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FRONTISPIECE

**Southworth and Hawes.**  
*Students at Emerson School for Girls.*  
Whole-plate daguerreotype—as produced.

*Courtesy of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri. Gift of Hallmark Cards, Inc., 2005.27.280.*

# The Southworth and Hawes Studio

## A Virtual Tour of their Operating Room

Mike Robinson

**I**T WAS HARD WORK to make pictures in our room. We never knew where our camera was going to stand, or where the sitter was going to sit, when the sitter came into the room. We arranged the sitter as we could, according to our judgment, the way the face ought to be represented in the picture, and when we got the place to sit ourselves there it had to go.

— Albert S. Southworth<sup>1</sup>

Unless noted otherwise, all of the daguerreotypes have been visually corrected (horizontally transposed or “flipped”) to allow comparison to the accompanying floor plans.

Daguerreotypes not transposed will be noted with “—as produced” after the caption’s plate size.

### INTRODUCTION

**T**HIS ARTICLE IS A TRANSCRIPTION of a portion of my lecture given at the 2005 Daguerreian Society Symposium in Rochester, New York, titled, “Southworth and Hawes, a Style Peculiar to Themselves.” Many present at the lecture told me afterwards how much they enjoyed the virtual tour of the studio space where, alongside a daguerreotype, I showed a diagram indicating precisely where Hawes or Southworth had placed their camera in order to make the exposure. As in my lecture, these images are shown in sequence to create a counterclockwise, 360 degree tour of the Southworth and Hawes “operating room”—a nineteenth century term used to refer to the space in which the daguerreotypes were taken.

Understanding the skylight and design of Southworth and Hawes’s operating room at 5 ½ Tremont Row, Boston, is key to understanding the unique look of their images. The operating room was roughly twenty-one by forty-five feet with a pyramid-shaped skylight, twelve by fifteen foot, centered in the flat of the roof, eighteen feet above the floor (figs. 1, 2 and 3).<sup>2</sup> In the south-east corner of the operating room was a ladies dressing room.

With the general layout of the studio in mind, I began looking carefully at Southworth and Hawes’s daguerreotypes to find common elements such as wall color, carpeting, and architectural details. This work allowed me to create the schematic floor plan illustrated here (fig. 4). To locate the position of the camera on the floor plan I had to determine the vantage point for each photograph. For this, I relied on my understanding of nineteenth century optics.

Southworth and Hawes experimented with lenses and while we don’t know exactly what kind of focal lengths



FIGURE 1

**Southworth & Hawes Studio,  
Tremont Street View.**

© George Eastman House. Building virtual reconstruction and images by Bero Architecture, PC.

those may have been, we do know for a fact that they used Voigtlander lenses.<sup>3</sup> As a daguerreotypist I use Voigtlander lenses in my own work, so I can tell you precisely the angle of coverage that a Voigtlander full-plate lens will give on a full plate. When shot on a horizontal plate that coverage is forty-five degrees and when shot on a vertical, or portrait, plate coverage is thirty-five degrees. So, knowing that angle of coverage, I was able to use the visual and architectural clues in the image to precisely determine where Hawes or Southworth chose to position their camera. In the seventeen floor diagrams, starting at Figure 7, the black dot shown represents the camera and the darker gray triangle the coverage of the lens, or angle of view.

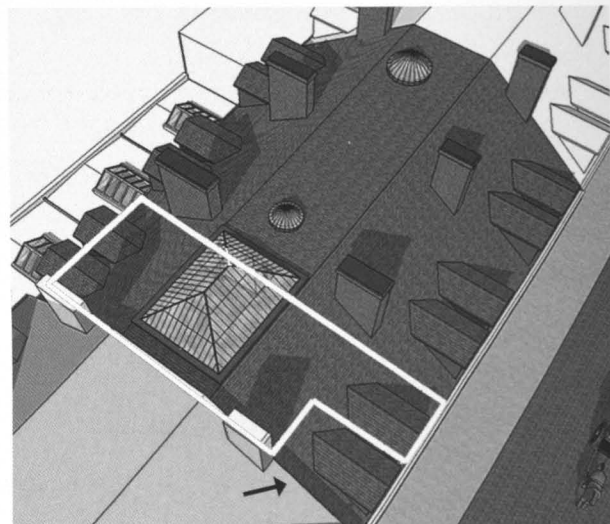


FIGURE 2

**Southworth & Hawes Studio, Roof View.**

© George Eastman House. Building virtual reconstruction and images by Bero Architecture, PC.

The white line in this illustration represents the operating room's floorspace. The ladies dressing room occupied the southeast corner, *arrow*.

1. Albert S. Southworth, "Comments at the National Photographic Association," 1873, *Philadelphia Photographer*, September 1873.
2. Sheila Foster and Grant Romer, in preparing for the *Young America* exhibition and catalogue, were able to gather from several sources the minute details required to reconstruct this space. Grant Romer and Brian Wallis, ed., *Young America: The Daguerreotypes of Southworth & Hawes* (Göttingen, Steidl, 2005), pp 29-30.
3. Southworth and Hawes paid 140 dollars for a full plate Voigtlander lens in 1845 and 70 dollars for a half plate Voigtlander lens in 1846. They were purchased from dealer Edward White of New York City, according to original receipts in the collections of the GEH/IMP and Matthew R. Isenburg, Connecticut, respectively.



FIGURE 3

**Southworth & Hawes Studio, Section from Northeast.**

© George Eastman House. Building virtual reconstruction and images by Bero Architecture, PC.

This is a cutaway of the southern elevation of the building where the Southworth & Hawes studio was located. The firm leased a reception area on the third floor and all of the attic rooms above.

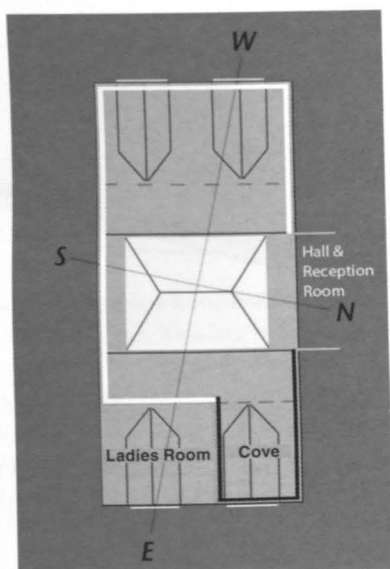


FIGURE 4

The floor plan of the operating room, one third of the building's attic rooms, is shown with compass directions. These will be helpful when we try to imagine where the sun may have been at the time an image was taken.

On the lower left is the ladies room, and a space next to it which I call the cove. The dotted lines represent roof beams which are evident in a few images.

The skylight is centered on the flat of the roof over the operating room, and there are four dormer windows and a widened exit which leads to the hall and into the adjoining reception room.

The room's walls were painted in a light colour, shown here with a white line, and the cove walls were painted in a dark colour, shown as a black line.

FIGURE 5

**Southworth & Hawes Studio.**

**View North East in Operating Room.**

© George Eastman House. Building virtual reconstruction and images by Bero Architecture, PC.

This illustration has been modified from the original with the cove area redrawn by the author.

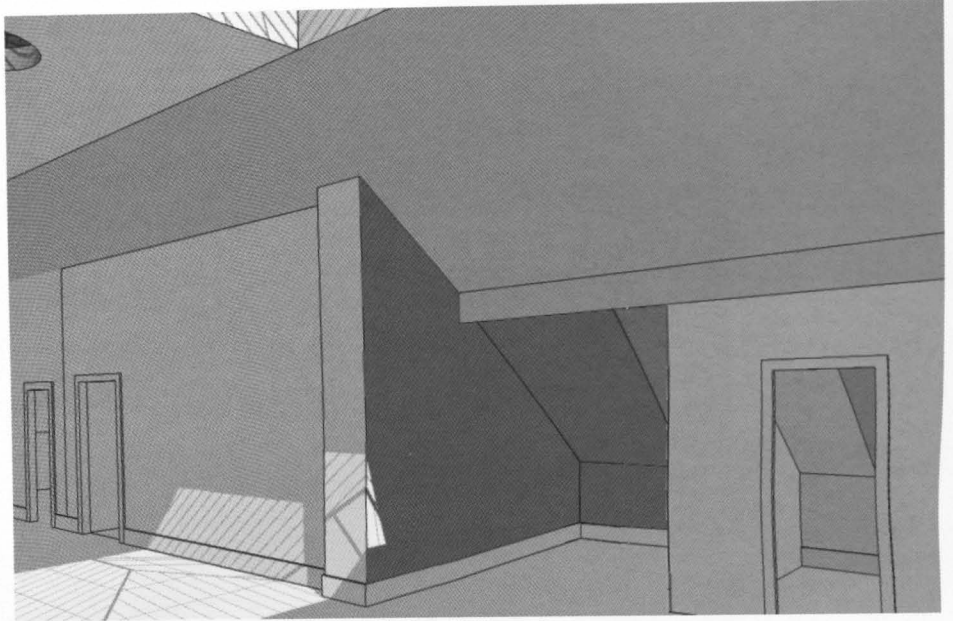


FIGURE 6

**Southworth & Hawes Studio.**

**View North West in Operating Room.**

© George Eastman House. Building virtual reconstruction and images by Bero Architecture, PC.

This is a composite illustration from two individual renderings, created by Mark S. Johnson.

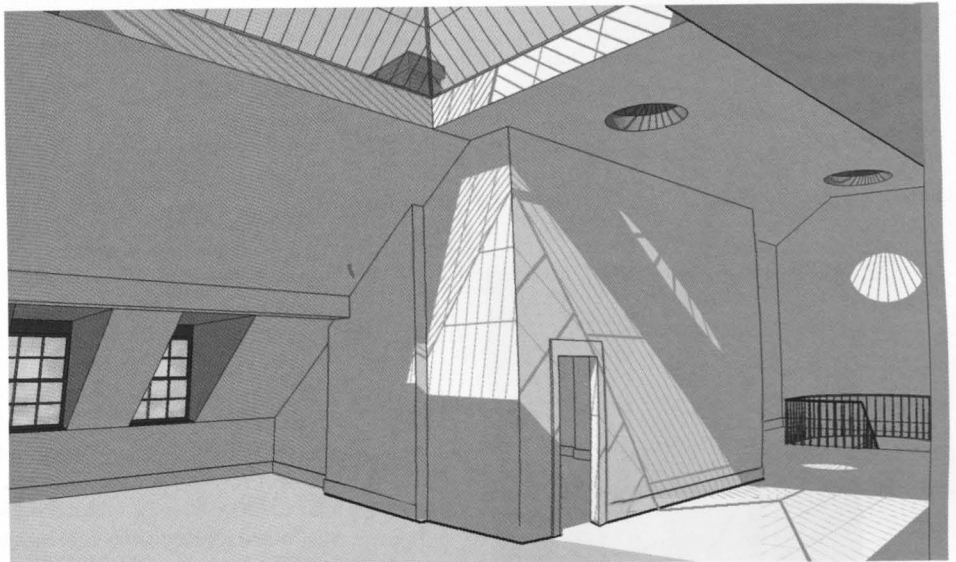


Figure 5, *top*, is a view of the operating room looking toward the cove at the Tremont Street front-side of the building. Figure 6, *below*, is looking toward the back of the operating room and down the wide hallway leading to a staircase beyond.

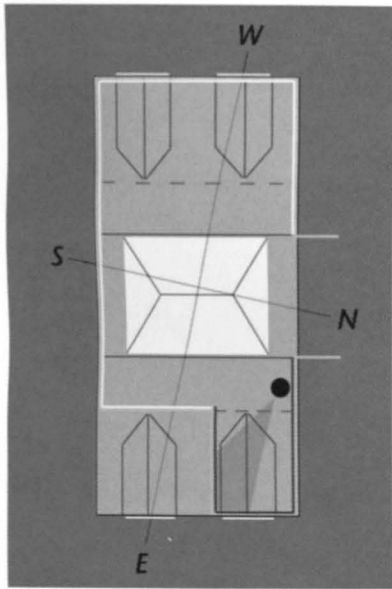


FIGURE 7

Southworth and Hawes.

*Unidentified Woman (with double exposure for fancy border).*

Whole-plate daguerreotype.

*Courtesy of The George Eastman House, 1974:0193:0050.*

LET'S TRY TO IGNORE the beautifully applied pattern background, but looking at the image itself, here we see a shot into the cove. The sitter is illuminated by the skylight and there is a gentle backlight from the dormer window. This is the only dormer window in the operating room where the adjacent wall does not finish off in a forty-five degree angle with the roofline, it goes directly to the floor.

I have to point out that these images may look odd to you because I've reversed them in Photoshop so that they appear as if Hawes was looking directly at the sitter. This adjustment is to avoid confusion during our 360 degree counterclockwise tour through the space.

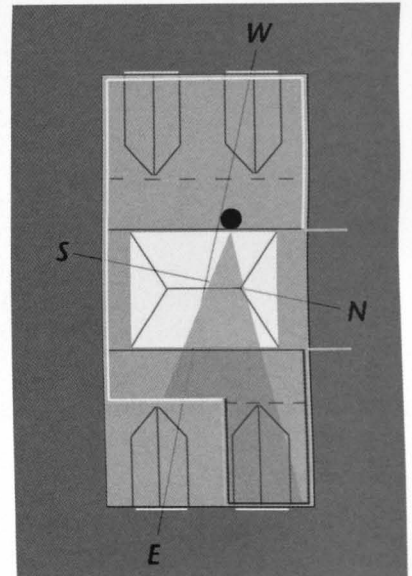


FIGURE 8

**Southworth and Hawes.**

***Three Unidentified Women.***

Whole-plate daguerreotype.

*Courtesy of Sotheby's, New York. Collection of Dr. Robert Harshorn Shimsak and Marion Brenner.*

**I**N THIS IMAGE HAWES MOVES to his right and backs up to shoot on axis with the north facing edge of the ladies dressing room wall. The dormer window can be seen in the cove area, and through it is the silhouette of Brattle Street Church.

By stepping two feet to the left and a little bit closer . . .

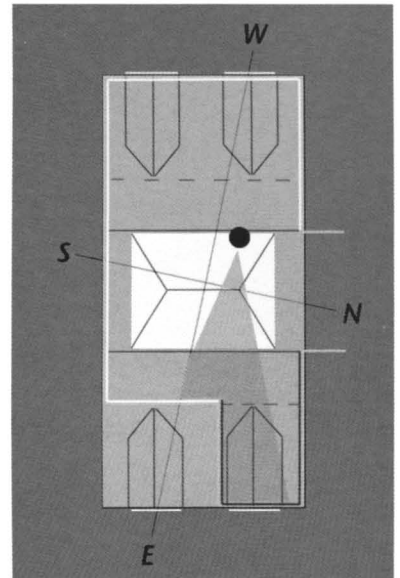


FIGURE 9

Southworth and Hawes.

*Unidentified Man (with double exposure for church view).*

Whole-plate daguerreotype.

Courtesy of Matthew R. Isenburg, Collection of Matthew R. Isenburg.

**B**RATTLE STREET CHURCH now fills the window frame. This image is unique in that the photographer has made the exposure of the seated gentleman with the window “curtained off” and then drew the curtain aside, refocused the lens on the distant church, and gave a second exposure to record sharp detail in the sitter as well as the distant background.

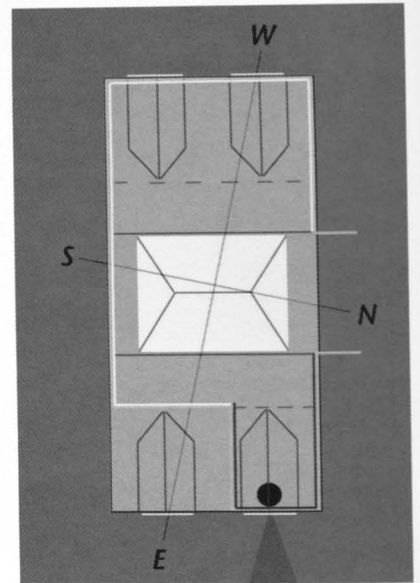


FIGURE 10

**Southworth and Hawes.  
View Down Brattle Street.**

Whole-plate daguerreotype.

*The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of I. N. Phelps Stokes, Edward S. Hawes, Alice Mary Hawes, and Marion Augusta Hawes, 1937 (37.14.3).*

Copy photograph © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

**N**OW, IF HAWES PICKED up his camera and moved directly to the window, this is the scene that would open up before him.

A view down Brattle Street from the cove dormer window. This view faces east and one can see in the distance the masts of sailing ships in the harbor.



FIGURE 11

Southworth and Hawes.

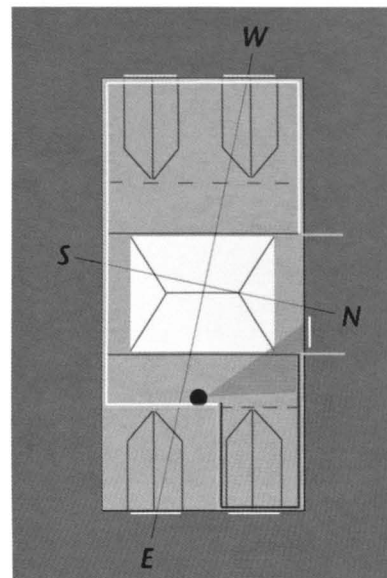
*Bennett Tyler.*

Whole-plate daguerreotype.

*Courtesy of The George Eastman House, 1974:0193:000.*

**M**OVING AROUND TO the north wall, just east of the hallway entrance, we see that we are still in the cove area with the dark painted wall. This wall is fixed in place. Notice the carpeting and the white baseboard.

Here is the first view of the column. This column was probably lightweight and tended to move around. It is made of three pieces. Hawes or Southworth could assemble it as they wished.



Keep in mind, they are using this column to hide the architectural transition down the hall or, in other images, to conceal a seam from a false wall or curtain.

This was intended to give the illusion of a much larger space.

In this image we can see one leg of the headrest used to hold Mr. Tyler steady.

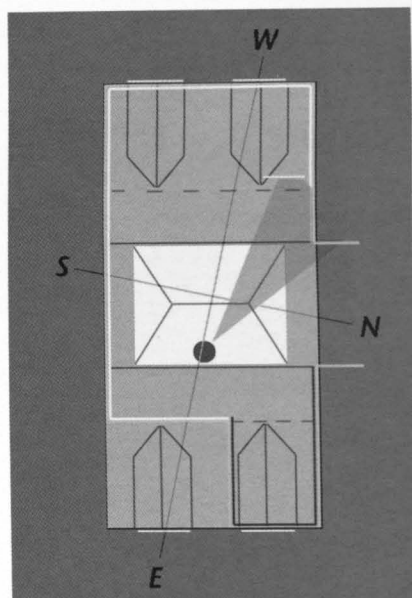


FIGURE 12

**Southworth and Hawes.  
*Unidentified Child.***

Quarter-plate daguerreotype with applied color.  
Courtesy of The George Eastman House 1974:0193:0732.

**M**OVING ALONG TO the other north west wall which is painted white, you can see once again the technique of trying to hide the architectural details. There is a plant covering the corner that leads down the hall.

This I believe is early in the evolution of their style. They've used a white curtain to hide the darkened receding space into the corner of the room and semi-successfully hide the edge of the white curtain with a column.

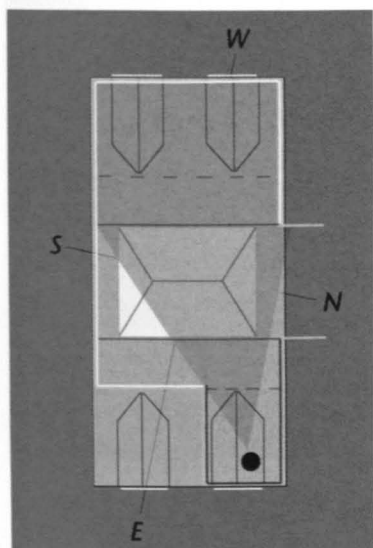


FIGURE 13

**Southworth and Hawes.**  
***Students at Emerson School for Girls.***

Whole-plate daguerreotype.

*Courtesy of The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.  
 Gift of Hallmark Cards, Inc., 2005.27.280.*



**T**HIS IS A REALLY WONDERFUL IMAGE to show the entire west wall of their studio. This image has twenty-five women in it. It was made, I believe, to satisfy their artistic sensibilities. Hawes or Southworth is about as far back as they can get in their operating room space so that the Voigtlander lens can cover the twenty-five foot expanse needed to fill the frame.

It was shot in the morning. Southworth wrote that with large groups they needed to work in a strong light for exposures in the two to three second range. The sun rises in the east, it is coming through the overhead skylight directly illuminating the sitters and is bright enough to allow the exposure with the dormer windows in the background uncovered. The light coming in from them is less intense in the morning as they face the west and an exposure can be made without these windows appearing blue, or solarizing.

If you'll agree that this image is their "artistic" vision of this group of women . . .



FIGURE 14

**Southworth and Hawes.**  
***Students at Emerson School for Girls.***

Whole-plate daguerreotype.

*Collection of William L. Schaeffer, reproduction courtesy of Mike Robinson.*

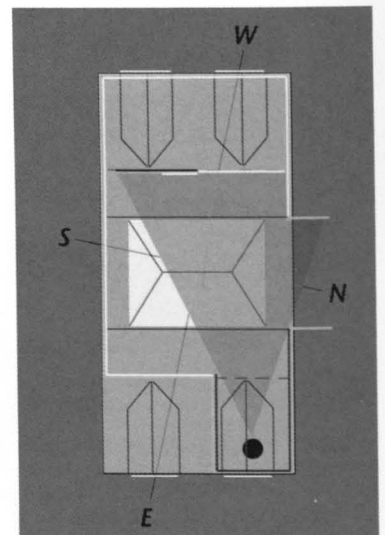
**T**HIS VERSION IS MORE representational. In the previous shot, three ladies stand in silhouette at the dormer window. This daguerreotype was made to satisfy the sitters desires in that every face can be clearly seen.

Notice that the women are seated in a semi-circular fashion so that each face will fit into the curved plane of a Voigtlander lens's focus.

I also believe that this image was shot in the afternoon. It now becomes necessary to mask off the bright light coming in through the dormer windows that face the west, and here we have our first clue to some of their operating room equipment.

On the right is a very large, white movable panel . . . I'll call it a false wall as it has a baseboard on it and is painted the same colour as the majority of the studio space. They also had a dark wall, seen here on the left, which was shorter in height. For this image they've thrown a white fabric over it to create a full width light colored background. To hide the division between the two false walls, they have placed their column.

Again, as it is shot in the afternoon, it is likely that the sun is coming more directly into the camera lens and to re-direct the light back onto the sitters the technique known as "bagging down" was used in which a very large sail cloth hanging overhead prevented the light from coming into the camera and reflected it back onto the group.



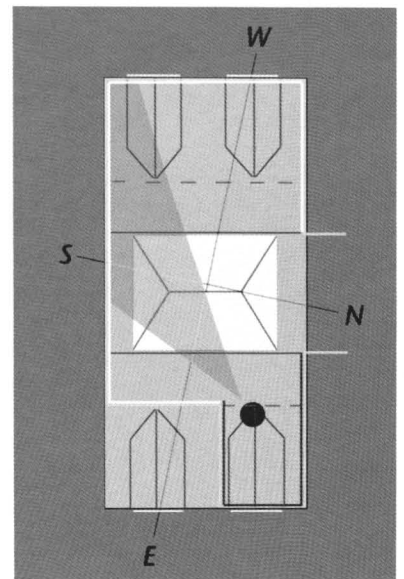
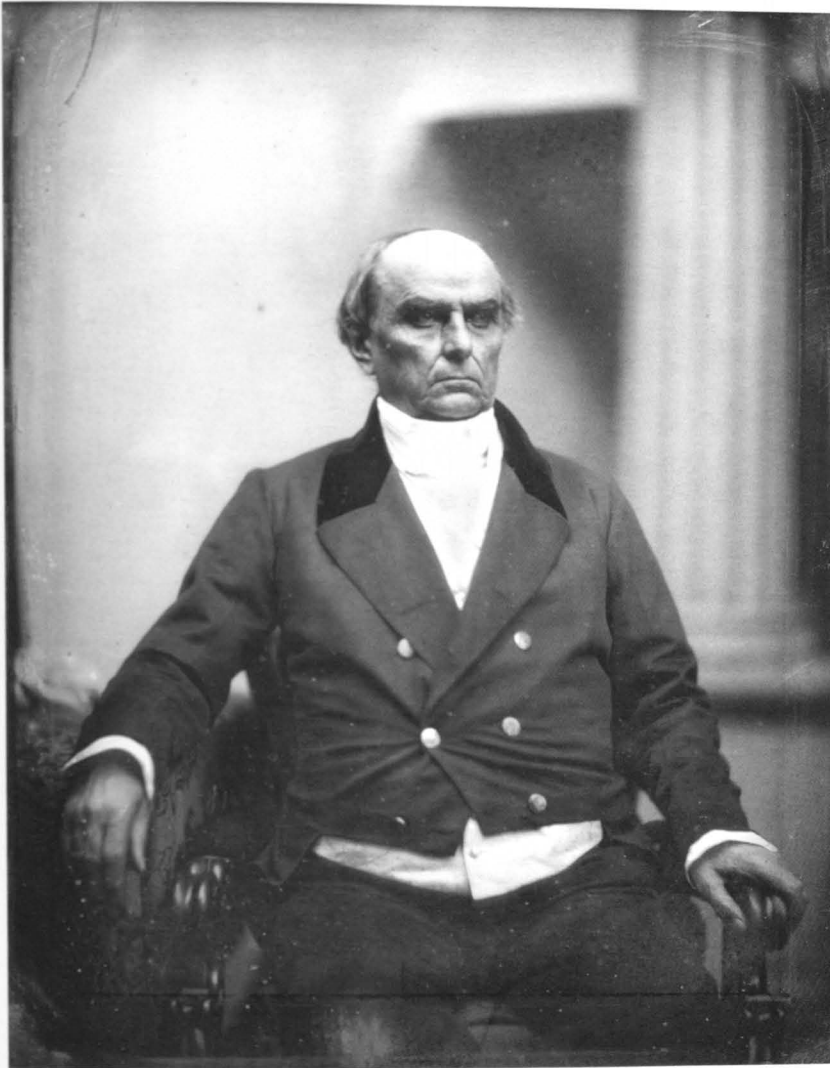


FIGURE 15

Southworth and Hawes.

*Daniel Webster, ca 1851.*

*Courtesy of The Museum of Fine Art, Boston, Gift of Edward Hawes in memory of his father, Josiah Hawes 43.1402.*

*Photograph © 2009, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.*

CONTINUING ON OUR 360 degree rotation, we have this wonderful shot of Daniel Webster. Hawes has seated Webster directly under the skylight. We can see that his eyes are in deep shadow, the shadow under the nose is straight down and there is strong illumination on top of his head.

The column is placed, perhaps, to mask off some light coming in from the dormer window.

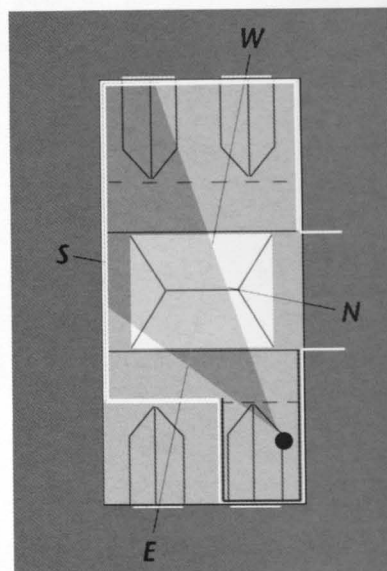


FIGURE 16

**Southworth and Hawes.**

*Standing Man and Seated Woman .*

Whole-plate daguerreotype.

*Courtesy of the late Thurman F. "Jack" Naylor ex Naylor Collection.*

FROM THE SAME VANTAGE POINT, only further back, we have this image formerly from the Jack Naylor collection again using the column to mask off light from the dormer window.

What I'd like to point out here is that this is possibly the best example in which the headstand used by Southworth and Hawes can be clearly seen. They de-

signed a special base of their very own, a flat, eight-sided metal plate with a pipe on it. Normally, this would be hidden behind the sitter out of view.

This unique headstand doesn't look like the fancy cast iron headstands that we know of in other daguerreotypes. It is very discreet.



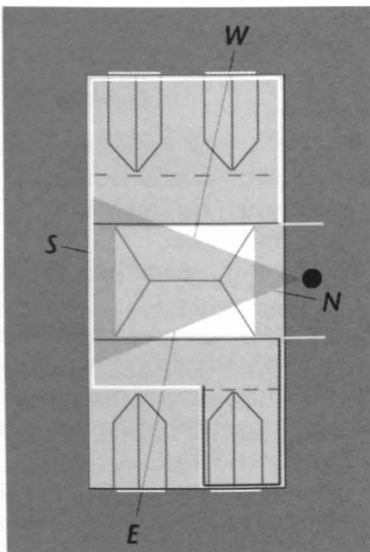
FIGURE 17

**Southworth and Hawes.**

*Unidentified Family Group.*

Whole-plate daguerreotype.

Collection of Howard and Carole Tanenbaum, reproduction courtesy of Mike Robinson.



**M**OVING AROUND TO the south wall we have this large family arrangement. This I think was a preferred area for Southworth and Hawes to work as the sitters never have to deal with direct sunlight getting into their eyes.

To photograph this large group, Southworth really had to back out of the operating room and move into the hallway with his camera.

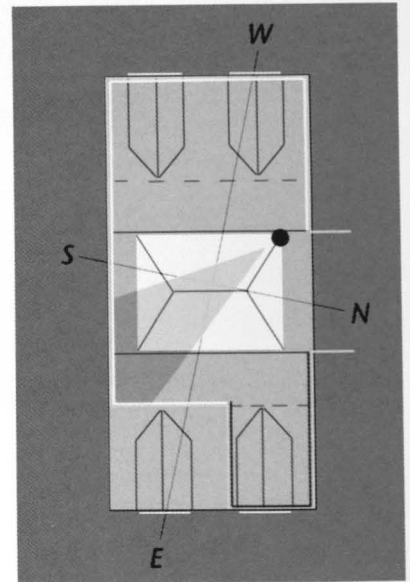


FIGURE 18

**Southworth and Hawes.**  
**Unidentified Family Group.**

Whole-plate daguerreotype.

Courtesy of The George Eastman House, 1974:0193:0073.

**N**OW WE MOVE INTO what seems to be one of Southworth and Hawes's favorite locations to pose groups. This is predominately the south wall, with the edge of the ladies room wall visible.

Once again the column is used to hide the corner transition.

Notice the pictures on the wall are hung about eight feet high, which we would never do in a home today. I believe the artists are trying to create the illusion that this image was taken in the parlor of an upper class home rather than a photographic studio.

A final observation is the placement of the sailcloth to soften the direct afternoon sun.

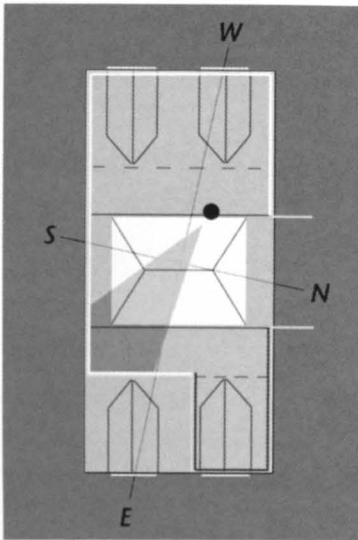


FIGURE 20

**L.S. Punderson.**

**Edward Hitchcock.**

Engraving in *Annual of Scientific Discovery*, 1854, Gould and Lincoln, Boston, MA.

ROTATING A LITTLE counter-clockwise we see more of the ladies room wall, including a portion of the ladies room door. This image of eleven unidentified gentlemen with documents is thought to be a group of doctors according to the inscription on the back.

Recently, I noticed that the frontispiece of the 1854 *Annual of Scientific Discovery* appears to be the man seated on the right in the front row. The frontispiece is an



FIGURE 19

**Southworth and Hawes.**

**Inscription: (verso in pencil) Doctor's Group.**

Whole-plate daguerreotype.

*The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of I. N. Phelps Stokes, Edward S. Hawes, Alice Mary Hawes, and Marion Agusta Hawes, 1937(37.14.6).*

*Copy Photograph © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.*

engraving, from a daguerreotype, of Edward Hitchcock, President of Amherst College and Geologist to the State of Massachusetts (fig. 20). Are these men all professors at Amherst College or men of science? Perhaps with a little more detective work, based on this new information, the identities of the other gentlemen will be revealed.

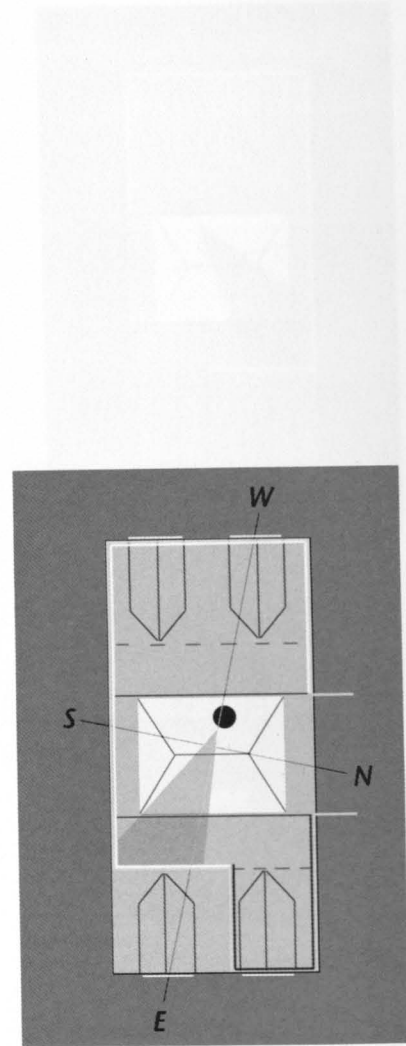


FIGURE 21

**Southworth and Hawes.  
Four Unidentified Women.**

Whole-plate daguerreotype.

*Courtesy of The George Eastman House, 1974:0193:0002.*

**H**ERE WE SEE EVEN MORE of the ladies dressing room wall than in the previous image. You'll notice that they've actually hung pictures on the ladies' room door and brought in the column once again to conceal it.

Quite often we see the shorter column with the ornate pitcher on top in this area.

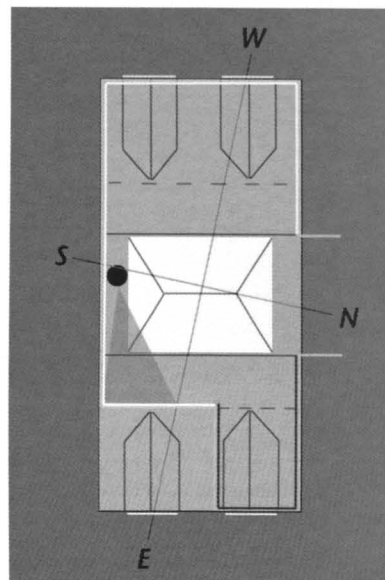


FIGURE 22

**Southworth and Hawes.**  
***Unidentified Bride.***

Whole-plate daguerreotype.

Courtesy of The George Eastman House, 1974:0193:0251.

AND NOW THIS WONDERFUL image of a bride. Hawes has literally jammed himself up against the south wall. The column is used to hide the door frame of the ladies room and the bride is looking directly over her right shoulder with the light now striking predominantly from a forty-five degree angle.

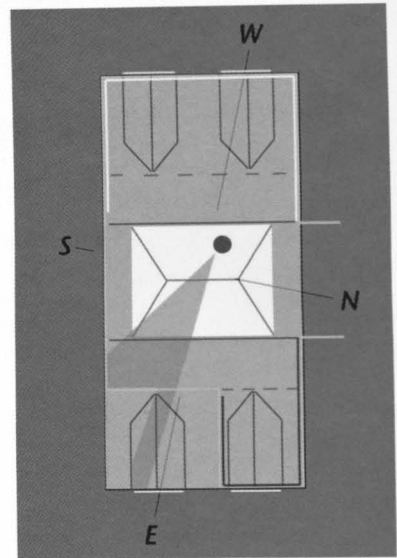


FIGURE 23

**Southworth and Hawes.**  
***Two Unidentified Women (with third in background).***

Sixth-plate daguerreotype.

*Courtesy of The George Eastman House, 1974:0193:1109.*



**N**EARING THE END of our 360 degree virtual tour of the Southworth and Hawes operating room, we have this shot with the ladies room door actually left open.

We can see into the ladies room with the dormer window light in the distance and Grandma patiently seated in the corner waiting for the exposure to be completed.

I was quite curious about this image. What is actually going on here? How could Hawes leave the door open?

I've made images where I've been intensely occupied with getting the pose just right for the sitters and I've

missed correcting things in the background. Could Hawes have suffered the same while arranging his sitters and failed to notice Granny exiting the ladies room, leaving the door open, and sitting in the corner?

I could forgive that once, but there is another nearly identical image in the George Eastman House archive (fig 24).

Now I had to think about this. How could they make this mistake twice? Well, I suppose it is possible if they took these two images in rapid succession.



FIGURE 24, LEFT, SHOWN NEXT TO FIGURE 23

**Southworth and Hawes.  
Two Unidentified Women.**

Sixth-plate daguerreotypes—both as produced.  
*Courtesy of The George Eastman House, 1974:0193:1085.*

THEN I STARTED to take a closer look at the plates themselves. I noticed that these are sixth plates. When supplied by the manufacturer all four edges of the plate would have been bent back slightly to prevent the edge of the plate from catching on the buffing paddle during polishing.

These plates have three turned down edges with one edge trimmed away. Their patented plate block for the sixth plate size gripped the plate by all four turned down edges and trimmed plates could not have been used with their polisher in this condition.

I have to assume that these plates were trimmed after the images were made.

I also noticed that one plate had its left edge trimmed away while the other had its right edge trimmed.

And then it struck me. When we bring the two trimmed edges together the result is a great stereo pair.

Another detail. Notice the hallmark on the left plate is located in the lower left and on the right plate, the upper right.

Hawes had to know when preparing to make this pair that he had to put the left image plate in the right plate holder with the hallmark up and the right image plate in the left plate holder with the hallmark down so they would be hidden behind the mat.

Now with this much attention to details I have to assume that the door was left open absolutely intentionally to enhance the depth of field in this stereo view.

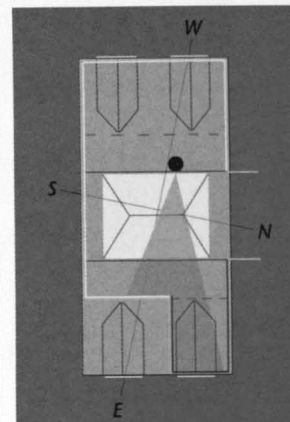


FIGURE 25

**Southworth and Hawes.**

***Gilman Brown.***

Two sixth-plate daguerreotypes.

*Courtesy of Dennis Waters, Collection of Dennis Waters.*

THIS LAST DAGUERREOTYPE, a stereo portrait of Gilman Brown, is the image that caused me to think that the previous two plates might possibly be a separated stereo pair. Of particular interest here is that the partners were experimenting with ways of increasing the depth of field in stereo imagery by changing the focus between exposures. Although odd looking on the printed page, when viewed in stereo the effect is remarkable.

This last image brings us back full circle to where we began our tour.

In closing, I'll quote Keith F. Davis as he describes how Southworth and Hawes moved about their operating room.

*The best daguerreians were engaged in a continuous dance with daylight — accommodating themselves to its direction and quality to put it to best pictorial use.<sup>4</sup>*

4. Keith F. Davis, *The Origins of American Photography, 1839-1885, From Daguerreotype to Dry Plate*, Yale University Press, p. 68.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ID LIKE TO THANK the following individuals and institutions for making these daguerreotypes available.

- Keith F. Davis, the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.
- Bero Architecture, PLLCC, Rochester, New York.
- George Eastman House, International Museum of Photography, Rochester, New York.
- Grant B. Romer.
- Sheila J. Foster.
- Dr. Robert Harshorn Shimsak and Marion Brenner.
- Chris Mahoney, Sotheby's New York, New York.
- Matthew R. Isenberg.
- The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York.
- Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.
- William L. Schaeffer.
- The late Thurman F. "Jack" Naylor.
- Howard and Carole Tanenbaum.
- Dennis Waters Fine Daguerreotypes

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MIKE ROBINSON is the proprietor of Mike Robinson's Century Darkroom, in Toronto, Canada. His daguerreian art is in the collections of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; The Portrait Gallery of Canada; The Art Gallery of Ontario; The Hallmark Fine Art Collection in Kansas City; The Snite Museum of Art at Notre Dame University; The George Eastman House International Museum of Photography and in many private collections.

Mike teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in 19th century photographic process at Ryerson University in Toronto.

Mike has also taught workshops in the nineteenth century processes at The National Archives of Canada,

The George Eastman House, The Amon Carter Museum, and The University of Notre Dame. His work has been reproduced in several issues of the *Daguerreian Annual* including a feature article, "The Making of Twenty Daguerreotypes" in the *Daguerreian Annual 2001*. He has written and lectured on the work of Southworth and Hawes. This article is based on his research for his essay published in *Young America, the Daguerreotypes of Southworth and Hawes*.

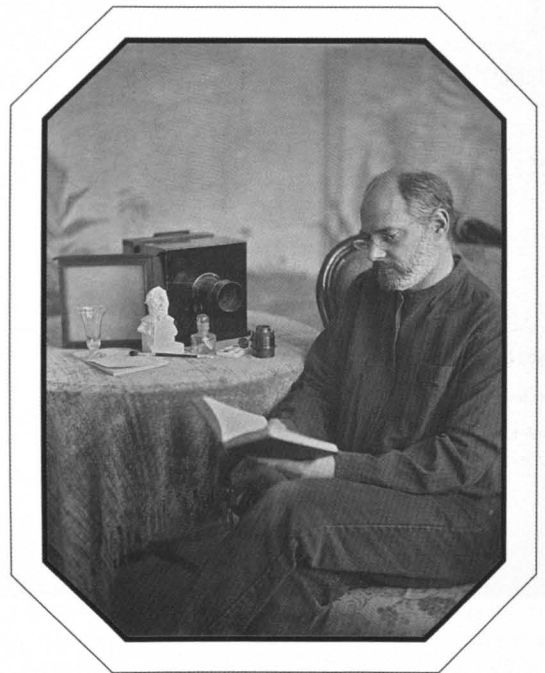


PLATE 1

**Mike Robinson.**

*Self portrait.*

Half-plate daguerreotype, 2005.

*Collection of the author.*



FIGURE 1, DETAIL ABOVE

**Thomas Easterly.**

*Rapids above Niagara Falls; Niagara, Niagara;  
Table Rock.*

Four half-plate daguerreotypes, ca. 1853.  
Clements Library, University of Michigan.

# THE DAGUERREIAN ANNUAL 2007

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