

THE ROOMS AT EVERGREEN

THE CASE OF THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGENIC IMAGE: BONUS CONTENT

BY DALE WILSON

The wet-plate collodion process—which is the basis for ambrotypes, ferrotypes (tintypes), glass-plate negatives and similar 19th-century imaging techniques—is enjoying a 21st-century resurgence. It's a welcome turn of events for some of us Canadian practitioners of these methods, and we're excited to share our knowledge with the new generation of photographers interested in incorporating these techniques into their contemporary practice.

Photo Digest, which later merged with *Photo Life*, first covered the ambrotype studio of Sherbrooke Village, a living-history museum in Nova Scotia, in 1992. Much to the disappointment of several contemporary practitioners claiming to be the first to resurrect these

techniques, this studio on the banks of the St. Mary's River opened in 1976 and has operated permanently since that time. No evidence has been able to disprove that it is the longest continuously operating ambrotype studio in North America.

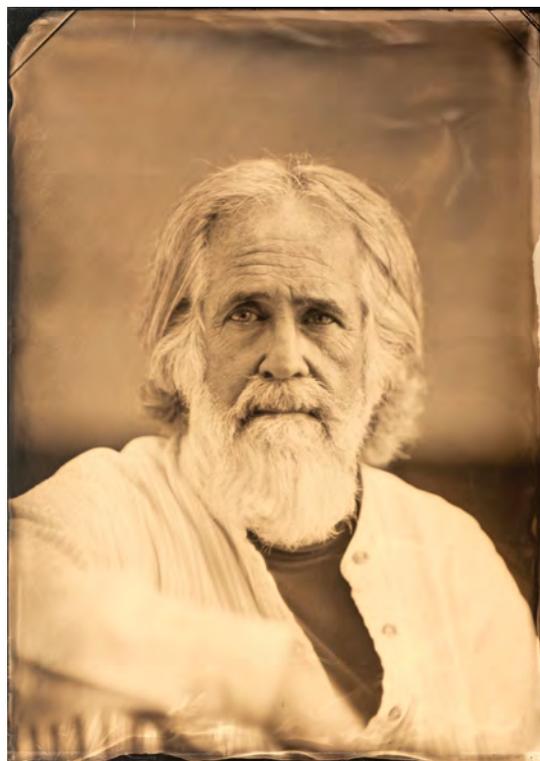
However, despite the wealth of experience and long-standing presence of photography in Nova Scotia, there was no place in Atlantic Canada for the public to learn the wet-plate collodion process. With a collection of daguerreotypes and other early-photography items, some dating back to the days of William Valentine, it seemed logical that Dartmouth Heritage Museum—located within eyeshot of where Valentine's studio formerly stood—host such a facility.



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With a very small budget and an even smaller group of volunteers with hammers and saws, a space was constructed for such a learning venue. As much as contemporary building codes would permit, the Rooms at Evergreen were designed to resemble a 19th-century accessory building with spruce board-and-batten on the outer walls and white pine on the interior walls. The darkroom has an eight-foot-long stainless-steel work table with drainage; the dry room accommodates storage and a small area for working with papers and other dry materials. The camera room features double doors and a skylight providing the balanced, natural actinic light that is so critical to the collodion processes.

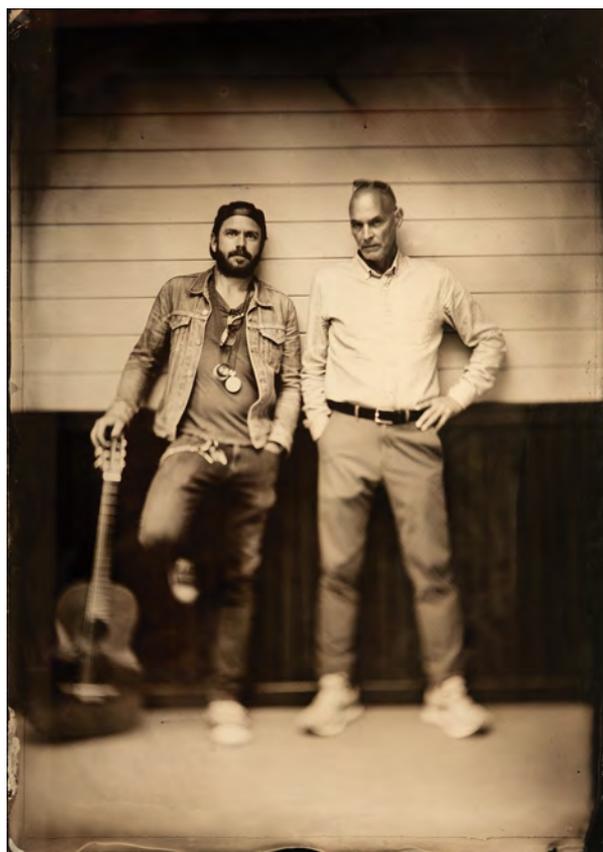
Originally scheduled to open in May 2020 on the anniversary of the 1839 *Colonial Pearl* newspaper article, the construction and opening of the Rooms at Evergreen were delayed by the pandemic. Though the facility has now been completed, programs and workshops will be launched at a later time when it is safe to do so. We're looking forward to participants having the exciting opportunity to learn and use 19th-century processes within the shadows of the pioneers that introduced photography to British North America some 28 years prior to Canadian Confederation. ●



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THE EARLIEST DAGUERREOTYPES IN PRE-CONFEDERATION CANADA

THE CASE OF THE MYSTERIOUS PHOTOGENIC IMAGE: BONUS CONTENT

BY DALE WILSON

Despite William Valentine having the first permanent studio in what is now Canada, the first pre-Confederation daguerreotypes were not made in Halifax. We know that American itinerant photographers Halsey & Sadd were temporarily in Montreal and Quebec City in the fall of 1840 offering their daguerreotype services. Newspaper advertisements show that other photographers were also using Daguerre's process during the time Valentine was operating his studio, and examples of some of these early daguerreotypes exist in national collections. However, despite Valentine's prominence at the time, not a single surviving daguerreotype credited to him has been found. To add to the intrigue: the two other photographers whose names appear most regularly in the Halifax advertisements both have connections to Valentine.

John Clow, from Saint John, New Brunswick, ran advertisements in the *Saint John Morning News* from May through August 1842 to promote that he was making daguerreotypes there. Did Clow learn the science and art from Valentine when Valentine stopped in Saint John in November 1841 on his way home from Boston? Or did Clow travel to New England during the winter of 1841 to 1842 to acquire the equipment and knowledge? This part

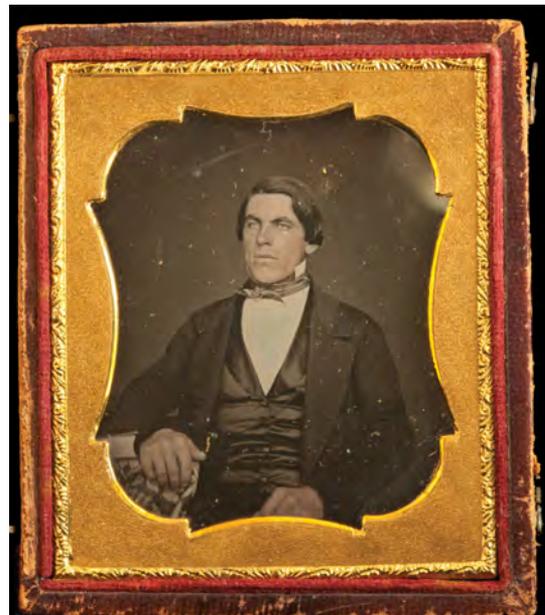
remains a mystery, but we do know that Clow was in Halifax by October 1842 working as Valentine's assistant. He stayed in Halifax until at least June 1848, and he was most certainly operating his own studio there at least as early as 1846.

Thomas Coffin Doane, from Barrington, Nova Scotia, started out in 1832 as an artist but travelled to Halifax in 1842 to learn the daguerreotype process from Valentine. In March 1843, Valentine and Doane travelled to St. John's, Newfoundland, and established temporary rooms at the Golden Lion Inn. They took out advertisements there in March and April of that year, and then they presumably returned to Halifax. When their partnership ended sometime between 1843 and 1846, Doane relocated to the West Indies before finally moving to Montreal, where he was established by 1846 and went on to receive international acclaim. Today, he is recognized as a Canadian photography pioneer.

Like Doane, Valentine started as an artist—a widely recognized one known for “preserving the lineaments of many notable persons”—before he began making daguerreotypes.* And that's what brings us to the case of a certain uncredited daguerreotype of Jane Elizabeth Fairbanks in



VALENTINE'S OIL PAINTING OF JANE ELIZABETH FAIRBANKS' MOTHER. COLLECTION OF DARTMOUTH HERITAGE MUSEUM. DHM.1973.087.001



DAGUERRETYPE OF REVEREND DUFF, MADE BY AN UNKNOWN PHOTOGRAPHER. COLLECTION OF DARTMOUTH HERITAGE MUSEUM. DHM.1969.096.015

the collection of Dartmouth Heritage Museum. The skill of the posing leaves no doubt that the photographer was quite experienced: the subject's position creates lines and angles that lead the viewer's eye throughout the image. In fact, the angles and perspective very closely resemble those in an oil painting of Jane Elizabeth's mother—a known work of Valentine. Textile expert Bonnie Elliott reviewed Jane Elizabeth Fairbanks' wardrobe and jewelry and suggested that her dress could be the tartan of her husband, Reverend Duff, and might have been worn as a wedding dress when they wed in 1847. The components of the case housing were made possibly as early as 1840 but most likely after 1845.

Meanwhile, there were two photographers working in Halifax in 1847: William Valentine and John Clow. By this time, Clow was operating his own studio. It is unlikely the Fairbanks family, a patron of Valentine's, would entrust their important family documentation to his former-assistant-turned-competitor—especially when Valentine was the best known daguerreotypist of the day.

Logical deduction would suggest the Jane Elizabeth Fairbanks portrait is a daguerreotype made by Valentine, but without the smoking gun of a signature or other clear proof, it is impossible to determine. ●

* Piers, Harry. "Artists in Nova Scotia." *Collections of the Nova Scotia Historical Society*, Volume XVIII, 1914. pp. 126).



DAGUERREOTYPE OF JANE ELIZABETH FAIRBANKS. COLLECTION OF DARTMOUTH HERITAGE MUSEUM. DHM.1973.087.183