

New Jersey Photographers of the Civil War and Postwar Era: John P. Doremus

Presentation by Gary D. Saretzky

Abstract

Of the more than 3,000 photographers active in New Jersey in the nineteenth century, a number of them were itinerant camera workers at some point during their careers, operating with a horse-drawn wagon. Some photographers, especially those taking views, circulated locally even when they had a gallery where they did portraits and sold other kinds of photographs. Like many other American photographers who did not always wait for customers, John P. Doremus began working in the medium during the Civil War, when there was a strong market for portraits. Doremus is distinguished in that for much of the latter 1870s and 1880s, he lived and worked on a floating gallery on the Mississippi River while his business back home in Paterson, Passaic County, was managed by his family. For this remarkable episode in his career, he was inducted into the National Rivers Hall of Fame in 1991. He is also exceptional in that he kept a journal that records fascinating details about his experiences. This profusely illustrated lecture profiles an able and ambitious photographer and entrepreneur whose career, characterized by both typical and unique experiences, sheds light on photographic and business practices of his era.

Bio

Gary D. Saretzky, archivist, educator, and photographer, worked as an archivist for more than fifty years at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Educational Testing Service, and the Monmouth County Archives. Saretzky taught the history of photography at Mercer County Community College, 1977–2012, and served as coordinator of the Public History Internship Program for the Rutgers University History Department, 1994–2016. He has published more than 100 articles and reviews on the history of photography, photographic conservation, and other topics, including “New Jersey Photographers of the Civil War and Postwar Era: John P. Doremus,” *New Jersey Studies* (Winter 2022).