



The Library Company OF PHILADELPHIA

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## Catching a Shadow: Daguerreotypes in Philadelphia, 1839-1860

**Philadelphia: September 18, 2009** – In the summer of 1839 Frenchman Louis Daguerre publicly announced his photographic discovery and almost immediately scientifically inclined men began experimenting with the process. From the mid 1840s through the mid 1850s interest in daguerreotypes rapidly expanded. Philadelphia became a leading center of American daguerreotyping. On **September 28, 2009** the Library Company of Philadelphia will display forty examples of its approximately 200 daguerreotypes, studio advertisements, 19th-century books about daguerreotyping, and other related ephemera in its new exhibition *Catching a Shadow: Daguerreotypes in Philadelphia, 1839-1860*. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Franklin Institute, and the Free Library of Philadelphia also lent material to this exhibition.



Image: D.C. Collins & Company, Portrait of Margaret Griscom McCord Smith, half-plate daguerreotype, Philadelphia, ca. 1854.

*Catching a Shadow*, curated by Sarah Weatherwax, Curator of Prints and Photographs, celebrates the 170th anniversary of the invention of the daguerreotype, and explores how news of the daguerreotype spread throughout Philadelphia both to the scientifically inclined men who experimented with the new process and to the public who sat for their portraits, and it examines the city's role as a leading center for daguerreotyping. It highlights the careers of selected Philadelphia daguerreotypists including Robert Cornelius, Marcus Root, and the Langenheim brothers.

Visitors to the exhibition have the opportunity to see significant works by some of Philadelphia's (and America's) most important daguerreotypists. Several Robert Cornelius daguerreotype portraits taken in 1840 and 1841 are displayed along with a manuscript letter soliciting customers for his newly opened studio. A rare example of a portrait taken by Sally Hewes, a Philadelphia female daguerreotypist, is exhibited. William and Frederick Langenheim's 1844 daguerreotype taken during Philadelphia's anti-Catholic riots, often described as America's first news photograph, is also featured. The awe-inspiring six half-plate daguerreotypes which together form a panoramic view of the Fairmount Water Works taken ca. 1846 by Thomas and David Collins is another exhibi-

tion highlight. From this monumental panorama to a small daguerreotype brooch, visitors will see daguerreotypes in a multitude of sizes and formats. Daguerreotypes commemorating joyful events such as marriage or a boy's transition from wearing dresses to long pants are displayed as are post-mortem daguerreotypes memorializing one of life's sadder events. Technical treatises on how to take a daguerreotype, including Louis Daguerre's 1839 book, *History and Practice of Photogenic Drawing*, and the English translation of Daguerre's instructions that appeared in the November 1839 *Journal of the Franklin Institute* are on view. Also included is Marcus Root's *The Camera and the Pencil* (1864), which focused on raising the aesthetic standard of all photography including daguerreotypes and promoting photographs as works of art. Both book lovers and aficionados of early photography will find something of interest in this exhibition.

**Please join us for the exhibition opening on October 1, 2009, featuring a reception at 5:30 followed by a lecture at 6:00 by curator and author Keith F. Davis**, who will speak about the remarkable achievement of the world's first successful photographic process – the daguerreotype – and Philadelphia's vital role in the history of early photography in America. This event is presented by the Library Company's [Visual Culture Program \(VCP@LCP\)](#).

This event is open to the public free of charge. To register, phone 215-546-3181, or e-mail [lpropst@librarycompany.org](mailto:lpropst@librarycompany.org).

### **Background Information about the Library Company**

The Library Company of Philadelphia is an independent research library concentrating on American history and culture from the 17th through 19th centuries. Free and open to the public, the Library Company houses an extensive non-circulating collection of rare books, manuscripts, broadsides, ephemera and works of art. The mission of the Library Company is to preserve, interpret, make available, and augment the valuable materials within our care. We serve a diverse constituency throughout Philadelphia and the nation, offering comprehensive reader services, an internationally renowned fellowship program, an online public access catalog, and regular exhibitions and public programs. Located at 1314 Locust Street, Philadelphia, it is open to the public free of charge from 9:00 a.m. to 4:45 p.m. Monday through Friday. The Library Company can be found online at [www.librarycompany.org](http://www.librarycompany.org).

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