"A GREAT VARIETY OF NEW AND FINE DESIGNS:"

ADVERTISEMENTS FOR PAINTED BACKGROUNDS, 1856-1903

by

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Abstract

The painted background, as a piece of photographic equipment, has rarely been studied apart from its decorative function in portraits. This thesis addresses the history, construction, and use of the painted background within studio portrait photography during the latter half of the nineteenth century as revealed from examining advertisements for painted backgrounds.

1,096 advertisements for painted backgrounds were reviewed in nine periodicals published in the United States of America from 1856 to 1903, all taken from the Richard and Ronay Menschel Library at George Eastman House. This material has been compiled into a comprehensive index revealing an increase in the use of painted background within portrait photography during this time period. The analysis of this research also provides information about the history of painted backgrounds, companies advertising backgrounds, sizes, styles, and costs of backgrounds, and ways companies shipped their backgrounds throughout this era.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest thanks to my thesis advisor and first reader Jamie M. Allen for her motivation, attention to detail, and continuous support throughout this process. I also want to thank my second reader Mark Osterman for his wealth of knowledge about anything photographic. I would also like to thank Alison Nordström for her help and guidance in forming this topic, and to my dedicated editor Emily McKibbon. I also want to thank Jessica Johnston, Joe Struble, Rachel Stuhlman, Sue Drexler, Rheytchul Kimmel, Barbara Galasso, and my fellow classmates for their intellectual conversations, support, and continuous encouragement.

Finally, I would like to thank my wonderful family and cherished friends for all their support and love throughout my education; especially to my sister Sarah who has been and will always be there for me, and once gave me the advice to "stay focused, eat lots of chocolate, and be glad you are not dead!"

"Let me paint the backgrounds for a nation, and I

care not who makes the photographs."

-L.W. Seavey

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Introduction

For centuries prior to photography, painted backgrounds were closely linked to fields outside of photography including dioramas[1] and theatre designs. Within photography the painted background first appeared shortly after the invention of the daguerreotype.[2] From this introduction, the painted background became an essential apparatus for any successful portrait photographer. As portraiture evolved and developed throughout the nineteenth century, the amount and variations of backgrounds available to any photographer also increased. Companies specializing in custom or artistic painted backgrounds and accessories appeared, and soon offered several different styles, contributing to the market for, and promoting the use of painted backgrounds.

During the latter half of the nineteenth century there was a shift from a photographer owning one painted background, to a photographer owning a multitude of backgrounds reflecting fashionable or seasonal trends. Though painted backgrounds are a tool used by photographers still today, the use of photographic backgrounds reached its zenith during the late nineteenth century. This can be accounted for by the rise in accessibility in photographic portraiture for the general public, and competition amongst photographers for this burgeoning market. Examining advertisements for painted backgrounds found in nineteenth century photographic journals demonstrates the truth of this claim by the volume of

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[1]Diorama is an image on fabric and painted so that the image changes as the light changes. Thus, the
[2] Avon Neal, "Folk Art Fantasies: Photographers' Backgrounds," *Afterimage* 24 (1997): 12.

advertisements found and the volume of companies advertising for painted backgrounds.

Painted backgrounds that appear in portraits produced in the latter half of the nineteenth century vary in what they depict, and scholarly research about painted backgrounds tends to focus on the subject matter of the background instead of how the background was used as a necessary tool for the photographer. Very little has been discussed about how painted backgrounds were advertised, sold, and used during the latter half of the nineteenth century in the United States of America. Though this paper will briefly examine different styles of backgrounds that were available to portrait photographers in the late half of the nineteenth century, the main emphasis of this research focuses on how backgrounds were advertised, sold, and used during this time period, explains the functional consideration that determine some of the aesthetics of painted backgrounds, examines how photographers would have used the background, and analyses how photographers would have purchased their backgrounds.

From contemporary to historical records, the language used to describe or account for painted backgrounds varies. Terms such as "backgrounds," "head Grounds," "photo-backgrounds," and "grounds" among many others have been used in both historical and contemporary sources. Nonetheless, all terms refer to and mean the same thing. Most consistently, historical writers have used the term background, either in one word or two words. Contemporary scholars generally use the term backdrop, with the exception of some authors reverting to the historical

term. For this paper "background" will be used to refer to the piece of fabric situated behind the sitter.
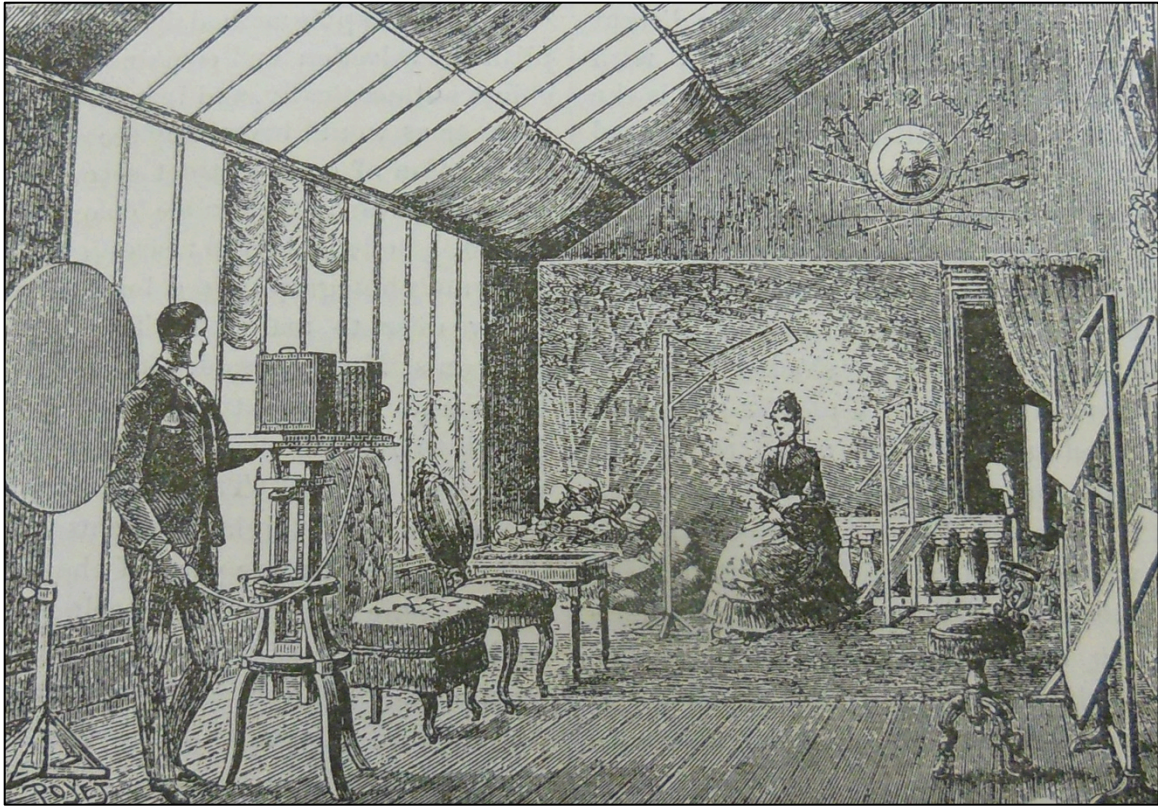
Figure 1: Example of a painted background situated behind the sitter and alongside other photographic apparatuses a photographer would have needed. Unknown, *Philadelphia Photographer* 25 (1888): n.p.

The literature summary focuses on a review of the secondary literature about painted backgrounds and their use in portrait photography. This section shows that little has been discussed about the painted background as a photographic apparatus, discussing instead the background as a cultural artifact.

A history of the painted background including its introduction in photography is discussed. This chapter will briefly mention how backgrounds were constructed, stored, and repaired by photographers. However, most of the chapter

will be devoted to how photographers were instructed to use the painted background in relation to his other photographic tools and the sitter.

My approach for reviewing the nineteenth century journals available at George Eastman House and the creation of the *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903*[3] is discussed in detail within the methodology section. Finally, I analyze the surveyed advertisements. In this chapter I examine the data I gathered and place it in its historical context to comment on general trends and shifts that occurred within this time period in relation to the painted background. Furthermore, I compare and contrast these advertisements to explain how photographers purchased backgrounds from the companies and demonstrate the differences between how general photographic suppliers and background artists advertised backgrounds. This essay concludes with a description of seasonal trends and shifts in subject matters and materials, while comparing costs and shipping of backgrounds.

Examining advertisements for painted backgrounds explains how painted backgrounds were used in the latter half of the nineteenth century in the United States of America and aids in understanding why painted backgrounds appear the way they do in these portraits. This information helps contextualize the sitter in relation to the painted background, the aesthetic trends of the day, and the challenges of using a painted background in the late nineteenth century.

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[3] Krista Keller, *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903* (Masters Thesis, Ryerson University, 2013).

Literature Survey

There are a limited number of resources available about studio staging within nineteenth century portrait photography and even less so about specific topics within this subject. Usually, information about portrait photography produced in the late nineteenth century focuses on the pose of the sitter or the use of the photograph within its social context. Thus, information about painted backgrounds that appear in typical portraits is scarce and brief. Furthermore, how painted backgrounds were advertised and sold during the latter half of the nineteenth century is a subject that is rarely discussed by contemporary scholars.

Within the primary literature, there are several rich nineteenth century sources in the form of manuals, catalogues, and periodicals that discuss the role and use of the painted background. Some of these publications teach photographers to construct their own painted backgrounds providing detailed information on their construction. These nineteenth century sources include sufficient information about the role of a painted background in portraiture and the ideal studio set up while contemporary sources lack this information. Information from the numerous nineteenth century sources is highlighted and discussed in the history of the painted background, while the secondary literature is featured here.

Within the secondary literature there is an emphasis on the cultural context and the aesthetic qualities of the photographs. Stephen Kasher provides a complete

history of the tintype in America in his book, *America and the Tintype*.[4] This

publication stresses the technique's low cost and how that allowed for sitters to be

more flexible and experimental with how they posed for their portraits. The chapter

"Stereotypical Tintypes and Tintype Backgrounds" devotes roughly two pages to the

discussion of the painted background and Kasher describes the increase in the use

of painted backgrounds alongside the rise and popularity of the tintype. Kasher

believes that a background supplied romanticism and transported the sitter to an

imagined time and place. The background was an escape from the pollution of a city

to an idealized paradise, stately home, or tourist site. According to Kasher, "It stood

for romance, for escape, for clean air, and for city planning."[5]

Avon Neal, in his essay "Folk Art Fantasies: Photographers' Backgrounds,"

argues that the history of painted backgrounds should be included in the history of

folk art.[6] Though Neal discusses the recent uses of painted backgrounds at local fairs

in Guatemala, he believes this practice is similar to what would have occurred

during the height of portrait photography in the United States. The author discusses

the fabrication and use of painted backgrounds by anonymous professional

photographers similar to those found in the nineteenth century. Neal's essay

provides an anthropological approach to the painted background that focuses on the

photographer's relationship to the background, such as how different subject

matters of backgrounds affected business. In addition, Neal also discusses the

practical aspects surrounding the use of a painted background, including how it was

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[4] Steven Kasher, "Stereotypical Tintypes and Tintype Backgrounds," in *America and the Tintype* (New York: International Center of Photography 2008).
[5] Kasher, "Stereotypical Tintypes and Tintype Backgrounds," 129.
[6] Avon Neal, "Folk Art Fantasies: Photographers' Backdrops," *Afterimage* 24 (1997).

transported, hung, and commissioned.[7] This essay does not focus specifically on the nineteenth century or the United States of America, but provides a source about how sitters and photographers interacted with the painted background.

Furthermore, Peter Palmquist's *Frozen in Iron* is a catalogue from an exhibition highlighting tintypes from his private collection.[8] The author discusses the relaxed atmosphere inherent in tintype portraits through studio staging and the playfulness of the sitters' poses. The reproductions of tintypes that appear in this publication show numerous examples of painted backgrounds that were available during the late half of the nineteenth century, but there is no discussion of the function that backgrounds played in portraits. The most Palmquist mentions about backgrounds can be found in the chapter titled "Resorts & Recreational." In this chapter, Palmquist recognizes that a background representing famous tourist destinations was a common subject matter for painted backgrounds and discusses the playfulness of sitters in front of backgrounds of notable tourist attractions such as Niagara Falls.[9]

Alan Griffith of *Luminous Lint*,[10] mentions the use of painted backgrounds for decorative purposes in portraits and argues that theatre and theatre sets influenced early backgrounds. Griffith mentions large manufacturers of painted backgrounds during the nineteenth century, such as the L.W. Seavey Company, and discusses famous portrait photographers known for their extensive collection of painted

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[7] Neal, "Folk Art Fantasies: Photographers' Backdrops," 2.
[8] Peter E. Palmquist, *Frozen in Iron* (New York: Eureka Printing Company, 2001).
[9] Palmquist, *Frozen in Iron*, 207.
[10] Alan Griffith, "Luminous Lint," Last modified April 22, 2013. http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/home/H1/

backgrounds. Furthermore, Griffith also argues that there is a relationship between photographic truth and the painted background; backgrounds frequently depicted tourist sites in an idealized form, while the real thing might have been just across the street.[11] Griffith dates the decline of painted backgrounds to the turn of the twentieth century when photographers wanted less decorative flair in their portraits and also cites the emergence of the amateur photographer as a contributing factor to its disappearance. Though this source is not devoted solely to the late nineteenth century, the author includes patents for painted backgrounds, as well as advertisements providing some evidence about how they were sold and constructed in the nineteenth century.

In addition, a brief history of the painted background is discussed in Mark Osterman's article "Focus on the Background."[12] Osterman examines the use of the background and its aesthetic shifts from the daguerreotype era until the twentieth century. The author discusses the various materials used in the construction of painted backgrounds and the array backgrounds available to portrait photographers during the nineteenth century. Though this source does not exclusively discuss the use of backgrounds in the United States, Osterman provides sufficient information about how backgrounds were constructed and used amongst other photographic devices.

The exhibition publication *Forgotten Marriage: The Painted Tintype & The Decorative Frame 1860-1890* justifies the Stanley Burns' inclusion of tintype

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[11] Griffith, "Luminous Lint."

[12] Mark Osterman, "Focus on the Background," *The Collodion Journal* 6 (2000): 6.-9.

portraits within the American Folk-art tradition.[13] The publication examines painted

tintypes from the Burns Archive, which holds largest collection of painted tintypes

in the world. Though how painted backgrounds were sold during this era is not

mentioned specifically, Burns argues Europeans initially preferred more painterly

photographs and therefore employed the use of a painted background, while the

American population at first desired realism and simplicity. Burns also argues that

Mathew Brady, the famous American portrait photographer, preferred the sitter

emerging from a dark background and did not endorse the use of "painted 'art'

backgrounds."[14] The author briefly mentions the invention of the painted

background and its early use within Europe but completely dismisses any use of

painted backgrounds in America.

In *Cartes de Visite: In Nineteenth Century Photography*, William C. Darrah

traces the history of the carte-de-visite. This history focuses on it uses within

portraiture, ethnography, reproductions of art, and the Civil War. In the chapter

focusing on portraiture, Darrah discusses painted backgrounds and claims that

painted backgrounds were purchased on a roll that contained multiple views.[15] This

roll was convenient for the photographer as all he had to do was unroll the

background until the desired scene appeared.

Marion and Floyd Rinhart's book, *The American Tintype*, discusses the

history, production, and use of the tintype in America.[16] A short discussion of

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[13] Stanley B. Burns, *Forgotten Marriage: The Painted Tintype & The Decorative Frame 1860-1890* (New York: The Burns Collections, Ltd. 1995).
[14] Burns, *Forgotten Marriage: The Painted Tintype & The Decorative Frame 1860-1890*, 18
[15] William C. Darrah, *Cartes de Visite; In Nineteenth Century Photography* (Gettysburg: W.C. Darrah Publisher, 1981), 31.
[16] Marion and Floyd Rinhart, *The American Tintype* (Columbus : Ohio State University Press, 1999).

painted backgrounds can be found in the chapter on the logistics of producing

tintypes, which focuses on studio set up. This chapter includes other aspects of

studio set up including specific accessories, cameras used by tintype photographers,

and the skylight studio. Rinhart and Rinhart briefly mention different styles of

backgrounds that were available during this time period and note that a

photographer would have had multiple backgrounds to choose from so that

backgrounds could be tailored to specific clientele; however, there is no mention

about how they were advertised, constructed, or sold within this time period. While

Rinhart and Rinhart include reproductions of advertisements for other objects used

in portraits, such as accessories, props, and darkroom equipment, they do not

include any advertisements for the painted background.

Camera Clues: A Handbook for Photographic Investigation, authored by Joe

Nickell is a source on how to understand historic photographs.[17] Nickell discusses

different techniques, materials, and equipment frequently used by photographers to

help demonstrate how photographs were produced in the past. Nickell includes a

brief history of photography, as well as a brief section about identifying old

photographs. A few pages are devoted to backgrounds, describing how they were

made and how companies such as L.W. Seavey sold painted backgrounds. Nickell

also discusses different scenes that were available and used by portrait

photographers.

The Victorians: Photographic Portraits by Audrey Linkman examines the

popularity of portrait photography in the Victorian era throughout the United

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[17] Joe Nickell, *Camera Clues: A Handbook for Photographic Investigation* (Lexington : University Press of Kentucky, 1994).

Kingdom.[18] Linkman discusses the carte-de-visite and its use within albums, the

family home, and as a medium to record important events such as marriage or

death. In the chapter "Photography Art Theory," Linkman discusses the use of

painted backgrounds and other accessories in portraits. The author alludes to how

the photographer would have used the background in relation to the sitter, the

subject matters available to a portrait photographer at the time, and its practical

functions within the portrait.[19] Linkman does not discuss how the background was

advertised, or sold to a portrait photographer.

      In many of these publications there is mention of the playful poses of the

sitter and how these scenes were produced in concert with backgrounds, but further

in-depth discussion about studio set-up is omitted. Painted backgrounds appeared

in most portraits reproduced in the selected publications mentioned above, yet they

were discussed rarely, if at all. Though painted backgrounds were used in portraits

for aesthetic and practical reasons, it is important to understand how they were

sold, used, and advertised to portrait studios during this time period. This

information is significant to understand the appearance of backgrounds in

nineteenth century portraits and how the painted background was used as an

necessary photographic apparatus.

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[18] Audrey Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits* (London: Tauris Parke Books, 1993).
[19] Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits*, 52.

History of the Painted Background

Similar to the head-rest the painted background was a necessary tool for portrait photographers. In portrait photography the painted background was used to enhance the overall appearance of the final photograph by creating dimension and complementing the sitters' attire and pose. Various subject matters, styles, and sizes of backgrounds were available, which influenced their use in relation to the sitter and other studio accessories.

Painted backgrounds were used in theatre productions before the invention of photography; professional theatres used large backgrounds as part of stage designs and itinerant actors also utilized backgrounds in their performances.[20] Although backgrounds used for stage set-up tended to be larger than ones needed for portrait photography, they shared similarities in how they were hung and in the conscious effort to have matching accessories and costumes.[21] In addition, artists who painted backgrounds for theatre usually painted backgrounds for photographic portraiture.[22]

Within the field of photography, backgrounds were first introduced during the daguerreotype era. The backgrounds shown in early daguerreotypes were plain pieces of fabric, usually wool. Antoine Claudet is credited with the introduction of the scenic background to photography in Europe in 1842; Henry Ulke is credited with introducing it to the United States of America around the same time.[23] As

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[20] Erik Viker, "Background Basics" *Stage Directions* 21 (2008): 42.
[21] Viker, "Background Basics," 42.
[22] La Fayette W. Seavey, *Photographic Mosaics* 6 (1873): 180.
[23] Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits*, 52.

photography became more accessible with the introduction and popularity of the tintype and carte-de-visite, and later the cabinet card, the number of photography studios in America greatly increased. Thus, the demand for and use of painted backgrounds increased significantly, and as a result the painted background can be seen in copious portraits produced in the latter half of the nineteenth century.
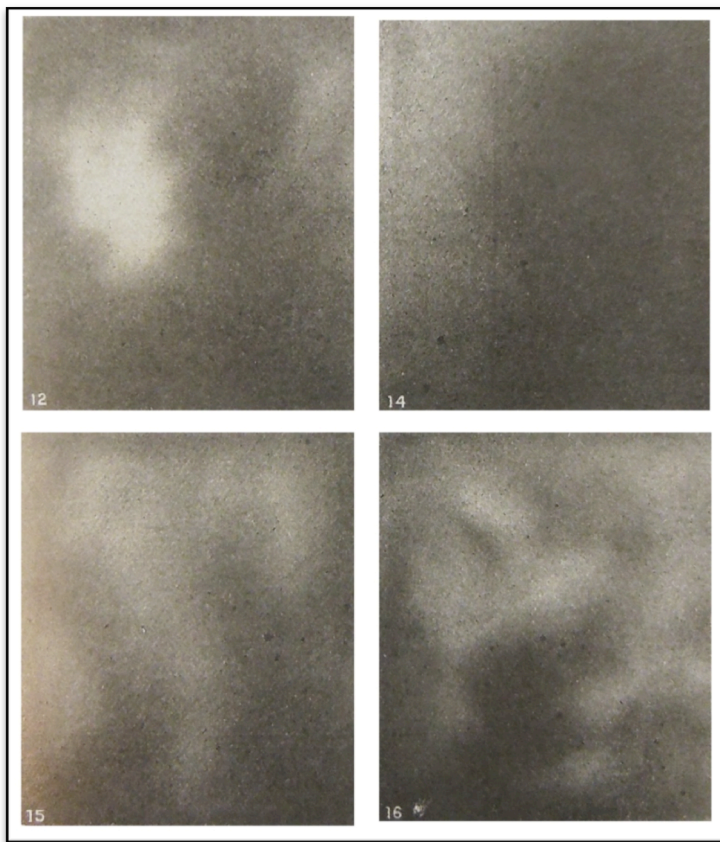
Figure 2: Examples of four graduated backgrounds. George Murphy, *Dealers Catalogue* (New York: George Murphy Inc., 1913), 29.

By the end of the nineteenth century there were a number of styles of backgrounds available to the common portrait photographer; the majority of backgrounds can be classified into two styles based on their subject matter. These styles are the plain background and the fancy or scenic background. Plain backgrounds were painted evenly in a single colour.[24] Graduated backgrounds (figure 2) were also considered plain backgrounds and featured a monochromatic gradient appearing more saturated or darker in specific areas and less so in other areas. The Rembrandt Background was a popular

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[24] Edward L. Wilson, *Wilson's Photographics* (Philadelphia: Wilson, 1883), 172.

style of a graduated background that was sold by several companies during this time period.[25]

The second style of background was the scenic background. This style of background usually depicted a realistic and detailed scenic view (figure 3). These scenes included, but were not limited to, nature views, famous art scenes and historical events, and interior views. Steven Kasher, believes that the three most popular styles of scenic backgrounds in the late nineteenth century were backgrounds depicting generic pastoral scenes, famous tourist sites, and interior views of generic stately homes (figure 4).[26]
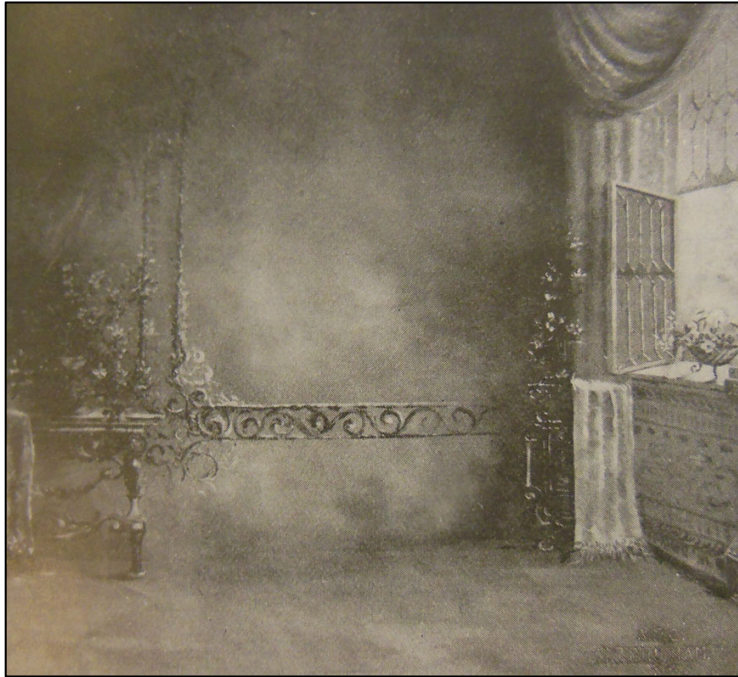
Figure 3: Example of a Fancy or Scenic Background. Paul N. Hasluck, *The Book of Photography: Practical Theoretic and Applied* (New York: Cassell and Company, Limited 1907), 473.

Though the image painted on the background varied significantly, the construction of most backgrounds was similar. The support was typically fabric, usually canvas or muslin. These heavier fabrics made backgrounds flexible while

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[25] Rembrandt backgrounds usually mocked the dark effect of Rembrandt paintings. These backgrounds were designed for bust photographs as they were only five feet by five feet. In 1871, Rembrandt backgrounds designed produced by Seavy and his company cost five dollars. L.W. Seavy, *Photographic Mosaics* (1871): 151.

[26] Kasher, "Stereotypical Tintypes and Tintype Backgrounds," 128.

also providing durability. Furthermore, backgrounds were usually painted with oil or distemper paint.[27] Distemper was significantly cheaper, but it was also more susceptible to scratches, dirt, and dents. In addition, earlier backgrounds made with distemper could not be rolled.[28] Thus, oil painted backgrounds were generally preferred because of their durability and flexibility.

Figure 4: Left: A soldier posed in front of a landscape background. Unidentified Photographer, ca. 1862, tintype, 1969:0208:0027. Centre: A group situated before a background portraying a stately home. Unidentified Photographer, ca. 1895, tintype, 2003:1167:0012. Right: Two men situated in front of a background depicting a famous tourist destination. Unidentified Photographer, ca. 1880, tintype, 1978:0829:0002. All images courtesy of George Eastman House.

Several nineteenth century sources provided instructions for photographers to create their own backgrounds.[29] However, these instructions were usually prefaced with caution, generally expressing that painting a background was better left to experts. Nonetheless, a few photographers provided detailed step-by-step

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[27] Distemper paint consists of a mixture of fine chalk, glue, water, and pigment.

[28] Unknown, "Backgrounds," *Photographic Times* 25 (1894): 38.

[29] Sources include: Hanmer Croughton, "Backgrounds for Photographers," *The Philadelphia Photographer* 25 (1888): 107-109; Unknown, "Home-made Backgrounds," *The Photo-American* 7 (1895): 71-72. Unknown, "Artistic Backgrounds in Portraiture," *The Photo-American* 8 (1895): 177-178. J. Traill Taylor, How to Make a Pictorial Background," *The Photographic Times and American Photographer* 7 (1882): 15-16.

instructions. The initial layout for the desired image was sketched with chalk before the paint was used, to map out basic forms, sizes, and shapes. Paint was then applied usually consisting of a mixture of glue with oil or distemper paint. Scenic and plain backgrounds were typically painted in a monochromatic colour scheme and painter tended to favour lamp black or rouge pigments.[30] Finally, to make the background more durable and to extend the life expectancy, a layer of varnish or rosin could be applied to the fabric.

In response to specific detailing and shading there are conflicting nineteenth

Figure 5: Left: Example of a background painted slightly out of focus. S. Anderson, ca. 1870, albumen print, carte-de-visite, 1982:0142:0006. Right: A background painted in focus with definite lines. Robert Armstrong, ca. 1870, albumen print, carte-de-visite, 1982:0185:0002. Both images courtesy of George Eastman House.

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[30] Osterman, "Focus on the Background," 6.

century opinions of whether the background should be painted as sharp as possible so that the background will remain in focus in the final photograph, or whether a background should be painted with soft lines to give the portrait more of a natural appearance (figure 5). These decisions were left to the photographer and his or her personal tastes. G.M. Carlisle, in an article the *Photographic Times and the American Photographer* about the how photographer should use backgrounds stated, "experience has shown that a ground properly painted should have no hard or decided lines, but should be merely suggestive with a ponumbra [sic] to all lines and figures"[31] and the more sophisticated scenes were better painted out of focus. Conversely, Edward Wilson argued that a background should be painted as harshly as possible, and that a sharp background will provide a harmonizing look with the sitter.[32]

Though the most popular type of background was paint applied to a single flat piece of fabric, there were variations of formats for backgrounds in the nineteenth century, including the conical background, revolving background, and picturesque foregrounds. The conical background was fashioned into a three-dimensional cone shape.[33] Conical backgrounds (figure 6) worked best for headshots because they framed the face with realistic depth and gradations. This type of background allowed the illuminated side of the face to be juxtaposed against the dark side of the background and the shaded side of the face to be juxtaposed

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[31] G.M. Carlisle, "The Background, its Use and Abuse, "*Photographic Times and the American Photographer* 15 (1885): 410.

[32] Edward Wilson, *Wilson's Photographics; a series of lessons, accompanied by notes, on all the processes which are needful in the art of photography* (Philadelphia: E. L. Wilson, 1881), 172.

[33] W. Kurtz, "Van Riper's Patent Conical Photographic Background," *The Photographic Times* 26 (1872): 71.
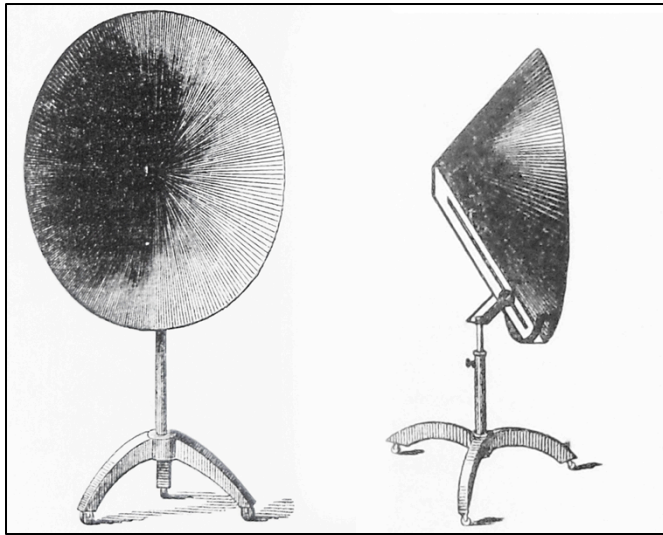
Figure 6: Front and side view of a conical background. W. Kurtz, *The Photographic Times* 26 (1872): 71.
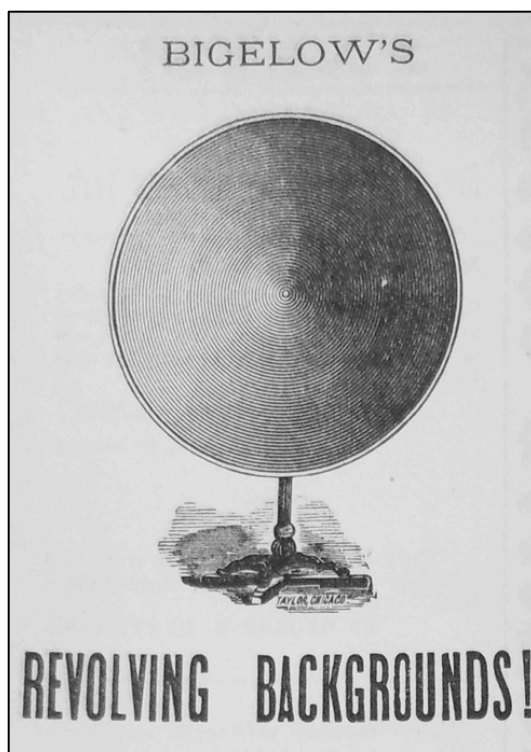
Figure 7: Front view of a revolving background. Bigelow, *Philadelphia Photographer* 9 (1872): 64.

against the illuminated side of the background. Properly constructed conical backgrounds could be raised or lowered depending on the sitter.[34] Variations on this type of background were also produced, but all designs created depth using a three-dimensional concave form.

Photographers sometimes chose revolving backgrounds (figure 7) because they could be adjusted based on the direction of light. The revolving background was a circular shape and featured a gradation from light to dark.[35] Thus, a photographer could turn the background until the darkest part of the background appeared behind the lightest side of the sitter and the darkest part of the sitter's face against the lightest part

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[34] Kurtz, Van Riper's Patent Conical Photographic Background," 72.

[35] Unknown, "Bigelow's Graduated Circular Background," *The Photographic Times* 13 (1872): 53.

of the background in order to direct emphasis towards the face of the sitter.[36]

Picturesque foregrounds were a trendy choice for commercial photographers because they were well liked amongst the public. As opposed to being placed behind the sitter, foregrounds were placed in front of the sitter (figure 8). Sitters would often place their face above of the foreground while holding onto the foreground at the sides, or poke their heads through cutouts in the foreground.[37] Foregrounds usually depicted a comedic scene to make it look as if the sitter is caught doing something outrageous such as riding a crocodile or being sketched by a dog.[38]

Though backgrounds provided an aesthetic element they also had an important practical role. The primary function of most backgrounds was to remain stationary during exposure times, which could sometimes be close to eight seconds.[39] This was especially significant for photographers who set up studios at outside fairs and celebrations. If the sitter was standing as still as possible it was important to have a background that remained still as well. Furthermore, backgrounds
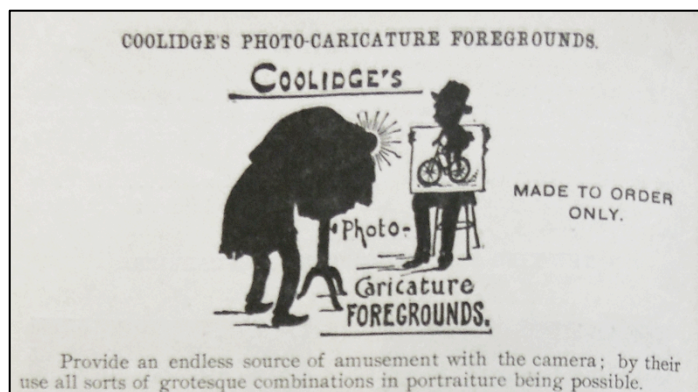
Figure 8: Sketch of a sitter holding onto a picturesque foreground in front of the photographer. The Anthony & Scovill Co., *Photographic Goods* (1903): 124.

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[36] Unknown, "Bigelow's Graduated Circular Background," 53.

[37] W.P. Buchanan, *Buchanan's Complete Illustrated Catalogue* (Philadelphia: W.P. Buchanan, 1893), 124.

[38] Buchanan, *Buchanan's Complete Illustrated Catalogue*, 124.

[39] There were backgrounds that were intended to moving during exposure time. Moving the background created a even background. A.K. Trask, *Trask's Practical Ferrotyper* (Philadelphia: Benerman & Wilson, 1872), 50.
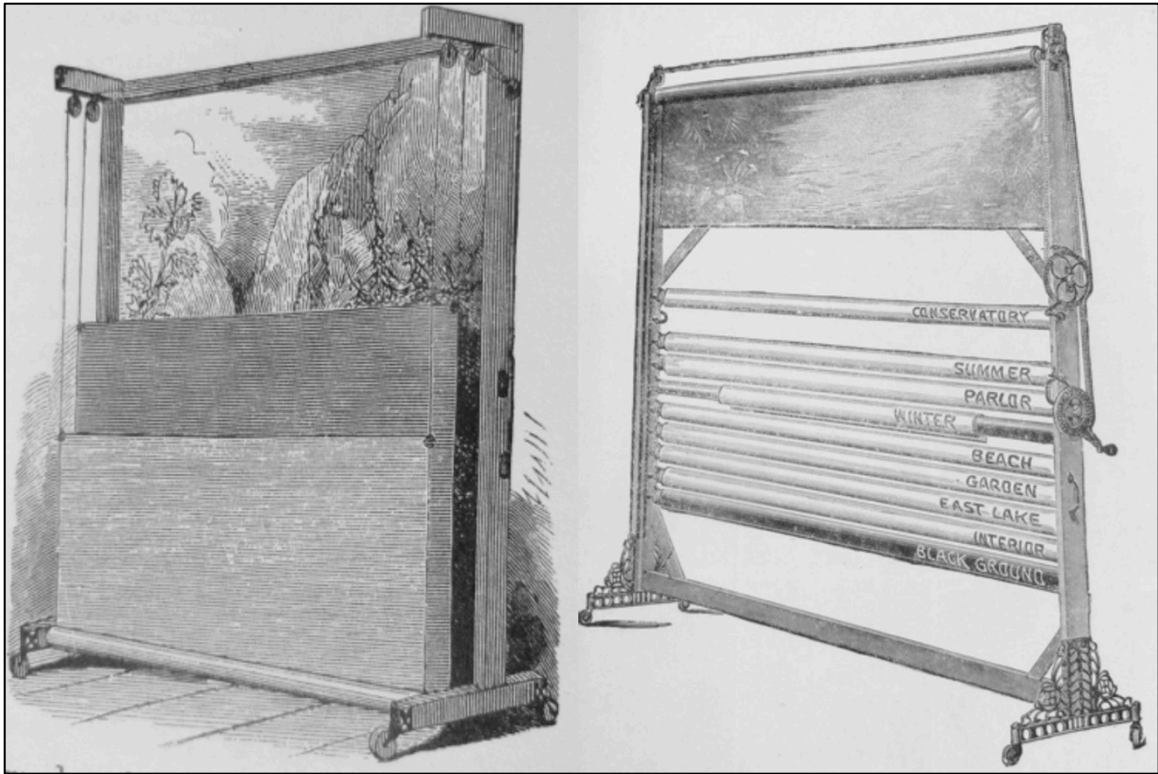
Figure 9: Left: Example of a background holder with bottom rollers. *Wilson's Photographics* (New York: E.L. Wilson, 1881), 176. Right: A background holder with rollers along the frame. W.P. Buchanan, *Buchanan's Complete Illustrated Catalogue* (Philadelphia: W.P. Buchanan, 1893): 127.

shielded unwanted objects from the camera's view. Undesirable and distracting

studio objects could be hidden from the camera, thus producing a more professional

looking photograph.[40] Finally, a background was intended to create dimension

within the photograph by creating the illusions of a space behind the sitter.[41] This

was especially significant for backgrounds depicting a scenic view.

Storing more than one background was difficult, especially in small portrait

studios. At first, studio photographers could stretch a background on the front and

back of a wooden stretcher. Then to change the background the photographer

would have to swing the frame around, which would require the photographer to

[40] Wilson, *Wilson's Photographics*, 170
[41] Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits*, 51.

move all of his accessories and anything else that was in the way.[42] To alleviate this problem, backgrounds were often stored on background holders or background carriers (figure 9). This apparatus was designed for the photographer who owned multiple backgrounds, and the background holder allowed for backgrounds to be rolled up and hidden away when not in use. It also helped protect the backgrounds from potential scratches, dirt, or dents.

Though there were variations on holder designs, most often the holder featured a wooden frame with rollers along the bottom or top. Backgrounds were wrapped around rollers, which were attached to the frame. Cords and pulleys on the sides of each background were used to raise or lower the background. To increase its functionality, wheels attached to the bottom of the background holder allowed the photographer to shift or transport the backgrounds when necessary.

The type of portrait the sitter desired affected the choice of background. Backgrounds were available in standards sizes from most photographic supply companies and the most common size was eight feet by ten feet;[43] nevertheless, companies who specialized in painted backgrounds, such as L.W. Seavey could construct backgrounds in custom sizes and subject matters. Larger and more versatile backgrounds tended to be more practical to a frugal photographer as large groups could be photographed together, and the photographer had the option of taking either full body photographs or partial body photographs. Moreover, with a larger background, photographers were able to focus on one particular section over

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[42] The Homeliest Man, "A Good Background Frame," *Philadelphia Photographer* 17 (1880): n.p.
[43] Other sizes, listed in feet include: 5 x 8, 6 x 8, 7x7, 7x8, 8x8, 8x9, 9 x 11, 10 x 12, 11 x 14.

another. However, if the photographer only created bust or half body portraits, he would only require a smaller background stretched on a wooden frame.

According to multiple nineteenth century photographers such as L.W. Seavey, Thomas Aquinas, and G.M. Carlisle, there was a proper way of utilizing a background, comparable to any piece of photographic equipment. Firstly, to create contrast in the photograph, the majority of photographers agreed that the darker part of the sitter's body was supposed to be situated in front of the lighter part of the background and the lighter part of the body in front of the darker part of the background (figure 10). This technique allowed for the sitter's face to stand out more dramatically from the background, which was important in a portrait.[44] For example, in bust work the gradation of the background was to be darkest at the bottom and gradually got lighter towards the

Figure 10: Example showing the darkest section of the background against the lightest part of the face. John W. Bainbridge, ca. 1865, albumen print, carte-de-visite, 1979:0753:0002. Courtesy of George Eastman House.

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[44] Paul N. Hasluck. *The Book of Photography: Practical Theoretical and Applied* (New York: Cassell and Company, Limited, 1905): 344.

22

face.[45] Secondly, the sitter was meant to be at least ten inches in front of the background so that the sitter would be in focus while the background would be slightly out of focus. In an ideal situation, the sitter was to be placed as far away from the background as possible because in the final photograph the background would not be in sharp focus, producing an overall natural look and depth to the photograph.[46] This technique also subdued the appearance of any stains, scratches, wrinkles, and other damages to the background.[47] Lastly, it was important to create the illusion that the sitter was situated within the particular scenery. This involved the photographer being conscious of the horizon line in the scenery in relation to the sitter,[48] synchronizing the sitter's shadows and the shadows painted on the background, hiding the edges of the background from the camera's view, and obscuring the line separating the background and the floor.[49] Hiding this separation created a more believable setting especially if the photographer was utilizing a scenic background. If the photographer used a holder with bottom rollers, a false baseboard would be placed in front to hide the rollers.[50] Interior backgrounds were easier to use than exterior backgrounds because baseboards and simple accessories looked better in interior views, while it was more difficult to create a convincing foreground for a landscape utilizing fake grass, rocks, and other props.[51]

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[45] L. W. Seavey, "Mr. L.W. Seavey of New York: Presentation on the Second Day," *The Philadelphia Photographer* 16 (1879): 312.

[46] Thomas Aquinas. *Photographic Mosaics* 36 (1900): 37.

[47] Osterman, "Focus on the Background," 6.

[48] W.M. Mora, "Background Matters," *The Photographic Times and the American Photographer* 11 (1881): 188.

[49] Seavey, "Mr. L.W. Seavey of New York: Presentation on the Second Day," 312.

[50] Unknown, "Hull Device for a Background Frame," in *The Philadelphia Photographer* 5 (1868): 243.

[51] G.M. Carlisle, "The Background, it's Use and Abuse, "*Photographic Times and the American Photographer* 15 (1885): 410.

According to most photographers, including Thomas Aquinas in

Photographic Mosaics and George Croughton in *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin*,

backgrounds were supposed to complement and blend in with the sitter while

simultaneously allowing the sitter to be the main focus. [52] Thus, a painted

background was supposed to flatter a sitter without competing to become the main

focus. To do this properly, a photographer was supposed to own multiple painted

backgrounds so the photographer could select the best background to match any

sitter's attire and attitude (figure 11). In addition to owning a multitude of

backgrounds, the photographer was also supposed to own accessories to match

each background he or she owned.[53] For example, a nice chair or table would suit a

background depicting a fancy interior, while a bench or a couple of papier maché

rocks would suit a rustic landscape. The background was supposed to recede

naturally and support the figure and proper accessories aided this effect.[54] To some

nineteenth century photographers, scenic backgrounds were too loud and tended to

compete with the face or body of the sitter. [55] Thus, a plain clean background was

suggested for the photographer who could not afford multiple backgrounds. A plain

background was believed to complement any person that walked into a studio, rich

or poor, and thus this was considered to be the perfect background by many

photographers. G. Hanmer Croughton stated, "a Photographer is always safe with a

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[52] Thomas Aquinas, *Photographic Mosaics*, 37
[53] Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits*, 51.
[54] Otto Walter Beck, *Art Principles in Portrait Photography: Composition, Treatment of Backgrounds, and the Process Involved in Manipulating the Plate* (New York: The Baker & Taylor Company, 1907), 162.
[55] Beck, *Art Principles in Portrait Photography: Composition, Treatment of Backgrounds, and the Process Involved in Manipulating the Plate*, 162.
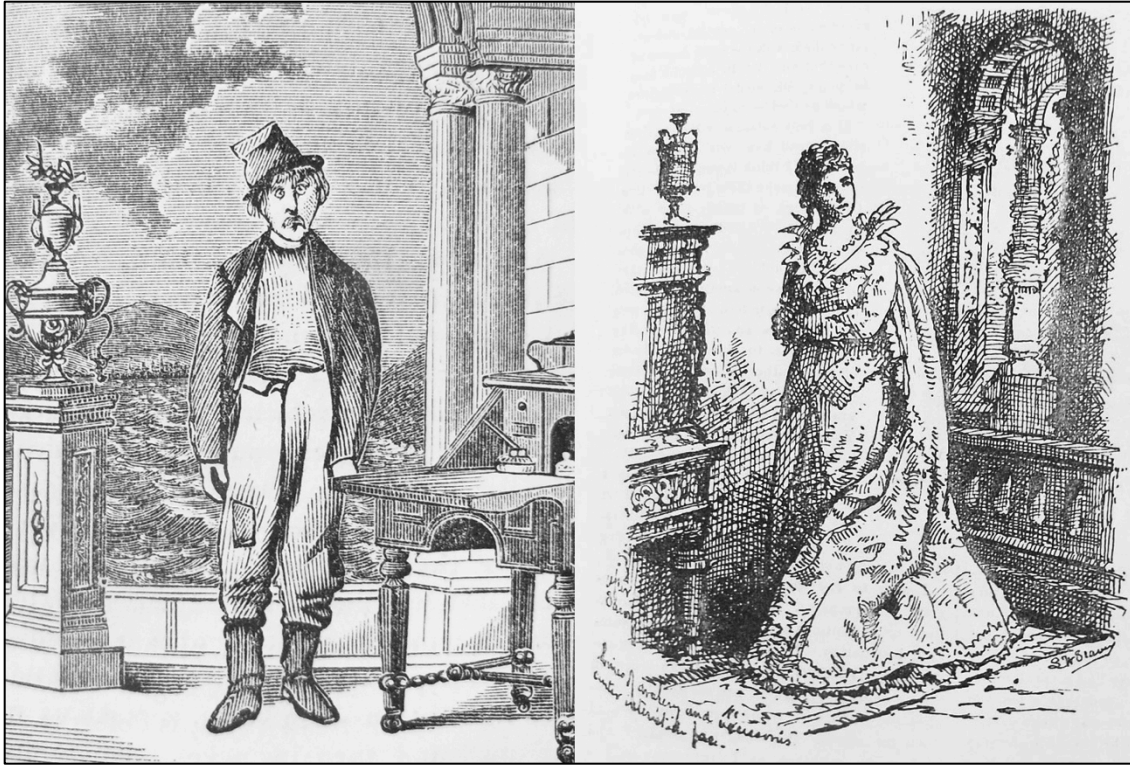
Figure 11: Left: According to A.R. Crihfield this is an example of a sitter not blending in or matching with the background and accessories. A.R. Crihfield, *Philadelphia Photographer* 72 (1869): 55. Right: Example of a background and accessories suited for the client. L.W. Seavey, *Philadelphia Photographer* 219 (1882): 331.

plain background,"[56] while Ellerslie Wallace agreed that for practical reasons,

"nothing is so useful as the plain background." [57] Furthermore, plain backgrounds

could be tilted and swung to create natural gradients.

One of the most serious concerns for passionate photographers during this

time period was to have the background remain the same in every photograph while

the sitters' outfits and outward appearance could vary dramatically.[58] Many

nineteenth century photographers wrote in response to this concern and suggested

ways to avoid this amateur mistake. The aid of proper posing, drapery, and lighting

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[56] A. R. Orinfield. "Relation of Backgrounds to Subjects," *The Philadelphia Photographer* 7 (1870): 55.
[57] Ellerslie Wallace, "Incongruities Between Background and Subjects in Portraiture," *American Journal of Photography* 7 (1895): 301.
[58] W. Kurtz, "On Backgrounds and Reflectors," *Photographic Mosaics* 5 (1870): 15.

were aspects that could be easily altered and shifted, which gave character to the sitter and individuality to the photograph.[59] Photographers at this time aspired to this concept of individuality because in reality no photographer could afford to own accessories to match every patron exactly. Therefore, proper manipulations using these three variables were considered important elements for every photographer to use. Thus, a successful photographer could make each photograph different whilst using the same background and accessories over again.

Contemporary scholars tend to view scenic painted backgrounds in a romanticized way, suggesting that the background crossed the boundary between what was real and what was pretend. Audrey Linkman, in *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits*, claims that with the addition of a painted background the photography studio itself became a place of make-believe where everything was fake, accessories and all.[60] Kasher claims that backgrounds situated the sitter in a time and place that was fictional; most sitters posing for inexpensive tintypes and cartes-de-visite would have never been able to experience such finery. According to Kasher, the painted background provided an escape from the slums of the city where a majority of patrons probably lived, and transported the sitter to a large spacious home, or a lush landscape with clean air, and exotic plants.[61] Painted backgrounds were considered a way to undermine one's social status at the time;

[59] Edward M. Estabrooke, *The Ferrotype and How to Make It* (Cincinnati: Gatchel & Hyatt, 1872), 175.
[60] Linkman, *The Victorians: Photographic Portraits*, 67.
[61] Kasher, "Stereotypical Tintypes and Tintype Backgrounds," 129.

once in front of the background the sitter could be whomever he or she wanted to be.[62]

The background provided a practical function for photographic processes with long exposures and an aesthetic and escapist element for sitters who wanted to be situated in front of a scenic view. Accessories, lighting, and posing helped accent the painted background and what it was meant to convey. These aspects also allowed for versatility for the photographer who could not afford an abundance of backgrounds. As a dimensional addition to portraiture, the painted background was a way for the sitter to become someone who they were not, shown in a setting that was make-believe. The painted background in all its varying shapes and sizes, was and continues to be a useful tool for every studio and professional photographer.

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[62] Kasher, "Stereotypical Tintypes and Tintype Backgrounds," 129.

Methodology

The remainder of this analytical paper is an examination of advertisements for painted backgrounds found within nineteenth century photographic journals published in the United States of America between 1856 and 1903. These journals are part of The Richard and Ronay Menschel Library, located at George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and Film in Rochester, New York. The advertisements have been compiled into an index titled *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903*[63] recording the bibliographical information of every advertisement located. A sampling of this index can be found in Appendix One and due to the length of the complete index, could not be published in this document. The complete *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903* can be found at the The Richard and Ronay Menschel Library at Eastman House.

The journals held at Eastman House provide a sufficient sampling for my research and include titles such as *Photographic Mosaics*, *The American Journal of Photography*, various volumes of *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin,* and the *Philadelphia Photographer*. However, a few publications held at Eastman House were bound at a later date and advertisements were removed at that time. This affected the selection of journals I examined, and as a result, I was not able to review advertisements in *Humphrey's Journal of Photography and the Allied Arts and Sciences,* and various volumes of *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin*.

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[63] Keller, *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903*.

When examining available advertisements, basic bibliographical information was recorded. This information included the title of the journal, volume number, date, and the exact page number of the advertisement. The name of the company that was selling painted backgrounds was recorded, as well as the type of company (Appendix Three). The types of companies advertising during this time period included large general photographic suppliers, small companies that specialized in painted backgrounds and accessories, and companies that were agents for other businesses or independent manufacturers. It was important to note the type of company that was advertising painted backgrounds because it often affected how much information was provided as well as the design of the advertisement. In company that was advertising painted backgrounds because it often affected how much information was provided as well as the design of the advertisement. In

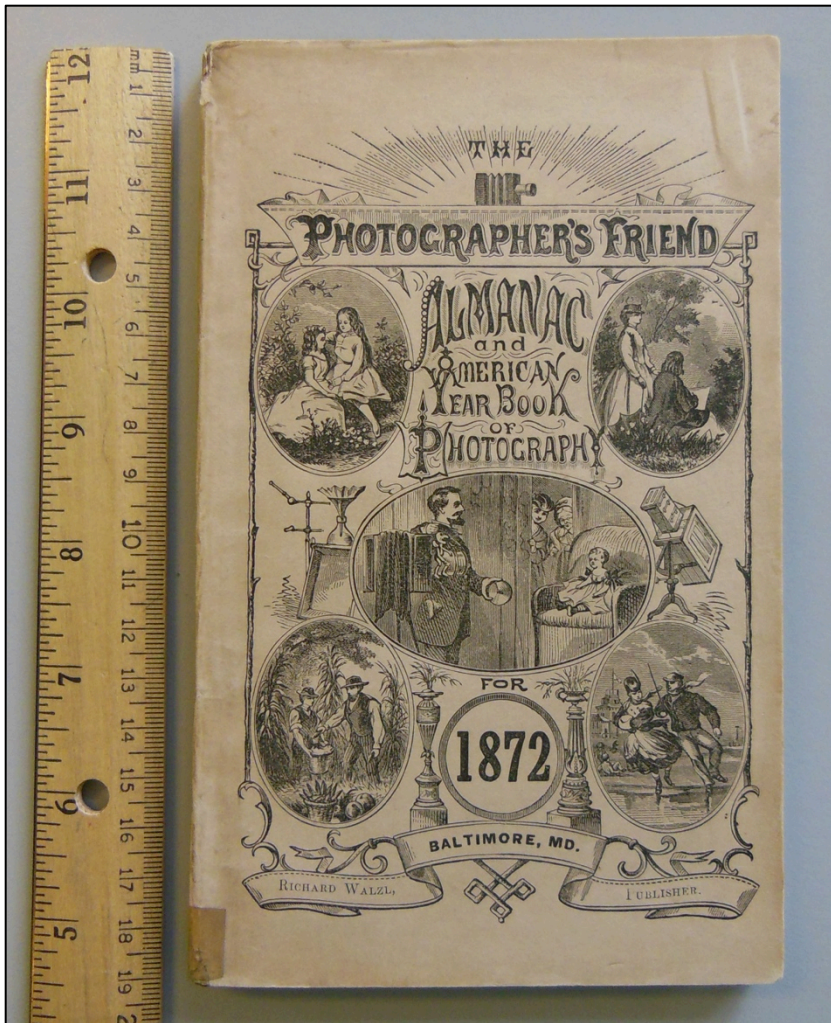**Figure 12:** Richard Walzl, *The Photographer's Friend: Almanac and American Year Book of Photography* **2 (1872): n.p.**

addition, the size of the advertisement was also noted; size was referred to as full page, half page, quarter page, and so forth.
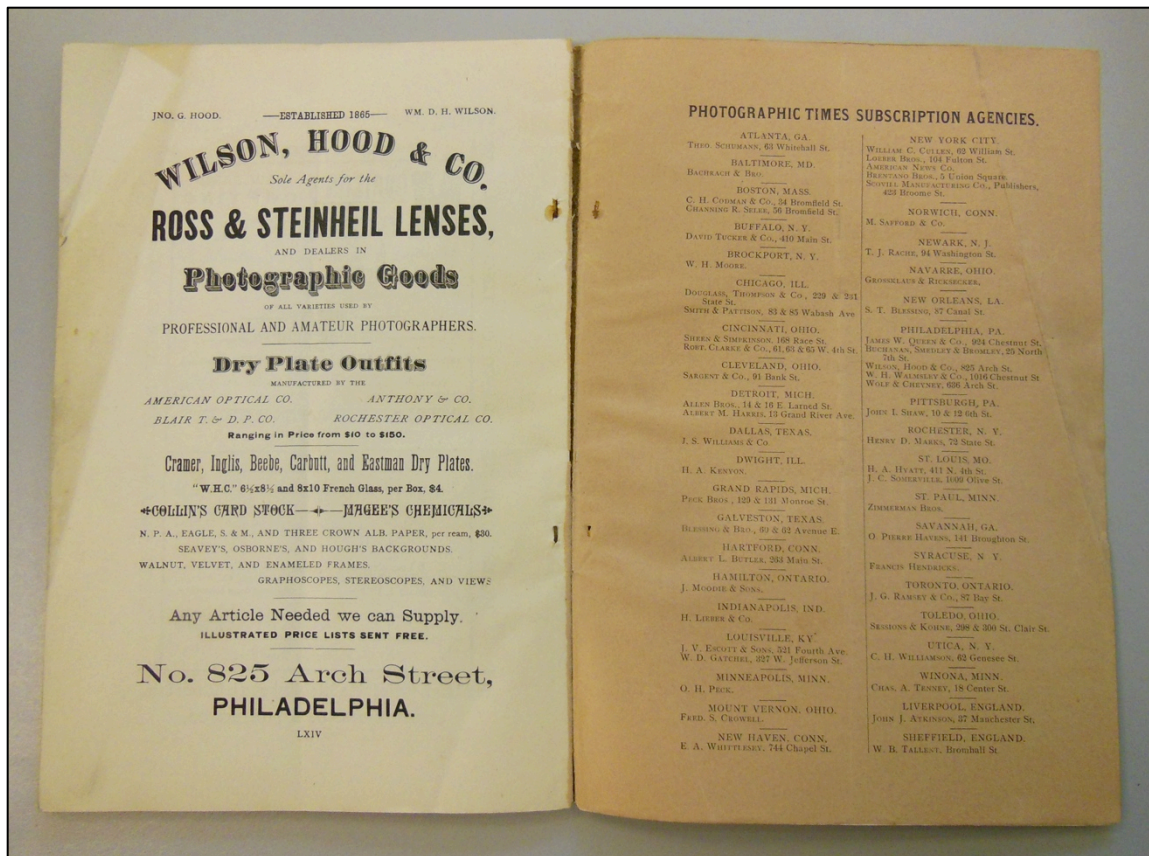
Figure 13: Full page spread of a photography journal. *The Photographic Times* 9 (1884): n.p.

Special attention was concentrated on the language that was used in these advertisements. This included the terms used to refer to a painted background (Appendix Two), and if the advertisements identified specific styles, themes, or subject matters that were available, usually in the form of style reference numbers, specific titles of backgrounds, and specific brands of backgrounds. Reference to materials or techniques used to produce the background was also noted (a full list of these can be found in the Appendix Four). Furthermore, if the advertisement

mentioned how the photographer could order or inquire about specific styles, this information was recorded in the index (Appendix Five). It usually stated the costs, shipping times, or how to acquire an illustrated catalogue.

A digital image was made of each advertisement to record additional information not transcribed directly to the index. This included design elements and overall ornamentation of the advertisement. Since this would be too difficult to describe in a consistent way, the digital image files capture the overall design elements of the advertisements.

This research and complete index assists in understanding how the advertising of painted backgrounds evolved during the latter half of the nineteenth century, including the companies that sold painted backgrounds, the language that was used to describe painted backgrounds, and the trends in subject matters and materials.

Analysis of Findings

Upon completion of this index, nine periodicals had been reviewed and a total of 1,096 advertisements were found and indexed. The dates of the periodicals ranged from 1864 to 1903. Information that was extracted from these advertisements, as outlined in the methodological approaches, can be found in Appendices One through Four. General trends identifying background costs, sizes, and methods of shipping during this time period can be understood from looking at these advertisements. These advertisements also revealed how many companies
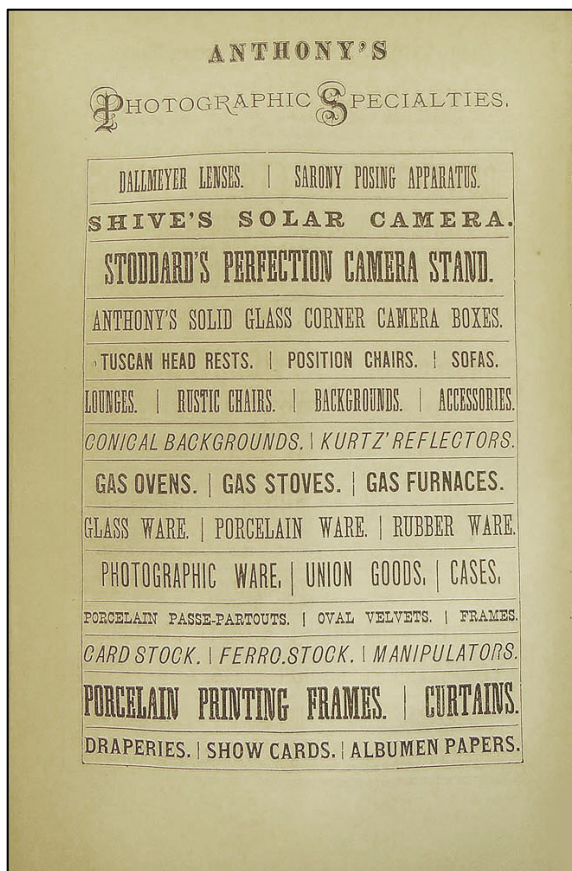
Figure 14: Anthony's Photographic Supplies, *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* 1 (1870): 172.

were selling backgrounds at this time, what type of company they were, and how they referred to a painted background.

A total of ninety-four variations of the word "background" were found in the advertisements, although all advertisements used the term "background" (Appendix Two). In most examples the word "background" was spelled out in one word, but occasionally it was separated into two words. Adjectives or proper nouns were sometimes added before or after the word "background" to reference a specific brand and style or to make the background sound more appealing; examples of

these include "New Backgrounds," "Seavey's Backgrounds," and "Scenic Backgrounds." However, the majority of the advertisements simply used the word "background," without modification.

There were a total of sixty-two companies advertising painted backgrounds during this time period (refer to Appendix Three), with thirty-nine general photographic suppliers, and twenty-three companies specializing in painted backgrounds.[64] There was a significant difference in how companies that specialized in painted backgrounds and general photographic suppliers advertised painted backgrounds. For companies that sold all kinds of photographic goods, the word background was usually small in size and located towards the middle to bottom area of the advertisement (figure 14). Conversely, for companies that specialized in painted backgrounds, the word background was most commonly the first word in the advertisement and relatively large, all in capitals, and often bolded (figure 15). Furthermore, in advertisements for specialized companies information such as cost, size, and materials were mentioned in the advertisements, while on average this

Figure 15: J.W. Bryant Co., *The Photo-American: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine Devoted to Photography* **4 (1895): 130.**

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[64] Brief histories of these companies can be found in Appendix Six.

information was not included in advertisements for general photographic suppliers. Some general companies listed how many styles they had, or that they were agents for specific brands, but this occurred infrequently. Very few large photographic dealers used their advertising space to advertise for painted backgrounds exclusively. There were a few exceptions, but these were short-lived promotions that only occurred for a few months before the company shifted their focus to another photographic apparatus. In advertisements for large photographic suppliers painted backgrounds were usually listed amongst a multitude of other photographic supplies (figure 14).

The size of the advertisement often indicated the type of company advertising backgrounds. General photographic suppliers such as Wilson, Hood and Co., and E. & H.T. Anthony usually purchased a full page of advertising space to list an array of the products they sold. This was in contrast to specialized companies including N.C. Thayer & Co., W. F. Ashe (figure 16), and Edwin Davis (figure 17) that published smaller advertisements ranging from three

Figure 16: W.F. Ashe, *Photographic Times* 120 (1880): 285.

quarters of a page or smaller. [65] There were a few exceptions to this as specialized companies such as J.W. Bryant and more often L.W. Seavey occasionally purchased full page space to advertise the latest styles of their painted backgrounds.
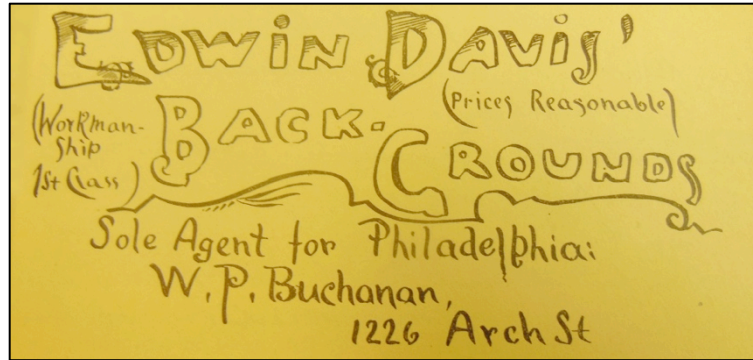
Figure 17: Edwin Davis, *The American Journal of Photography* 7 (1895): v.
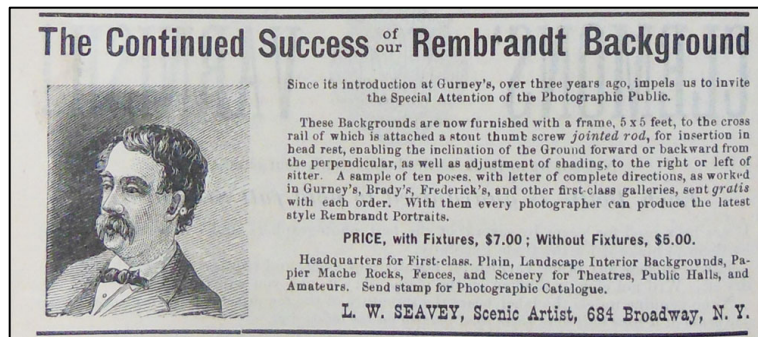
Figure 18: L.W. Seavey, *Philadelphia Photographer* 8 (1871): n.p.

In 1871 the L.W. Seavey Company produced an engraving of a sitter in front of a graduated background (figure 18). Additionally, in the 1872 and 1873 volumes of *Photographic Mosaics,* Seavey included an engraving of his busy studio with examples of backgrounds in progress and background painters (figure 19). This was rare because as prior to 1900 advertisements for painted backgrounds rarely included illustrations depicting the imagery or styles of the background. Many advertisements described the different styles, but never provided any illustrations. Backgrounds were not easily reproduced through engraving, and photomechanical reproduction was inefficient and expensive in this period. If an advertisement was promoting backdrops and accessories—which was common for companies that specialized in painted

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[65] Advertisement sizes for specialized companies also include twelfth, tenth, eighth, sixth, fifth, and quarter of a page.

backgrounds—illustrations of the accessories would be reproduced through

engravings, and in two cases with tipped-in albumen photographs, while the

backgrounds were not (figure 16). The most common accessories that were

illustrated in advertisements included vases, pedestals, and posing chairs. Entering

the twentieth century illustrations of backgrounds did become more common in

Figure 19: L.W. Seavey, *The Photographer's Friend* 2 (1872): n.p.

advertisements. Companies such as W.P Buchannan, and Hub Scenic Co. published

engravings depicting painted backgrounds in 1900.

There were ninety-one different ways that companies specified how a
photographer should inquire about the advertised painted backgrounds and how
the companies shipped their backgrounds (see Appendix Five). Backgrounds could
be purchased directly from manufacturers or from agents for individual artists or
smaller companies. If photographers were in the same city as large photographic
dealers they were able to visit the stores to purchase their backgrounds.
Photographic conventions were another way photographers could order painted
backgrounds in person, and it is evident from L.W. Seavey's monthly bulletins in
Photographic Times that background painters regularly attended these conventions
to display new painted backgrounds and accessories (figure 20). Photographers
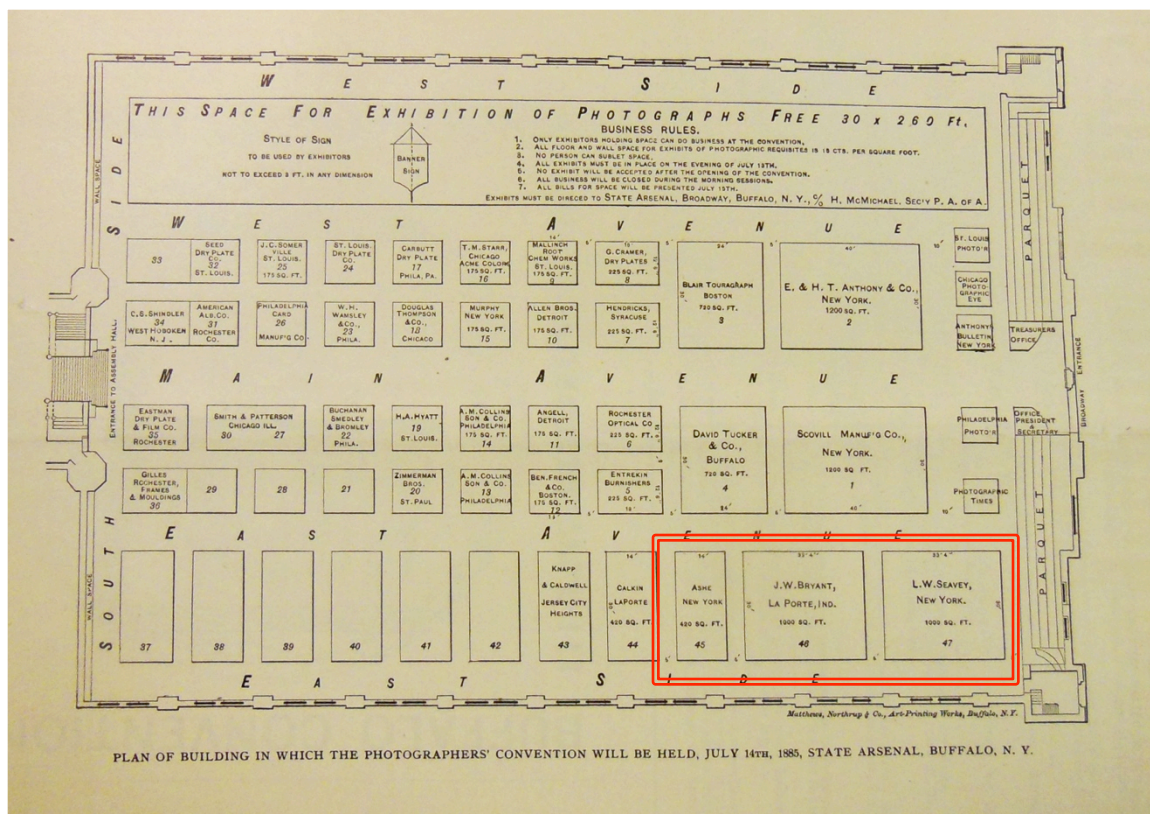
Figure 20: "Plan in building in which the photographers' convention will be held, July 14th, 1885, State Arsenal, Buffalo, N.Y." L.W. Seavey, W.F. Ashe, and J.W. Bryant purchased booths at the convention. They appear at the lower right. *The Photographic Times and American Photographer* 15 (1885): n.p.

could view the painted backgrounds in person before ordering backgrounds, and

from Seavey's bulletins published after the conventions it is apparent that they were

successful business ventures as Seavey usually indicated that he had made several

transactions. [66]

In contrast, for commercial photographers living outside of any major city,

attending these conventions or visiting the stores was difficult and thus they were

required to complete mail orders. Not every company specified how they completed

mail orders in their advertisements, but many did. In order to view the different

styles of backgrounds for sale, photographers usually wrote to the company

enquiring what styles they were interested in and the company would send a

selection of sample photographs or an illustrated catalogue (figures 20, 21).

[67]Sometimes sending these photographs was at the expense of the photographer,

and a few companies required the photographer to send a stamp upon initial inquiry

to pay for the shipment of the sample photographs. Some companies required the

photographer to return the sample photographs. Nearer to the turn of the century

companies began to indicate that their sample photographs included a model

demonstrating different poses in front of the background, including L.W. Seavey,

Scovill & Adams Company, and W.P. Buchanan.

Once a photographer made his or her selection, he or she then had to choose

the size and material of the background. For materials, photographers had the

choice of distemper, or the more expensive but more durable oil paint. Sixteen

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[66] L. W. Seavey, "Ye Monthlie Bulletin," *The Photographic Times and American Photographer* 152 (1883): 469.

[67] Catalogues with painted fabric samples exist, however the author did not find any.

different materials and mediums were identified in the advertisements alluding to

how painted backgrounds were constructed during this time period (Appendix

Three). Additionally, specialized companies offered additional features. For

example, when purchasing from the L.W. Seavey Company the photographer had to

choose the direction of light either from left or right.[68] When backgrounds were

shipped they were usually rolled and shipped in a crate. The crate or box and even

rollers were an extra cost to the photographer,[69] and the advertisements usually stated this cost. Furthermore, it was common for a company to send a set of written or illustrative instructions if a background was unique in its subject matter in order to demonstrate how to pose the sitter and show examples of how the background had been used successfully.[70]

Figure 21: J.W. Bryant, *Philadelphia Photographer* 25 (1888): viii.

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[68] L. W. Seavey & Co., Scenic Artists, *Philadelphia Photographer* 64 (1869): n.p.
[69] George Murphy, *Photographic Mosaics* 21 (1885): 155.
[70] Lafayette W. Seavey. *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* 1-18 (1878): n.p.

There were generally two pricing options for backgrounds based on size: by standard size or per square foot. Mainly, backgrounds were sold in standard sizes such as 4 x 5, 5 x 7, 8 x 10, and 11 x 14 feet. Advertisements typically stated these background sizes and their set costs, which increased as the

Figure 22: Ralph J. Golsen, *The American Journal of Photography* 233 (1900): 247.

Figure 23: Minott M. Govan, *The Photographic Times and American Photographer* 16 (1886): vi.

size of the background increased (figure 23).[71] Periodically, these standard sizes were advertised to suit a particular clientele; smaller backgrounds (head grounds), such as five by seven foot or smaller, were advertised to suit children and larger backgrounds of eleven by fourteen feet were best for groups of people.[72] Alternatively, backgrounds were also priced per square foot, allowing the photographer to choose the specific measurements of his background to fit his studio (figure 23). The cheapest background available during this time period was fifteen cents per square foot and the most expensive was forty cents per square foot. [73] Thus, in 1887 a 8x10 plain background priced at twenty-five cents per square foot would cost a photographer twenty dollars. On average, prices for backgrounds depicting a scenic view cost more than plain or graduated backgrounds; this was true for both backgrounds sold in standard sizes and backgrounds priced by the square foot. Also, scenic backgrounds were priced according to the specific subject matter or the amount of detail on the background. It was common to find exterior backgrounds

Figure 24: Example of an advertisement for painted backgrounds by a specialized company. J.W. Bryant, *The Photographic Times and American Photographer* 16 (1886): iii.

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[71] Packard Bros., *The American Journal of Photography* 178 (1894): x.

[72] Scovill Manufacturing Company, "Osborne's Practical Backgrounds," *The Photographic Times and American Photographer* 157 (1884): n.p.

[73] Plain backgrounds were generally less expensive than scenic backgrounds and most plain backgrounds were advertised at eight cents per square foot. Prices for scenic backgrounds depicting landscapes, and various interior scenes also include 20, 25, 30, 35 cents per square foot.

priced lower than interior backgrounds, and in 1878 the L.W. Seavey Company

stated that, "our backgrounds at 30 and 35 cents contain twice the elaboration of the

old styles at 25 cents."[74] Occasionally backgrounds were advertised as part of a

packaged deal with matching accessories; for example, scenic artist W.F. Ashe

advertised a landscape background and three papier maché rocks for twenty-five

dollars.[75]
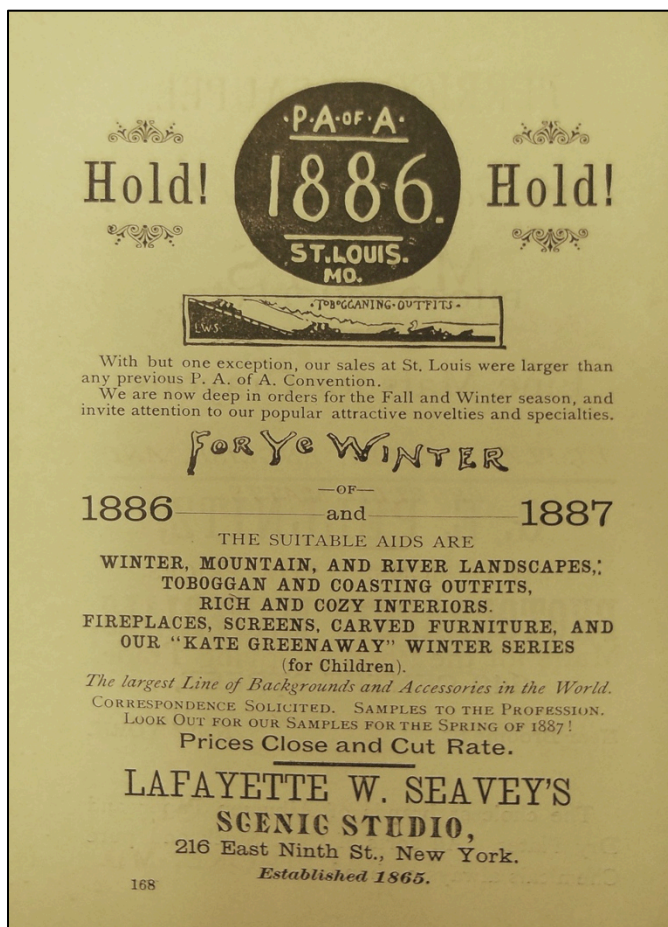
Figure 25: Lafayette W. Seavey, *Photographic Times* 96 (1878): 255.

After 1871 plain unpainted woolen backgrounds commonly found in daguerreotypes were no longer advertised. Similarly, the amount of backgrounds available to photographers increased yearly. By 1883, L.W. Seavey advertised that he had more than 500 designs[76] and by 1892 almost 1,200 styles to choose from.[77] Furthermore, in 1889, Seavey also advertised that his background holder was large

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[74] Lafayette W. Seavey, *Philadelphia Photographer* 178 (1878): 332.

[75] W.F. Ashe, *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* 1-18 (1878): 25.

[76] L.W. Seavy, *Philadelphia Photographer* 25 (1883): 3-4.

[77] Lafayette W. Seavey, *Photographic Mosaics* 28 (1892): 312

enough to store up to thirty backgrounds,[78] while earlier background holders could only hold little more than two backgrounds. Thus, in the late nineteenth century it was common for portrait photographers to own a multitude of backgrounds.

Figure 26: Portrait showing a child in front of a winter themed background and sitting in a sleigh. G. E. Bacon, ca. 1870, albumen print, carte-de-visite, 2008:0531:0021. Courtesy of George Eastman House.

As more backgrounds were being produced seasonal trends in the production of backgrounds began to emerge. These trends usually focused on an approaching holiday or the upcoming season; for example, from the fall months until December, winter themed backgrounds were advertised (figure 25). These backgrounds were usually advertised as snow landscapes, snow grounds, and winter cottages; winter accessories such as sleighs and artificial snow (figure 26) were also advertised alongside the background. Winter themed backgrounds appeared to be a popular choice for photographers because they were often the only style mentioned in the advertisement or the style was bolded, larger in size, or given other emphasis through graphic design. There was also an increase of background orders around the Christmas season and sometimes companies could not keep up with the amount

[78] Lafayette W. Seavey, *Photographic Mosaics* 25 (1889): 161.

of orders and admitted that the volume precluded timely shipment of orders. L.W.

Seavy acknowledged this in his advertisements and bulletins after the holiday

season and stated, "many backgrounds ordered for Christmas we failed to supply on

time. Rush too great. We need from one to six weeks to fill orders, according to the

season"[79] and warning photographers in the autumn months "Don't defer. The rush

will soon begin."[80] After the winter months, advertisements shifted their focus to

spring and summer styles of backgrounds. These styles generally included summer

villas, cottages, and park scenes with matching accessories including benches or

artificial rocks. Trends in the subject matter of backgrounds relating to a specific

Figure 27: Example of a military style background. Unidentified Photographer, ca. 1863, Tintype with applied colour, 1981:2678:0001. Courtesy of George Eastman House.

time period or cultural trends were also apparent in these advertisements. Military styled backgrounds were available and advertised in 1864 and 1865, usually titled military, naval, or battlefields (figure 27).

Despite Kasher's argument that backgrounds depicting tourist sites were very popular and common, none of the advertisements specifically mentioned painted backgrounds that portrayed popular tourist attractions.[81] However, they did appear in

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[79] Seavy, *The Photographic Times and American Photographer*, 98.
[80] L.W. Seavy, *The Photographic Times and American Photographer* 135 (1882): 92.
[81] Kasher, "Stereotypical Tintypes and Tintype Backgrounds," 128.

portraits and there are a few possibilities that explain why backgrounds depicting tourist attractions appeared in portraits, but not in any of the surveyed advertisements. Firstly, portrait photographers could have painted their own background, which would have allowed for the customization of subject matter. Secondly, companies that specialized in painted backgrounds, such as L.W. Seavy and W.F. Ashe, advertised that they could paint any subject and famous tourist
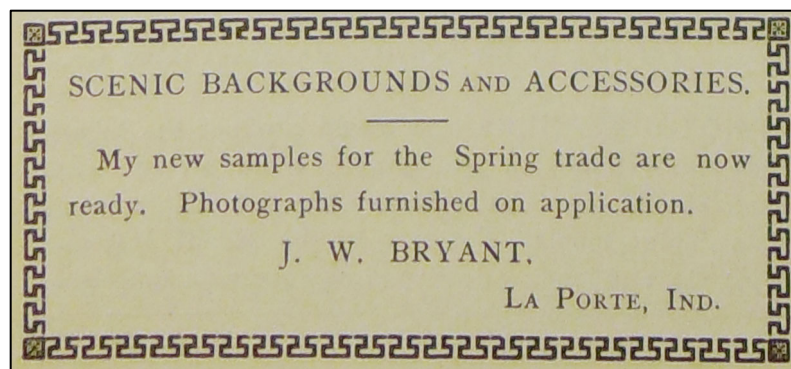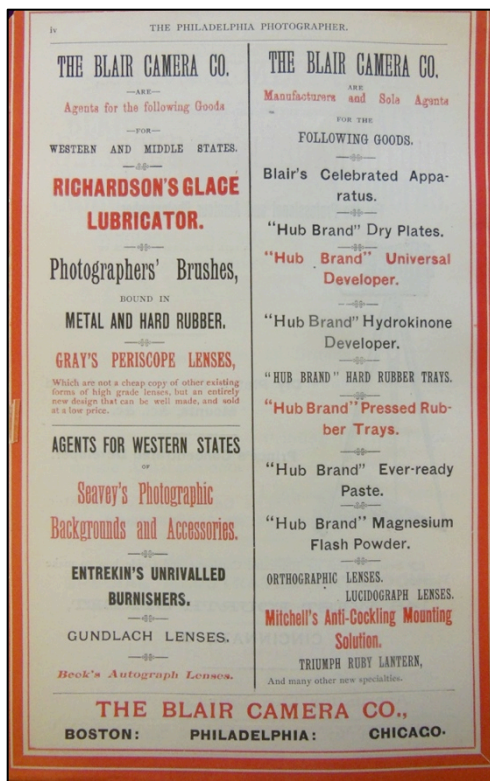

Figure 28: Example of an advertisement for painted backgrounds by a specialized company. L.W. Seavey, *The Philadelphia Photographer* 25 (1888): iv.

destination could have been an option. Finally, it is possible that these were commonly available but not advertised.

Despite reviewing journals prior to 1864 my research lacks advertisements before this year. There are two explanations that can clarify why no advertisements for painted backgrounds appeared in any of the surveyed journals published prior to 1864. First, various journals at Eastman House had their advertisements removed prior to binding; [82] however, it is possible that there

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[82] Periodicals that did not contain advertisements for painted backgrounds include *Humphrey's Journal of Photography and the Allied Arts and Sciences*; *Photographic Mosaics,* Volume 1; *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin,* Volumes 1-7; *The American Journal of Photography,* Volumes 1-11; *The Photographic Times and American Photographer*, Volumes 18, 19, 24, 26; *The Photographic Pointer*, Volume 1: Numbers 1-6, Volume 2: Number 1, Volume 27: Numbers 5-7; *The Photographer's Friend,* Volumes 1, 4; *The Photographic World*, Volumes 1-2; *The Indicator*, Volume 2 Number 7; *Philadelphia Photographer,* volumes 1-3, 7, 12-13; *The Photographic and Fine Art Journal*, Volumes 7-11, second series Volumes 1-2; *The Photo-American: An Illustrated Monthly Magazine Devoted to Photography*, Volumes 7-11.
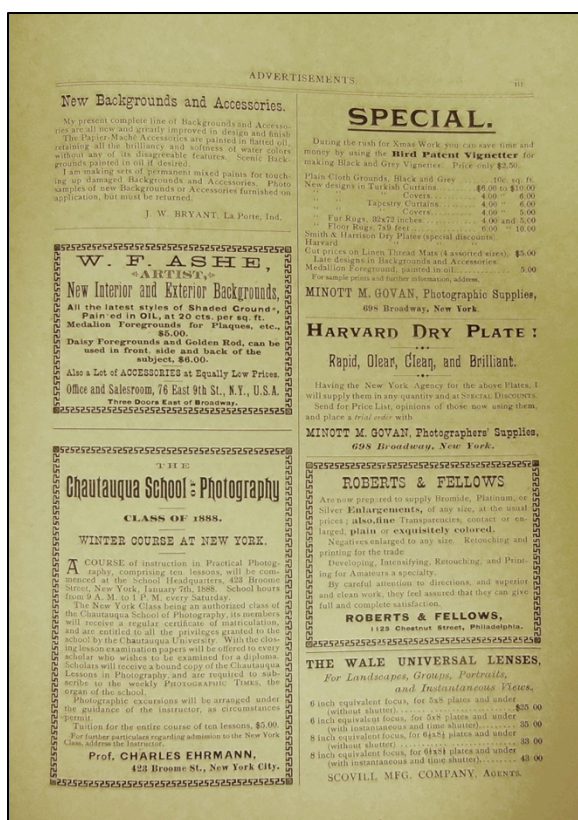
Figure 29: Notice three different advertisements for painted backgrounds by three different companies located on the page spread. J.W. Bryant, W.F. Ashe, and Minott M. Govan, *The Photographic Times and American Photographer* 17 (1887): iii.

were no or few advertisements for painted backgrounds available to photographer. Second, journals with advertisements intact contained no advertisements for painted backgrounds. This absence of advertisements prior to 1864 verifies that there was not a large market for painted backgrounds at this time. G.M. Carlisle stated in 1885, "During the first years of my experience with the camera—1857—it was impossible to obtain, painted to order on in the market as merchandise, a practical or useful background, but to-day we are favoured with a variety that leaves nothing to be desired."[83] However, earlier in 1864, there were at least six different companies advertising backgrounds and advertising multiple styles. Thus, photographers had several of styles to choose from early in portrait photography but not nearly as many as the thousands of options available by the end of the century. Furthermore, in 1864 John B. Purdy & Son advertised that they re-painted over existing backgrounds,[84] confirming that photographers were using painted backgrounds prior to this date. In addition, services for re-painting backgrounds were less costly

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[83] Carlisle, "The Background, it's Use and Abuse," 410.
[84] John B. Purdy & Son, *The American Journal of Photography* 7 (1864): n.p.
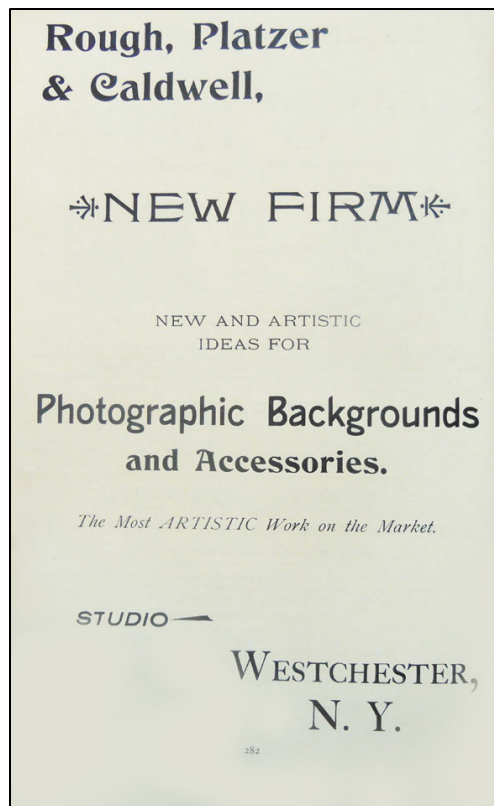
Figure 30: Example of a full page advertisment for painted backgrounds by a specialized company. Rough, Platzer & Caldwell, *Buchanan's Complete Illustrated Catalogue* (Philadelphia: W.P. Buchanan, 1896): n.p.

per square foot (eight cents rather than up to thirty cents). This proves that backgrounds were considered an expensive apparatus that photographers might be loathe to accumulate in great numbers, and that backgrounds could be re-painted in order to stay current
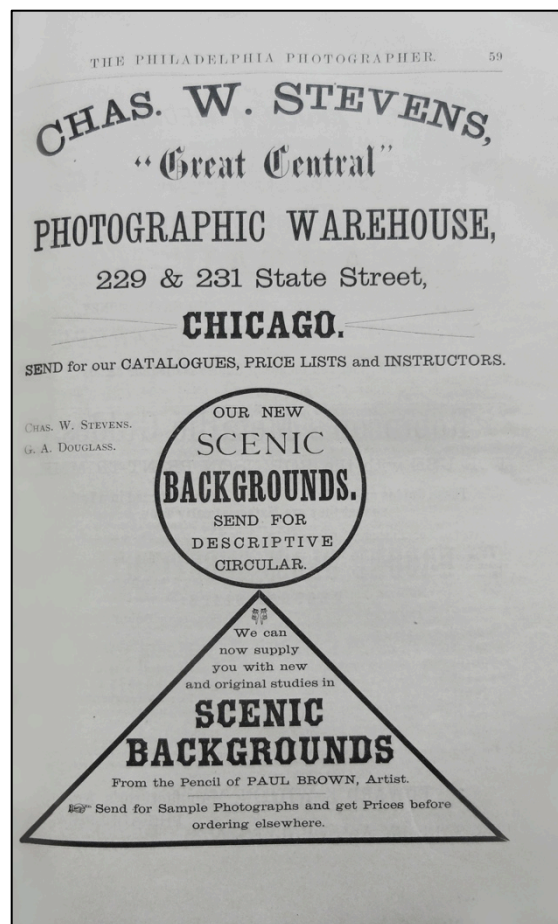
Figure 31: Chas. W. Stevens, *Philadelphia Photographer* 170 (1878): 27.

with the latest styles and trends in a more economic way.

Companies sometimes used their advertisements to acknowledge the artist painting their backgrounds and to promote their other services. In two circumstances the names of individual

background artists were revealed; examples of these included Chas. W. Stevens advertising the pencil of Paul Brown[85] (figure 31) and the Benj. French & Co. advertising backgrounds manufactured by Peter Fales of New Bedford, Massachusetts.[86] These names usually highlighted individual painters who did not sell their own backgrounds like L.W. Seavey, W. D. Osburns, WM. M. Conran, W. P. Buchanan, and W. F. Ashe did. Moreover, though the majority of the advertisements were tailored specifically to photographers as they were published in photographic journals, companies sometimes advertised other services they could provide. The Hub Scenic Co. stated in many of their advertisements that they were specialist in painted backgrounds for both photography as well as theatre. Furthermore, Seavey also advertised that his services included fields other than photography including theatre, decorations for halls, and flags.[87] We can therefore conclude that painters for painted backgrounds were the same as those panting backgrounds for other applications. Furthermore, it is a possibility that they included these mentions to build interest or to add legitimacy.

As stated earlier there were over sixty companies advertising painted backgrounds during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and the company that most frequently advertised throughout these journals was the L.W. Seavey Company. Not only did the L.W. Seavey Company purchase a substantial amount of

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[85] Chas. W. Stevens, *Philadelphia Photographer* 170 (1878): 77.
[86] Benj. French & Co. *Philadelphia Photographer* 8 (1864): n.p.
[87] L.W. Seavey's advertisement stated, "Scenery for theatre, public halls, and amateurs. Panoramas, theatres and churches frescoed. Panoramas, sceneries for Private theatricals. Flags and decorations for balls, and political associations to let. Patterns, stencils, and ready mixed colors for fresco painters." La Fayette W. Seavey
Photographic Mosaics 6 (1873): 180.

advertising space, other companies also specifically noted that they carried Seavey's backgrounds. It is clear that the L.W. Seavey Company was very popular, and that Seavey was himself a very influential and established background painter. Furthermore, to emphasize his popularity within the photography world, L.W. Seavey occasionally listed prominent photographers that owned his backgrounds, including Napoleon Sarony, Mathew Brady, William Kurtz, and Jeremiah Gurney.[88] In addition, the L.W. Seavey Company began to publish a monthly bulletin in *Photographic Times* (figure 32). This bulletin varied in size from an eighth of a page to a half of a page, and appeared in the "Special Notices" section before the

Figure 32: Example of one of L.W. Seavey's Bulletins. *The Photographic Times and American Photographer* 12 (1882): 454.

advertisements at the back of the journal. This bulletin was used to announce new styles of backgrounds, upcoming photographic conventions, updates about the studio, and other matters.

To summarize, it is clear that prices were either set for standard sizes of backgrounds or priced by the square foot for photographers wanting a custom-sized background. Photographers who wished to purchase backgrounds could view sample photographs upon an initial mail inquiry, or visit stores or attend conventions. Both general photographic suppliers and companies who specialized in

[88] L.W. Seavey, *Photographic Mosaics* 7 (1870): 177.

painted backgrounds advertised painted backgrounds but the design and layout of

the advertisement usually differed in the size of the advertisements, the amount of

information provided regarding costs, sizes, shipping, and placement of the word

"background." On rare occasions the name of the individual who painted the

backgrounds was revealed. This index of information compiled from these

advertisements shows that there was a rise in the use of painted backgrounds

during the later half of the nineteenth century, and a growing specialization within

the field as demand inspired competition and customization.

Conclusion

This thesis addressed the historic and contemporary scholarly research about painted backgrounds; the history of the painted background and how they were used and produced during the latter half of the nineteenth century; and analyzed the terms used to describe painted backgrounds, companies that sold backgrounds, how photographers enquired and purchased their backgrounds, and the various materials and styles of backgrounds available during the period of 1864 to 1903 in the United States. This research showed that in the latter half of the nineteenth century there a was a rise in the use of painted backgrounds by portrait photographers in the United States of America, as evidenced by advertisements for painted backgrounds found in periodicals published during this time period.

Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903[89] and this thesis are substantial sources contributing to the understanding of the different terms used to describe painted backgrounds, which companies were selling backgrounds during this time period, and how photographers purchased their backgrounds. This paper also revealed the different styles, sizes, and materials that were available to photographers, which increased in number and variation every year. This research is significant in understanding the use and appearance of painted backgrounds in portraits produced in the late half of the nineteenth century and why backgrounds appear the way they do.

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[89] Keller, *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903*.

Expanding the timeline of the journals surveyed or the geographical location of where the journals were published would be invaluable sources for comparison. Research could also be completed on patents for specific styles of backgrounds, brands of background carriers, and materials. Furthermore, uncovering sample photographs would provide rich information about how photographers would have purchased their backgrounds.

My thesis revealed that backgrounds were advertised in a multitude of ways and referred to by many terms. The use of the background shifted, and by the latter part of the nineteenth century it was common for a photographer to own several backgrounds. New styles of backgrounds were introduced annually and sitters had greater choice of how they wanted to be photographed. Companies specializing in backgrounds and accessories were common throughout this period and often advertised their range of services and extensive styles and products. Like the painted background itself, this thesis provides a foil for contextualizing the sitter, and nineteenth century portraiture in general. As one of the largest pieces of photographic equipment, the painted background should be not be disregarded as it reveals much about cultural trends of the time, the photographer's skills, and aesthetic aspirations of late nineteenth century photographic portraiture.

Appendix One: Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903

The following is a sampling extracted from *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903*[90] recording the bibliographical information pertaining to advertisements for painted backgrounds found in journals published in the United States of America between 1864 and 1903. *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903* is part of the Richard and Ronay Menschel Library at George Eastman House in Rochester, New York.

Name of Journal	Volume	Date	Page Number	Company	Type of Company	Size	Terminology	Inquiry / Shipping	Materials
Anthony's Photographic Bulletin	Vol 1	August 1870	152	Anthony's Photographic Supplies	General	Full	Backgrounds	No	No
Anthony's Photographic Bulletin	Vol 1	September 1870	172	Anthony's Photographic Supplies	General	Full	Backgrounds	No	No
Anthony's Photographic Bulletin	Vol 1	October 1870	193	Anthony's Photographic Supplies	General	Full	Backgrounds	No	No
Anthony's Photographic Bulletin	Vol 1	October 1870	197	W.F. Ashe	Specialized	Sixth	Backgrounds	No	No
Anthony's Photographic Bulletin	Vol 1	November 1870	215	Anthony's Photographic Supplies	General	Full	Backgrounds	No	No
Anthony's Photographic Bulletin	Vol 1	November 1870	219	W.F. Ashe	Specialized	Sixth	Backgrounds	No	No
Anthony's Photographic Bulletin	Vol 5	April 1875	n.p.	W.F. Ashe	Specialized	Sixth	Backgrounds	No	No
Anthony's Photographic Bulletin	Vol 9	November 1878	n.p.	E. & H.T. Anthony & Co.	Specialized	Full	Backgrounds	Yes	No
Anthony's Photographic Bulletin	Vol 9	November 1878	n.p.	Lafayette W. Seavey	Specialized	Full	Snow Landscapes	Yes	No
Anthony's Photographic Bulletin	Vol 9	1878	25	W.F. Ashe	Specialized	Quarter	Backgrounds	No	No
Anthony's Photographic Bulletin	Vol 9	1878	8	E. & H.T. Anthony & Co.	Specialized	Full	Backgrounds	Yes	No
Anthony's Photographic Bulletin	Vol 9	1878	23	W.F. Ashe	Specialized	Quarter	Backgrounds	No	No
Anthony's Photographic Bulletin	Vol 9	1879	23	W.F. Ashe	Specialized	Third	Backgrounds	No	No

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[90] Keller, *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903*.

Appendix Two: Terms to Refer to Painted Backgrounds

This appendix lists the terms used to refer to a painted background. This information was compiled from the photographic journals published in the United States of America between 1864 and 1903 that were reviewed while creating the *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903*.[91]

- Architectural, landscape boudoir, interior or exterior
- Artistic Backgrounds
- Ashe's Backgrounds
- Back Grounds
- Backgrounds
- Backgrounds for Amateurs
- Backgrounds for Professional and Amateur
- Backgrounds for Spring and Summer work
- Backgrounds on Burlap in Colors
- Backings
- Baltimore Conservatory Background
- Benndon and Asher's
- Bigelow's Backgrounds
- Bendann and Plain False Backgrounds
- "Brendann" Background Negatives
- Bryant's Accessories & Grounds
- Bryant's Backgrounds
- Burlap Grounds in Colors
- Chestnut Series
- Cloth Backgrounds
- Continuous Backgrounds
- Continuous Grounds
- "Eagle Standard" Background
- Endless background (with Purchase of a background carrier)
- Exterior Ground
- Extra Graduated Backgrounds
- Fancy Painted Backgrounds
- Felt Grounds
- Felt Plain Backgrounds
- Fine Backgrounds
- First Class Plain and Fancy Backgrounds
- Flock Backgrounds
- German Graduated Backgrounds

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[91] Keller, *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903*.

- German Graduated Grounds
- Graduated Backgrounds
- Grounds
- Handling Grounds
- Head Backgrounds
- Head Grounds
- High Art Backgrounds
- High Grade Background
- High-Grade Backgrounds
- Improved Photographic Background
- Interior and Exterior Backgrounds
- Interior and Exterior Grounds
- Interior Ground
- Landscape Ground
- Landscape and Conservatory Background
- Mascotte Junior Backgrounds
- Modern backgrounds
- Negative Backgrounds
- New Backgrounds
- New Interior and Exterior Backgrounds
- New Style Backgrounds
- Oil Backgrounds
- Oil Painted Backgrounds
- Osborne's Practical Backgrounds
- Painted Oil Foregrounds, Head Rest Plants, The new foreground, Assortment of Backgrounds
- Picturesque Foregrounds
- Plain Cloth Backgrounds, black and grey
- Plain Grounds
- Plain Woollen Backgrounds
- Photo Backgrounds
- Photo. Backgrounds, &c
- Photographic Backgrounds
- Rehn's Backgrounds
- Rembrandt Backgrounds
- Revolving Backgrounds
- Ross' Backgrounds
- Sanded Oil Backgrounds
- Scenic Backgrounds
- Scenery Backgrounds
- Scenery Backgrounds, woolen Backgrounds, Bigelow's Plain Oil Painted Backgrounds
- Scenery Grounds
- Seavey's Backgrounds and Accessories

- Seavey's, Osbourne's, and Hough's Backgrounds
- Shaded Grounds Painted in Oil
- Skating Rink Ground
- Snow-Covered Landscapes
- Snow Grounds
- Snow Landscapes
- Snow Scenes
- Special Vignetting Background
- Spurgeon, Bryant Backgrounds
- "Spurgins" Celebrated Backgrounds
- Standard New York Backgrounds
- Summer Backgrounds
- The Finest Backgrounds in the West
- The "Leading" Backgrounds and Accessories of the world
- Weeke's Concave Background
- Winter Landscapes
- Wool backgrounds
- Wunderlich's Fancy French Backgrounds

Appendix Three: Companies Advertising Painted Backgrounds

The following appendix lists companies that advertised the sale of painted backgrounds. This information was compiled from the photographic journals published in the United States of America between 1864 and 1903 that were examined while compiling the *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903*.[92] The list is separated into two sections; (1) companies specializing in painted backgrounds and accessories and (2) those selling general photograph supplies. Variations of the company names are sub-listed.

SPECIALIZED:

- W.F. Ashe
  - Ashe's
  - W. F. Ashe, Scenic Artist
  - W. F. Ashe, Artist
- Ashe, Dayton & Co.
- Badgley and Hoerter Co.
- Bigelow's
- J. W. Bryant
  - J. W. Bryant Co.
  - Bryant's
- W. P. Buchanan
- WM. M. Conran
- Edwin Davis'
- Ralph J. Golsen
- R.V. Harnett
- Hearn's Photographic Printing Institute
- E.B. Hough
- Hub Scenic Co.
- Lamson & Co (late with Ashe, Dayton, & Co.)
- W.D. Osburns
- Packard Bros.
- John B. Purdy & Son
  - John B. Purdy & Co.
- The Rehn Background Company
- C.F. Rice
- Rough & Caldwell
- Lafayette W. Seavey
  - Lafayette
  - L.W. Seavey's
  - L.W. Seavey
  - Lafayette W. Seavey's

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[92] Keller, *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903*.

- La Fayette W. Seavey's Scenic Studio
- Lafayette W. Seavey's Scenics
- L. W. Seavey & Co., Scenic Artists
- Seavy
- Seavy's Hys Workeshop
- L.W. Seavey hys Workeshope
- Seavy's Studio
- L. W. Seavey & Co., Scenic Artists
- Swasey's (Scoville Manufacturing Co.)
- Hiram J. Thompson

GENERAL PHOTOGRAPHIC SUPPLIERS:

- WM. H. Allen & Bro., Successors to Moses Sutton, selling Bigelow's
- E & H.T. Anthony & Co
  - Anthony's Photographic Supplies
  - E. & H.T. Anthony & Co. (selling for W.F. Ashe)
- The Blair Camera Company Co., agents for Seavey's
- The Boston Institute of Photography
- Brendann Brother's
- Buchanan. Bromley & Co.,
- Buffalo Photographic Warehouse
- Central Stockhouse/R.H. Moran
- Chicago Photo. Stock House
- Douglass, Thompson, & Co.
- Benjamin French & Co.
  - Benj. French & Co. manufactured by Peter Fales
- Gatchel & Hyatt
- The Globe Scenic Company
- Minott M. Govan (Successor to Lehmann & Brown)
- R.A. Green's Scenic Headquarters (est. in 1871)
- Harris & Kittle
- William B. Holmes
  - W.B. Holmes
  - WM. B. Holmes
- H. A. Hyatt for The Western Interior Decorating Co.
- Dr E. Jacobson's New Anline Colors
- A.B. Lamson
- George Murphy
- Edward W. Newcomb
- Platzer & Co.'s
- Scoville Manufacturer Co.
  - Scovill Manufacturing Co.
  - Scovill Manufacturing Co. for L.G. Bigelow

- - Geo. Murphy
  - Charles A. Seely
  - Sheen & Simpkinson
  - Jas H. Smith & Co.
  - Chas. W. Stevens
    - Chas. W. Stevens (for Paul Brown's)
  - Chas. W. Stevens from the pencil of Paul Brown
  - John Taylor & Co.
  - N.C. Thayer & Co.
  - David Tucker
  - Richard Walzl at the National Photographic Emporium and Publishing House
  - Willard & Co.
    - Willard MFG. & Co.
    - Willard & Co. (Selling for Sto & Borgelt's Flock Backgrounds)
  - Chas. A. Wilson
  - Wilson, Hood, & Co.
  - Geo. J. Wolf & Co.
  - United States Photographic Supply
    - United States Photographic Supply (successors to C.B. Richard & Co.)
    - United States Photographic Supply Co

Appendix Four: List and Glossary of Materials

This appendix features materials that were identified in the advertisements, as well as definitions of each material. This information was compiled from the photographic journals published in the United States of America between 1864 and 1903 that were reviewed while creating the *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903.*[93]

- Burlap
- Distemper
- Felt
- Fir
- Cloth
- Cotton
- Oil
- Oil paint
- Oil colors
- Oilene
- Paint
- Painted in oils
- Painted in pure lead and oil
- Painted on cotton
- Watercolour
- Wool

Burlap
Burlap is a natural fibre made from the jute plant. With painted backgrounds, burlap was used as an alternative to canvas.

Distemper
Distemper paint consists of a mixture of fine chalk, glue, water, and pigment. During the latter half of the nineteenth century it was a cheaper alternative to oil but did have its disadvantages. Earlier distemper backgrounds could not be rolled because the paint would crack, the backgrounds were more likely to scratch, and they could not be cleaned.

Felt
Felt is a non-woven fabric made from wool. Felt backgrounds were generally used for plain backgrounds.

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[93] Keller, *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903*.

Fir
Fir is wood found from an evergreen tree. This wood is employed to create the revolving background. Wood was used for structure and support and oil paint was applied to the wood.

Lead and Oil
Lead oxide is added to oil paint to increase its durability.

Oil/Oil Paint/Oilene/Oil Colors
Oil paint consists of colour pigment suspended in oil. Backgrounds painted in oil were popular because of their durability. Oil backgrounds were less susceptible to scratches, dirt, dents, and stains. If a background did get dirty the photographer was able to clean the background. Furthermore, it was advertised that oil backgrounds did not crack or fade, and they could be rolled, which made it easier to store and transport. Background painters usually sold pastels and small containers of paint to repair backgrounds in case something did happen to the background.

Watercolour
Watercolour paint is a mixture of pigment in a water-soluble ground. Backgrounds made of water colours were very fragile as they could fade, stain, and scratch.

Wool
It is a fibre made from sheep's fur. Most commonly wool blankets were stretched taut over a wooden frame. Wool blankets were used to create a plain or in some cases an almost invisible looking background. To create an invisible background in daguerreotypes, wool stretched over a wooden frame was hung from a ceiling and then swung by the photographer so the background was in motion during exposure. It was said to have "rendered the surface of the plate invisible."[94]

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[94] System of Photography, "Back Ground: Transparent or Invisible," *The Daguerreian Journal* 1 (1850): 111.

Appendix Five: Modes for Inquiring and Shipping Backgrounds

This appendix explains how companies advertising for painted backgrounds specified how photographers would have had to contact the companies to inquire about specific styles and to purchase their backgrounds. This list also includes how backgrounds would have been shipped to the photographers. The entries were compiled from the photographic journal published in the United States of America between 1864 and 1903 that were reviewed while creating the Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903.[95]

- A Photographic Book of Backgrounds or Accessories, mailed on application, to be re-turned.
- A trial of Rehn's Backgrounds will assure you of their beauty and cheapness
- Address all order to
- Address for price list
- Address your dealer or the manufacturer
- All orders should state the direction of light, Whether from right or left.
- Any goods bought of me can be returned at my expense if they fail to please.
- Call and Examine my Grounds before making your purchase
- Call and inspect our showroom.
- Call on or write for terms and samples before making their purchases
- Complete Professional or Amateur Catalogue on Application
- Correspondence Solicited
- Correspondence Solicited, inquiries cheerfully answered.
- Descriptive price list of the above on application
- Estimates and Illustrated Price Lists free.
- For circulars address Henry C. Peabody Manager
- Foreign Orders Carefully Filled.
- Full illustrated circular mailed on application
- Full particulars and descriptive circulars
- Furnish samples on application
- Further information can be obtained by writing for latest price list, just out.
- Get our samples and look them over
- Goods carefully packed and shipped to all parts of the country
- Illustrated Price Lists Sent Free
- Latest novelties introduced by Mr. L.W. Seavey on application.
- Mail for Sample Set

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[95] Keller, *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903*.

- New Price. List No.4, October 1st. Send name now and receive one. Address
- Ordered executed promptly with care
- Orders filled in their turn
- Orders filled promptly
- Orders filled with care
- Orders not shipped on time, need one to six weeks
- Orders Promptly Filled
- Our new samples are now ready and will be mailed on application, but must be returned in five days.
- Our productions can be procured of any dealer
- Pasteboard models
- Photographs mailed on application
- Photographs mailed on application. All orders receive careful attention
- Photographs mailed on application, but must be returned
- Photos with subjects on application
- Sample Photographs sent on receipt of stamps and indication of the style wanted
- Samples furnished upon application
- Sample Photos (to be returned and not for copying) on application
- Sample Photographs sent on receipt of stamps and indication of the style wanted
- Sample Prints
- Sample prints on usual conditions
- Sample prints sent to known responsible parties only.
- Sample sheet on application
- Samples Free
- Samples on application
- Samples show figure posed
- Samples sent by mail
- Samples sent on application
- Samples sent on application, orders for any of the above can be filled on short notice.
- Samples to the profession
- Securely packed that they will bear safety, transportation as freight
- Send 4-cent stamp for our new 112 page catalogue and background design circular.
- Send 4 cents in stamps for our new 112 page catalogue and design sheet of new backgrounds
- Send for catalogue
- Send for descriptive circular
- Send for free with subscription
- Send for Illustrated Catalogue

- Send for new books of Photographs
- Send for Photographs
- Send for photographs showing different positions
- Send for price list
- Send for sample photographs with subjects
- Send for Sample
- Send for sample photographs
- Send for sample photos
- Send for sample Photos. Especially the new designs
- Send for samples
- Send stamp for circular
- Send stamp for photographic catalogue
- Set strips of every description
- Shipped by express
- Shown in photograph with Subjects, in our new Sample book.
- Solicit domestic and foreign correspondence
- These sizes may be sent by mail on receipt of 35c. Extra
- To all purchasers a reduced sheet of poses gratis. Address for Sample prints
- Those sold will be shipped immediately, if desired
- Bryant's new accessories sent on application.
- We will furnish you photographs for selection
- Will furnish samples on application
- Write for photographs and illustrated catalogue.
- Write for Sample Book of New Backgrounds and Accessories, they contain a Great Variety of New and Fine Designs
- Write for samples of Background and Accessories. Photographs of J.W.
- Write for suggestions, samples and catalogue.
- Write to your stock Dealer or to us direct for samples.

Appendix Six: Histories of Companies

The following appendix features brief histories of the companies that were found to have advertised for painted backgrounds in the reviewed photographic journals published in the United States of America between 1864 and 1903 that were reviewed while creating the *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903.*[96]

WM. H. Allen & Bro/ Allen Brothers
W.H. Allen and O.C. Allen were successors to Moses Sutton. They established the WM. H. Allen and Brother business in 1851. In 1871 the company was located at 11 East Larned Street in Detroit, Michigan.[97]

E. & H. T. Anthony & Company (1842-1901)
E. & H. T. Anthony & Company was the largest supplier and distributor of photography supplies in the United States during the nineteenth century and was located at 501 Broadway for the majority of this time. In 1842, Anthony opened a daguerreotype studio and five years later opened a separate shop that sold photographic supplies. Anthony later closed his portrait studio to focus on selling photography supplies and in 1847 Anthony moved to 205 Broadway. In the 1850s he expanded his business to include daguerreotype cases, stereographic images, and other apparatuses. In 1852 his brother Henry joined the business and together in 1854 the brothers opened a factory, which was located in New York City's Harlem Rail Road Depot. In 1870 the company began to manufacture cameras and by 1871 the British Journal of Photography was describing Anthony's as the largest photographic firm in the world. In 1877 the company listed Edward Anthony as President, and his brother Henry T. Anthony and V. M. Wilcox as vice presidents. Notably, E. & H. T. Anthony & Company had a very close business relationship with Mathew Brady.[98] On 23 December 1901, E. & H.T. Anthony merged with rival Scovill and Adams Company becoming Anthony and Scovill.[99]

W.F. Ashe
W.F. Ashe owned a specialized company manufacturing backgrounds and accessories. The company was located on 76 East 9th St. New York in 1892.

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[96] Keller, *Index of Advertisements for Painted Backgrounds 1864-1903.*
[97] W.H. Allen, Photographic Times 1 (1871): 106.
[98] Keya Morgan, "The History of Photography," accessed July 10, 2013, http://www.mathewbrady.com/history.htm.
[99] Michael Pritchard, "Anthony, Edward (1819-1888) and Henry Teibout (1814-1884)" in *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography* edited by John Hannavy (New York: Routledge, 2007): 48-9.

Badgley and Hoerter Co.
Badgley and Hoerter Company was owned by Samuel F. Badgley and John A. Hoerter. The business was located in Louisville, Kentucky.

Bigelow
Bigelow was a manufacturer of backgrounds. He is best known for his revolving and Rembrandt backgrounds.

The Blair Camera Company Co.
Thomas Blair founded the Blair Tourograph Company in 1878 in Connecticut. The Scovill Company, to whom Blair had ties with, first introduced the Tourograph camera. In 1881 Blair moved to Boston to expand his business, which included selling dry plates and four years later detective cameras and in 1886 shortened the company name to the Blair Camera Company and concentrated his business efforts to manufacturing photography apparatuses.[100] In 1890, Blair purchased the Boston Camera Company in competition with Eastman Kodak Company. In 1899 the Blair Camera Company was purchased by Eastman Kodak, and moved to Rochester where it was open until 1907 and in 1908 Blair Camera's were sold as a division of Eastman Kodak Company.

The Boston Institute of Photography
The Boston Institute of Photography was located at 52 Boylston Street in 1886.

J. W. Bryant
Bryant specialized in backgrounds and accessories and his backgrounds were claimed to have been firmly made but were light so they were easy to use.[101] The company was based out of La Porte, Indiana. Wair & Barnes became successors to this company ca. 1897.[102]

Buchanan, Bromley & Co.
Buchanan, Bromley & Company was located at 1030 Arch Street Philadelphia in 1890 and had a second location at 1226 Arch Street. They specialized in painted backgrounds and accessories. The partnership published and distributed *How to Make Photographs* in 1888.

W. P. Buchanan
W.P. Buchanan owned a general photographic supply company based out of Philadelphia. Buchanan is best known as the Luxo Flashlight man because in 1906 he established a flashlight competition with Luxo. Buchanan was also a member of

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[100] Historic Camera's History Librarium, "Blair Camera Company History," accessed July 6, 2013, http://www.historiccamera.com/cgi-bin/librarium/pm.cgi?action=display&login=blair_camco
[101] Unknown, "Exhibits: Fourth Notice," *The Photographic Times and the American Photographer* 11 (1881): 344.
[102] Wair & Barnes, *International Annual of Anthony's Photographic Bulletin and American Process Yearbook* 9 (1897): 26.

the photographer's association of Pennsylvania[103] and became the vice-president of the Columbia Photographic Society in Philadelphia.[104] Buchanan also published *The Photo Ticker* a photographic magazine.[105]

Central Stockhouse/R.H. Moran
The Central Stockhouse was established by R.H. Moran in 1874. The business was located at 231 Centre Street in New York City. Moran was a manufacturer and dealer of photographic supplies and specialized in photographic chemicals such as collodion, silver nitrate and varnish.

Chicago Photo Stock Co.
In 1896 E. & H.T. Anthony purchased the Chicago Photo Stock Company,[106] which was located at 38 E. Randolph Street in Chicago in 1897.

WM. M. Conran
WM. M. Conran was best known for his oil backgrounds. His business was situated in several locations including 187 S. Clark Street Chicago in 1890, and 185 S. Clark Street 1891. Later in 1891, Conran moved studios to 445 South Normal Parkway Englewood, Illinois.[107]

Edwin Davis
Located in Philadelphia at 1226 Arch Street, Edwin Davis was the sole agent for W.P Buchanan in Philadelphia in 1895.

Douglass, Thompson, & Co.
The Douglass, Thompson, & Co was a general Photographic supplier at 229 and 231 State Street, Chicago, Illinois. They sold Paul Brown & Son's backgrounds and accessories in 1881 and 1882.

Benjamin French & Co
Benjamin French opened a daguerreotype studio in 1844 but due to lack of business became a retailer for photographic goods in partnership with L.H. Hale. From its beginning, the company was located at 109 Washington Street in Boston until 1864 when the company moved to 319 Washington Street. In 1856 the Benjamin French & Co. became the first supplier in the United States to sell Jamin and Darlot products. By the 1890s due to French's failing health his son, Dr. Wilfred French (who was also a photographer) was handling much of the business responsibilities. The Benjamin French Company was successful into the twentieth century and merged with the William H. Robey's Horgan & Robey firm to become the Robey-

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[103]E.E. Seavey, *The Camera Magazine* 10 (1906): 108.
[104] Greg Beato, "Out of Focus: An Eulogy for Kodak" *The Smart Set,* February 10, 2012.
[105]Unknown, *Wilson's Photographic Magazine* 39 (1902): 448.
[106] Unknown, Wilson's Photographic Magazine 35 (1896): 47.
[107]Edward L. Wilson, Wilson's Photographic Magazine 28 (1891): 94.

French Company in 1920, and later became a subordinate of the Eastman Kodak company.[108]

Gatchel & Hyatt
Gatchel and Hyatt formed a partnership selling daguerreian goods from 1848 to around 1861. In 1863 Gatchel became a branch manager of a store owned by a refiner in Cincinnati. A year later both Gatchel and Hyatt purchased the branch to sell photographic goods. In 1874 the company purchased William H. Tillford's photographic supply stores and was however briefly, called the Tri-City Stock House. Gatchel and Hyatt eventually dissolved their relationship and Hyatt kept the St. Louis branch while Gatchel retained the remaining two stores. In 1880 the two men rejoined their partnership with the addition of Mulett a photographic dealer in St. Louis. In 1882 Gatchel sold his store in Cincinatti and relocated to St. Louis where he remained as manger until 1895 when his two sons (A.D. Gatchel, and F.E. Gatchel) took over and renamed it W.D. Gatchel and Sons. Hyatt owned the branch in St. Louis until his death in 1905.

The Globe Scenic Co.
The Globe Scenic Company specialized in background accessories. The company was located at 261 Wabash Avenue in Chicago.

Ralph J. Golsen
Ralph J. Golsen owned a business located on 80 and 82 Wabash Avenue in Chicago. The company was a retailer for a variety of photographic equipment.

Minott M. Govan (Successor to Lehmann & Brown)
Minott M. Govan was a general photographic supplier, but frequently advertised for painted backgrounds and accessories. Govan first had his business at 28 West 14th Street, New York, and in 1886 was listed at 18 Clinton Place, New York. In 1901 Govan either opened a second location or moved to 6 West 15th Street.

R.A. Green's Scenic Headquarters
The R.A. Green's Scenic Headquarters Company was established in 1871 and they specialized in painted backgrounds and accessories. In 1889 the business was located at 148 State Street in Chicago.

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[108] Unknown, *Photographic Times and American Photographer* 7(1882), xxvi;
Unknown, *Commerce, Manufactures & Resources of Boston, Mass: A Historical Statistical & Descriptive Review* (Boston: National Publishing Company 1883), 132;
American Publishing and Engraving Co., *Illustrated Boston, the Metropolis of New England* (New York: American Publishing and Engraving Co. 1889), 136;
Unknown, *The Photographic Journal of America* 27 (1890): 512; Unknown, *Wilson's Photographic Magazine* 27 (1891), 59; Unknown, *The Photographic Times* 32 (1900), 92; Unknown, *Photo-Era: The American Journal of Photography* 44 (1920), 321.

R.V. Harnett

R.V. Harnett was a manufacturer, importer, and dealer in photographic goods. In 1864 his business was located at 482 Broadway, New York.

Albert M. Harris

Albert M. Harris was the trade agent for The Rehn's Background Company and supplier for Bryant's Backgrounds. His business was located at 15 Grand River Avenue, Detroit, Michigan in 1883.

Harris & Kittle

Located at 13 Grand River Avenue Detroit in 1886 the Harris & Kittle Company was a retailer for all types of photographic goods.

Hearn's Photographic Printing Institute

Charles W. Hearn established a career in artistic printing including drawing the backgrounds in photographs. Hearn published *The Practical Printer: a Complete Manual of Photographic Printing* in 1874. Hearn printed photographs for many publications and in 1876 he purchased The Philadelphia Photographer printing company. In 1877 his business was located at 24 Winfield Place in Philadelphia, but he also had stores in Portland, and Boston by 1889. Though Hearn moved into several studios throughout Boston he remained in the city until his death in 1922.[109]

William B. Holmes

William B. Holmes owned a business selling general photographic supplies. The business was located at 555 Broadway, New York City in 1867-72.

E.B. Hough

E.B. Hough owned a specialized company selling backgrounds and accessories. The company was located at the Grand Opera House in Syracuse, N.Y. in 1882.

Hub Scenic Co.

The Hub Scenic Company specialized in painted backgrounds and was based out of Boston, Massachusetts.

H. A. Hyatt for **The Western Interior Decorating Co.**

Hyatt opened a retail store in St. Louis selling photographic goods in 1880 when his partnership with Gatchel dissolved. Hyatt sold The Western Interior Decorating Company's backgrounds at his St. Louis branch in 1884. (*see also Gatchel and Hyatt*)

A.B. Lamson

A.B. Lamson was located at 565 Ninth Avenue New York City in 1872.

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[109] Eastman Kodak Company, *Abel's Photographic Weekly* (1922): 478, 480; Unknown, *Photo Era Magazine* 27 (1906): 106; Unknown, *Photo-Era Magazine* 38 (1917): 48; Unknown, *The Practical Printer* (1874): 10.

Lamson & Co
In 1865 the Lamson Company was located at 68 Bleecker Street, New York. They specialized in backgrounds and skylights exclusively.

George Murphy
Sometimes referred to as George Murphy Inc, George Murphy's business was based out of 250 Mercer Street, New York City in 1885.[110] In 1893 the business was located at 57 East Ninth Street, New York City.

Edward W. Newcomb
Edward W. Newcomb was a chemist and a dealer in photography supplies.

W.D. Osborne
W.D. Osborne patented "Picturesque Foregrounds," which were sold by Scovill Manufacturing Company in 1882.

Packard Bros.
The Packard Brothers Company was established in 1884 and was located in Roslindale, Boston. They primarily sold mainly scenic backgrounds and remained in business until at least 1894.

Platzer & Co.'s
Platzer and company specialized in oil backgrounds and was located at 41 Carlton Ave, Jersey City in New Jersey in 1890.

John B. Purdy & Son
In 1864 John B. Purdy's shop was located at 52 Franklin Street, New York and in 1865 he moved to 242 Canal Street, New York.

The Rehn Background Company
The Rehn Background Company produced painted backgrounds and accessories. Albert M. Harris was the trade agent for these backgrounds.

C.F. Rice
C.F. Rice's business was located at 220 Wabash Avenue, Chicago. The company specialized in accessories and backgrounds.

Rough & Caldwell
Rough, Platzer, Caldwell specialized in painted backgrounds. The business was located in Westchester, New York in 1896 and then on 56th East 9th Street, in New York City by 1922.

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[110]Unknown, "Industrial Displays" *Photo-Era: The America Journal of Photography* 15 (1910): 159.

Scovill Manufacturer Co.
The Scovill Manufacturing Company was originally founded in in Waterbury,
Connecticut in 1802 by Dr. Frederick Leavenworth, David Hayden, and James
Mitchell Lamson Scovill. The company first produced and rolled their own brass and
began to manufacture silver plated copper sheets for daguerreotypes around 1842.
In 1846 they opened a store in New York carrying a full array of photographic
products and soon became a primary distributor of photographic equipment. The
company acquired the American Optical Company in the 1860s, which allowed for
the production of Scovill's box cameras, stereoscopes, and accessories. In 1866 the
company was located at 4 Bleeker Street in New York City. In 1889, the name of the
company was changed to Scovill & Adam's, and on December 23, 1901, the firm
merged with E. & H.T. Anthony becoming Anthony and Scovill.[111] In 1907 the
company changed and abbreviated their name to ANSCO. The company still exists
today.[112]

Lafayette W. Seavey
In 1865 Seavey and Gaspard Maeder (a scenic painter) opened a studio in New York
specializing in painted scenery for travelling theatre. In 1868, Seavey began to
produce painted backgrounds tailored to photography and soon he became one of
the most popular background painters in the United States of America. Seavey ran
his business like of a factory producing mail order and custom made backgrounds.
At one point Seavey had twenty workers in his studio, presumably in the 1870s
when his company increased in popularity.[113] Charles Trembley and M.M. Govan
over sighted his shop financially.

Dr. Hermann Vogel considered Seavey to be the first background painter in the
world[114] because he was the first to have opened his own business specializing in
painted backgrounds. The Seavey Company allowed portrait photographers to
choose from an illustrated catalogued of many different styles and subject matters.

Charles A. Seely
Charles Seely was a chemist and in 1863 was credited as the editor for the *American
Journal of Photography*.[115] In 1864, his business was located at 244 Canal Street,
New York and he sold Weeke's concave backgrounds.

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[111] "Pacific Rim Camera: Photographica Pages: Scovill Index, accessed July 8, 2013,
http://www.pacificrimcamera.com/pp/scovill/scovill.htm
[112] Historic Camera's History Librarium "Scovill Manufacturing Company, accessed July 8, 2013,
"http://www.historiccamera.com/cgi-bin/librarium/pm.cgi?action=display&login=scovill
[113]Historical Ziegfeld Group "Theatre," accessed July 6, 2013,
http://historicalziegfeld.multiply.com/photos/album/497?&show_interstitial=1&u=%2Fphotos%2F
album#
[114] A.E. Rinehart, "L.W. Seavey: Artist," accessed July 6, 2013, http://photos-
memories.com/SeaveyBio.htm
[115] Leah Dilworth, *Acts of Possession: Collecting in America* (Newark: Rutgers 2003), 90.

Sheen & Simpkinson
Comprised of C.H. Sheen and Simpkinson, the Sheen & Simpkinson company was a retailer for general photographic supplies located 166 and 168 Race Street Cincinnati, Ohio.

Jas H. Smith & Co.
James Smith founded the Jas H. Smith and company in the late 1860s to early 1870s. Smith purchased a photography studio where he worked as a professional photographer for over a decade. By the 1870s, Smith began to concentrate on selling and manufacturing various apparatuses including camera stands, posing stools, burnishers, and darkroom equipment. In 1892 the company was located at 186 Wabash Ave in Chicago and sold all types of photography equipment including revolving backgrounds.

In 1901, two fires damaged Smith's business and ultimately bankrupted him. Smith eventually rebuilt the company by inventing a more powerful form of flash-powder and by 1909 was marketing Victor powder under the James H. Smith & Sons Corporation name.[116] The Jas. H. Smith & Company eventually became and grew into the well-known Smith-Victor Corporation, manufacturers of photographic lighting.

Chas. W. Stevens
Chas. W. Stevens' business was located at 150 Dearborn St., Chicago in 1874.

Sto & Borgelt's Flock Backgrounds
Willard & Company sold Sto & Borgelt's Flock Backgrounds in 1886 in New York.

Swasey
Swasey specifically manufactured painted backgrounds and accessories. Swasey backgrounds were sold by Scovill Manufacturing Company in New York City.

John Taylor & Co.
John Taylor & Company was formed in San Francisco around 1865. The company consisted of John Taylor and James. H. Page, who were druggists by profession but became retailers of chemical glassware and photographic equipment. Albert A. Hickox became a third owner sometime during the 1860s or 1870s. The company was first located at 512-514 Washington Street and in 1873 the company expanded to 512-518 Washington Street. In 1875 a competing photographic supply, Oscar Foss and Company purchased John Taylor & Co. and the business no longer sold photographic supplies. The company moved four times until 1900 when the business closed.[117]

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[116] Smith-Victor Corporation, "History," accessed July 7, 2013
http://www.smithvictor.com/company/history.asp?s1=History
[117] Peter E. Palmquist, Thomas R. Kailbourn. *Pioneer Photographers of the Far West: A Biographical Dictionary, 1840-1865* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 542-543.

N.C. Thayer & Co.
The N.C. Thayer and Company was located at 46, 48, and 50 East Jackson Street in 1883 Chicago, Illinois and then at 257 and 259 State Street in 1886.

Hiram J. Thompson
In 1880 Thompson's store was located at 259 Wabash Avenue, Chicago. The company manufactured, imported, and sold many products including mirrors, engravings, and photographic materials.[118] Prior Hiram J. Thompson and C.F. Rice were partners (Rice & Thompson) but the company dissolved in 1879.

David Tucker/ Buffalo Photographic Warehouse
In 1871 David Tucker's business was located on 296 Main Street Buffalo, New York. Tucker owned the Buffalo Photographic Warehouse in 1873 and 1874 it was located on 292, 294, and 296 Main Street, Buffalo. Tucker was presumably partner with S.B. Butts during this time.

United States Photographic Supply
Based out of 57 East 9th street New York City and 62 Clark Street Chicago the United States Photographic Supply's specialties were German Graduated backgrounds as well as albumen paper and Eikonogen (a chemical developer). George Murphy was appointed sole selling agent for the company.[119]

Richard Walzl at the National Photographic Emporium and Publishing House
The National Photographic Emporium and Publishing House was a retailer for general photographic supplies and was located at 46 Charles Street in Baltimore, Maryland in 1872. Walzl published *The Photographer's Friend and Revised Price Catalogue.*

Willard & Co.
J.W. Willard worked with the Scovill & Adams Co. for many years. In 1896, he purchased an agency for photographers and photo-engraving under the name of J.W. Willard, which was located on 7 Co. at 25-27 Third Avenue, New York.[120]

Chas. A. Wilson
Chas. A. Wilson was listed at No. 7 N. Charles Street, Baltimore in 1874.

Wilson, Hood, & Co.
John G. Hood, one of the founders of the Wilson, Hood and Company, began business life under F. Gutekunst, one of the oldest photographers in Philadelphia. In 1866 Hood owned a retail store specializing in photographic supplies with Edward L. Wilson on Arch Street in Philadelphia. Initially the company focused on props and

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[118] Hiram J. Thompson, *Photographic Times* 9 (1879): 41.
[119] Edward L. Wilson, Wilson's Photographic Magazine 17 (1890): 640.
[120] Edward L. Wilson, *Wilson's Photographic Magazine* 33 (1896): 640.

accessories for cabinet cards.[121] This business eventually formed Wilson, Hood, & Co., which was then succeeded by the Cheney, Hood Company. [122]

Geo. J. Wolf & Co.
 Geo. J. Wolf & Co. was listed at 918 Arch Street, Philadelphia in 1893 and 1894.

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[121] The Library Company of Philadelphia, "Collections," accessed July 10, 2013,
http://www.librarycompany.org/collections/stewardship/
[122] Edward L. Wilson, Wilson's Photographic Magazine 50 (1913): 317

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———. *The Photographic Times and American Photographer* 13 (1883): 98.

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———. *The Photographic Times* 13 (1872): 53.

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⸺. "Hull Device for a Background Frame." *The Philadelphia Photographer* 5 (1868): 21.

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⸺. *Wilson's Photographics; a series of lessons, accompanied by notes, on all the processes which are needful in the art of photography.* Philadelphia: E. L. Wilson, 1881.

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