

Save That Film Pack Adapter ?

By Walter Johnson

The original Premo Film Pack of 1908 has a new use for those of us who continue to work the historic photographic processes. A way to house and use the Daguerreotype or Wet-plate with safety and a minimum of handling. The Kodak company long ago stopped loading the film packs because they were not profitable. The last of the film packs were 4X5, 16 exposure units, and had to be hand loaded, that was the problem, and made them too expensive to continue in production.

So now the film pack adapter is useless; well think again. I, as many of you had the problem of a correct holder for my 4X5 Daguerreotype plate, a regular cut film holder often times could be made to work, but you would run the risk that the plate would not fit into the holder. The push of the plate into the grooves designed for film was a real problem, because all Daguerreotype plates were not the exact same size.

I solved the problem with the use of the film pack adapter. While the adapter is a bit larger, [thicker], than the standard film holder, will fit with ease into any Graphic Graflock film back. My current camera, a Busch 4X5, allows the use of the film pack adapter with no problems, as would most common 4X5 cameras. This is how.

Film pack adapters came in several different sizes, from 1 5/8" X 2 1/4" [4.5 X 6], to 5"X7", and the first photo shows the range in size from 2 1/4" X 3 1/4"; 3 1/4" X 4 1/4" [quarter plate]; 4"X5"; and 5"X7". I'm somewhat certain that the 5X7 film pack was the largest size offered by Kodak because of the nature of the thin film stock to hold flat during the exposure. Film packs were not loaded with cut film as we know it today, but with roll film based film that could allow the movement of the film to the back of the pack after exposure. The paper tabs attached the film were used to pull the exposed film to the back of the adapter to wait until time to develop the film. I would tare only half the tab off, knowing that because the film was so thin to handle it would create "Moons", so tray processing was the only answer. The paper tab helped to avoid the many developing problems.

I found that in using the film pack adapter that I could load and unload the Daguerreotype plate with a minium of handling and was quicker and more certain than the fumbling with a normal film holder altered to hold the thicker metal plate.

The adapter was fitted with a pad made from “foam core”, I would cut it to size and then tape it with black photo tape to insure a light tight seal. The filler pad would be placed in the holder after the Daguerreotype plate was inserted into the holder, and then close the spring back of the adapter to lock the plate for use.

My photos show how I would load the adapter, the unloading was just as easy, you would remove the filler pad, and then turn the adapter over and let the plate drop into your hand. A few of my students used a small pen knife to lift one edge of the plate to where they could be certain of a good grip to remove the exposed plate. The benefit of using the film pack adapter is it works to hold a Wet-plate 4X5 glass just as easily as the Daguerreotype plate, all I did was to cement a small thin piece of plastic into each of the four corners of the adapter to not have any silver nitrate in the adapter.

Should you have any other questions, please let me know and I'll do my best to answer them.....Walter Johnson





