

“The Past and Present: Death of Josiah Johnson Hawes,” September 1901

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The Past and Present

Death of Josiah Johnson Hawes of Boston
The Oldest Professional Photographer in America.

JOSIAH Johnson Hawes, the oldest professional photographer in the world, died at Crawford, N. H., on Wednesday Aug. 7th. whither he had gone for rest. Though in the 94th year of his age, he did his own operating and posing, until the last. His venerable figure and quaint studio in Tremont Row, Boston, has been a striking landmark in the city for over sixty years. He was a painter of portraits in oils in his early days. In 1841, only two years after Daguerre had communicated his discovery to the Academy of Science in Paris, and in the same year that Fox Talbot first gave the Royal Society in London a description of his process for securing a negative, Mr. Hawes was making daguerrotypes in Boston. Two years later Dr. Draper of New York succeeded in reducing the time of exposure necessary from thirty minutes to 25 seconds. The process being now feasible Mr. Hawes associated with him a partner, Albert Southworth, and together they built the first skylight for sun pictures in America, and soon the studio of Hawes & Southworth, Daguerrotypists, was known all over the East for fine portrait work.

Among those who sat before Mr. Hawes' camera were Daniel Webster, Charles Sumner, Rufus Choate, Louis Kossuth, Theodore Parker, Emerson, Channing, Jared Sparks, Bronson Alcott, Lyman Beecher, Thomas Starr King, Dorothea Dix, Lucy Larcom, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Longfellow and many more whose fame still lives. Jenny Lind and her lover, Otto Goldschmidt, were taken while seated hand in hand.

Charles Dickens was a frequent visitor, when he came to Boston, and with James T. Fields as his companion, he often used to climb the winding stairs to the studio or "salon," as it was called in these early days.

The Boston Herald tells how the original daguerreotype of Webster was made on the morning when he, Webster, delivered his famous Anthony Burns speech from the balcony of the Revere House. The old photographer had also at least a dozen other daguerreotypes of Webster, made at different periods of his career.

In those days sitting for one's picture was, with most people, a serious business, not to be entered into lightly. There was no duplicating a daguerreotype except by a second sitting. There was no ordering a dozen or two, to be reproduced from one negative.

The favorite size, which, though larger, corresponded to the cabinets of to-day cost \$15 apiece. They were made on copper plates, faced with silver and polished like a mirror and were inclosed in a case or frame under glass.

In late years Mr. Hawes revived the art of daguerreotyping with marked success. He had little sympathy with the modern notion of retouching negatives and with modern

photo papers, but stuck to Alburna, and Daguerre's process found an unusually fine student in him. He was the inventor of numerous mechanical devices, such as the swingback camera, the reflecting stereoscope, the multiplying camera and the curtain plate holder, a clamp for polishing, the vignette, etc.

Josiah Johnson Hawes lived to see photography developed into a popular science, first; then, into a world embracing industry, and finally he saw it lifted up to a coveted place among the Fine Arts. He lived to see photography placed within reach of the humblest man, woman and child, through the ubiquitous Kodak, the Brownie, and other cheap cameras. He lived to see a complete map of the stars of heaven made by photography. He saw the cinematograph and its moving pictures. He lived to see pictures taken by telegraph and wafted through space. In fine [time—ed.], he saw the birth and development of the science, for sixty years, and was part of it, an experience that seldom falls to the lot of man.

He had fine taste in art and literature and with his poetic temperament was combined a keen mind, great energy and strong will. His intellectual power diminished only slightly with advancing age. In later years his appearance strongly suggested the poet Bryant. He died as he had lived a man of scrupulous integrity, a staunch friend and loyal to his profession to the end.

The Photo Era is glad to pay this tribute to his worth here, because of the distinguished services he gave to the art of photography.

The generation of great men and women who knew him, profited by his knowledge and marvelled at his art beautiful, are passed and gone. He was the last link in the long chain connecting the past and present of photography. But his memory will live in the hearts of those who delight to make pictures and who honor the profession of which he was such an distinguished member.

[End of text.]

EDITOR'S NOTES:

A subsequent article about Hawes appears in the same publication. See "Stray Leaves from the Diary of the Oldest Professional Photographer in the World," *Photo Era* 16:2 (February 1906): 104–107.¹

See also the obituary, "Oldest Photographer Dead," *New York Times* 50:16,097 (10 August 1901): 7.²

Also informative is the illustrated article, "A Famous Photographer and His Sitters," *Demorest's Family Magazine* (New York) 34:5 (April 1898): 134–135, 156.³

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P9060001_HAWES_PHOTO-ERA_1906-02.pdf

2. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/N9010001_HAWES-OBIT_NY-TIMES_1901-09-10.pdf

3. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/P8980001_HAWES_DEMOREST_1898-04.pdf

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