

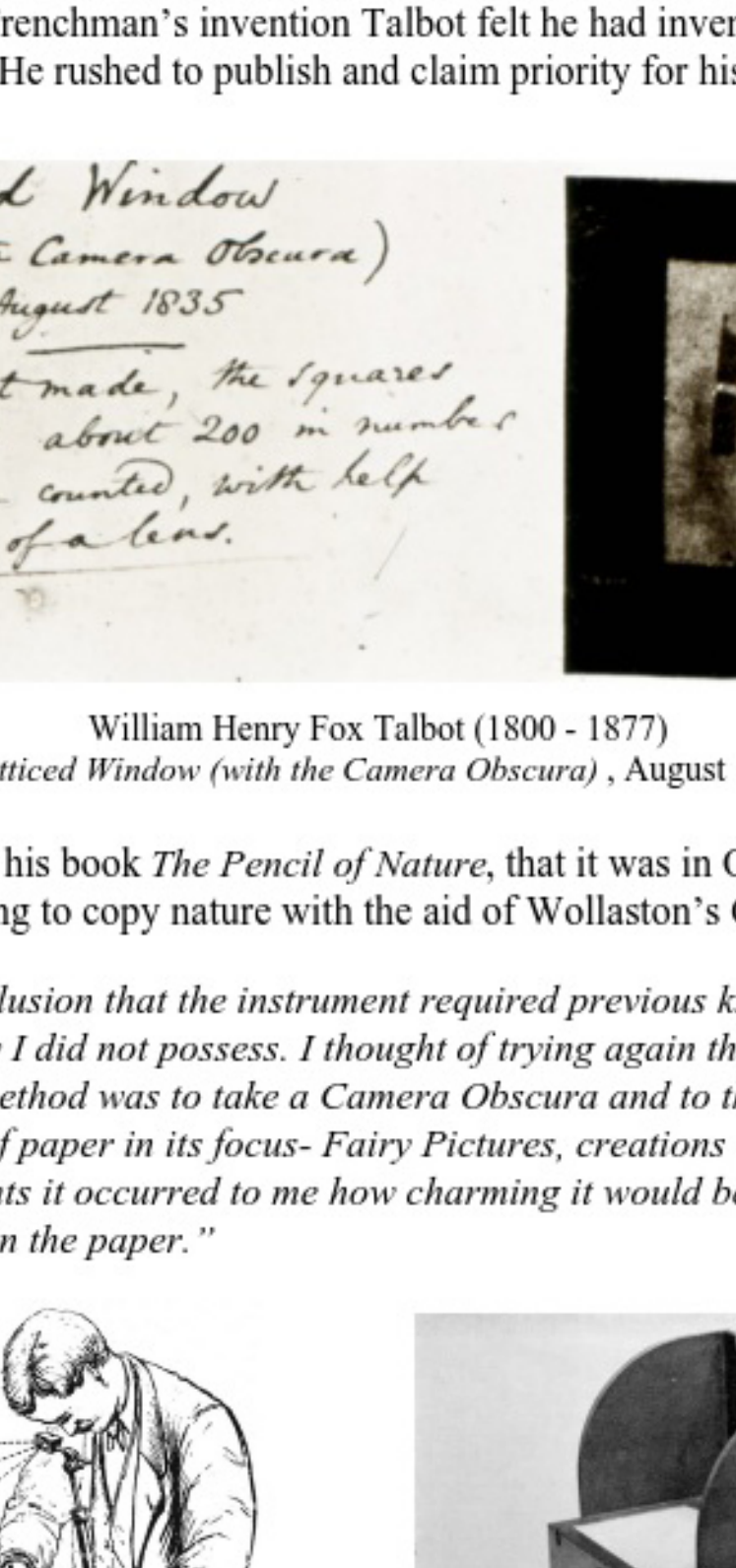
## William Henry Fox Talbot - The Pencil of Nature

Today I will continue with the story of the "invention" of a photographic process. If you were to read these blogs in chronological order, this one would be number three. *The Science and Art* episode would be first, followed by *Mirror with a Memory - The Daguerreotype*. Although I haven't been writing these in any order, I think they may make more sense if read that way.

Before I begin, I would like to thank the many people who wrote to us with positive responses, especially to last week's PowerPoint "talk." Your responses are appreciated and keep us motivated! I will plan on doing a few others that way in the future.

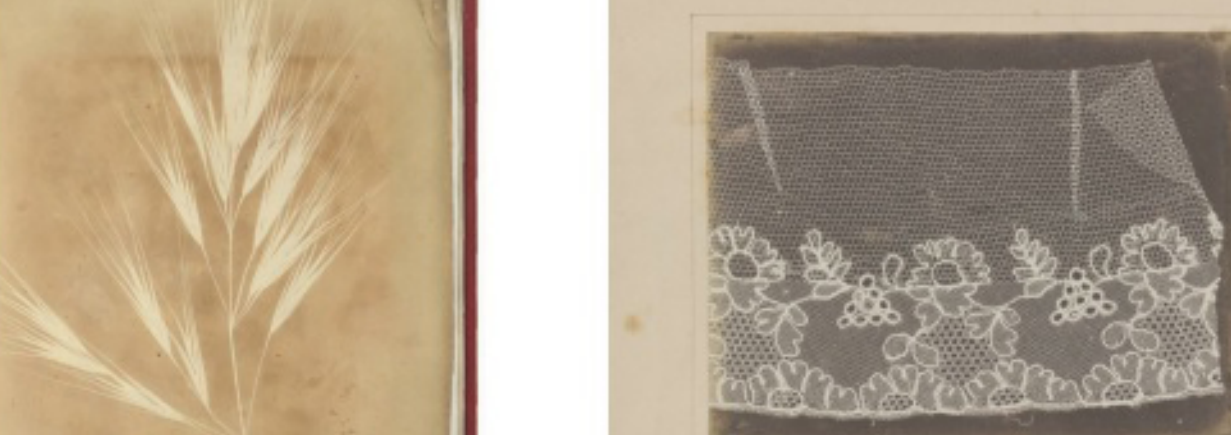
Also, please feel free to pass our weekly emails to others. If friends want to join our mailing list even better (to subscribe [click here](#)). This effort began during our Covid quarantine with the hope of offering you something to read and think about other than the virus. One of the best responses we have received is from a high school teacher who is using these weekly newsletters in his curriculum to help him teach online. If you know any photography teachers or programs in high schools or higher, please feel free to distribute these blogs!

### William Henry Fox Talbot (1800 - 1877)



John Moffat  
William Henry Fox Talbot, 1864

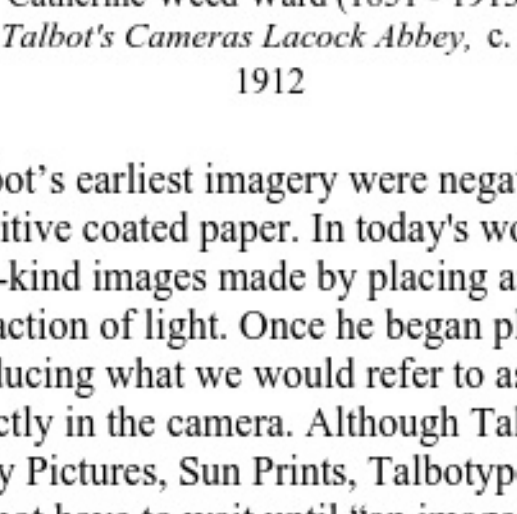
The English scientist, mathematician, botanist, linguist, and classical scholar, William Henry Fox Talbot was astonished at the news of Daguerre's invention. Hearing the first reports of the Frenchman's invention Talbot felt he had invented a technique that seemed equivalent. He rushed to publish and claim priority for his invention.



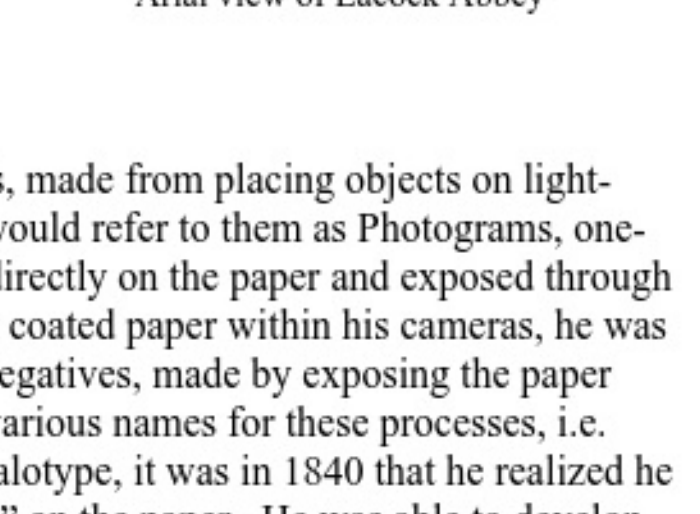
William Henry Fox Talbot (1800 - 1877)  
*Latticed Window (with the Camera Obscura)*, August 1835

In 1844 he wrote in his book *The Pencil of Nature*, that it was in October 1833, while in Italy, he was trying to copy nature with the aid of Wollaston's Camera Lucida:

*"I came to the conclusion that the instrument required previous knowledge of drawing which unfortunately I did not possess. I thought of trying again the method I tried many years before. The method was to take a Camera Obscura and to throw the image of the objects on a piece of paper in its focus- Fairy Pictures, creations of the moment. It was during these moments it occurred to me how charming it would be to imprint these images durably upon the paper."*



Camera Lucida illustration from the Scientific American Supplement, January 11, 1879



Talbot's Camera Obscura

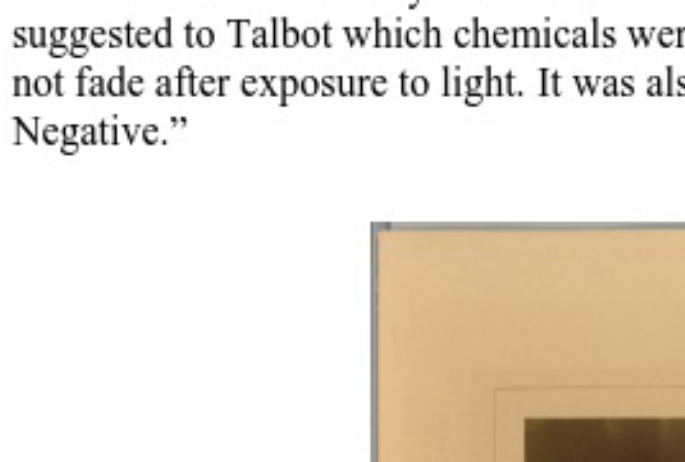
He first made prints of flowers and lace, but by the summer of 1835, he had placed cameras all over his home, Lacock Abbey.



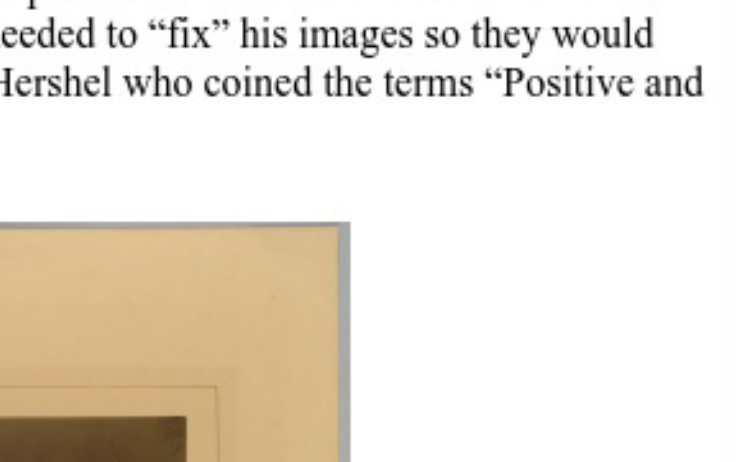
William Henry Fox Talbot (1800 - 1877)  
*Bromus Maximus, Genoa, 1839*  
from *The Pencil of Nature*, 1844-46



William Henry Fox Talbot (1800 - 1877)  
*Lace, 1845*  
from *The Pencil of Nature*, 1844-46

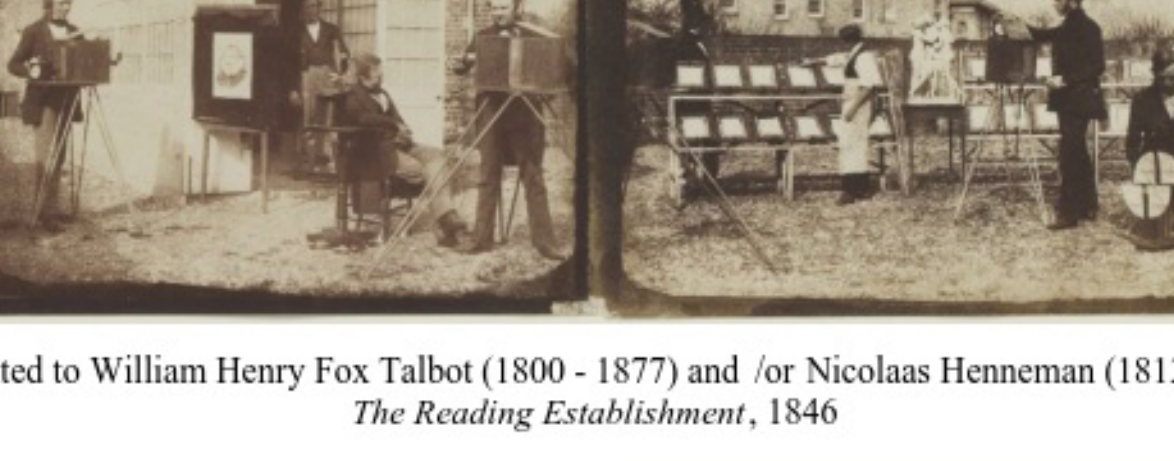


Catherine Weed Ward (1851 - 1913)  
*Fox Talbot's Cameras Lacock Abbey, c. 1891 - 1912*



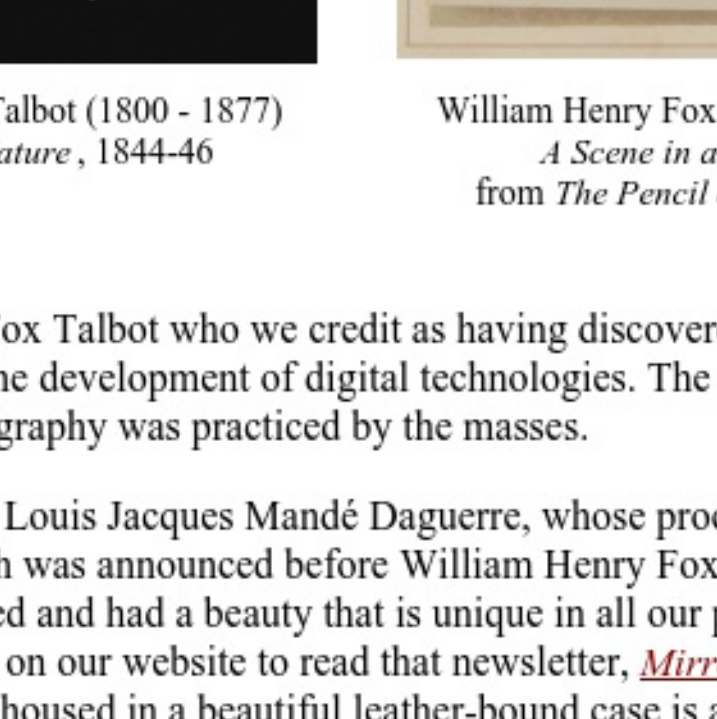
Aerial view of Lacock Abbey

Talbot's earliest imagery were negative prints, made from placing objects on light-sensitive coated paper. In today's world, we would refer to them as Photograms, one-of-a-kind images made by placing an object directly on the paper and exposed through the action of light. Once he began placing the coated paper within his cameras, he was producing what we would refer to as Paper Negatives, made by exposing the paper directly in the camera. Although Talbot had various names for these processes, i.e. Fairy Pictures, Sun Prints, Talbotypes, and Calotype, it was in 1840 that he realized he did not have to wait until "an image appeared" on the paper. He was able to develop the "Latent Image" exposed in the camera. This enabled him to make images in minutes instead of hours! He then went on to take that "negative" and place it on top of another sheet of chemically coated paper and when exposed to sunlight he produced a positive! He called these prints "Calotypes" from the Greek "Beautiful Pictures."



William Henry Fox Talbot (1800 - 1877)  
*An Oak Tree in Winter Lacock, c. 1842-43*  
Calotype negative and salted paper print

I mentioned before in my "Science and Art" episode that it was Sir John Herschel who suggested to Talbot which chemicals were needed to "fix" his images so they would not fade after exposure to light. It was also Herschel who coined the terms "Positive and Negative."

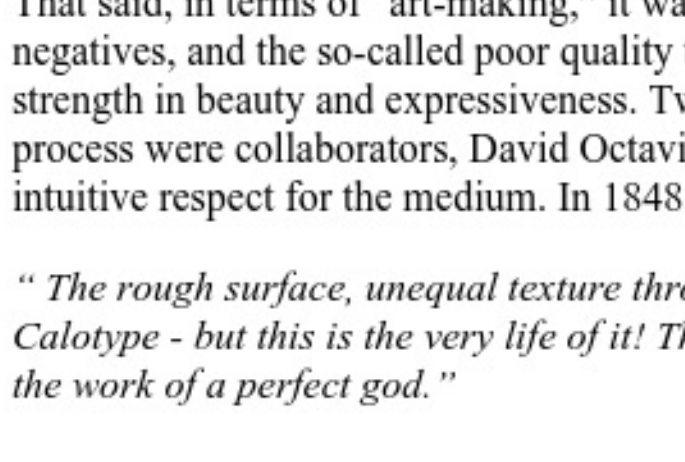


Julia Margaret Cameron (1815 - 1879)  
*Sir John Herschel, 1867*

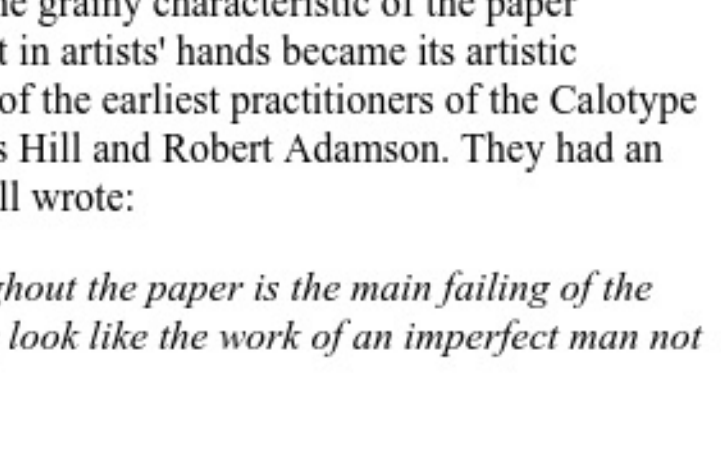
Talbot began mass production of images for his book, *The Pencil of Nature*. Produced from 1844 - 1846, and offered in six installments, it is considered the first commercially published book of photogenic drawings. The volumes contained 24 Calotype prints, each one pasted in by hand, along with a descriptive text. Talbot intended the volumes to illustrate the possible applications for his invention, especially in regard to photographing a variety of subjects and locations.



Attributed to William Henry Fox Talbot (1800 - 1877) and/or Nicolaas Henneman (1813 - 1898)  
*The Reading Establishment, 1846*



William Henry Fox Talbot (1800 - 1877)  
*The Pencil of Nature, 1844-46*

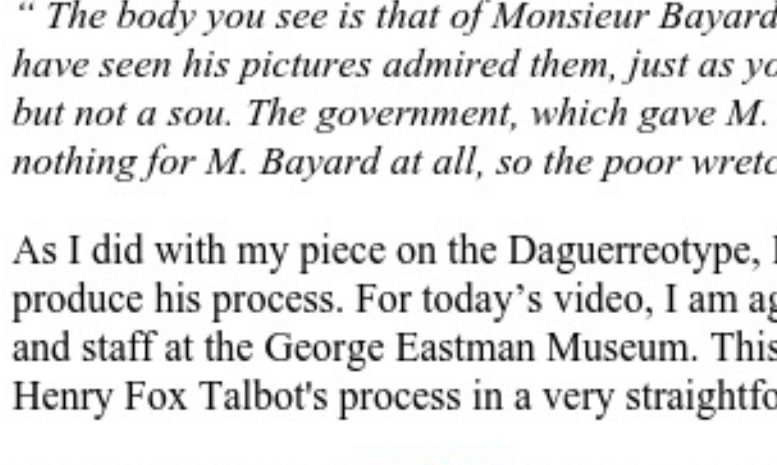


William Henry Fox Talbot (1800 - 1877)  
*A Scene in a Library, 1844*  
from *The Pencil of Nature, 1844-46*

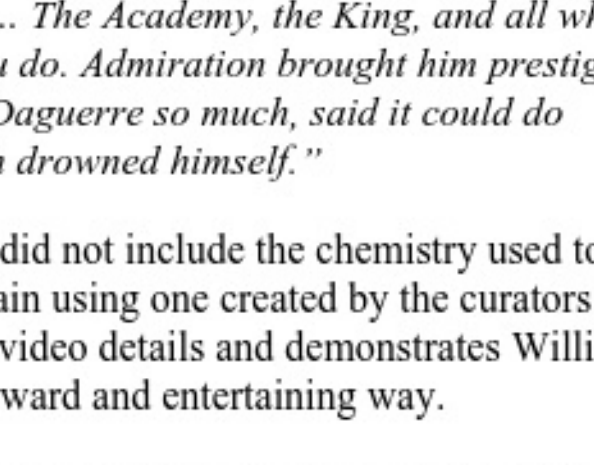
It is William Henry Fox Talbot who we credit as having discovered photography as we practiced it up until the development of digital technologies. The negative-positive process is how photography was practiced by the masses.

The French inventor, Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre, whose process, the Daguerreotype, which was announced before William Henry Fox Talbot's invention, was extremely detailed and had a beauty that is unique in all our photographic processes. (Please go on our website to read that new-essay, *Mirror With A Memory*). Its mirror-like image housed in a beautiful leather-bound case is a wonder to behold, almost a spiritual experience. Their sharpness and ambience are unrivaled. But, these one of a kind images were not easy to produce and, even under ideal circumstances, are difficult to view. There was also no practical way to reproduce or copy them.

Calotypes were not as beautiful to produce, especially at first. Paper negatives were not very sharp and when used to produce positives - laying one piece of paper atop the other and exposing it to sunlight, results could be considered quite poor in comparison to the Daguerreotype in terms of sharpness and clarity. BUT, the ability to make multiples was what ultimately won out. The preciousness and uniqueness of the Daguerreotype was not what people wanted, they wanted the ability to produce an image and make as many copies as one wished, which became the working methodology for photography.



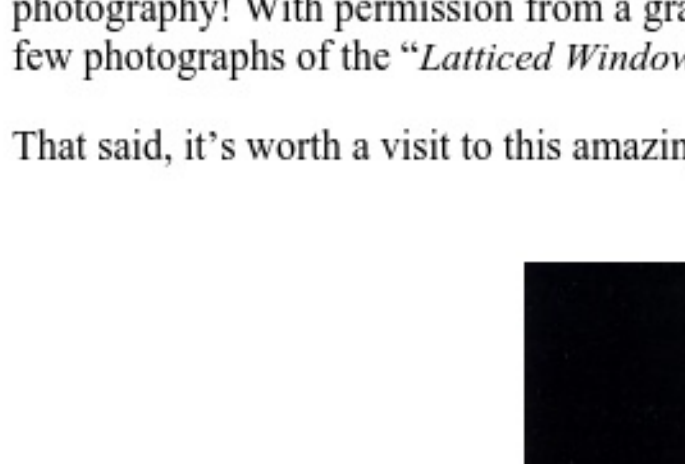
Daguerreotype from the 1850s



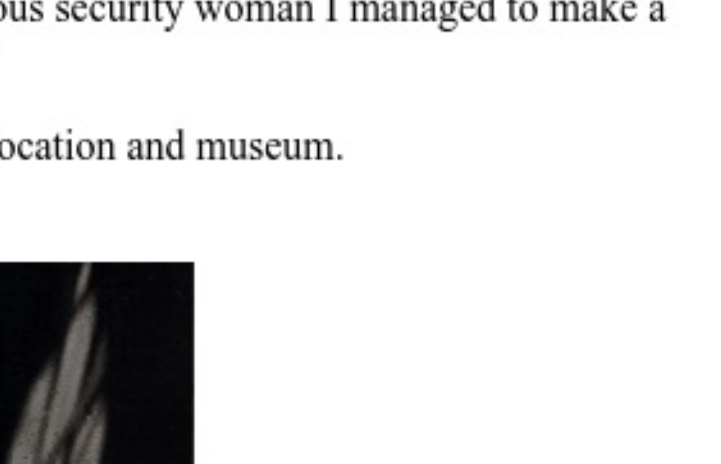
David Octavius Hill (1802 - 1870) and Robert Adamson (1821 - 1848)  
*Mrs. Rigby, 1843-48*  
Salted paper print from a paper negative

That said, in terms of "art-making," it was the grainy characteristic of the calotype negatives, and the so-called poor quality that in artists' hands became its artistic strength in beauty and expressiveness. Two of the earliest practitioners of the Calotype process were collaborators, David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson. They had an intuitive respect for the medium. In 1848 Hill wrote:

*"The rough surface, the unequal texture throughout the paper is the main failing of the calotype - but this is the very life of it! They look like the work of an imperfect man not the work of a perfect god."*



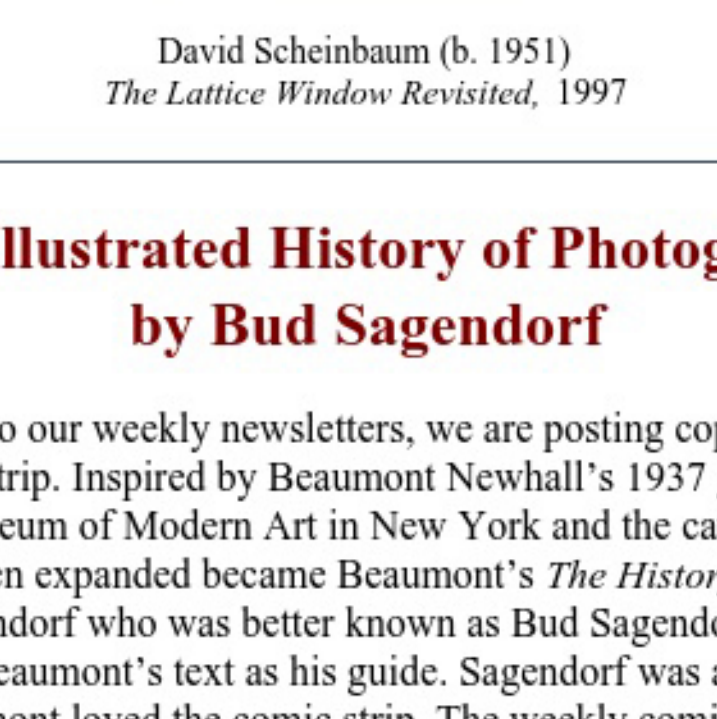
David Octavius Hill (1802 - 1870) and Robert Adamson (1821 - 1848)  
*The Misses McCandlish, 1843-47*  
Salted paper print from a paper negative



David Octavius Hill (1802 - 1870) and Robert Adamson (1821 - 1848)  
*Newhaven Fishwives, 1843-47*  
Salted paper print from a paper negative

Louis Jacques Mandé Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot opened the door for others to come forward, inventors in Florence, Brazil, Norway, among other places. Some processes were similar and others were equally unique as the Daguerreotype and the Calotype. But with all the attention to these two inventions, others did not get the attention their inventors had hoped. Perhaps it is best illustrated by another French inventor, Hippolyte Bayard. Bayard was a civil servant in Paris, and on July 14, 1839, he exhibited 30 photographs. His method was original, unlike either Daguerre's or Talbot's.

He produced this image:



Hippolyte Bayard (1801 - 1887)  
*Self Portrait of a Drowned Man, 1840*

On the back of this print he wrote:

*"The body you see is that of Monsieur Bayard... The Academy, the King, and all who have seen his pictures admired them, just as you do. Admiration brought him prestige, but not a sou. The government, which gave M. Daguerre so much, said it could do nothing for M. Bayard at all, so the poor wretch drowned himself."*

As I did with my piece on the Daguerreotype, I did not include the chemistry used to produce his process. For today's video, I am again using one created by the curators and staff at the George Eastman Museum. This video details and demonstrates William Henry Fox Talbot's process in a very straightforward and entertaining way.

I suggest you visit the [website](#), which contains a plethora of information about Talbot and his inventions.



Lastly, in 1997 my family and I made a pilgrimage to Lacock to visit the birthplace of photography. We found an impressive and friendly village built around the abbey. I remember thinking it strange upon entering the building that there was a sign, "No Photographs!" Imagine my surprise, no photographs in the birthplace of photography! With permission from a gracious security woman I managed to make a few photographs of the "Latticed Window."

That said, it's worth a visit to this amazing location and museum.



David Scheinbaum (b. 1951)  
*The Latticed Window, Lacock, 1997*

## The Illustrated History of Photography by Bud Sagendorf

As an added feature to our weekly newsletters, we are posting copies of a History of Photography comic strip. Inspired by Beaumont Newhall's 1937 groundbreaking exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the catalog for the exhibition which when expanded became Beaumont's *The History of Photography*. Forrest Cowles Sagendorf who was better known as Bud Sagendorf created a weekly strip in 1938 using Beaumont's text as his guide. Sagendorf was a photography enthusiast and Beaumont loved the comic strip. The weekly comics are a fun and accurate introduction to the early processes and practitioners of photography. I'm sure some of you will recognize his drawing style from his Popeye comics.



We again want to thank you for the feedback. Your emails and calls mean the world to us and continue to motivate. We have had some wonderful responses.

Many of you have also asked about accessing our previous emails. We have added a new page on our website entitled "[History of Photography](#)". All our past and future weekly mailings will be located there for viewing. Please feel free to share them and encourage interested parties to join our mailing list under "contact".

Thank you, please stay safe, healthy, productive, and involved.

Please visit our website [www.photographydealers.com](http://www.photographydealers.com) to view our current inventory.