

I.G. Owen: Civil War Era Photographer of Newton, New Jersey

Presentation by Gary Saretzky

Abstract

Although there were about 3,000 professional photographers in New Jersey in the nineteenth century, many of them had their own businesses only briefly or worked for others, and remain, perhaps deservedly, obscure. But some others like Ira G. Owen stand out today because their products are encountered frequently by collectors and historians. Like other studio photographers, Owen, primarily active in the 1860s, sought to profit from the strong demand for photographs so that he could have a comfortable middle-class life. Owen exemplifies the “you can make it if you try” kind of success story that came true for some able and motivated entrepreneurial Americans in a market economy in which small businesses could flourish under effective management. This article traces the trajectory of Owen’s career, closely looking at his marketing and production methods, including posing styles employed to satisfy his many customers during the Civil War and postwar years in Newton, Hackettstown, and Scranton.

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 “Ira G. Owen: US Civil War Era Photographer of Newton, New Jersey,” *New Jersey Studies* (Winter 2024).