

Edward T. Whitney, "Reminiscences," June 1889

(keywords: Edward Tompkins Whitney, Edward Anthony, Henry Anthony, Abraham Bogardus, Martin M. Lawrence, Jeremiah Gurney, Marcus A. Root, Andrew W. Paradise, Mathew Brady, George N. Barnard, D. D. T. Davie, James Wallace Black, Frederick A. Wenderoth, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography.)

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REMINISCENCES.

By E. T. Whitney.

Your invitation to contribute some article to your Annual for 1889 duly received. It affords me pleasure to comply with your request, perhaps more than it will the reader of any article I may send. I may be termed an old foggy, as I shall send nothing new to those unacquainted with the early history and trials in making daguerreotypes, the article may be of interest. [sic] After the announcement of Daguerre's discovery among the first to experiment was Edward Anthony, to him, as to his brother Henry in later years, we went for advice. The two brothers little thought in their close quarters, corner of Fulton street and Broadway, forty-five years ago, selling morocco cases, they were laying the foundation of one of the largest stock houses in the country. In common with all engaged in the picture business and the public generally, we mourn their loss.

At this time, 1844, Abraham Bogardus, M. M. Lawrence, J. Gurney, Root, A. W. Paradise (with Brady) and myself (and one or two others whose names I have forgotten) were the only ones in New York making daguerreotypes. Let the reader now remark the contrast between the past and the present. No journals, no bulletins, to give you aid, every dark room barred of access. *A New Discovery!* that promised great things, and no information except what could be gleaned from foreign journals. Not only were the dark rooms closed but those who had opened galleries for sittings had to keep the outer doors locked each morning until they could try the coating boxes before admitting sitters. The great difficulty to be overcome was to prevent fogging the plate with the fumes of bromine; daguerreotypes could be made with iodine alone, but it was too slow; think of sitting ten or fifteen minutes for your picture! This uncertain state of things lasted until it was discovered that bromine could be held in lime and give off the fumes slowly, thus enabling us to coat the plate without fogging. The next difficulty arose from dampness of the buffs, this was soon remedied by heat.

In 1846 I left New York and moved to Rochester, opened a gallery in the Arcade. In 1848 made the first exhibition of pictures taken by the sun at the State Fair held in Syracuse. At this place, with the assistance of Geo. N. Barnard and D. D. T. Davie, organized the first convention for promoting the advancement of the art, and arranging a scale of prices for daguerreotypes. In 1850 Brady and Root prepared some large daguerreotypes for the World's Fair in London. I also prepared a frame, that arrived in

New York too late to go with the others. This frame was taken by C. Wager Hull to the American Institute Fair in 1882; after that Scovill's people sent it to the Photo Convention at St. Louis, and now it hangs in Scovill's on Broome street, and is considered quite a curiosity, and is probably the only frame of large daguerreotypes in existence.

In 1850 J. W. Black, of Boston, came out to Rochester and instructed me in the photographic art, and here began a new set of trouble. No collodion in the market, no trays for development, no albumen paper. We had to make our gun-cotton, our trays and bottles, out of sheet gutta percha. After photos were printed to give them a finish used wax. I have waxed photos now thirty-nine years old not faded. But not to make this paper too long I will close by giving a short account of the two first solar prints that were made in New York in 1853 or 1854 by Brady and Gurney. They had galleries side by side in Broadway, near White street. Each unbeknown to the other was making life size solars for the American Institute Fair, held in those years at Castle Garden. I had access to both, and kept the secret. In order to sensitize the paper for a full length picture, Brady prepared a gutta-percha tray 7 feet long by 5 wide, which with the silver bath cost him over \$100. On this silver wave the paper was floated until sensitized. The negative used was on a small plate, a group of three, Brady, Gardener [Gardner—edit.], Wenderoth, and was six feet high, the picture was in his Washington Gallery in 1862. J. Gurney prepared his paper at less cost by putting the silver on with a cotton wad; his subject was a full length of a lady, and both pictures were very good.

[End of text. The text's second sentence is best understood if revised to separate sentences as indicated by bracketed note.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

This text is an abbreviated version of a reminiscence given five years prior. See E. T. Whitney, "Reminiscences," *Photographic Times and American Photographer* (New York) 14:159 (new series no. 39) (March 1884): 122–24. ¹

Among the names mentioned are: Edward Tompkins Whitney, Edward Anthony, Henry Anthony, Abraham Bogardus, Martin M. Lawrence, Jeremiah Gurney, Marcus A. Root, Andrew W. Paradise, Mathew Brady, George N. Barnard, D. D. T. Davie, James Wallace Black, Frederick A. Wenderoth.

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8840001_WHITNEY_PHOTO-TIMES_1884-03.pdf

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