Mapping Estonian daguerreotypes

News about Daguerre’s invention spread widely among the German-speaking people. For this reason, it is believed that those who read German newspapers in Estonia became aware of this photographic process shortly after the first announcement.

The earliest notes about making and selling daguerreotypes, as well as equipment, in Estonia were published in a newspaper in August, 1840\(^1\). The first advertisement by itinerant daguerreotypists was published in June 1843 in a local newspaper “Revalische wöchentliche Nachrichten”, where Benno Lipschütz and Baptista Tentsi mentioned that they are making daguerreotypes every day from 11 am till 6 pm and thanked their customers for the warm reception\(^2\).

However, the oldest daguerreotype that we know of so far in Estonian photographic collections is dated around 1844, but was taken in Saint Petersburg, Russia\(^3\). The oldest daguerreotype which was made in Estonia and is also preserved there in the museum’s collection is a daguerreotype portrait taken by Carl Friedrich Wilhelm Borchardt (1816-1899) in Tallinn several years later, around 1850.

During the 1840s, seven itinerant daguerreotypists travelled through Estonia, taking photographs in Tallinn and Tartu. They were either coming from or heading to Finland, Russia, or elsewhere\(^4\).

Today, only 22 daguerreotypes, including four stereo daguerreotypes, are known to exist in the collections of Estonian museums, archives, and libraries. Most of the photographers are unknown and several of the daguerreotypes were probably not taken in Estonia. Unfortunately, some of them are in poor condition, the original housing is damaged or missing. As the daguerreotypes held within the private collections have not been examined yet, it is likely that there are more than 22 of them situated in Estonia.

The Estonian Photographic Heritage Society\(^5\), in cooperation with several curators of photographic collections, is gathering stories about the dawn of photography in Estonia and all daguerreotypes are soon to be published in the Daguerreobase.

NOTES

1. Revalische wöchentliche Nachrichten, 05.08.1840, p. 876.
2. Revalische wöchentliche Nachrichten, No. 25, 21.06.1843, p. 746.
3. Estonian Literary Museum, EKL, A-37:1254, see article by Asmer, Vilve ibd pp. 8-13
5. www.fotoparand.org.ee/