

REDISCOVERY

Since the early days of photography, the process of capturing images has appealed to many women. Their work, unfortunately, while no less important than men's, has rarely been evaluated or studied. And now because of the feminist movement it is beginning to be re-discovered.

One can go as far back as the late 1400s to the experiments of Mrs. Fulhame, an alchemist who discovered that chloride of gold could be affected by light.¹ But it was not until 1849 that she was credited with this discovery by H. N. Snelling, an author and

plate which had been coated with silver. The plate had been made sensitive to light by exposure to iodine vapour. An exposure was taken, then the image was fixed with a solution of water and common salt. The resulting image was similar to a mirror.

Tipping a daguerreotype in the light can make the image seem to disappear and reappear. The negative and positive are one. Each daguerreotype is a unique original. The mirror image is so delicate that each daguerreotype was placed under glass in its own leather case for protection.



early inventor. He stated that Mrs. Fulhame's experiments were the 'first steps' towards the discovery of photography.

Today, photo-historians discredit the contributions of the early alchemists and there is no mention of Mrs. Fulhame.

In 1839, L. J. Daguerre announced his photographic invention, the daguerreotype, at l'Institut de France. His photographic image consisted of a copper



In 1841, only two years after the invention of photography, Mrs. Fletcher was advertising in Montreal that she was producing daguerreotypes. She claimed to be 'unsurpassed by any American or European artist.'

Franziska Mollinger, a German daguerreotypist, travelled all over Switzerland taking views. In 1846, Miss Jane Cook was listed as a daguerreotypist in the city directory of New York. Caroline Hopes was working in St. Louis the same year. And there were others:

Laura Jones

Madame L. was working in Belgium; Mrs. Henry Mead, Mrs. Julia Shannon, Miss Wigley, and Sarah Holcomb had photographic businesses.

Because daguerreotypists rarely signed their work, the discovery of actual daguerreotypes by women is nearly impossible. Information regarding the women daguerreotypists is also extremely limited. City directories, newspaper ads, and the occasional mention in a book are the only clues to the discovery of these women.

Daguerreotype portraiture was replaced with more efficient methods during the 1850s and 1860s. There were fourteen women photographers known to have been working in Ontario and Quebec during the 1860s,

disparate places as Winnipeg, Toronto, and Philadelphia. The poses were often similar; women frequently stood, while their husbands sat. This was done to show off the women's dresses. Occasionally, a woman would have feet that were considered too large to be fashionable; her feet would be tied under her chair and a pair of dainty shoes on wooden pegs would replace her own.

The cabinet cards were often more elaborate than the carte de visite. Extensive retouching with pencil, knife, etcher, charcoal, or paint was done. Attempts were made to create soft delicate women and strong men.



Kodak Historical Collection

and part of my rediscovery of women photographers involves searching for these missing artists.

When we do discover work by these women, we find that their prints were largely 'carte de visite' or calling card size (4×2-1/2"), or 'cabinet' card size (6-1/2×4-1/2"). The photographs were printed on albumen paper. Artificial props and painted back-grounds were common; for instance, an identical type of fringed chair appeared in photographs from such



Among the women working in Ontario using this format were Mrs. Amy James of Belleville, Mrs. W. Stewart of Aurora, and Mrs. Henny of Bowmanville. In Quebec, Madame Dupont worked in Three Rivers, and Mrs. Quinn worked in Spencer Cove.

By the late 1880s roll film had been invented and photography became more accessible to the public.

By 1890 there were thousands of photographers. In France it was estimated that there were thirty thousand

The Daguerrotype.

Eva Wilder McGlasson

*You hev to hold it sidewise
Fer to make the likeness show,
'Cuz it's sort uh dim an' shifty
Till you get it right—'bout so!
An' then the eyes winks at yeh,
An' the mouth is cherry ripe,
Law! it beats yer new-style picters,
This old diggerytype!*

*Thar's a blush acrost the dimples
Thet burrows in the cheeks;
From out them clumps o' ringlets
Two little small ears peeks.
Thet brooch thet jines her neck-gear
Is what they used to wear;*

*A big gold frame thet sprawled around
A lock o'—some one's hair.*

*'Twas took 'fore we was married,
Thet there—your maw an' me,
An' times I study on it,
Why, 't fazes me to see
Thet fifty year 'ain't teched her
A lick! She's jest the same
She was when Sudie Scriggens
Took Boone C. Curds' name.
The hair is mebbly whiter
'An it was in '41,
But her cheeks is jest as pinky,
An' her smiles ain't slacked up none.*

*I reckon—love—er somethin'
Yerluminates her face,
Like the crimson velvet linin'
Warms up ther picter case.*

*'S I say, these cyard boa'd portraits,
They make me sort uh tired,
A-grinnin forf upun yeh
Like their very lips was wired!
Give me the old diggerytype,
Whar the face steals on your sight
Like a dream that comes by night-time
When your suppers' actin right!*

*The Canadian Photographic Journal 1,
no. 6 (July 1892), p. 141.*

professionals and three hundred thousand amateurs. In the U.S. census of 1890 there were 17,839 male and 2,201 female professional photographers—about eleven per cent were female. In Canada in 1891 there were 1,142 male and 135 female professional photographers.

Many times these people were taking photographs for personal use. Most of the people doing photography during the 1890s were amateurs; the majority of them remain unknown. They photographed largely for their own personal pleasure. Often they were well-to-do, and frequently they were opposed to selling their work. Camera clubs became quite popular. Great Britain had the largest number of clubs. There were at least two hundred and fifty. There were twenty-three in the rest of Europe, and ninety-nine in the States. Serious amateurs spent a great deal of time and patience increasing their technical skills. Lectures on recent inventions, technical processes, portraiture, and composition were held on a regular basis, usually monthly. Competitions, exhibitions, and outings were significant events of the clubs. Criticism of each other's work was emphasized.

Admitting women to the camera clubs was a major issue among the amateurs. It was considered a method of expanding membership and a way of making the meetings more sociable. The issue was influenced by serious women amateurs who wanted to become members, and sometimes by men who wanted women to model at the meetings.

The Montreal Camera Club was formed in 1890. The charter states: 'The club shows a courteous spirit towards the fair sex, ladies being eligible to membership and also to hold office.' The Toronto Camera Club was formed in 1894. There was little discussion in the minutes regarding the admission of women. Women were allowed to become members, but they were not allowed to use the darkroom until 1943, and even at that time the use was restricted to the daytime.

Professionally, portraiture was the area most open to women. It was felt that women could make their

sitters especially comfortable. It was assumed that women were more sensitive to children and more patient. Studios were frequently set up within the home, so the photographer didn't have to carry the heavy equipment and could still keep an eye on the children.

Some women were concerned with the effect that developer had on their 'lady-like hands,' and the accompanying smell. However, the printing of photographs by large studios was actually dominated by women. It was felt that women were more precise and careful, and produced better results.

Retouching negatives and colouring photographs were occupations common to women. They could do it in their spare time, at home, 'in a quiet way.' The areas where the number of women were significant were not the visible areas. There weren't many women doing outdoor photography; until after the turn of the century the work that most professional women did was within their homes.

There was an element of surprise regarding the extremely fine accomplishments of women photographers. In the 1890s a large number of women became very successful. Was it an inborn quality of preciseness, of basic cleanliness and patience that resulted in this success? Should women be admitted to the camera clubs? These were some of the issues relating to women photographers during the 1890s.

Women took photographs for different reasons. For Hannah Maynard and Gladys Reeves, photography was a profession. As an explorer, Mary Schaffer Warren was interested in photography as a tool to use in her lectures. Millie Gamble photographed her sisters and friends. Whatever their reasons, the photographs of these women live on as a significant historical record. ☉

¹Henry H. Snelling, *The History and Practice of the Art of Photography; or the Production of Pictures through the Agency of Light* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1849), p. 5.