Philadelphia Area Photographers: A Concise History, 1839–1940

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From accomplished photographers to materials manufacturing, publishing, and exhibitions, Philadelphia has played a significant role in the history of photography since the medium's inception. In 1839, news of photographic techniques principally developed by France's Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre (1787-1851) and England's William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877) quickly traveled to Philadelphia. Among the first experimenters was inventor Joseph Saxton (1799-1873), who from the window of his office at the U.S. Mint at Juniper and Chestnut Streets, captured the cupola of Central High School and a portion of the State Armory building on October 16, 1839. The resulting daguerreotype is generally considered to be the first known photograph taken in the U.S. Robert Cornelius (1809-1893), who produced the photographic plate used by Saxton, is credited with the first known photographic portrait of a human taken in the U.S., a self-portrait also produced in 1839. At the suggestion of friend and chemist Paul Beck Goddard (1811-1866), Cornelius notably enhanced the light sensitivity of daguerreotype plates with bromine fumes, a technique that became universally adopted. In May 1840, Cornelius opened the city's first daguerreotype portrait studio at Eighth and Ranstead Streets, only the second such studio in the U.S.

By 1850, more than one hundred daguerreotypists operated in the city. Among the most prominent: Samuel Broadbent (1810–1880), whose firm persisted into the early twentieth century; the brothers Frederick (1806–1874) and William Langenheim (1812–1879), who opened their gallery in 1840, pioneered glass positive slides (Hyalotypes), and held the Philadelphia patent rights to Talbot's paper negative process; Montgomery P. Simons (1816–1877), also active in Charleston, SC, Richmond, VA, and Trenton, NJ; and daguerreotypist, spiritualist, and writing teacher Marcus Aurelius Root (1808–1888), introducer of the ambrotype to Philadelphia and author, *The Camera and the Pencil or The Heliographic Art* (1864) featuring one of the first histories of photography. Frederick Gutekunst (1831–1917), initially with his brother Lewis (b. 1832), operated from 1857 until his death and was celebrated for his celebrity portraits (U.S. Grant, Lucretia Mott, Grover Cleveland, et al.). Gutekunst's first wife Emma helped found the Industrial Home for Blind Women.

While most daguerreotypists were white males, Black portrait painter and daguerreotypist Robert Douglass Jr. (1809–1887) was closely associated with abolitionist leaders including William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879). Women photographers, who numbered more than 100 in Philadelphia by 1900, included amateur daguerreian Eliza Henry, and Sally Hewes (1819–1853), the daughter of Wilmington, DE, Underground Railroad manager Thomas Garrett (1789–1871). Henry's work was exhibited at the Franklin Institute in 1840, while Hewes worked as a daguerreotypist at Samuel Broadbent & Co.[1]

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[1] Sally Hewes' brother, Ellwood Garrett (1815–1910) was a prominent daguerreotypist and later photographer in Wilmington. Ellwood's son, C. Alfred Garrett (1835–1891) had photography galleries in Salem, NJ; Philadelphia; and West Chester, PA. C. Alfred's brothers Maurice and Warren were photographers in Philadelphia and, succeeding their father in 1870, Wilmington.

By 1860, collodion processes, including negatives, ambrotypes, and ferrotypes (also known as melainotypes and tintypes), superseded daguerreotypes as dominant photographic formats. That year, more than 300 Philadelphia photographers plied their trade, including camera operators and apprentices working for gallery owners, and more opened studios during the Civil War to meet increased demand. The vast majority of photographers before 1880 were professional portraitists but some amateurs concentrated on outdoor views, including author Robert Montgomery Bird (1806–1854), using paper negatives in 1853. In 1862, thirty-three amateurs formed the Photographic Society of Philadelphia (PSP), now the oldest such organization in the U.S. Early PSP leaders included engineer/inventor Coleman Sellers II (1827-1907), later Franklin Institute president, and photographic materials supplier, author, and editor Edward L. Wilson (1828–1903), whom James S. Jensen described as "the single most prominent voice of American photography during the last four decades of the nineteenth century." Wilson, who invented the popular Philadelphia Card Envelope for cartes de visite and tintypes in 1862, edited the monthly, *Philadelphia Photographer*, beginning January 1864. In 1889, upon his move to New York, it was retitled *Wilson's Photographic Magazine* and in 1915, *Photographic Journal of America*. He played a leading role in establishing the National Photographic Association, which held its third convention for professional photographers in Philadelphia in 1871 and became a partner and then sole owner of the Centennial Photographic Co., which had the exclusive rights to photograph the Exposition. In 1881, he traveled to the Middle East with Philadelphia photographer William H. Rau (1855–1925) and thereafter became a popular lecturer on the Middle East. Particularly known for outdoor work, Rau was appointed official Lehigh Valley Railroad photographer in 1895.

At the Centennial Exposition, the Photographic Art Building, a 242 x 77-foot glass-ceilinged annex to the Art Gallery built largely through Wilson's fund raising efforts, displayed photographs and apparatus supplied by 132 U.S. exhibitors (about three dozen from Philadelphia), plus foreign contributors. Frederick Gutekunst produced an impressive panorama of the 1876 Centennial Exposition grounds, using sheets of mammoth-sized albumen paper manufactured by local producer John R. Clemons (1821-1905). Philadelphian photo historian Julius Friedrich Sachse (1842–1919), *American Journal of Photography* editor, acquired the Centennial exhibition photographs; his granddaughter, Marion Carson, donated them to the Library of Congress.

Philadelphia's A.M. Collins & Son manufactured much of the card stock in the U.S. used for mounting cartes-de-visite, cabinet cards, stereographic views and other photo formats in the nineteenth century. In the 1860s and 1870s in particular, stereo views were very popular parlor entertainments. Brey & Brey concluded that, by 1872, the Englishman James Cremer (1821–1893), in business from 1855, "was the largest publisher of stereo views in Philadelphia, making him among the largest in the country." From 1872 to 1875, Cremer documented the construction of City Hall in stereo views. He also was a major lantern slide publisher before Philadelphian Caspar W. Briggs (1847–1942), who went into business with his father Daniel in 1872. After relocating from Chicago in 1870, photographer John Carbutt (1832–1905) became the first U.S. producer of gelatin dry plates, orthochromatic dry plates, celluloid negatives, and X-ray plates. Appointed by Wilson, Carbutt was in charge of the photography exhibition at the Centennial Exposition. Among many other technical innovators in Philadelphia was photographer and inventor William G. Entrekin (1833–1903), who patented 12 photograph burnishers used to add gloss to albumen prints.

Across the Delaware, by 1900 more than 300 photographers had lived or worked in Camden. Lorenzo Fisler Jr. (1841–1918), the son of a five-term Camden mayor, photographed mostly in Shanghai from 1864 to 1884 before returning home. Camden portraitist Andrew Sims (c. 1830–1917) operated from 1865 to 1897. After photographing for the U.S. Navy and Gutekunst, Henry D. Garns (c. 1838–1923), remained active for more than fifty-five years in Philadelphia and Camden. He employed photographer Henrietta L. Wardle (1847–1909) of Riverton from 1889 to her death. After operating in Cape May, Samuel C. Chester (1851–1937), had a gallery at 326 Federal, Camden, from 1895 to 1924. Earlier in his 60+ year career, he photographed President Garfield and Thomas Edison while working for Mathew Brady in Washington, DC. From 1897 to 1912, Edward F. Sherman (1857–1914) and his wife Mary (1866–?) ran successful Camden studios and did both portraiture and views before retiring to Florida where Edward was murdered near St. Petersburg. Photographers around Camden included Riverton's Bertha M. Lothrop (later Mrs. Frederick W. Radell, 1871–1932), who in the 1890s made innovative candid portraits of children widely used in advertising and calendars.

While the middle and upper classes patronized first class studios in Philadelphia, particularly Chestnut Street's more than twenty by 1900, many cheap tintypes were also made (1860s–1890s). Using his patented mounting machines, tintype king James R. Applegate (1828–1913) reportedly could produce fifty tintypes a minute. Applegate also built the first amusement pier in Atlantic City, with a branch gallery and carousel. At an 1892 raid at his extensive Philadelphia premises, police arrested 215 habitués, mostly minors; Applegate was charged with running a disorderly house.

With the advent of more convenient gelatin dry plate negatives around 1880, amateur photography in Philadelphia expanded, encouraged by Thomas Eakins (1844–1916), professor at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (PAFA) until 1886, and his wife Susan McDowell Eakins (1851–1938). Among others, Eakins mentored Eva Watson (later Watson-Schütze, 1867–1935) and Amelia Van Buren (1857–1942), internationally known Pictorialist photographers by 1900. Cosponsored by PSP, major exhibitions of photography were held annually in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia from 1886 to 1894, followed from 1898 to 1901 by four Philadelphia Photographic Salons at PAFA, more narrowly focused on art photography, organized by Alfred Stieglitz (1864–1946) of New York and PSP leaders John G. Bullock (1854-1939), Robert S. Redfield (1849-1923), and George Vaux Jr (1863–1927). Influential at-home portrait specialist Mathilde Weil (1872–1942) of Philadelphia exhibited at the first three. The 1898 Salon, attended by 16,000 and the first U.S. photo exhibition actively sponsored by an arts organization, accepted only 259 of 1,500 submissions. In 1902, Stieglitz formed the Photo-Secession for art photographers with Bullock, Redfield, and Watson-Schütze among its first members.

An 1898 Salon exhibitor, Elias Goldensky (1867–1943), a Ukrainian Jewish emigré, worked for Gutekunst from 1892 to 1895, then opened at 270 S. 2nd Street, former site of the Philadelphia College of Photography run by Henry M. Clifford (1830–1885). By 1910, Goldensky led "The Coterie," an informal association of the prominent portrait photographers in America. At 5pm, local photographers Rau, Ryland W. Phillips (1866–1925), and others would meet at Goldensky's "Hall of the Bohemians" at his gallery at 1705 Chestnut Street to which he moved in 1908. Goldensky's sitters included Philadelphia's color photography inventor, Frederick E. Ives (1856–1937), Philadelphia Orchestra conductor Leopold Stokowski (1882–1977), and FDR. Goldensky donated his archives to Philadelphia's American Museum of Photography (AMP),

founded in 1940 by Louis Walton Sipley (1897–1968) as the first museum devoted solely to the art and science of photography. The AMP collection is now at the George Eastman Museum.

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