

Early Photography in Fredonia
By Douglas H. Shepard, 2000

Although the first details about Mr. **Daguerre's** invention didn't reach the U.S. until 1839, there were itinerant daguerreians in Fredonia as early as June 1841. On 28 June 1841 "Messrs. **Garlick & Rockland**," having put up at the **Johnson House** (today's *1 Park Place*) advertised their presence in the *Fredonia Censor*. There may have been others soon following, but the next to advertise in the newspaper was a Dr. J. F. **Clark**, who stopped here — at the **Johnson House** — in December 1844 and again in September 1845.

He was followed by "Mr. **Hulaneski**" (Sep.1845), **Clark** again (Dec.1846 and Feb.1847), **Mixer & Stevenson** (May 1848), S. **Teats** (July 1848), William **Hamilton** (Feb.-Apr. 1849), L. M. **Petch** (May 1849), D. J. **Kellogg** (Sep.-Oct. 1849), J. P. **Cutler** (Sep.-Dec.1849), D. W. **Brown** (Jan.-Mar. 1850), William **Clark** (Aug.1850), and, finally, George R. **Martin** in January 1851.

Martin travelled on, like the others, but soon returned. In July 1851 he had local carriage-makers **Mason & Dickinson** make him "a moveable daguerreian room," what was known as a Daguerreian Car, a wagon specially fitted out with a small studio and a processing room. After traveling the countryside, he returned and opened his "New Skylight Daguerrian Gallery" in December 1851 at today's *2 West Main Street*. Thereafter he was in residence during the winter months and on the road in the summer, our first "permanent" photographer.

By December 1852 **Martin** had renamed his studio the "Fredonia Daguerreian Gallery," and on 4 January 1853 he married Miss Lydia A. **Crane**. Born in Madison County in May 1828, her family had moved here in 1834, where she attended the Fredonia Academy in the 1840s.) The **Martins** first rented rooms at the home of S. M. **Clement**.

In February 1853 **Martin** announced that he would also be offering instructions in photography at his Gallery. One person who we know studied with him was Elijah G. **Morrison**, who had attended the Fredonia Academy from 1842 to 1849. He was, thus, a classmate of Lydia Crane **Martin's**, and then became a clerk at **Walker & Taylor's** store at 2 West Main Street. Upstairs was the Fredonia Daguerreian Gallery where **Morrison** learned the mysteries of photography. Apparently, when **Martin** left Fredonia to study new photographic techniques, **Morrison** was left in charge. On 17 January 1854 he advertised the "Daguerreian Rooms Open Again," under his, **Morrison's**, charge. (He soon went on the road for himself. He was in Concord NY in 1859, and in Randolph NY in 1860. By 1870 he was married, with a 12-year old son, working as a photographer in Belle Plaine IA. According to his obituary, he later moved to Colorado and finally to California. He died in Santa Monica on 7 January 1888.)

After **Martin's** temporary departure in 1854, he returned in March to announce that he was master of a new process for producing colored daguerreotypes. He continued the practice of traveling through the county during the spring and summer months. In 1855 Henry C. **Frisbee** and his wife had their pictures taken, no doubt by **Martin**, since he was the only daguerreotypist in the Village at the time. A bad fire destroyed the building he was in on 16 January 1856, and he had no insurance to cover the loss estimated at some \$700 to \$800. **Martin** set up temporarily over J. **Lamson's** store and then moved to rooms over **Taylor & Jennings'** store by the beginning of 1857.

A new competitor had arrived in the Village at this time. Ira G. **Tompkins**, who had been with **Tompkins** Daguerreian Rooms in Buffalo for several years and had traveled as an itinerant photographer for six months. He arrived here in February 1857, set up in business over **Frisbee's** Bookstore as the "New Daguerreian Room," offering "Improved Ambrotypes." This led to a fierce advertising debate in the *Censor* between **Tompkins** and **Martin**, occasionally joined by Orrin **Monroe** of Dunkirk. In December 1857 **Martin** had moved to his "New Gallery" in the Center Block "up-stairs to the right." **Tompkins** countered with an ad for his rooms over **Frisbee's** Bookstore in the Center Block, "turn to the Left." **Tompkins** held out until March 1858 when he sold to L. [Lyman] W. **Tarbell**, "Daguerreian Artist."

The *Fredonia Advertiser* explained that **Tarbell**, from Ohio, "designs to establish a permanent business here."

In June and October 1858 the *Censor* mentioned **Martin's** new colored ambrotypes, and the *Advertiser* added that the colorist was the local painter Amos **Wight**. **Wight** began his career in Fredonia in 1839 as a wagon builder and blacksmith, but in 1845 he gave it all up to become a portrait artist, meeting with much success. One of the hand-colored daguerreotypes of **Martin** and **Wight** was of two sons of the "senior editor" of the *Censor*, and their Newfoundland dog, Old Nip, set against a "beautiful landscape."

By the end of 1858 **Tarbell's** Gallery was being run by Lyman's son William H. **Tarbell**. In March 1859 **Martin** advertised that his daguerreian car was for sale. (The ad was still running in February 1860.) The *Censor* of April 1860 mentioned photographs taken by **Martin** of the Rev. E. S. **Wright's** father and mother, another one of the few clues we have to which sitters were photographed by which artists. In September 1860, William **Tarbell** married DeEtte **Purple** of Sinclairville and in December 1862 took over **Martin's** rooms in the Center Block. Either then, or soon after, **Martin** set up another Gallery "over **Miner's** Bank," i.e., about at today's 28 West Main Street.

There is an odd glimpse of **Martin's** personality in a talk given by Louis **McKinstry** at a "Forefathers Day" celebration reported in the *Censor* of 24 December 1902. **McKinstry** recalled a debating society that used to meet in the 1860s in the old Fredonia Academy. On the evening when the subject was the Character of the Puritans, "one of the disputants, Mr. G. R. **Martin**, surprised and electrified the audience with his eloquent eulogy of New England. Mr. **Martin** was a college graduate who ran a photograph gallery, and was a very quiet gentleman, rarely appearing in public. . . ."

In its 20 April 1864 issue, the *Fredonia Censor* invited its readers to visit **Martin's** Gallery to "see the pictures of Surgeon **Washburn**. Dr. Charles E. **Washburn**, Surgeon of the 112th N. Y. Regiment, had been in practice in Fredonia since 1851. He died while in service of typhoid fever on 10 April 1865. The public was also invited to see the portraits of Hiram J. and Adaline **Miner**. **Miner** moved his bank here from Utica in 1850, and to Dunkirk in 1858. The **Miner's** Bank over which **Martin** had his studio had been H. J. **Miner's**. In 1864 it was H. D. M. **Miner's** bank. The article continues, "The Photographs are taken by **Martin** and colored by **Kellogg**. [It is not known who **Kellogg** was, perhaps the "Ornamental Painter," Albert **Kellogg**, recorded in the Jamestown NY Census of 1870.]

Martin, the quiet gentleman, remained in Fredonia with his family, living on Temple Street. The 1865 Census, where he describes himself as an "artist," and the 1870 Census, where he is a "photographer," show him still in residence. The *Censor* of 6 April 1870 refers to a colored photograph of Harrison **Parker**. The photography was done by **Martin**, the hand coloring by Rufus **Lester**, who also did the coloring of a photo of the Rev. I. **George** taken by **Monroe** in Dunkirk. By December 1871 **Martin** had taken on, at least temporarily, Mrs. O. B. **Evans**. The *Censor* of 27 December 1871 carried their first ad: "Pictures for the Holidays! Beautiful Christmas Gifts. Mrs. O. B. **Evans** at G. R. **Martin's** Photograph Gallery."

It is not clear whether she remained here or traveled on and then returned. The 13 August 1873 *Censor* announced, "Photographs! Mrs. O. B. **Evans**." She had taken the rooms formerly occupied by George R. **Martin** "over **Miner's** Bank." It must have been then that **Martin** went back to Utica, leaving his family here and never returning. The 1875 Census, where he is still listed as head-of-household, adds, in the comments column, "at Utica." The Utica City Directories of 1876 and 1878 have entries for him as "Photographer" at 58 & 59 Franklin Square in that city. He then disappears from the records, except for the 1880 Census for Fredonia. That shows Lydia **Martin** as head-of-household with **Martin** entered as her husband, a photographer, but, unlike the others in the household, father's and mother's birthplaces are left empty, suggesting that he was not there to supply the answers. The only mention after 1880 comes in Mrs. **Martin's** 1907 obituary, which states that George R. **Martin** had died some 20

years earlier. There is no record of his ever returning to Fredonia, and he is not buried in the Forest Hill Cemetery family plot.

The Mrs. **Evans**, who had taken over **Martin's** studio at *30 West Main Street* in 1873, was Jane M., wife of Oliver Benton **Evans**, Photographer, who opened a studio in Buffalo around 1848. She had worked with her husband there. In the 1873 ad, she states that she has produced Ivorytypes "18 years ago," which can be seen to prove their durability. Make an appointment "as Mrs. E's time for the next month will be divided between Westfield and Fredonia." Three testimonials follow: from H. H. **Gifford** of Jamestown dated 24 February 1872; from C. F. S. **Thomas** of the *Commercial Advertiser*, Buffalo, 19 February 1869; and from Dr. T. F. **Hunt**, Associate Editor, *Commercial Advertiser*, Buffalo, 10 March 1868. **Gifford** has "Ivory pictures" of himself and of Mrs. **Gifford** taken by Mrs. **Evans** at Buffalo "some sixteen years ago" (i.e. 1856). **Thomas** has one made in 1856, and **Hunt** one done in 1867. Obviously, then, she had been at work in Buffalo at least from 1856 through 1867.

It is not clear why she first came to Fredonia in 1871, but it is clear that she stayed here, with her studio at *28 West Main Street* at least into 1879. She is included in **Lants & Son's** 1879 Jamestown Directory. She had been joined by her daughter Grace E. **Evans** by 1875. Her husband, O. B. **Evans**, had moved to Pennsylvania and died there in 1878; Mrs. **Evans** left Fredonia then or soon after. The studio she had used at 28 West Main was taken over by another photographer, who found a competitor already in residence on the other side of Main Street, the rooms **Martin** had had much earlier.

William H. **Tarbell**, daguerreian, took over those rooms in December 1862. In April 1866 Damon P. **Clark** of Dunkirk opened his Photograph & Ambrotype gallery there, replacing **Tarbell**, but by January 1867 he was replaced by Salmon Halstead, who was himself replaced by Burton W. Ladd in February 1867. (Clark continued as a photographer in Dunkirk.)

Ladd's long advertisement in the *Censor* of 6 February 1867 states that he had "conducted one of the best Photograph Galleries in the State for the last three years." Within the next year or so, Ladd took on a junior partner creating the firm of **Ladd & Parker**, first name unknown. **Parker** sold his interest to Charles **Pringle**, Jr. in November 1868. Charles **Pringle**, Jr. was the youngest child and only son of Dr. Charles and Delia A. **Pringle**, who had moved to Fredonia in 1852 when young Charles was 5. He entered the Fredonia Academy in 1862 for seven terms. He also joined the Union Zouaves, a junior militia. When and how he came to study photography is not known. A comment in an 1877 newspaper article said he had been "connected with the photography business for the last 12 years in Fredonia, so he must have begun by 1865. Three years later he bought out **Parker's** interest to create the firm of **Ladd & Pringle** over the Bank in the Union Block, 3 East Main Street.

In July 1870 they sold the equipment to R. H. **Beckwith** and A. H. **Whitney**, who took over their rooms. The senior partner was Russel H. **Beckwith**, who must have been the Russell **Beckwith** "errand boy" living the Orren **Monroe** household in Dunkirk at the time of the 1865 Census, learning photography at **Monroe's** Dunkirk Gallery. The *Censor* of 13 July 1870 says that **Beckwith** "had five years experience in O. **Monroe's** gallery" and adds that both of the new proprietors are "young men." **Beckwith** was 21, and the junior partner, Asa H. **Whitney** of Dunkirk, was 20. In December 1870 the firm advertised that they were "now taking those beautiful PHOTOGRAPHIC CRAYONS" as well as "PHOTOGRAPHS & FERROTYPES." Any photograph could be "Colored or Finished in India Ink in the finest style by Mr. A. **Van Scoter**. On 16 August 1871 they reminded their patrons that Mr. Arthur **Van Scoter** was still at work. They also offered PORCELAIN PICTURES, plain or colored, and plain photographs as well. They had now purchased a large camera so they could take pictures of any size "Also Views; as we have the largest view camera in the county."

"Photographic Crayons" or "Crayon Photographs" were photographs which had the edges of the central image fading off the way crayon portraits of the time were done. There were several techniques to achieve this effect. Porcelain pictures were photographs transferred to a ceramic tablet that could be fastened to a headstone or tomb. **Pringle** may actually have continued as a silent partner with the

two younger men. The 1 May 1872 *Censor* described the "**Beckwith, Whitney & Pringle** photography establishment" in Sinclairville." Either Mr. **Beckwith** or **Pringle** is constantly there." They have first class apparatus in both places. The Sinclairville gallery "does all the photography for **Brooks'** Locomotive Works." The business reverted to Charles **Pringle** again early in 1873. He had married a local girl, Alice E. **Wygant**, daughter of John B. and Cornelia M. **Wygant**, in Aurora IL on 13 March 1873 (an elopement?) and advertised himself as "Sole Proprietor" of the "People's Photo Gallery, Union Block" in the *Fredonia Censor* of 19 March 1873.

Beckwith moved on. In 1880, he was working as a photographer in Bradford PA, living in the household of William **Beemon**, whose wife Maggie was also a photographer. **Whitney** went into the dry goods business in Dunkirk. **Pringle** maintained his studio "over 53 Main," i.e. 3 East Main Street. The *Censor* of 19 March 1873 announced that **Pringle's** Photograph Gallery, with Charles now as the "sole proprietor" had been frescoed and refitted. One product of what he began calling the People's Photo Gallery was the July 1873 series of photos of the extensive **Taylor, Day & Co.** wagon factory on Center Street. In June 1877 he announced a bold new venture, the American Institute of Photography. **Pringle** claimed to have secured an exclusive process "which will undermine the present manner of manufacturing photographs." The ad continued, "The National Photographers Association passed a resolution some two years ago fixing the time at three years for a beginner to complete the course of instruction necessary to become competent to take charge of a gallery. This was by the process general used by photographers at that time, but now by his process Mr. **Pringle** claims that it can be taught in from sixty to ninety days."

Pringle had arranged for a series of lectures by specialists on optics, light and shadow, etc., together with hands-on practice. "India ink, water colors, pastel, crayon, negative retouching and the beautiful oval glass process are under the supervision of Mr. R. W. **Lester**." Col. E. A. **Curtis** was in charge of the architectural drawing department. Although the American Institute of Photography seems to have gone nowhere, **Pringle** did continue running his photographic studio. However, a new photographer was added to the Fredonia scene in 1878. The *Censor* of 3 April announced the opening of Harry **McNeil's** gallery in the Woleben Block.

Henry P. (Harry) **McNeil** was born about 1855 in Montgomery NY. According to the 1875 Census he was the adopted son of James and Esther **McNeil** (one of eight adopted children). In 1875 he was working as a clerk in a dry goods store. He may have studied photography with Asa **Whitney**, by now a dry goods merchant in Dunkirk, before opening his own gallery in the second floor over one of the stores in the Woleben Block, the large brick building at 45-53 West Main. In March 1881 he moved to the third floor over **Miner's** Bank, 28 West Main, and in May of that year married Clara, daughter of Asa H. **Whitney**. It is **McNeil** who donated, or lent, an album of "Old Timers" to begin the Historical Collection of the newly established Darwin R. **Barker** Library in November 1882. In 1887 Charles H. **Sisson** opened a gallery on West Main Street, as did **Montgomery & Cook** on East Main Street. The latter firm did not last very long.

In March 1890 **McNeil** began selling photographs of the old Fredonia Academy building. which was in the process of being torn down to make room for the new Village Hall and Opera House. The *Censor* of 26 March pointed out that the prints were "Boudoir size, twice as large as cabinets." Unfortunately, **McNeil** suffered from Bright's disease and had an attack early in September 1890 from which he never recovered. He died on 5 September, age 36. Oddly enough, on the day **McNeil's** illness was announced, 3 September, the *Censor* also announced that portrait artist **Wight** had just opened "a new photograph gallery on Cushing Street." The ad said, "First class portraits in oil and old paintings retouched at this gallery. A. **Wight**, Artist."

By the end of the month **McNeil's** equipment and files were purchased by E. K. **Hough** and Charles O. **Mason**, who announced they had **McNeil's** negatives and could make prints from them for anyone who requested them. E. K. **Hough** was born in Potsdam NY on 24 December 1834. A partial

record in the LDS Church Family Search file has a Eugenio Kinkaid **Hough** born in 1834. . . of Connecticut, who died on 3 January 1902. According to his obituary, **Hough** studied photography beginning in 1856. He was listed as an artist and daguerreotypist in Petersburg VA and 1858, and a daguerreian in Louisburg NC in 1859 and in partnership as **Hough & Levois** in Hillsborough NC. From 1861 to 1866 he was a "poser" in a New York City gallery. In 1865 he married Frances S. **Mason**. He later had a studio in Winston NC and in Tennessee.

The *Censor* of 9 June 1886 reported that **Hough** had purchased 27 *Green Street* "and will move here soon." Next door, at 35 *Green Street* were Mr. and Mrs. Ezra T. **Ely**. Mrs. **Ely** was Mrs. **Hough's** sister. In September **Hough** left for Winston NC. The *Censor* of 29 September 1886 reported that his crayon portraits of four local worthies had won "both first and second premiums at the fair." He was going to North Carolina to close out his business there "which he hopes to sell before next summer and then to open a portrait establishment here." Mrs. **Hough** remained in Fredonia for the winter. The *Censor* added that the couple had traveled extensively in the West Indies and South America. "Glad to welcome them as permanent residents." They traveled again, since the *Censor* in March 1887 noted that **Hough** and his wife "of Chattanooga" were to return in April. In the following May, Mrs. **Hough** died a few weeks before the death of her brother, George **Mason** of Ripley.

In March 1889 **Hough** was planning to establish a photographic gallery on Gillis Street, and in November he married Mrs. Fannie M. **Mason**, George's widow. It was in September 1890 that he and Charles O. **Mason**, his nephew and stepson, took over **McNeil's** gallery at 28 West Main Street. At the time, **Hough** was 56, **Mason** 23. It may well be that **Mason** learned his photography from **Hough**, perhaps on the job. The partnership was dissolved by 1893, as **Hough** considered "engaging in the photograph business" in Brocton, according to the *Censor* of 12 April 1893. Charles **Mason** continued the business at 28 *West Main*, then at 36 *East Main* from about 1900 to 1930, when he moved to 17 *East Main Street*. In 1935 he had Cosimo **Mancuso** as his assistant. When **Mason** died in February 1933, **Mancuso** took over the studio and ran it until about 1943.

During these years, there were a number of others involved in the trade in Fredonia, some of whom did not have their own businesses. The 1880 Census lists an Arthur D. **Mitchell** of White Street as a photographer. The 1891 Directory has a Maud M. **Adams**, photographer, boarding on Green Street, where E. K. **Hough** and C. O. **Mason** both lived. Charles H. **Sisson** had a photography studio on West Main by 1887. The *Censor* of 27 September 1899 said that he was "back from Pennsylvania" and ready to take pictures again at his gallery on the corner of West Main and Forest Place. The 1900 Directory gives the business address as 61 West Main. He was there until about 1920. Leslie **Tennant** listed himself as a photographer in the 1904 Directory. He may have worked briefly for **Mason** whose wife was Fannie **Tennant**. In 1918 M. Russell **McLaren**, who had been a clerk in his father's dry goods store, set up his photographic studio at 35 West Main Street. By the 1930s, his son, Robert R. **McLaren** and Robert's wife Doris, who was their colorist, had joined him. The elder **McLaren** retired by 1968, but in 1969 the firm's name is gone from the directories.