first-rate one is ever wanted. They are the most difficult picture to take, and therefore have been discountenanced by operators, but not by the public. A cheap operator prefers to take an ambrotype for fifty cents rather than a daguerreotype for the same money, and a good many customers, among the ignorant classes more particularly, never know the difference. But ask Bogardus, ask Anson, or Gurney, of New York, or Williamson, of Brooklyn, and they will tell you that they take “lots of ’em,” and always, when wanted at all, they are called for by *first-class* people. The ambrotype is indeed in little demand now, and we trust soon to hear that the *last one* has been taken.

The four-fourth photograph has fallen off in popularity, and the *carte de visite* is in truth now the popular favorite. But to suppose that we shall not have something that will far surpass even it in popular estimation, is to suppose that the world will stop moving. We believe that the march of improvement is *onward*, and that even the card pictures will have their rivals for the favor of a fickle public. But as for the daguerreotype, the first in the race, we affirm that the time has not yet arrived when it is to be considered as “doomed.”

Mr. Root, a couple of years since, said that he looked forward with perfect confidence to the time when the daguerreotype should hold its old position as being the best of all known processes for producing miniatures by the aid of light, and asserted that at that time it was the most perfect and reliable of all pictures, that its soft finish and delicate definition had never been equalled, and that if operators would call attention to and recommend the beauties of this process to their customers, they would soon leave the fading ambrotype to its merited obscurity.

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

As a foundation for the study of daguerreotypy in later years, see Grant B. Romer, "The Daguerreotype in America and England after 1860." *History of Photography* 1:1 (July 1977): 201–212. Names mentioned by Romer are Abraham Bogardus, Rufus Anson, Jeremiah Gurney, Charles A. Williamson, John Adams Whipple, Marcus Ormsbee, Antoine Claudet, Thomas M. Easterly, Alvah Pearsall, Dr. Schultz-Sellack, John William Draper, Pierre Jules Cesar Jansen, Alexander Hesler, William Shew, Mathew J. Steffens, Josiah Johnson Hawes, Frank Haes, Major-General J. Waterhouse, Thomas Bolas, E. J. Wall, William M. Hollinger, E. Benthin, Charles Tremear, Gladys Müller, Charles Duncan, Albert Raborn Phillips, Jr., Irving Pobbaravsky, Harvey Zucker, James Abrecht, Fred Birkhill, Walter Johnson, Cliff Krainik, Marvin Kreisman, O. Sherwood Poppe, Joel Snyder, Richard Malpas, Roger Baker, Thomas Young, Grant Romer.

See also the document in this archive: *Research notes: "Post-daguerreian-era daguerreotypy."*¹

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/R0080005_POST-ERA_DAGTYPY.pdf

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