



**Rob Niederman Explores Detours in the Evolution of Photographic Technology**  
**Sunday, November 5, 2023, 7:30 P.M., via Zoom**  
**Link to be emailed to members before the meeting**



Camera innovation from its beginnings to present is an intriguing journey of twists and turns. Many efforts improving the picture taking experience through new designs, features and accessories were successful but, as with any maturing technology, photography's evolutionary tree is also riddled with dead-end branches.

In his presentation *A Brief Look at Unusual Solutions to Early Photographic Challenges*, Rob Niederman, collector and historian specializing in pre-1900 American wood & brass cameras and accessories, will show and describe some lesser-known designs that might be considered perplexing and even outlandish by today's standards.

The discussion includes items from Rob's collection: a rare lens-mounted daguerreian prism to correct the issue of lateral reversing of "hard-images"; a variety of wet- and dry-plate equipment capable of creating multiple images on a single plate using different methods; late-19th to early-20th century hybrid cameras able to make pictures on both plate and film; plate cameras with odd shutter arrangements; and two rare accessories—an intimidating early-1900s pistol-shaped powder-flash and a deceptive c.1906 accessory claimed to retouch photographs while being made.



American Chamfered Daguerreotype camera with rare reversing prism fitted to lens shade, c. 1850

Researching the lore and legacy of photographic apparatus and documenting their "stories" is an important aspect of Rob's collecting. In 1998, he created and continues to update a website devoted to his collection, [www.antiquewoodcameras.com](http://www.antiquewoodcameras.com), which includes a dedicated webpage listing worldwide photography

equipment shows. In 2008, the BBC cited his website as "recommended." He also has Instagram accounts displaying some of his collection and photography: @antiquewoodcameras and @robniederman.

In 2011, working with another collector, Rob completed a 1½ year endeavor called *The Digitized Kodak Catalogue Project* which was made available to the collector community. In addition to including digital scans of 67 Kodak catalogues spanning 1886 to 1941, keyword searches for cameras and other items can be conducted across all catalogues. His articles about wood & brass apparatus and accessories appear in publications by the Photographic Historical Society of New England, the Photographic Collector's Club of Great Britain, the American Photographic Historical Society, the Michigan Photographic Historical Society, the Cascade Photographic Historical Society, and the Chesapeake Antiquarian Photographic Society.



Chelsea powder-flash outfit, dangerous, c. 1901

Rob's extensive working knowledge of photography contributes to his understanding of early equipment. He built a darkroom at the age of 11, began shooting large format up to 11 x 14 inches by age 17, and continues to study pictures by master photographers. In 1980, he was accepted into Ansel Adams' Yosemite workshop.

Before collecting cameras and pausing his photography pursuits, Rob attended the University of Arizona. He is a retired IT executive with over 35 years in the fields of tele- and data-communications and large-scale datacenter management and operations.

Over the years, Rob has been contacted by museum curators, the Academy of Arts and Sciences, professors, and authors looking to identify and clarify the use of early equipment and processes in their proper context for exhibitions and stories.

## 19th Century White Mountain Images

For anyone interested in the history of the White Mountains and nineteenth-century photography, the newly released *Moosilauke! After the Ice*, edited by Robert W. Averill and Kris Pastoiza, is a fascinating collection of nineteenth-century writings, heavily illustrated with period images.

This book is the fourth volume of *The Moosilauke Reader* series, the eleventh in The Moosilauke History Project, which includes Averill's, *In Search of Amon Clough*, a 370-page biography of the pioneering White Mountain's photographer, illustrated with 150 full-sized 3-D images, viewable in stereo with the included viewer



## Archive Receives Missing Issues

Many thanks to PHSNE member Ralph London who replied to a recent request for copies of publications that were missing in the archive.

## 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](mailto:membership-chair@phsne.org), or use the Web form at <https://phsne.org/application>.

*snap shots*, edited by Beverly Regelman, is published monthly, September through June, by the Photographic Historical Society of New England, Inc., 47 Calvary St., Waltham MA 02453. It is available at <https://snapshots.phsne.org> within a few days of mailing. Articles and exhibition/book reviews are always welcome. Send to [snapshots@phsne.org](mailto:snapshots@phsne.org). Authors retain copyright to their original articles; however upon written application to the *snap shots* editor, PHSNE may grant non-profit societies with similar aims and interests a one-time right to reproduce a *snap shots* article as long as the author and source are credited and a complimentary copy of the publication is sent to PHSNE.

## Athenaeum Exhibit Highlights Changing City

Changes in the Boston landscape over a thirty year period are highlighted in a new exhibit at the Boston Athenaeum, *Developing Boston: Berenice Abbott and Irene Shwachman Photograph a Changing City*.

Abbott's *Changing New York* (1939) is well-known, modeled after Eugene Atget's photographic documentation of Paris in the 1920s. Less known is Abbott's earlier work photographing Boston in 1934. Shwachman, Abbott's student, documented the changing Boston landscape in the 1950s and 1960s. Much of the progress reflected the recovery from the decline that took place during and after the Great Depression.



Faneuil Hall from Cornhill Street  
Irene Shwachman, 1966  
<https://tinyurl.com/5n7nz5w8>

Seventeen of the twenty-four images are by the less-known Shwachman; the remainder by Abbott. Shwachman spent nearly a decade on *The Boston Document* which consists of over 3,500 negatives. "Most of that time, she worked on her own. From 1962-63, she was employed as a photographer by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (today's Boston Planning & Development Agency), until a project manager fired her. He was shocked,

shocked, to learn that the BRA was employing a photographer who was a woman" (<https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/09/06/arts/two-very-different-bostons-two-less-different-photographers/?p1=StaffPage>).

Curator Lauren Graves took a risk, according to *Globe* reviewer Mark Feeney, by interspersing the work of the two photographers. "With all due respect to Shwachman, she wasn't the photographer Abbott was (as she'd have been the first to admit). Conversely, the city Shwachman had in front of her camera was so much more dynamic. Yet the quality of both photographers' work and the expertness of the hanging mean that risk turns into reward. Each enhances, and enlarges, the other."

The exhibit runs through December 30th, along with a companion show. *The Caponigro Collection: Boston in 1959* featuring 11 black and white photographs by Paul Caponigro.

## Donations Committee Formed; New eBay Site for PHSNE Sales

Donations to PHSNE are a significant part of PHSNE operations. They are the source of items sold at *Photographica* and are also sold on eBay. Money raised from sales is a serious contributor to the operations budget of the organization. Items are also donated to schools for use in photography programs.

A Donations Committee was formed within the last year to handle contributions and make the disposition of contributions a more transparent process. Soon PHSNE members and mailing list individuals will be receiving an email through our Constant Contact list. A **SIGN-UP LINK** will be provided to receive periodic announcements from the Donations Committee. By signing up, you will receive advance notification of photo equipment and images donated to PHSNE. Many of the items will be available for sale on PHSNE's new eBay site with username **phsneusa**. The committee will also periodically issue lists of equipment donated to schools and nonprofits by PHSNE.

Collecting and trading photo equipment, images and ephemera has been an active part of PHSNE



membership. To help keep those activities thriving, Donation Committee will be compiling a list of collectors and dealers and their specific interests for those who want to sign up. The list will be offered to people who have reached out to PHSNE looking for assistance in selling their photographic collections.



We are launching the PHSNE's eBay charity business auction site, username **phsneusa**, by offering an iconic **Hasselblad SWC**. It was described by the Swedish camera maker as *"an aristocrat among cameras and will produce well defined wide-angle pictures with extreme depth-of-field."* We commonly buy the Hasselblad SWC for the superb images from its ZEISS BIOGON 38mm f/4.5 lens on 6 x 6 cm 120 roll film. This lens is truly remarkable due to lack of distortion and vignetting while photographing with 91° angle of view. As Ken Rockwell points out, these attributes, along with the high optical resolution on the SWC system, made it a favorite camera for aerial and satellite mapping and surveillance.

The Internet has many articles that extol the virtues of this niche medium format camera. PHSNE's eBay listing on **phsneusa** will give full description and condition of this working camera. For starters, we should mention that the camera was manufactured in 1968 and will be supplied with 12 "on-back" early Hasselblad V 120 film magazine. Internet camera sellers and buyers would rate our **Hasselblad SWC** as being a solid bargain condition working camera that has been used but not abused. Log onto our **phsneusa** site and see this camera and many more items that have been very generously donated to PHSNE.

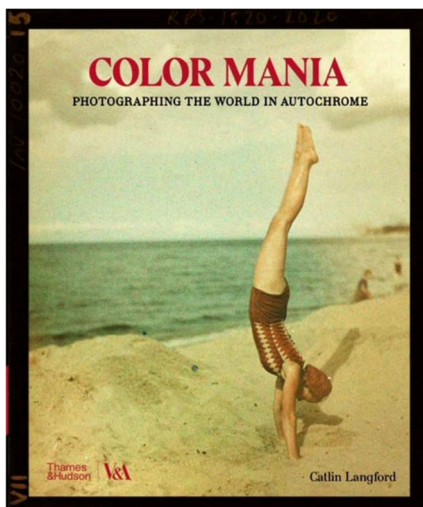
PHSNE is no different from other nonprofits; we are always seeking volunteers. If anyone is interested in helping assess and categorize donations, the Donations Committee welcomes new members. You will need to be able to come to the PHSNE warehouse in Waltham, MA to play, test and work with the donated equipment. Please click the **Get in Touch** link at the bottom of the **phsne.org** web page to contact the Donations Committee.

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## Autochrome Mania

The Royal Photographic Society presented a YouTube talk by Catlin Langford curator and author of *Color Mania*. From their description: “*Colour Mania* is the first publication to explore the Victoria and Albert Museum’s world-class collection of autochromes, a large majority drawn from the [RPS] Collection. In this talk, curator and author Catlin Langford discusses the history and culture surrounding the autochrome, and her process for bringing these works to life for *Colour Mania*.” Additional description and the presentation is available at <https://youtu.be/AARD2PiXkU>.

Langford’s book *Color Mania: Photographing the World in Autochrome*, published by Thames & Hudson in May 2023, offers “unprecedented access to the



V&A’s collection of autochromes—one of the greatest collections of early color photography in the world. [It] presents the pioneering photographic process in its full, vibrant, and painterly beauty. Fragile and light sensitive, autochromes cannot be displayed in public, and so this volume provides a rare and

brehtaking opportunity to view them true to size” (<https://tinyurl.com/ycyb4abs>).

“Invented by the Lumière brothers [and commercially available in 1907], the autochrome was the first widely available color photography process and remained popular for two decades”. Alfred Stieglitz was an early enthusiast.

If you are developing a “mania” for even more info on autochromes also see *The Lumière Autochrome: History, Technology, and Preservation*, “the product of more than 20 years of historical and technical research” (from book), by Bertrand Lavédrine and Jean-Paul Gandolfo; translation from the French published by the Getty Preservation Institute in 2013. The Getty’s site <https://tinyurl.com/apxe37n2> has more info.

And, of course, visit the collections online at the V&A Museum ([https://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?q=autochrome&page=2&page\\_size=15](https://collections.vam.ac.uk/search/?q=autochrome&page=2&page_size=15)).

### PHSNE Meetings

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

### Upcoming meetings:

**December 3**—John Felix, PHSNE President, on the first 50 years of PHSNE

### Connect to PHSNE Online and by email:

PHSNE’s Web site is online at <https://phsne.org>. See <https://www.facebook.com/PHSNE/> for items of PHSNE interest. Comments are welcome, so join the discussion of photo history. Visit <https://snapshots.phsne.org> for *snap shots* issues since 2005.

Stay connected to PHSNE via our emails: a *snap shots* e-copy, and *Photographa* show announcements. Sign up at <https://phsne.org/emails>.

For information on all available PHSNE publications, see <https://phsne.magcloud.com>.

## Portland Camera Club Heading Into 125<sup>th</sup> Year

Founded in 1899, the Portland Camera Club in Portland, Maine will celebrate 125 years of continuous meetings next year according to club president Dick Sawyer. David A. Kirkwood, a club member, recently completed a history of the club’s first 100 years. *Seeking the Magic Light: A Chronicle of the First Hundred Years of the Portland, Maine Camera Club* is available online.

### Browse This Website

A wide variety of collections of images is available at the website of *Public Domain Review* (<https://publicdomainreview.org/collections/images/style/photographs/>). A sampling would include the following:

- Cabinet Card Photographs from the Harvard Theatre Collection
- Decayed Daguerreotypes
- John H. White’s Photographs of Black Chicago for DOCUMERICA (1973–74)
- Early Photographs of Juneteenth Celebrations
- Of Chickens, Eggs, and Cannonballs: Roger Fenton’s Valley of the Shadow of Death (1855)
- Samuel G. Szabó’s Rogues, A Study of Characters (1857)
- John Margolies’ Photographs of Roadside America