

Geo-referencing Daguerreian Studios in New York City



Ill. 1, Charles D. Fredericks, 585 Broadway studio imprint on brass mat. Sixth plate daguerreotype ca. 1859

ABSTRACT

Photographs are primary source documents that, just like manuscripts and printed documents, carry many types of embedded information. As a result, photographs have their own unique vocabulary and require their own literacy to be fully understood.

Understanding photographs involves looking at several elements. **Time** - How the image fits into the continuum of photography - is it unique, interesting, or innovative in terms of time and aesthetics? **Place** - Are there unique aspects of the location where the image was made, be it scenic or portrait. **Context** - Is there information about the photographer and their work within which the image fits? Does this context provide any new information that can help better understand both the creator and subject?

Much of the interest in provenance or identification of daguerreotypes revolves around the location for scenic images, or for portraits, identification of the photographer and subject. As an example of a research strategy that can be used to study the time, place, and context of the development of early photographic businesses in America, a project to research and geo-reference the early photographic studios in New York City using information culled from imprints, census records, city directories and other period sources is described.

KEY WORDS: daguerreotype, photographic business, Geographic Information System (GIS), data visualization, New York City

ILLUSTRATIONS: collection of Jeremy Rowe Vintage Photography, [vintagephoto](http://vintagephoto.com)

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Much of the scholarship related to daguerreotypes involves the aesthetics and historical importance of the image, or interest in the photographer that created the image. In addition to the appreciation of the aesthetic impact of the image, much of the interest in provenance or identification of daguerreotypes revolves around the location for scenic images, or for portraits, identification of the photographer and subject.

I consider photographs to be primary source documents that, just like manuscripts and printed documents, carry many types of embedded information. As a result, photographs have their own unique vocabulary and require their own literacy to be fully understood.

I feel that understanding photographs involves looking at several elements. **Time** - How the

image fits into the continuum of photography - is it unique, interesting, or innovative in terms of time and aesthetics? **Place** - Are there unique aspects of the location where the image was made, be it scenic or portrait. **Context** - Is there information about the photographer and their work within which the image fits? Does this context provide any new information that can help better understand both the creator and subject?

There is significant literature about aesthetics, processes, photographers and many subjects to help us explore these aspects of the photographs, but other facets have been less studied and understood. Following this path led me to seek more information about pioneer Daguerreian photographers, their studios, business locations and practices.

(Ill. 1) The photographers and studios that

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how they learned photography, where they traveled and exhibited their work. However, less attention has been paid to studying how these early photographic businesses were established and evolved in response to the mid-19th century passion for portraits and photographs. Even less attention has been directed to the interrelation and interaction between individual photographic studios as they developed in urban settings.

Among the few exceptions are *Images and Enterprise; Technology and the American Photographic Industry 1839 - 1923* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975) by Reese Jenkins, and *Industrial Madness - Commercial Photography in Paris 1848-71*, E. A. McCauley (Yale, 1994). Jenkins dedicated its first chapter to the pre-collodion photographic businesses. Jenkins focused on the daguerreotype and early photographic suppliers in New York for his discussion of the development of the photographic business in the U. S. Though many other books and articles address early photographic business from the unique perspective of photographer, manufacturer, or supplier, most of these works focus on individual entities and less so on the interrelationships between photographers in a region or urban setting.

As a photographer myself, as I began collecting, I wondered about how these pioneers supported themselves, how they afforded the expensive equipment, obtained materials and supplies while traveling in remote areas, and how and why they moved their studios. I was invited to write a bit about the research efforts that have resulted, and would like to share my geo-referencing project in its current state, and some thoughts about its future.

As noted, New York City was critical to the development of the photographic business in America and became a natural focus for my research efforts. From early experimenters, to the suppliers of cameras, plates, and

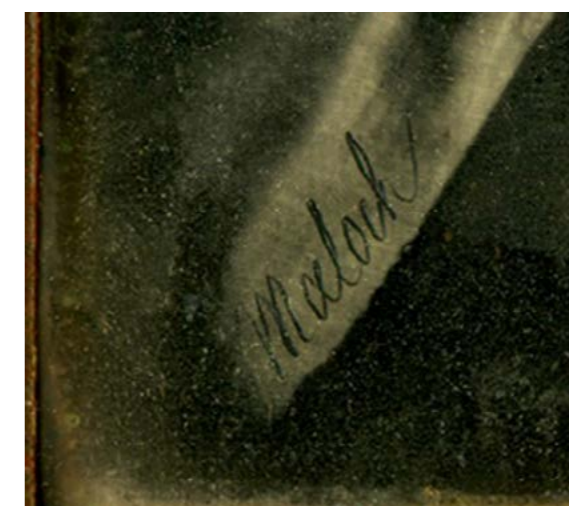
created daguerreotypes used several techniques to identify their images. Some photographers placed paper labels under cover glass or affixed to the rear of the image, *passé partout* mount or frame. (Ill. 2, 3, 4)

In the U. S. many photographers stamped their names, and often addresses, into the brass mat or embossed this information into the velvet pad on the inside of the case cover. (Ill. 5) Particularly after about 1850, photographers occasionally used the preserver to attach business cards or printed advertisements to the back of the image.

(Ill. 6) Some photographers and manufacturers also produced collateral advertising pieces that included their names and locations. (Ill. 7 a,b) Identifications can also appear as manuscript notations behind the image inside of the case, inscribed into the plate surface, or as prop - such as a book or plaque - that has been placed within the image. Occasionally unmarked images can be tentatively identified using known furniture, backgrounds or props, such as columns, that appear in the image.

Many individual photographers have been highlighted in monographs of their work and biographies that include information about

Ill. 2, McClees & German, Corner of Chestnut and 8th Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, paper studio label. Half Plate Daguerreotype ca. 1850



Ill. 3, Abraham Bogardus, studio advertisement in case plush pad. Sixth plate daguerreotype ca. 1850

Ill. 4, Rufus Anson, 589 Broadway studio imprint in top of oval velvet case. Ninth plate daguerreotype ca. 1858

Ill. 5, Paper label for Scovill Manufacturing Company, No. 57 Maiden Lane ca. 1850

Ill. 6, Advertising token for Scovill Manufacturing Company, No. 57 Maiden Lane ca. 1850

Ill. 7 a,b, Czech photographer Jan Maloch identification scratched into dress at lower left of plate (detail on right) Approximately ninth plate daguerreotype ca. 1848



virtually invisible in the history of photography. Initially I obtained addresses and identified tentative years of operation from John Craig's *Daguerreian Registry*. As my searches expanded to include city directories and other sources, I began to find new information and add names and dates to John's listings. I began to create a database to track both advertisements and individual listings for known photographers, operators, and business suppliers. Where possible I noted the photographic processes mentioned in their ads. As I continued to compile the list, I became interested in the patterns of studios as they were established, operated, moved and closed along the Bowery over time.

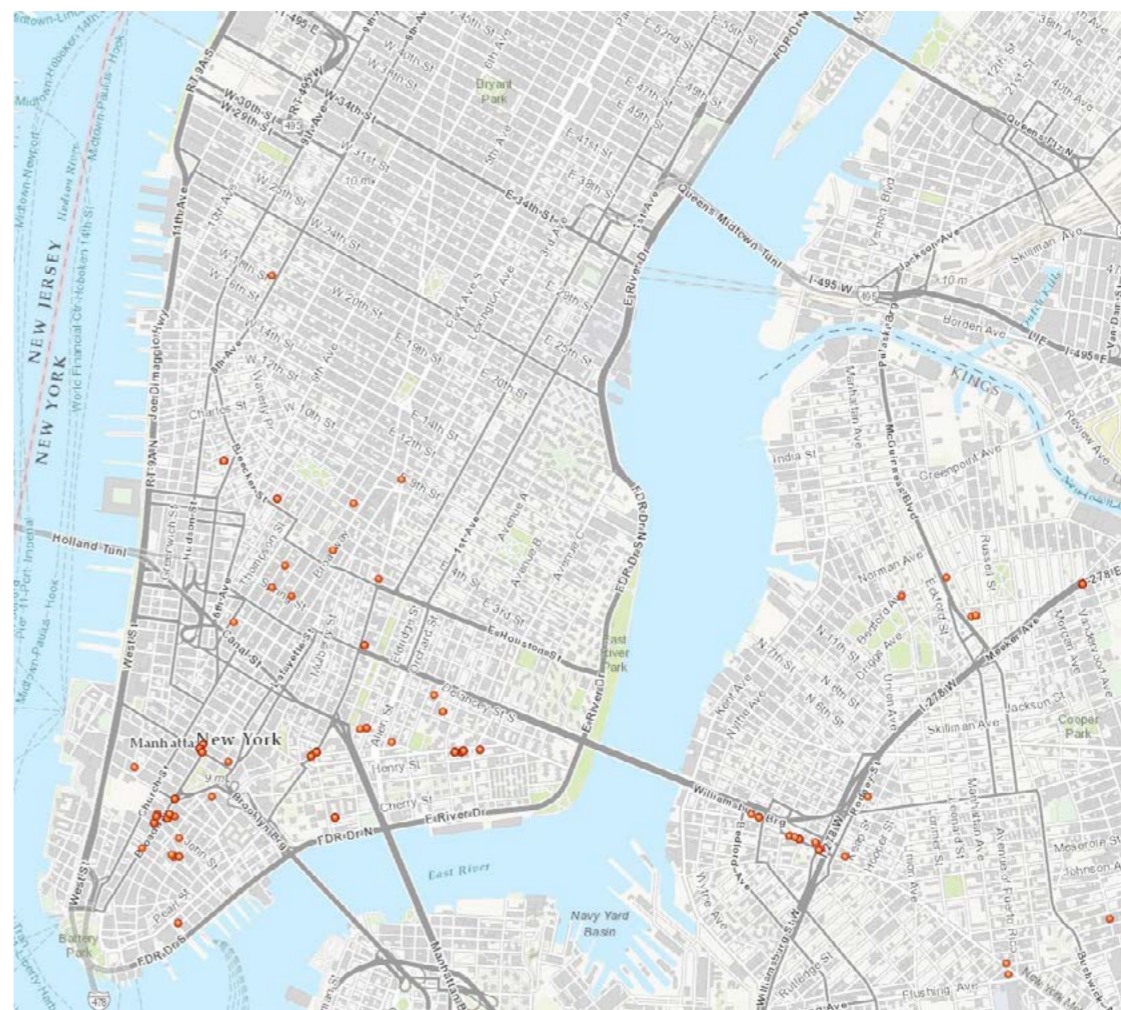
I began to notice names of several operators on the lower East Side of Manhattan that later worked on Broadway, and became interested in understanding how and why this movement might have occurred. I defined my research target as photographers who advertised their studios, and for whom I was able to identify estimated dates of operation. I required an advertisement in print, such as in city directories or census records, or on a mat or case imprint in an attempt to focus on established businesses as opposed to itinerant photographers. I expanded my research beyond the Bowery to include any photographers that operated in first Manhattan, and later Brooklyn since many operators had ties in both communities. Initially I targeted the classic Daguerreian Era from 1839 - 1860, but soon expanded my horizon, moving the ending date up to 1880.

As I wondered whether the photographers lived in or adjacent to their studios, or how far these photographers commuted, I added residential address where they were available. I also included suppliers of the cameras, optics, cases, chemistry and raw materials that I found. I wondered whether the studios initially clustered around the suppliers.

I eventually added dated advertisements and

chemistry, to the photographers that created the daguerreotypes themselves, New York City was one of the most active American cities during the Daguerreian era. Most of the attention of photographic historians and researchers has focused on suppliers like Scovill & Company and Edward & Henry T. Anthony; camera and optical manufacturers like William and William H. Lewis, Aaron F. Palmer & Joseph Longking, and Charles C. Harrison; and the famous photographers that operated posh studios on Broadway, such as Jeremiah Gurney, Abraham Bogardus, Charles and Henry Meade, and Matthew Brady.

(III. 8) In looking at images in my collection, I initially became interested in photographers operating in New York City on the Bowery, one of the main avenues that passed through the working class neighborhoods of lower Manhattan. Many of these Bowery studios were little known if not virtually obscure, known only from advertisements or the imprints that randomly surface. I was surprised when my initial research identified over 100 photographers who operated studios on the Bowery before 1860. I asked myself why these pioneers who produced thousands of daguerreotypes had remained



information from the 1852 reverse directory - sadly the only year available for New York City businesses. The reverse directory is organized geographically by street address, as opposed to alphabetically listed businesses in traditional city directories, and provided valuable additional information about businesses operating in proximity to each other, including several listings for multiple studios operating on different floors of a single building, and fascinating information about the other businesses that functioned on the floors below the photographic studios. I wish Manhattan reverse directories were available for other years...

A quick comment about data quality of the information I have been working with is warranted. First, serendipity is an important factor in finding any information from this era

due to the significant gaps in original source material. What was originally included, what is still available and accessible, particularly from sources such as mat imprints and manuscript sources, can never be comprehensive. However, once a large enough sample has been created it should provide accurate general information about trends and tendencies in business development within the area studied.

Similarly, the business directories and even census records are often incomplete due to gaps or declined responses at the time they were compiled. Transposition and printing errors in the directories and records provides another source of errors and omissions. Human error is added when scouring through the printed, or microform, records while trying to identify individual listings in the directories to augment the display advertisements and

III. 8, John Henderson, Bowery studio imprint on brass mat ca. 1850

III. 9, Geo-referenced map of Daguerreotypists in New York City and Brooklyn 1839 - 1843

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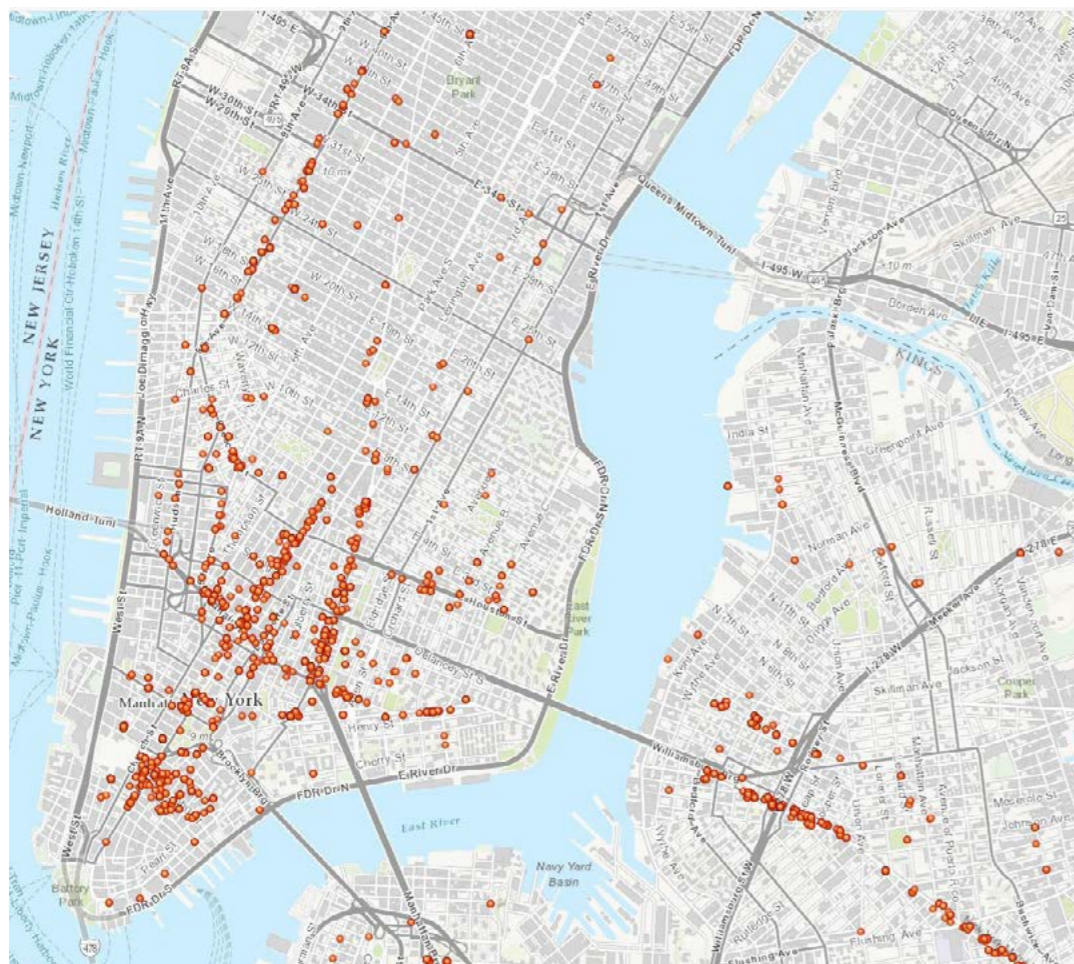
attempt to follow the trail of smaller studios. And finally, even when scanned material finally became available significant optical character recognition errors further complicate the process of compiling information about these early photographers.

(*Ills. 9, 10*) As the database grew to over 10,000 listings, I began to explore how to visualize the data. Mapping locations seemed to be the most important initial issue. I used the street address for each studio to identify longitude and latitude coordinates, and sought assistance in using Geographic Information System (GIS) tools to map the locations. Initially I used Google Earth as a development platform, but found the contemporary satellite view it provided distracting, so located an appropriate vintage map of New York City, and geo-referenced it to overlay the Google

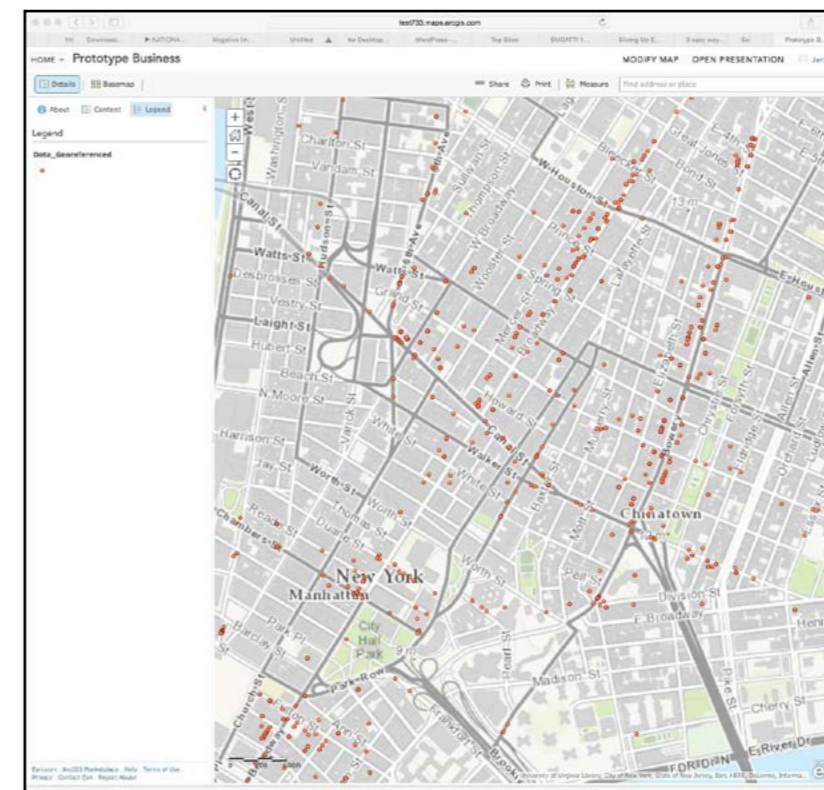
map for my data visualization. I have included several examples of different visualization tools, including the historic map overlay and detail images as illustrations.

Since changes over time was a critical issue in understanding the development of early studios, I coded the information and created individual maps of the businesses operating during each year, beginning in 1839.

(*Ill. 11*) The data visualization of time and place showed fascinating patterns of development beginning with the first advertised studios that my sources identified in lower Manhattan - one operated by James R. Chilton at 263 Broadway, the other by Richard A. Lewis at 142 Chatham Street. (*Ill. 12*) Over time, new photographic studios slowly clustered and progressed north up both Broadway and Bowery, with periodic



Ill. 10, Geo-referenced map of Daguerreotypists and early photographers in New York City and Brooklyn 1839 - 1863



outliers operating on connecting streets began in 1844. The increase in use generally continued until 1854, when collodion processes such as ambrotypes, ferrotypes, and collodion negative processes were introduced. After the introduction of the competing processes, use of the term dropped into the mid 1860s.

(*Ill. 13, 14, 15*) In addition to showing the location of the studio on the map, several of the GIS tools can display additional information about the photographer, dates of operation etc. as text fields, and show examples of advertisements or of their work when a specific location has been selected. The prototype of display of this additional information has been used to obtain user feedback and better understand how much detail to present.

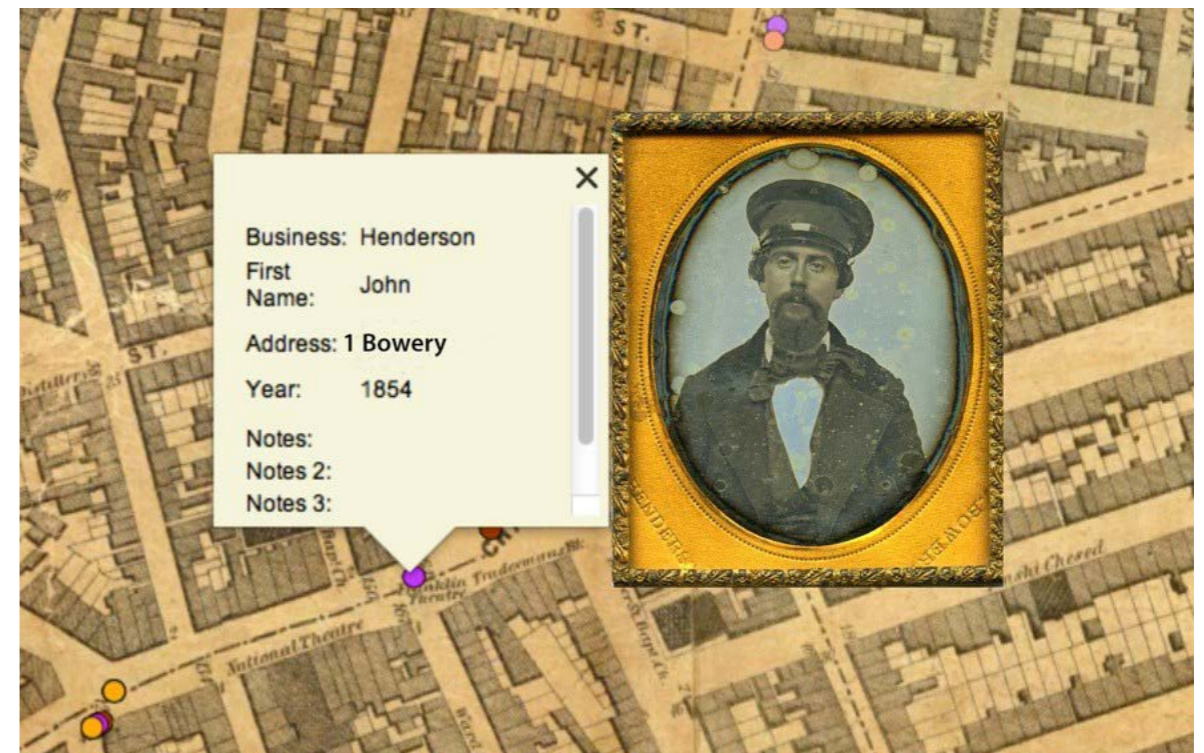
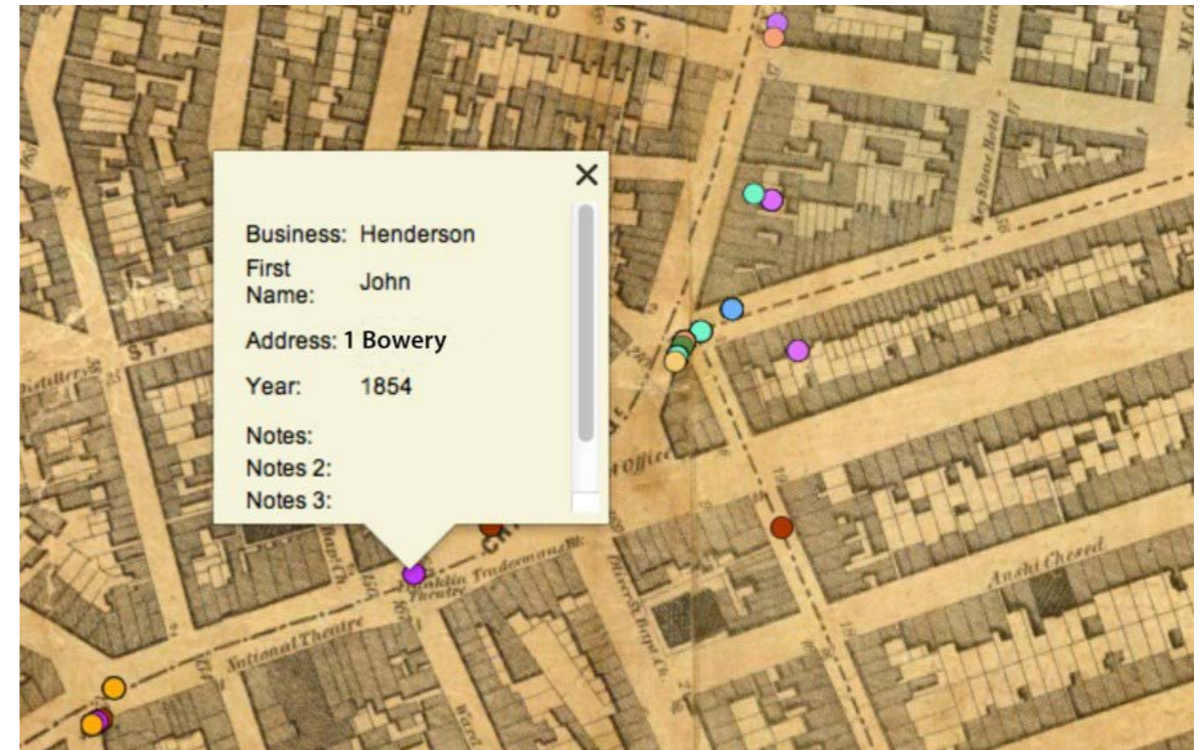
(*Ill. 17*) Another use of the database was to explore frequency of the use of different photographic terms in advertisements and how it evolved. Looking at the terms "Daguerreotype," and similar terms such as "Daguerreian," "Daguerreotypist," etc. provides an interesting graphic representation of their use over time. It took several years for photographic advertisements using these terms to propagate before a dramatic increase

began in 1844. The increase in use generally continued until 1854, when collodion processes such as ambrotypes, ferrotypes, and collodion negative processes were introduced. After the introduction of the competing processes, use of the term dropped into the mid 1860s.

In an effort to identify more powerful tools I have been exploring other open source and commercial options, such as ESRI GIS software, which though costly, has the potential to provide more detail about distance and empirical analysis to mine the database for patterns and relationships. Hopefully issues such as licensing and subscription costs of commercial software such as ESRI, and robustness of open source solutions can be addressed to permit providing online access in the future.

(*Ill. 16*) I have also used similar techniques to identify locations and dates as a foundation for mapping the route of a photographer, Dudley P. Flanders, who made one of the first commercial trips through Arizona to create a collection of stereographs in 1874. The resulting mapped

Ill. 11, Geo-referenced map of New York City Daguerreotypists map detail



III. 12, Geo-referenced map of New York City Daguerreotypists over historic map ca. 1855 (detail)

III. 13, Detail of geo-referenced map of New York City Daguerreotypists over historic map ca. 1854 (detail of selection of individual data point showing photographers operating at the selected address)

III. 14, Detail of geo-referenced map of New York City Daguerreotypists over historic map ca. 1854 (detail of selection of individual data point showing photographers initial data field display with potential of adding notes and background information)

III. 15, Detail of geo-referenced map of New York City Daguerreotypists over historic map ca. 1854 (detail of selection of individual data point showing photographers initial data field display with example of studio production)

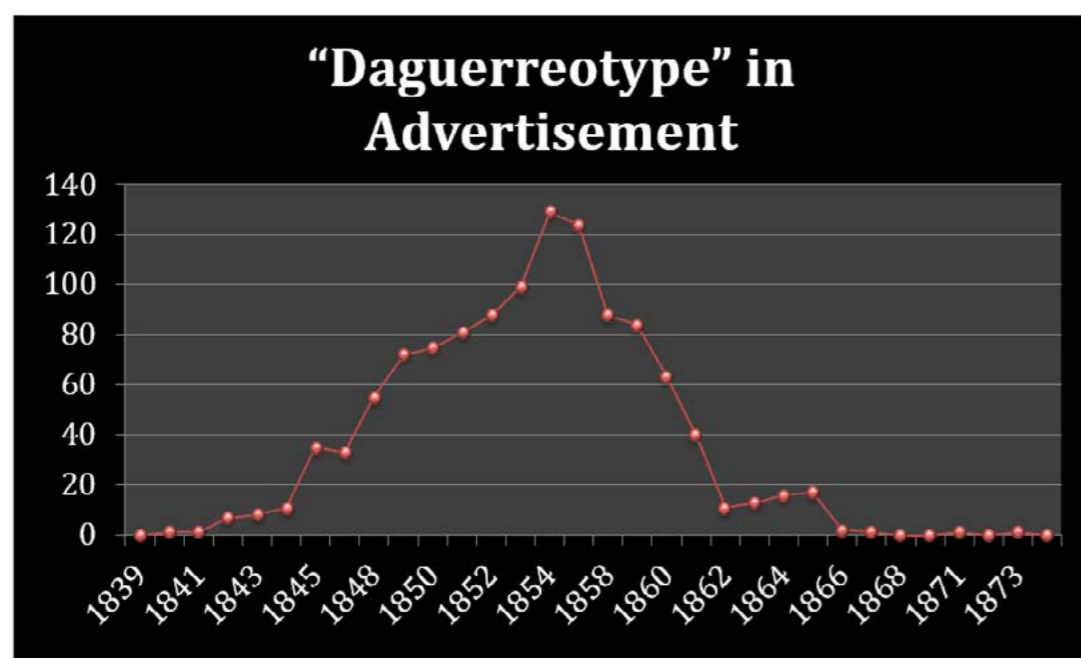
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exploring distances between home and studio and distances between studio and suppliers to identify and explore relationships. Another area of interest reflects the many emerging and evolving immigrant neighborhoods in New York City. Where surname or census data provide a trail, it will be interesting to look at relationships between the backgrounds of the operators of new studios and their neighborhoods. Following individuals as they moved between sole proprietorships and partnerships, and as they moved from working-class to more affluent neighborhoods, is another future analysis permitted by the database.

The approach, and tools and techniques used in the New York City project shed light on a relatively new and fascinating aspect of the development of photography in urban settings. As others have learned about the project, there is interest in adding more urban areas, such as Washington D.C., Boston, and Philadelphia in the U. S., with similar potential for mining directories and other resources to develop

route shed new light on the work of Flanders and helped discover the location of a number of previously unidentified images from the series. Analysis such as this, using time and place to create maps and visualizations, will hopefully be valuable tools to apply to the work of other photographers and other collections of images. Additional research areas for the future include



III. 16, Route map of Dudley P. Flanders excursion to Arizona in 1874 showing locations visited and route traveled in red (rivers in blue, stage routes in yellow, and camps as yellow dots, and forts as orange triangles) with example of image and collateral detail display

III. 17, Frequency mapping of the term "Daguerreotype" occurring in advertisements in New York City Directories 1839 - 1873

the requisite database for visualization. Adding European cities with rich photographic histories would create the potential to do a meta-analysis of the evolution of early

photography and explore similarities and differences in patterns of development over time in different urban settings and between American, English and European operators.

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