



Bernie Zelitch “Discovers” Annie Powell
PHSNE Program, Sunday, May 7th, 7:30 P.M., via Zoom
Link to be emailed to members in May



How does somebody with no particular background in the field discover an unknown but prolific and artistic photographer? In late 2020, neoclassical songwriter Bernie Zelitch, retired from journalism and software engineering, was creating a music video about a

mill ghost from 1909. He came across a University of Massachusetts Lowell image of a haunting "anonymous" mill worker. That single photograph, which he used, set him on an unexpected quest that ultimately revealed the remarkable Annie Powell (b 1859, West Yorkshire, England, d 1952, Lowell).

Zelitch says she never signed her work; in one case, a man received credit for her photos. Zelitch asserts, however, that a preponderance of forensic and stylistic evidence, as well as century-old "selfies", shows that she is almost certainly the creator of over 2,500 extant photos. More are being discovered.

Ultimately her photos went into collections in England, Cornell University, Harvard University and the University of Massachusetts Lowell,



Circa 1894. Powell's handwriting is on the back of this photo of her niece, Emma Whiteley, (b 1890, West Yorkshire, England). This is one of about 75 effects discovered at the house in Lowell's Highlands neighborhood where she died in 1952. From 1903 to 1906, when the studio went bankrupt and Annie continued her work anonymously, Annie and John advertised themselves as business partners.

her adopted city. In her longest assignment from about 1900 to 1932, Powell worked for pennies per photo documenting potholes and construction sites for Lowell City Engineers and spent hours transforming glass plate negatives into works of art.

She died in 1952 at the age of 92. Her unmarked grave is steps from that of tourist destination Jack Kerouac.



Circa 1898. An 1896 Powell ad said, "We are unexcelled in children's photos" and this one found among Annie's final effects shows that to be more than an idle brag.



Circa 1909. This is the photo that inspired a search for Annie Powell in November, 2020. Used in a music video about a mill worker's ghost, the author was unsettled that such a talented artist was "anonymous". Today, we know the photographer was Annie Powell (b 1859, West Yorkshire, England, d 1952, Lowell) and the subject was Curina Mello (b 1891, Azores, d 1980, Lowell).

To help understand the mill worker photo, Zelitch contacted Annie Powell descendants. For some reason, they had kept her final effects long after having lost track of their owner. He created "by Annie Powell, Inc." a non-profit devoted to acquisition, preservation, promotion, and research, and byAnniePowell.org goes live on April 15. Annie's great-great-great grandniece serves as a director.

PHSNE Tours PEM

On Saturday, March 11th, twenty-three PHSNE members enjoyed a private tour of *Power and Perspective: Early Photography in China*, a major exhibit at the Peabody Essex Museum in Salem MA. The tour was led by Stephanie Tung, Byrne Family Curator of Photography, ably assisted by Curatorial Research Associate Bing Wang.



In addition to the many photographs, there were a number of interesting artifacts on display including carved ivory sculptures, an incense burner in the shape of a ship, and a very tiny woman's shoe worn by a woman whose feet were bound.

Tung will be the speaker at the June 4th PHSNE meeting.

PHSNE Membership

New members are invited to join for half the rates for the first year. Regular PHSNE membership (U.S. and Canada) is \$30 for students, \$50 for individuals and institutions, and \$55 for a family; foreign membership is \$60. Join or renew online at <https://phsne.org/join> or <https://phsne.org/renew>, or send a check in U.S. dollars, drawn on a U.S. bank or dollar denominated international money order. Please check the expiration date on the *snap shots* mailing label before sending in dues.

Send payments, changes of address, and other contact information, to PHSNE Membership Chair, 47 Calvary St., Waltham MA 02453, email membership-chair@phsne.org, or use the Web form at <https://phsne.org/application>.

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Storage Unit Houses Huge Collection

Sometimes it's a great idea to do the boss a favor. In December, employee Karen Cusmano and her boyfriend Fridrik agreed to empty out a storage locker her boss acquired from someone who passed away. The enticement was that they could keep whatever was in it—the contents was likely some cameras. What they eventually removed from the unit were 2,000 cameras and accessories, some of considerable value.

"The vast majority of the collection is Miranda and Minolta," Cusmano says. "There's also a good amount of FEDs, Voigtlander, Zorkis, Zenits, Fujicas, Yashicas, Pentaxs, Prakticas, Mamiya Sekors, Exaktas, Olympus's, Exas, Petris, Konicas, and some TLRs and other brands I can't think of at the moment"

(<https://petapixel.com/2023/02/27/couple-finds-trove-of-2000-cameras-and-lenses-in-storage-unit/>). Cusmano added, "To top it off we have enough cases, flashes, tripods, adapters, filters, body caps, lens caps, magazines, mounts, books, pamphlets, price guides, and service manuals to open up a store."

The valuable items included a Minolta MD 135mm 1.2 lens that they sold for \$2,300; a Minolta CLE in a bag with three lenses, one of which was a Leica; five Minolta SR-2s; thirteen Orion Miranda Ts; and a Miranda Supreme lens. The couple is keeping some of the cameras for their own photographic use.



Scope Out the Escopette By Darier

The year 1888 saw the introduction of the original Kodak camera. In the same year, Albert Darier was granted the first Swiss patent for photography, number 17, for a light-weight, handheld camera he called the Escopette. It used Kodak original roll film to create 110 exposures (size 68 x 72 mm).



<https://tinyurl.com/2p922ym6>

“The Escopette’s name stems from the gun bearing the same name, because of its shape: the camera was mounted on a pistol grip, and a trigger served as the shutter release.” (<https://tinyurl.com/2p922ym6>). The shutter release is part of the pistol grip; the camera is fired like a weapon, aimed at the subject and fired. It had no viewfinder; instead, sight-lines were drawn on the body. Its portability enabled amateurs to photograph scenes and events quickly and easily.

Manufactured by E.V. Boissonas (c 1888), the Escopette was constructed of wood, though the front was made of metal. It had a “carved wooden handle . . . accompanied by polished brass support legs to serve as a tripod and brass hardware to mechanize the film advancement. It was fitted with a Steinheil Periscopic f/6 90mm lens and spherical

shutter with trigger release” (<https://tinyurl.com/3rtvh5yb>).

“A periscopic lens is a symmetrical lens, consisting of two equal convex meniscus elements with the aperture between them. It was first made by Steinheil in 1865 (the origin of the name is simply that *Periscop* was Steinheil's name for their product). . . . Its simplicity (with no cemented elements) makes it cheap, and such lenses are found quite widely on simple popular cameras [for example, the Vest Pocket Kodak]. . . and some box cameras” (http://camera-wiki.org/wiki/Periscopic_lens).

Using a wheel just below the lens to adjust the shutter tension, exposure times could vary from 1/25 to 1/100 sec. A key below the shutter is used to cock it. The lens has to be removed to change the sliding stops.

The Escopette was not the first pistol-shaped camera. “[The] design had been employed previously by Skaife and Enjalbert, but the Escopette was more elaborate. It could be rested on a flat surface for time exposures, and it had a pair of hinged, collapsible legs mounted on the bottom front of the camera body which could be adjusted in length and served, with the pistol grip, to create a tripod” (*A Century of Cameras, From the Collection of the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House*, by Ethan S. Lothrop, Jr., p.44). The size of the finished wooden box was a modest 3 1/2 x 3 1/4 x 3 3/4 inches; with legs extended, the maximum dimensions were 3 3/4 x 7 x 8 1/4 inches.

The Escopette received a silver medal at the Paris Exposition of 1889. It is a rare camera found only in a handful of museums and collections including the Eastman Museum in Rochester, NY. *McKeown’s Price Guide to Antique Classic Cameras, 1997/1998* describes the camera as “rare” with an estimated value of \$8,000+ (about \$14,765 in today’s dollars, assuming its value held up).

Editor’s note: The late Ethan Lothrop (d 2008), well-known photo historian and author of A Century of Cameras quoted above, was a charter member of PHSNE. He served on the first Board of Directors and was PHSNE’s first elected vice-president. He was awarded an honorary life membership in 1983.

Met Shows Tip the Scales

The Metropolitan Museum of Art is hosting two concurrent photography shows: *Berenice Abbott's New York Album, 1929* and *Richard Avedon: MURALS*. Both feature unusual scale; the Avedon *MURALS* are larger-than-life, and Abbott's *Album* is quite literally an album, a typical black album page with eight to eleven high quality photos approximately 2 x 3 inches. *Album* runs through September 4th and *MURALS* through October 1st.

Abbot worked in Paris as Man Ray's assistant in the early 1920s, She was influenced by Eugene Atget whose work documented Paris street scenes, and set about to do the same thing in New York when she returned to the United States. She adopted Atget's idea, though her style was quite different.

"Lacking a darkroom, she had her negatives developed as your parents or grandparents would have, at drugstores and commercial photo labs. Fierceness is very different from fussiness. That absence of polish and finesse adds to the sense of excitement and energy and discovery evident on every one of the album pages" (<https://tinyurl.com/3tfj4xrw>).

"As indicated by that word "MURALS" (and all caps is definitely justified), the most sizable works in the Avedon show are very sizable. They're wall-size. The five panels of "The Mission Council, Saigon, South Vietnam, April 28, 1971, are more than 10 feet in height and slightly more than 32 feet in length. Almost as big are triptychs of Andy Warhol with members of his



<https://www.metmuseum.org/exhibitions/richard-avedon-murals>

Factory crowd and of the defendants in the Chicago 7 trial. To call these pictures assertive would be an understatement."

You can find an interesting perspective on Avedon's work in a review of a show that took place in Milan and ended in January. It focused on "the brutality of photography" and asked a key question: "What obligation does a portrait photographer have to their subject? Is it their duty to cast that person in the best light, or the most revealing light?" The site included excellent examples of Avedon's work (<https://tinyurl.com/dtdeh3xu>).

PHSNE Meetings

Meetings are usually held online on the first Sunday of each month, September to June.

Upcoming meetings:

June 4—Stephanie Tung, Photography Curator PEM

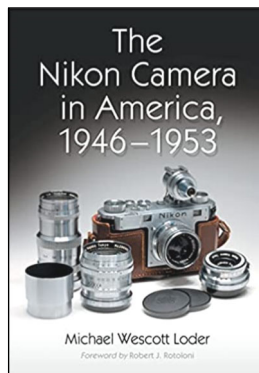
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Wes Loder: Podcast on Nikon History



After viewing the February PHSNE presentation by Wes Loder, a PHSNE member purchased Loder's book *The Nikon Camera in America 1946—1953* and found it contained a very interesting history of Nikon's early days.

In his search for more information, he came across the podcast *Camerosity* by Mike Eckman that featured a November 2021 interview with Loder about Nikon. Robert Rotoloni, president of the Nikon Historical Society, joined the discussion. You can listen to the podcast at: <https://camerosity.podbean.com/e/episode-13-nikon-history-with-michael-wescott-loder/>.

Check Out This Website

Visit <https://youtu.be/5QcYCMIBSoU> to view *Behind the Scenes: Preserving and Preparing French Daguerreotypes for Exhibition*. Learn more about French Daguerreotypes in the Gabriel Cromer collection and about how curators, conservators, and preparators work together to prepare these unique objects for exhibitions at the museum.

Edith Currier presented a talk on the Gabriel Cromer Collection at PHSNE's June 2021 Zoom meeting. See the June 2021 issue of *snap shots* at <https://snapshots.phsne.org> & the meeting recording at <https://youtu.be/TgJ7QHg5EeA>.