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Also embracing the Sciences, Arts, and Literature



DAGUERRE

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WALTER A. JOHNSON, EDITOR

To the public (editorial)

The first number of the Daguerreian Journal is now before the public. Our bark is launched, the sails unfurled, and we are on the broad sea of Journalism. . . We are grieved that the art we have so long practiced, and held in such high estimation is looked upon by many as unworthy of the notice and patronage of the public. We can but acknowledge that there are a few engaged in our profession who are almost void of taste and artistic skill; yet there are many who would do honor to any profession and rank foremost in other arts. These last we wish success in their onward and upward course; and we would also cordially extend a helping hand to the less favored few. We fair would tell them how to improve, and teach them to study nature, -- she is the artist's true guide.

A lack of pride among Daguerreians is one of the greatest disadvantages our art labors under. Many care not what may be their reputation as artists so long as they put a few dollars into their pockets. This is decidedly wrong, for one poor picture will do more injury than ten good ones can repair. Let every artist strive for a good reputation by honoring his profession, and, in less than twice twelve months this art will stand forth with a new face, demanding of the public a position of the greatest respect.

We have only to look through eleven years to behold the first announcement of the Daguerreian Art. There behold its imperfect development, and now witness its gigantic growth. It has rapidly spread over the land till no less than ten thousand artists are engaged in this profession in America, alone. The pages of history contain no equal progress in either of the other arts.

When first practiced it was customary to set the subject in the direct rays of the sun for from five to fifteen minutes; and even then only a faint impression was produced. Now, in an instant, we can catch the shadow of a babe with its smile; even the lightnings have been imprinted on the tablet of silver. We look upon the past with pleasing emotions, and hold in bright anticipation the coming future. . .

Daguerreian Artists! we hail you as brothers; we have long been one with you, and still make one in you extensive band! Ours is an art distinct from all others; one capable of bearing the ensign; already has it assumed a giant strength. But few persons have any conception of the vast amount of business transacted by the Daguerreotypists of America. There are millions of dollars worth of stock consumed yearly--our numbers are not less than ten thousand.

It now remains with us whether we shall assume a position equal in rank to any of the other arts. Let us resolve to be ever foremost, and with perseverance we may stand there. Let us talk, and write upon our profession, freely and in concert, and lend our aid to everything that has a tendency to elevate and perfect it. What better step can we take to the accomplishment of this object than to support a Journal devoted to our profession?

Though ours is the Daguerreian's Journal, yet we do not intend that it shall be confined to that art alone. Painting, sculpture, and the sciences, will also find a place in its columns, and thus add to it variety and interest for the general reader. It will contain criticisms on paintings and various works of art, and it shall be our aim to make it a gallery filled with mental daguerreotypes of whatever will instruct and interest the artist.

Our way lies over untrodden field; the Daguerreian Journal is a pioneer in the history of this art. We believe it to be the first and only one published in the world, which is principally devoted to the Daguerreian Art. A vast amount of labor lies before us, but having set out we shrink not from our responsibility, though expecting to endure all the care, anxiety, and perplexity, incident to our undertaking. Yet with your approbation and assistance, ARTIST, we will brave it all. To you we look for aid, and from you we expect it; we know your liberality; we know your anxiety to improve in your profession, and we know, too, how difficult it has ever been to obtain information as pertaining to our art. We now offer you a medium from which you may obtain such information as you most need, believing that we have only to present it to your notice to secure at once your hearty co-operation.

By Mr. S. D. Humphrey, Editor of the world's first photographic magazine, 1850.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS.

We shall now proceed to describe, briefly and clearly, the Daguerreotype process, as practised by the most successful operators of the day; omitting such variations as are not essential to the production of good proofs, and which tend rather to confuse than instruct the amateur, but not knowingly discarding anything which can facilitate his progress. And first, a remark or two on the silver plates, upon which the picture is obtained.

These plates are made expressly for the Daguerreotype. There are several sizes, the more useful of which are as follows: -

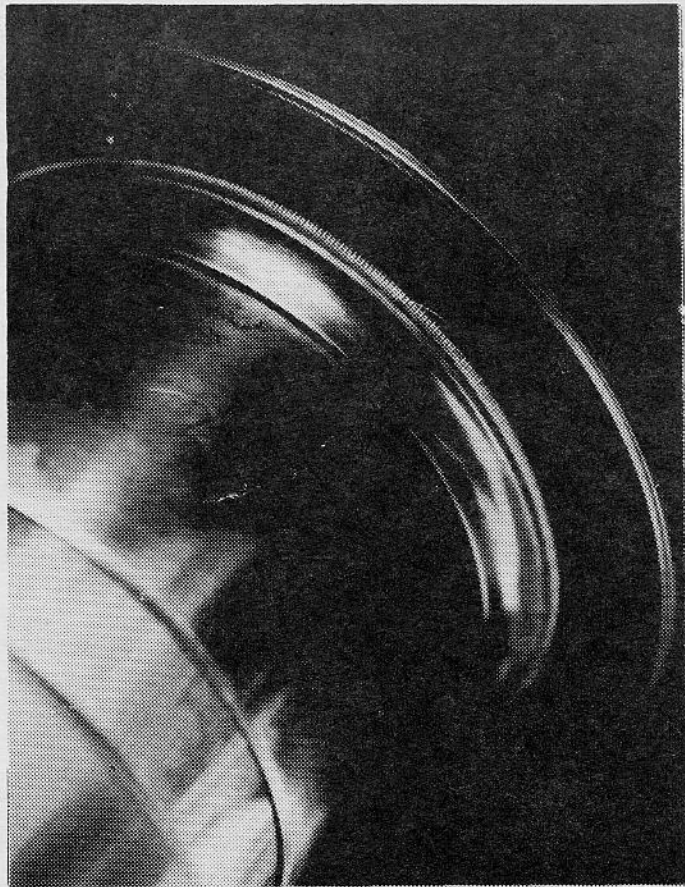
- No. 1.-2 by 2½ inches.
- No. 2.-2 ¾ by ¾ inches.
- No. 3.-3 by 4 inches.
- No. 4.-4 by 5 inches.

The purchaser should be careful to select plates of a white metallic lustre, perfectly free from small holes, cracks, flaws, or any kind of blemish. These may be detected by breathing on the plate; and a defect or spot, however small, will become a source of great annoyance when a picture has been obtained, and much time will have been needlessly consumed in polishing and preparing them. Those that have any trace of copper appearing through the silver must be rejected.

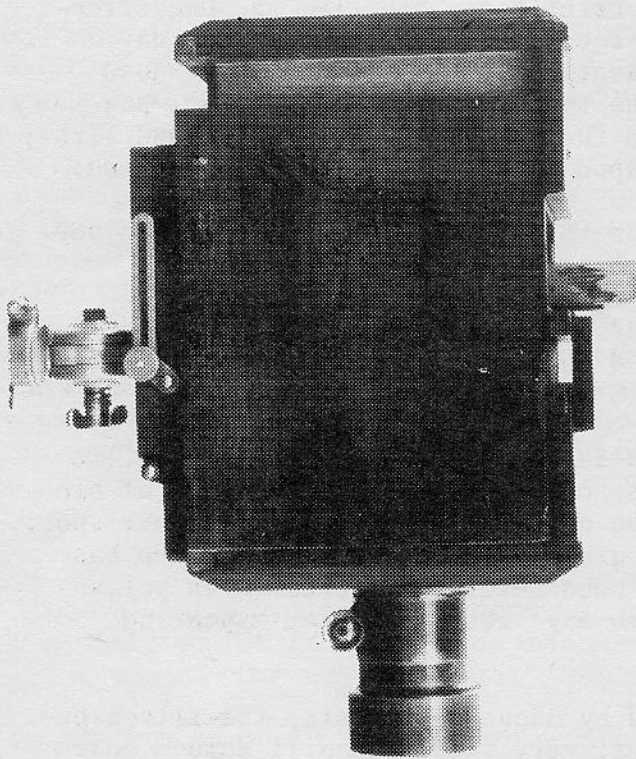
French plates are now largely used by daguerreotypists; the silver being considered purer. They are, however, very thin, and will seldom bear more than one or two cleanings. A number at the corner shows the proportion of silver employed, and none of less value than 1-40th should be employed; those of 1030th silver are perhaps more economical. The most beautiful pictures are obtained on plates covered with pure silver by the electrotype process hereafter described.

Cleaning and Polishing the Plates.

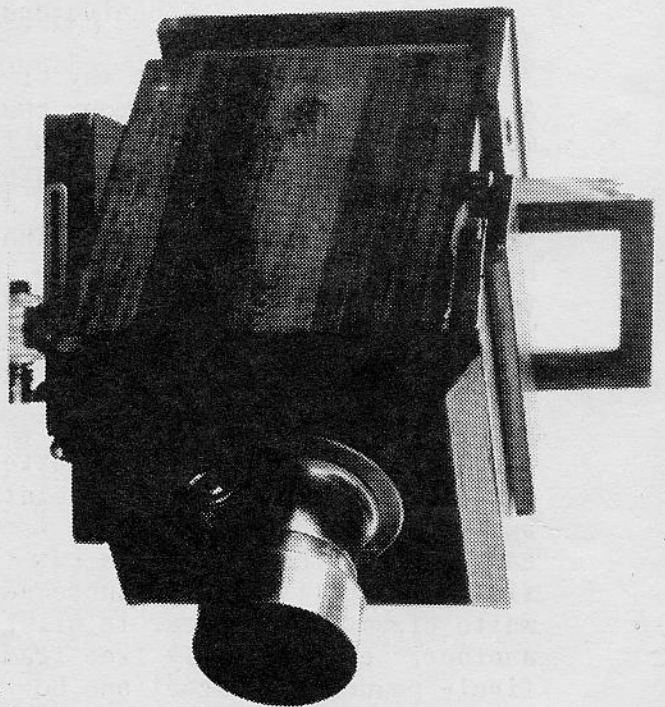
The best and easiest way of cleaning plates is by the use of a lathe. A round buff, somewhat larger than the plates to be cleaned, having been mounted on the headstock, and a little oil and rotten-stone, well mixed, carefully spread over it, a plate is placed in a metal holder (fig. 17) and held firmly against the surface of the buff: - a few turns will remove all trace of any former picture. The buff may be scraped now and then with the back of an old knife, to remove the accumulated dirt, and wiped occasionally to take off any dust or grit: a drop or two of oil must be added when it gets too dry. The face of the plate having been partially cleansed from oil, by rubbing it on a flat buff kept for the purpose, and the back and sides carefully wiped, it may be placed on the iron wire stand, which is made for the purpose of burning off the oil which still remains on the surface. Heat is applied by dipping a little cotton, fixed on the end of a piece of iron wire, in naphtha, lighting it, and holding it under each plate till small whitish spots appear upon it, when it is permitted to cool. This operation requires care, for if the burning be too long continued, the plate will not take a fine black polish in the subsequent process: if not sufficiently burned, white clouds will appear in gilding. The oil-buff is now to be replaced by another, kept perfectly free from grease or grit, and well supplied with finely powdered charcoal and best rouge in equal proportions, kept ready in a muslin bag. A few times, pressing the plate strongly at first, and afterwards more lightly, will give the plate a beautiful even black polish. If possible, the plate should be removed from the lathe without stopping its revolutions, which will prevent any circular marks appearing upon it. It is afterwards buffed lightly with a hand-buff, as will presently be mentioned.



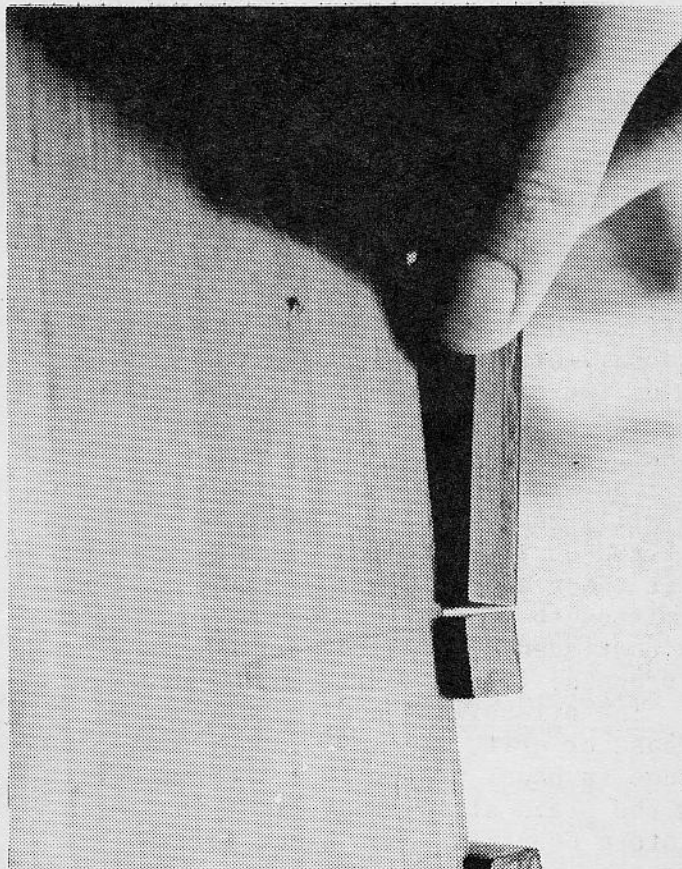
C-1



C-3



C-2



C-4

C-1; The Voigtlander lens.

C-2; A three-quarter view.

C-3; The perfect profile.

C-4; Opening the doors.

DAGUERREAN

EQUIPMENT GALLERY

One of the primary functions of "The Daguerrean Society" will be to identify and catalog the daguerreotype equipment known to be in private collections. Once that's completed, we'll start to explore the store-rooms of our national museums. The society will need the full cooperation of its members in order for this goal to be reached. As a start, we have photographically recorded six daguerreotype cameras, (with four more to be photographed) from the midwestern states alone.

GENERAL DISCRPTION of DAGUERREOTYPE CAMERA NUMBER ONE,

Owner, Walter A. Johnson, 1360 Haines Ave., Columbus, Ohio 43212

Camera number one is of American descent although it does not have a maker's name or number. It is thought that the camera was purchased in New York city approximately 1845 by the great-grandfather of Mr. Harold Wagner, Marrietta, Ohio.

The camera is a quarter plate size with demensions as follows; overall lenth (closed) 28.7 cm., heigth; 20.9 cm., width; 19.5 cm., the camera extends 2. cm. to focus at infinity with the lens set at center focus. The lens is a Voigtlander & Son in Wien, serial number, 1867, approximate focal length, 19.5 cm..

The ground glass focus panel (glass size, 10.7 x 13.8 cm.) is marked by pencil (?) with three ovals for portrait areas, 1/4 plate, 1/6 plate, and 1/9 plate.

Unusual features; there are no bone knobs on the top of the camera to open the doors to insert the plate holders. Instead the sides of the camera body have been tapered in 4mm. at the top of the camera. The operator raises the doors from the side rather than from the center.

The camera body is constructed of mahogany covered with rosewood veneer. The orginal finish has not been removed, but it has been cleaned and waxed to renew the beauty of the rosewood veneer.

Resteration; two small pices of rosewood veneer were replaced on the front bevel plains of the camera, lens focus knob assembly replaced, lens brass tube cleaned and refinished to the present tone, and a 1/4 inch crack on the face of the camera repaired. This resteration has restored the camera to a useable condition and recently it was used to expose reclaimed daguerreotype plates.

The camera was purchased in the fall of 1969 along with five other cameras and one camera stand, total cost for the lot, \$53.00. The cost of restoration has added another \$40.00 .

Members can order 8 x 10 photographs of every half-tone used in "The New Daguerreian Journal". Each picture is numbered so you can order copy prints easily. Even if you can't collect the daguerreotype cameras you can collect photographs of them at modest cost. The copy prints (8x10) will cost \$2.00 each plus \$.50 postage and handling per order, allow about three weeks for deliverly.

Description of the Process, continued.

When a lathe is not at hand, the plates may be cleaned by hand in the following manner. The operation is rather more lengthy and troublesome, but quite as effectual if properly conducted. Having fixed the plate on one of the plate-holders before described, shake over it some finely-powdered tripoli or rotten-stone, add a small quantity of pure alcohol, and with a piece of prepared cotton proceed to rub the plate with a rapid circular motion, taking care not to press upon it with much force:-the paste formed by the alcohol and tripoli must then be well cleaned off with fresh wool and dry tripoli, and the above process repeated two or three times, until a clean surface of pure silver is obtained. This is the best plan for a new plate:-if the plate has been used before, and the picture has not been what is termed fixed, the above operation will also suffice; but if it has been fixed, it is necessary to use a little olive oil with the tripoli in the first instance, the oil being burned off in the manner before mentioned. If the picture does not readily come off, a little dilute nitric acid may be used, but with great precaution, as if not quickly removed it will eat into the silver. The plate is now ready for polishing: this is best performed by rubbing the plate rapidly over the buff, which must be kept well supplied with prepared lamp-black or charcoal, pressing the plate hard and evenly against it, and changing the direction frequently, but always ending by polishing in a direction which will cross the picture you wish to obtain upon it; that is, if the plate is to be placed upright in the camera, finish it from side to side, and vice versa.*

*An experienced Daguerreotypist informs us that he has found a constant cause of failure in producing good pictures arise from the buffs absorbing moisture and the vapours of iodine and bromine. To get rid of these he adopts a plan much used in America. The buffs for finishing the plates are kept in a small oven made of sheet-iron, heated with a spirit lamp, and kept perfectly free from dust. By this process he finds a vast improvement in the tone of his pictures.

The last polish should be given a short time before the plate is to be used; and any dust which may remain on it should be removed carefully, holding the plate in an inverted position, with a piece of cotton or a camel's-hair pencil, just before the process of iodizing.

Some of the French operators recommend the use of the essential oils of citron, lavender, or bergamot, and they are used with advantage if quite pure, a fact ascertained by dropping a little on a piece of thin paper, and gently warming it over a lamp until the stain disappears, which it will do entirely if there be no fixed oil combined with the essence. A little tripoli, made into a cream with an essence, is dropped upon the plate, and distributed by the cotton as in the former process; when cleaned off by dry tripoli, the plate is ready for buffing.

The following preparation for cleaning plates has been strongly recommended: it consists of four drachms essence of bergamot, mixed with one pint spirit of wine, to be well shaken together, allowed to stand one or two days, then filtered through bibulous paper, with a small quantity of magnesia, to remove the excess of oil. It is used with tripoli or rotten-stone and cotton wool.

A piece of thick caoutchouc made sticky by heat or a little turpentine will be found useful in removing prepared plates from one pan or frame to another.

FIFTEEN YEARS' EXPERIENCE OF A DAGUERREOTYPYER.

by Alexander Beckers.

(Read before the Society of Amateur Photographers of New York, January 31, 1889.)

In response to the request of your Corresponding Secretary, Mr. Duffield, I hereby give an outline of my experience in the history of the daguerreotype, for a period of fifteen years.

The details of this antiquated, senior branch of your art can interest you only in such parts as are similar. A comparison of the two, however, will show the progress of the half century we commemorate to-day, as also the centennial of the birth of Daguerre.

The first daguerreotype I saw, was made by Robert Cornelius, in Philadelphia. His laboratory was conspicuous. On the outside could be seen a large mirror, swung on a bracket, for illuminating his sitters with reflected sunlight. The use of bromine was not yet known in 1840, but Boudine introduced it soon after. In the same year Robert Chilton called on my brother to make hyposulphite of soda, offering four and a half dollars per pound, stating that the French article cost over five dollars to import, although still impure. Thus the first hypo was made here at the corner of 23d street and Fourth avenue, the present site of the Young Men's Christian Association. Orders for other chemicals followed, and in 1843 Louis Beckers was the first to manufacture photographic chemicals exclusively, at Old York Road, Philadelphia.

In the same year I entered the daguerreotype business of Mr. Fred Langenheim, in the Merchants' Exchange of Philadelphia. Here there was little to be seen of things you see nowadays in a photographic art gallery. A kind of a hiding-place for a dark room, and a spyglass-like camera were all the indications of the mystery I was to learn. The camera rested on a candlestick-like tripod, with three set-screws for adjustment, and was placed on an ordinary table. To interchange the ground glass and round daguerreotype plate, it was necessary to unscrew a flanged ring, and replace the same by a reverse motion. For the adjustment of the focus, there was the rack and pinion, as Voightlander's instruments still have. This instrument was one of the first made according to the mathematical calculations of Professor Petzval, of Vienna, having two achromatic lenses. It had been sent by young Voightlander to his college-mate, William Langenheim, as a present, with supplies and instructions, but also the warning not to try daguerreotyping, unless he had courage enough to try five hundred times more after failing with the first hundred pictures. William Langenheim, a lawyer, did not have the courage, but his brother Fred had, and succeeded so well that he was offered six hundred dollars for that odd camera.

The manipulations of preparing a daguerreotype plate will not interest you much. I should state, however, that the production of a chemically clean surface on silver, is a difficulty that increases four-fold with the size of the plate. Another difficulty is the use of the chemicals in a volatile state. The iodine can be controlled by sight with faint day-light, but the bromine only by even temperature and constant practice.

At Langenheim's necessity soon introduced a square camera, with square plates and holders. A high tripod was also used instead of the table. In the summer of 1843 the first dozen of small Voightlander objectives, such as are still on the market, were imported. Soon after, four larger ones, for 6x8-inch pictures, arrived. In the fall of that year, Phillip Hass, formerly of Paris, showed Fizeau's method of fixing the image on the plate by cold gilding. Soon after the picture was made more brilliant by heating the plate while the gold solution was on it. In that winter the first polishing wheel was made. It was constructed like an ordinary grindstone, worked by a treadle, the wheel being cushioned and covered with buckskin. With the aid of this machine, and after weeks of hard labor and many experiments, we succeeded in making the first good large daguerreotype of 6x8-inches, called whole size; half and two-thirds size were advertised and made with success. At that time we also succeeded in making a picture of a sick lady at her own residence, which had been considered impossible.

In the spring of 1844 Mr. Edward White bought one of the large Voightlander instruments, and for him I made the first large daguerreotypes in this city at 175 Broadway. There were then but few daguerreans here. They were I. Brush, Weston, Artho, Insley, Plumb, and others I cannot recall.

I remained with Edward White until December, 1844, when it became impossible to make a picture in his operating room on account of the extreme cold, for Mr. White would not allow a fire in the place over night. Then I commenced business for myself, at the corner of Nassau and John streets, and after May, 1845, at 201 Broadway, under the firm of Langenheim & Beckers, agents for Voightlander & Louis Beckers.

At that time the large Voightlander objectives had a chemical and a visual focus, so that in order to make a large, near picture, the lenses were moved out one-eighth of an inch, while for usual work the ground glass was set permanently one-sixteenth of an inch nearer than the plate. That summer I took a view of High Bridge before the scaffolding was removed. This picture was taken for the engineers, and was perhaps the first one ever taken here in aid of architecture. By taking out-door views I discovered that the plates increased in sensitiveness with the time between the preparation and exposure, and in 1848 obtained a sharp picture of a procession in motion.

In 1847 I began to use a speculum metal mirror, in order to have my pictures not inverted. For very unsymmetrical faces this arrangement was quite indispensable in order to get a likeness. The mirror was attached to the instrument at an angle of 45 degrees. The use of the mirror required double the time exposure. It was made by Fitz, Senior, the optician, and was used for years after.

In 1848 Fred Langenheim bought the Fox-Talbot patent for the United States, at six thousand dollars. He introduced it here and failed in the undertaking. Our daguerreotypes were taken so perfect that they were preferred to any Talbotype. Abroad the superiority of our pictures was attributed to our clear atmosphere until American Daguerreotypists, as Dentists, took the lead all over the world.

In 1849 my firm was changed to Beckers & Piard. Having now more time, we succeeded in substituting machinery for cleaning our plates, and thus obtained cleaner and better plates in one-third the time required by hand.

In 1852 M.M. Root, of Philadelphia, made two pictures on one plate. We succeeded in making four on one plate, and in such a way that the exposed quarter was in the center of the field of the lens. It was then a great relief, as locket pictures were in fashion. In 1856 Mr. Ormsbee patented this same multiplying plate holder and collected considerable money on it, until my priority made his claim void.

The production of stereoscopic portraits was the next task. Marchner, of Philadelphia, made patent cases to show these pictures in a very neat way. In 1854 F. Langenheim had commenced to manufacture stereoscopic views on glass. He sent me three dozen of his make, to find sale for them here. At the first exhibit of these pictures one dozen of them were broken. This loss set me to thinking how to find an arrangement to show and secure the pictures against breakage, and in 1857 I obtained a patent for my revolving stereoscope. The increasing demand for this machine induced me to sell my daguerreotype business in 1858.

Thus I was relieved from satisfying the vanity of each individual beauty of this world, and ended my career as a daguerrean.

Anthony's Photographic Bulletin, March 9, 1889

In our next issue we will continue the "Description of the Process" plus photos and details of a daguerreotype coating box, and several more articles of interest. Your suggestions and comments are welcome and necessary if the New Daguerrean Society is to continue. Your letters are welcome as well as your other contributions for use in the coming issues. So please, send those cards and letters. The next issue will be in the mails Oct. 1, 1971.