

The history of the publication of
“The New Daguerreian Journal”

By Walter A. Johnson

What had planned to be another normal Sunday visit to my in-laws changed my life for the next four years, and I had no way of knowing that these changes were waiting for me in the next few hours. I had planned to drop off the family at Grandma's home, and then check for photographic items in the local antique shops in the area as I normally would. But on this trip, I had made plans to drive north to Cleveland, Ohio, to see the collection of cameras owned by Ernest Conover.

The Conover home was located on Chillicothe Road in Aurora, Ohio, just outside of Cleveland. It's a federalist style farm home with a central staircase and the fireplaces placed at the outside walls, but the real feature of this home was the large addition built on the back of the house. This room that we would think of as “the family room” today was large and spacious equally divided with a large wicker table and several chairs surrounded by many display cases filled with his valuable photographic collectibles. At the far end was the workspace and the new Italian made lathe that was, for now, Ernie's pride and joy. Ernie would spend considerable time reworking and restoring the 19th century cameras in his collection, and the new lathe was a great help in that effort. I did have some idea of the many early wood cameras in Ernie's collection, but until now, not seen them. This then was my first opportunity to see for myself his wonderful collection of Daguerreian cameras and other related items. I watched as he removed the Daguerreotype camera from the display case, and as he handed it to me, I felt the joy of holding history in hand, and for an ardent collector, nothing more need be said.

I asked if I could make several photographs of each of the items in his collection, thinking that I may never have a better opportunity to be this close to so many historical collectibles. He was pleased that I had come with my Hasselblad camera and film ready to shoot, so Ernie started to place one item after the other on the wicker table before me; in time, all items in the collection were recorded to film.

Finally we were able to sit back and relax in the large wicker chairs, drink some coffee, and enjoy the view at the back of the house. It was then that I had made the comment that it is a shame that so little is known about the many wonderful photographic items in private collections. My feeling was, with better information as to what and where the quality photo collections were located, this would encourage other collectors to also share what they have collected with the public. Perhaps then with that knowledge, we could all make a greater effort

to save and preserve historical photographic artifacts. I then turned my attention to his wonderful selection of Daguerreian objects and said that they were in my mind a prime example of what I had been talking about; the public should know of his fine collection.

Ernie then looked at me and asked “Why not you”? I clearly was not ready for his question, and couldn’t grasp that thought at that moment. He then repeated his question and continued with the suggestion that I use of his collection as a start of the informational base that I had spoken of. Ernie was aware of my personal collection and the American made Daguerreotype camera that I had recently purchased, [the one thing we had in common]. He then suggested that I start with an informational newsletter based on the single subject of the Daguerreotype and related items. I confessed that I had considered the idea of a newsletter, but didn’t feel I had the funds to make the commitment to publish then. My income then was quite limited and with my family needs to think about, I just didn’t feel that I could ask my wife to support any additional expenses related to my photographic collection. He smiled, and said that he fully understood. Ernie walked over to his desk at the other end of the room, and when he returned he handed me a check for \$100.00, saying that it should help me get started. I honestly didn’t quite know what to say or do then, but I knew if I did accept his check there would be no excuse not to give it a try. I then asked, “What if it doesn’t work as I think it should?” His answer was, “That’s OK, at least you would have tried”. I accepted his check, and the rest is now history.

My ride home was filled with thoughts of all the possibilities that were before me, and I almost forgot to pick-up Doris and the kids as I neared Columbus. After everyone had retired from the long day at Grandma’s, I was able to talk with my wife Doris about what had happened during my visit with Ernie, and what I wanted to do. She listened, knowing that this project would help me in my teaching the History of Photography, [502], in the Department of Photography & Cinema at The Ohio State University. She also saw that this could become another time consuming effort away from the family.

My first issue was to name the newsletter, and to whom should I send them to. The name was obvious, if intended to target a select group of photographic collectors only interested in the Daguerreotype and other early photographic technology. “The New Daguerreian Journal”, seemed to me be a fitting name. I would create a facsimile of the original “Daguerreian Journal”, published by S.D. Humphrey, Nov. 1850. The first issue published August, 1971 was only eight pages, but it set the direction for the many issues to follow. A “Playboy” style centerfold was reserved for images of important Daguerreian cameras and other related objects, featured with as much information that could be found about them.

After spending all the funds supplied by Ernie and more to get going with my first issue, I realized that perhaps I had gotten into a larger project than I had expected. The expenditures included printing and postage costs plus the other necessities required for layout and design. It was never my intention to publish for profit, but I did want the overall cost of production to be offset by an equal number of subscribers. My intention was to publish Bi-monthly, or six issues a year at \$1.50 each. The annual subscription rate for membership for The Daguerreian Society,

and to receive “The New Daguerreian Journal”, was \$10.00; \$15.00 for foreign subscribers to cover the extra cost of postage. The response was greater than expected, and I now knew that I would need to make plans for Vol. 1, Number two.

I asked friends for recommendations of high quality and reasonably priced printers in the area. I found a small print shop at the south end of Northwest Blvd., not far from my home. I can't remember the name of the shop now, but I do recall that the owner made several suggestions as to how my publication could be designed to save money with the overall printing cost. I would design the pages to fit a standard size paper stock, and then lay out each page to be camera ready for the printer. This then would reduce both the material and time cost of each issue. The second issue of NDJ was to include all of his suggestions, and with weekly visits to his shop to collaborate with him insured that each printing was to improve. Because of his help and encouragement I felt that I could enlarge the Journal; the volume number two was extended to 12 pages, and NDJ Vol.1, # 3; 20 pages, and because of cost restrictions, the remaining issues of the NDJ would stay at 24 pages. The total number of pages printed of all the combined issues of the NDJ, [Aug. 1971 to July 1975], was 278.

The NDJ project was not an easy task to undertake, it was my first effort in working outside the campus with new instructions to better understand printing and layout design; it was in fact, on the job training of what not to do, and I was very lucky to have good instructors to guide me.. First I would need quality articles, important images, and interesting graphics; to support the intention that my NDJ would have the look and feel of the original Humphrey's Daguerreian Journal. The paper selection was an early problem because of the color of acid aged paper, but my printer found a cover stock that gave a look to resemble the original and we were able to make ready for issue two.

With issue NDJ Vol.1 #2, I had redesigned the page lay-out with the reduced format in mind, and to include all of my printer's suggestions. First, think in picas, [as all printers do], not in inches, and remember this was long before the introduction and common use of any PC or Mac computers, so each page lay-out was done by hand. After the selection of the written text, I would hand deliver it to the printer. He would then set the type on to a white paper stock, a soft wax was applied to the backside of the paper to enable me to lay-out each column of the page, I could then fit and make changes as needed to fill the allotted spaces. As I would lay-out my pages, it required me to visualize both pages; for instance, the front cover and back page, [pages #1 and #24], then the inside pages, [#2 and #23]. I was to continue to work with the two-page lay-out for most all of the issues of the NDJ to comply with my printer's request for “camera ready” copy. The only changes were in the special topic issues that contained many more images and required far more production work. I had photographed most of the images printed in the NDJ and spent many hours in the darkroom printing images to size; often from other photos that required resizing. When working to close an issue, the floor of my working space was filled with cut paper and images discarded while driving myself to meet the printing deadline. Once again, remember please there were no computers then, and the tools required then were; a steel ruler, T-square, paper cutter, black markers of several sizes, Exacto knives with many blades,

diluted Elmer's glue, a large print roller, [mine was made by Kodak about 1890, and weighted about six lbs.], and scissors. Each issue was handcrafted, from the selection of the images, the darkroom work to produce them, the design of each page. The estimated cost of the time required to complete the final copy to the printer was about 50 to 60 hours per issue. After the second issue of the NDJ had been printed and mailed, the word was out that the Daguerreian Society was indeed real.

From the very beginning the NDJ was a very personal project, but with the help from many other supportive persons my job was made much easier; Mr. & Mrs. Floyd and Marion Rinhart; Mr. Donald Lokuta; Mr. Kent Bowser; Mr. Edward Lentz, of The Ohio Historical Society; and all the other persons who sent images and/or assisted me with the task of production. Notes of encouragement from so many included those from; Mr. Beaumont Newhall, then Director of The George Eastman House, Mr. Van Deren Coke, Mr. Colin Osman, editor of Creative Camera, Mr. Richard Rudisill, Ms. Dru Shipman, Mr. Donald P. Blake, Editor & Publisher of The Graphic Antiquarian, and many more. This encouragement was especially welcome during those moments when things were not going well and I could use a push. Two other persons that I must call attention to for all their support and assistance; Dr. Alfred C. Clarke and Dr. Robert Wagner. They were both my most important local advisors concerning the content and direction the NDJ was to take. Thinking back as to how it all began, I can't overlook how quickly Floyd and Marion responded; they were the first to subscribe, and almost as quickly to suggest that they would be happy to supply articles to help get things going. They did offer several pieces that were printed over the years in the NDJ, [many positive comments would arrive after each printing], they worked so very well as a team. Floyd was a "What if type of thinker", and Marion would respond with "Perhaps we could do this", that made them an ideal working team. With their every visit to Columbus, I would spend as much time as possible with them because they were so interesting to talk with. It was not how much they knew of the subject that impressed me, but rather their love of it. You realize then, that people like them are so very special, and to be treasured.

June, 1973 an agreement was made with the Ohio State University Libraries Publications Committee to undertake the distribution and money management of the NDJ, by agreement I was to maintain the role of Editor and have full control of the contents. Also, I had requested that the printer that been so very helpful at the start would continue to print future issues. The problems of money management and the time required to following the details of current membership, payment, and subscriptions were now out of my hands. This then would allow me more time to improve the contents of upcoming issues. However, my problems of production did not go away, the request for articles, photos, and suggestions from subscribers would go unanswered and my job of finding suitable material of interest was to continue. I had a long talk with Mr. Donald Blake, [editor of The Graphic Antiquarian], about this problem, and he could offer few answers because he too was facing similar issues.

There are two issues of the NDJ that require special notice; they are Vol. 2 #4, and Vol. 3, #4. The volume 2, number 4 became a very special project because of my personal interest in the

Postmortem, [photographic death image, PM's], photography. The printing of this issue was intended to support a larger overall program, including an exhibition of more than one hundred PM images selected from "The Walter Johnson collection", [now in The Strong Museum, Rochester, N.Y.], and a multi-media slide presentation composed of 16 Kodak Ektagraphic slide projectors, computer programed, of over 1100 images titled, "Gone, but not Forgotten". The exhibition of the same name was shown in The Silver Image Gallery at The Ohio State University, and it was the best ever attended exhibition held at that location. All local television stations aired spots of this unusual collection of images including the OSU Lantern, and the Columbus Dispatch newspapers. Because of the continued interest, the exhibition was extended by an additional two weeks to allow the public more time to view the material. The multi-media presentation was shown twice, [almost to the day, one year apart], to a packed auditorium designed to seat 500 persons. In both showings, the problem with the excessive standing room at the back became an issue. This 31 minute presentation was reviewed by the OSU Lantern newspaper, "as being hit in the face with a brick". Long after that first presentation I returned to the Teaching Aids office of Ron Buckenroth, Rick McKee, and Tom Burns who had worked with me to create the program, and asked the value of it. After some delay, they all agreed that if they had produced this program for an outside firm, the cost would have been approximately \$65,000.00. Not bad when you consider the program was completed just 17 minutes before showing, and in only five weeks overall.

The second special issue was Vol 3,. #4, this issue was to celebrate the "Victorian Child" In this issue the images were to display the love and reverence given to the children of the 19th century. The fun, [for me], was in the selection of images that showed "kids as kids". The many selected pets or toys included in the images with the children is evidence that only that child or their parents could have asked that they be there. These are the images of endearing love intended to hold for the family this very special moment that the future could not change, and would never be the same again.

Collecting photographica during the 70's was very different from what is done today with E-bay and the computer to assist with a worldwide searching for items. When the Ohio Camera Collectors Society held the first Photographic Trade Fair, May, 1969; all of the items sold were recorded and the values given to those who had a table at the event At that time, few collectors knew the value, [and often didn't care, because they only would trade items and never sell one], of any of the many photographic items currently on display, so the value of any sold item that day became the value standard for other photo collectors. Should you ask any collector why they do what they do? The answer will be a personal one, or none at all. This is not to imply any "right or wrong", the truth is that we are a fickle bunch controlled by an unknown form of compulsory behavior seen by others as, "just out of control". During the 70's, all photographic collecting was still new, untested, and very enjoyable with the understanding that the "new kid" to collect was photography. A good collection was not dependent on the amount of money invested, but by the effort and energy invested to network with other photo collectors, traveling to find items of interest, and the research and study to understand the field more completely. Then most photo collectors would purchase anything that would come their way, so long as it

would fit into their budget, thinking that one day it could be traded for something else to better fit into their collection. From attending the OCCS Photo Trade fair, you could come to know the faces of those collectors that you may have talked with many times on the phone, there were the warm handshakes, large smiles exchanged, and the willingness to openly share information. There have been many changes over the years with those who now own photographic collections, and those who are now active collectors, the one consummate fact we all share is the many friends made in the process of collecting.

Most all of the photographic collectibles that were once in my collection have been placed in several major museums or universities about the nation, I had always known that I could only be a temporary custodian to the many objects that I had collected, knowing that, it was my planned intention to place these valuables into public ownership to be enjoyed by others for years to come.

As I think back on those days when I worked so hard to fill those dreams before me; having the time of my life, and each day wondering how I could have done it? The publication of the journal was instrumental to my knowledge of the Daguerreotype process and the tools used, and I'm never quite certain who or what to credit my interest in "Dags". I do realize that my learning process did include the assistance from far too many persons to thank now, but I owe a special "thanks" to my students who wanted from me that something extra in the classroom; and they became my best instructors. Each issue of the NDJ was "handcrafted" as were the Daguerreotypes of yesterday, and because of that I feel a personal closeness and pride for the good that had come from each printing. My reason to discontinue the production of "The New Daguerreian Journal" was because I had become emotionally and intellectually consumed, and needed very much a change in direction. To realize and accept that I'm first a photographer, not a writer, required that I return to making photographic images, [whatever the process used]. My true love is for photography, perhaps my only one? Problems as these are not uncommon, every project has its limits, and I had reached mine. As you spend the time reading these pages of the contents of the NDJ, I can only ask that you find in them, some of the enjoyment that I have had in producing them.

Walter A. Johnson