The first photographers in rural space
Itinerant daguerreotypists in East Frisia and Schleswig-Holstein

III. 1. In the second half of the 19th century itinerant photographers travelled with a mobile photo studio drawn by horses, wood engraving after E. Sues, Erich Stenger, 1865, Uwe Scheid, 1875. Image taken from Uwe Scheid, Als Photographieren noch ein Abenteuer war, 2nd ed., Dortmund: Harenberg Kommunikation, 1987, p. 48
After the public announcement of the new invented photographic method in Paris in August 1839, it was in the role of the itinerant daguerreotypists to advertise and publish the method in the cities and rural regions. For these men it was also a new lucrative occupation. Most of them had a quite different professional background. In the beginning they travelled from town to town, from village to village before some of them settled in the cities and founded the first studios. Even then, they travelled around with their cameras for a couple of weeks per year to take portraits of people.

For the announcement of their arrival and the duration of their stay in a city, they used different advertising strategies, e.g. word-of-mouth advertising, advertisements in the newspapers, presentation of daguerreotypes in displays or even in exhibitions. The routes of some of the first photographers are fairly well known, especially when they visited larger towns. Less is known about the daguerreotypists in rural regions, and hardly anything at all is known about the social and economic conditions of the travelling photographers. This article focuses on the northern regions of Germany, East Frisia and Schleswig-Holstein, two regions which developed quite differently.

**KEY WORDS** History of Photography, Itinerant daguerreotypist, Daguerreotype travelling equipment, East Frisia, Schleswig-Holstein

From 1840 to 1848 approximately 48 itinerant daguerreotypists found their way to Schleswig-Holstein. They were from the nearby city of Hamburg, but also came from Prussia, Denmark, France and Austria, Bavaria, England, the Netherlands, Saxony and Switzerland. In the same period only five itinerant daguerreotypists are known in East Frisia. East Frisia was accordingly poorly served. In contrast, Schleswig and Holstein received more traffic as they are well situated on an important journey and trade route from Hamburg and Altona to Denmark and Scandinavia.

**WHO WERE THE FIRST ITINERANT DAGUEREOTYPISTS?**

Their professional background was very diverse, innkeeper, pest-exterminator, watchmaker, carpenter, opera singer, an actor and art flower manufacturer, gymnastic artist, dentist etc. At first many operated daguerreotyping as sideline, like the gymnastic artist and waxworks owner Carl Barthold from Hamburg. He advertised in February 1846 in Schleswig that he will daguerreotype in the morning and be a showman in the evening. Some quickly gave up taking daguerreotypes and offered their equipment for the sale. Most constant were the artistically or technically educated ones, such as the miniaturists, portrait painter, silhouette cutter, chemist, optician or physicist. After travelling a while from town to town, these men made their second occupation into their main profession, settled with a studio in a town and travelled around in the region for only for a few weeks in the summer months.

The education of only a few photographers can be reconstructed, e.g. the trained actor Carl Heinrich Neupert (1803-1857). After his move from Hamburg to Christiania he first produced artist flowers. When the daguerreotypist Carl Ferdinand Stelzner (1804-1894) stayed and worked in Christiania for a month in August...
1843 (Ill.2), Neupert (Ill.4) learnt the new craft from him. Eight months later, in May 1844, he announced in the newspaper, that he has succeeded in making good portraits. (Ill. 3) After four weeks he went off on travels via Kristiansund and Bergen to Trontheim. As an itinerant daguerreotypist he travelled around in Scandinavia, the Baltic and parts of Russia. Neupert was not alone in learning the photographic process from other daguerreotypists, others experimented over a longer period before they gained reasonable results and tried to get orders.

HOW DID THEY TRAVEL AROUND WITH THE EQUIPMENT IN THE COUNTRY?

Traveling in first half of the 19th century was generally very arduous. The railway network was still spreading and connected only the bigger towns and commercial centres. In the rural areas one travelled with one’s own horse and carriage or by the stagecoach. These journeys were long, the streets were bad, not paved and in bad weather muddy and almost impassable. The passengers sat closely together and were shaken up by each other. These journeys were generally very arduous. The railway network was furnished with a bed, a desk and a portrait box or a little bag, as Trudpert Schneider and his sons used, and so it could be transported without problems on the stagecoach or the train. (Ill. 5). If they were travelling by foot, they perhaps used a handcart or even owned a horse and cart. In 1842, Swiss Jean Baptiste Isenring (1796-1860) provided headlines in the Munich press. He had ordered to get built a heateable “Sonnenwagen” (sun wagon), which was furnished with a bed, a desk and a portrait studio. One can presumably imagine Isenring’s vehicle looked like the wood engraving of E. Sues in 1865 (Ill. 1). Isenring’s “Sonnenwagen” was in 1842 a little sensation for the Munich population as well for the itinerant trade, because in the Munich "Tagblatt" of 27th September 1842 one could read that the, “art is not going to the bread anymore, but now it drives to the bread”. The equipment, packed well, did not take a lot of space. Most of the equipment was made of wood and could be packed easily in a handy box or a little bag, as Trudpert Schneider and his sons used, and so it could be transported without problems on the stagecoach or the train. (Ill. 5). If they were travelling by foot, they perhaps used a handcart or even owned a horse and cart. In 1842, Swiss Jean Baptiste Isenring (1796-1860) provided headlines in the Munich press. He had ordered to get built a heateable “Sonnenwagen” (sun wagon), which was furnished with a bed, a desk and a portrait studio. One can presumably imagine Isenring’s vehicle looked like the wood engraving of E. Sues in 1865 (Ill. 1). Isenring’s “Sonnenwagen” was in 1842 a little sensation for the Munich population as well for the itinerant trade, because in the Munich "Tagblatt" of 27th September 1842 one could read that the, “art is not going to the bread anymore, but now it drives to the bread”.

WHERE DID THEY SET UP THEIR TEMPORARY STUDIOS?

With his “Sonnenwagen” Isenring was independent of all local conditions, could stop his portrait studio on wheels anywhere and immediately start portrait work. His competitors had to look for a suitable room for daguerreotyping. They moved into accommodation in private quarters or inns and worked at a place for as long as they found customers. If the weather permitted, they worked outside, in the garden or backyard, where it was brighter than in any interior. As scenery they were content with a bright house wall, a room wall or a white cloth. A little space for the sensitization and development of the plates could be installed anywhere in a few minutes, as the dark rooms did not have to be extremely light-tight. In two to three hours everything was set up. In the North German regions the weather was technically possible to take photographs not only in sunshine but also in grey weather. The lighting conditions could be improved in glass houses. The itinerant J. Behrens publicised in Emden his “heated glass pavilion” for the winter. This was made possible because business-minded inhabitants in East Frisia occasionally modified hot houses into photographic studios and let them for rent to the itinerant photographers for the winter months.

The early stage of photography is closely connected with the markets taking place once or twice a year. At the fairs the native and surrounding population did not just stock up on vitally necessary goods for the coming months or sell their surplus production. Apart from being a place for exchanging goods and money the market was also a place for swapping information and for enjoying entertainment. Together with the farmers and dealers, the showmen, travelling entertainers, singers and animal tamers came into the town. They brought a welcome intrusion and diversion into the otherwise monotonous and unchanging days of the people. Alongside the wild animals...
and curiosity cabinets, photography was one of the visual sensations which were offered at the fairs; his structures to add, market and entertainment was common all over Europe, and these markets were connected by the itinerant dealers and showmen. Kiel in the dukedom of Holstein had a certain appeal for itinerant daguerreotypists, less because it has a university and port than because of its importance as a trade and shopping centre. During the “Kiel Umschlag” many people came to the town from near and far. Among them, the daguerreotypist Fr. Beurmann from Hamburg was repeatedly found at the fair offering his daguerreotype services. Showmen such as the aforementioned gymnastic artist and waxworks officer, Carl Barthold from Hamburg, always amenable to new technical developments, gained advantage from the attraction of the new and exotic things by using the photography as a further source of income (III.6). At the beginning the fairs and markets were also the home of the daguerreotype, a fact which is hardly mentioned in the literature of the early history of photography.

The entertainment started with the fascination for the technical apparatus, some pioneers asked for admission to view it. The magic of a photographic picture fascinated the audience of the fairs just like the painted and drawn fantasy pictures of the peep-boxes or panoramas. Moreover the new technique, which was advertised as, “the sun burns the portrait on the plate independently”, was something magical for the audience. For satisfying one’s curiosity they paid admission to admire the apparatus, watch a portrait sitting or see the displayed daguerreotype images.

HOW DID THEY ANNOUNCE THEIR TEMPORARY STUDIO?

According to demand, they decided to stay for a couple of days or even weeks in a village or town. In a small village word of mouth or the simple residence in a well-known pub was sufficient advertising, in small towns and for short-term stays they informed the population about their arrival with placards and handouts or engaged a bell man. In bigger cities advertising had to be used a little more extensively. Usually they announced their arrival in the local newspaper, distributed advertising leaflets and displayed samples of their daguerreotypes in local art and book stores or placed a showcase in front of the temporary studio. A very popular technique was letters to the editor in the local newspaper. The quality of the portraits were praised to the skies and a visit was highly recommended. The letters were signed just with an abbreviation or with a pseudonym such as “layman of daguerreotype” (the daguerreotypist Louis Reupangé from Berlin).

In the advertisements they set out their wares and qualifications, e.g. portrait painter, the location of the temporary studio, the opening hours, their special offers, additional information about the interior and about the prices for single and group pictures. A typical advertisement is for instance the one of Fr. Beurmann, who stayed in Kiel in July 1844. He recommends his daguerreotype studio at the Alte Wall No 116, during the time of the trade market in Kiel. “The undersigned will stay here only for a short time and sincerely offers services for taking daguerreotype portraits in black, coloured, gold and copper cards, at a price of 8 to 3 M. The studio is heated and the time for a meeting is daily from 10 a. m. to 3 p. m. NB. The staircase to the studio is from the side behind the wall. F. Beurmann from Hamburg”46. Another daguerreotypist J. Burghold jun. added his address and the prices in writing on his 57 x 86 mm leaflet. (III. 5)

A popular method in advertisements was to introduce oneself as especially competent in daguerreotyping or to otherwise lift oneself out of the mass e.g. by adorning oneself with name suffixes, which particularly impressed the people in the provinces. The suffix “from Berlin”, “from Hamburg” or “from Hanover” etc., as Fr. Beurmann added in his above advertisement, added a certain cachet to the photographers. A photographer, who came from Hanover to East Frisia, was regarded as something special, because Hanover was the seat of the government and the residence of the king. To state one’s origin using the suffix of a German city, was mildly helpful. Much more effective was to add, a French suffix, which associated one with the country of origin of the daguerreotype. Johann Jacob Bachmann from Zurich called himself “typeur à la Daguerre” during his stay in Hamburg’. Some others changed one of their forenames into a French version, so Ludwig changed to Louis and Georg to George. The “strange and unknown” obviously had an additional appeal and increased the reputation for the audience. This was criticized by the Munich “Tagblatt” of September 27th in 1842, in writing “if Mr Isenring would be from Paris or London, his performances would receive more attention by the good Germans…”.47

For proof of their talent and for advertising the daguerreotypists presented examples of their work in exhibitions. Beside art and bookstores the customers occasionally got the opportunity to view the daguerreotypes in inns and private residences or they were displayed in showcases at a busy street or place.

WHICH PROBLEMS AND SURPRISES DID THEY FACE ON THEIR TRAVELS?

Occasionally it happened that the itinerant daguerreotypists arrived at a small town and were confronted with competitors, a settled photographic studio or another itinerant photographer. They were forced to move on and to look for a new location. It was also possible that the aliens’ police refused to grant a permit or the “Landdrosteli” (regional administration) denied them a trading license. In Prussia from 1845 and in the Hanover kingdom from 1848 on, photography was classified not as art, but as a mechanical work, in so far it was regarded as trade. Provided that the trade was performed for a consideration and itinerantly, a trading license was required. For the trading license a minimum age of 25 years and the presentation of a qualification certificate was necessary, which was partly presented in form of daguerreotypes. However, in other cases an official certificate was required. The “Landdrosteli” tried to keep
the number of photographers on a low level until 1861, probably to assure the livelihood of the first settled daguerreotypists in East Frisia. The quantity of the chemicals (bromine, iodine, mercury etc) and the plates had to be planned for well before the journey. If they were away on business for several months, the chemicals perhaps could be bought at a local pharmacist, but the plates were more difficult to obtain. In East Frisia and Schleswig-Holstein not many daguerreotypists were settled in smaller towns, where perhaps plates could have been bought. For example, the first studio in the East Frisian Emden was opened in 1848, in Leer and Norden only in 1859, and in Schleswig-Holstein it was in Lübeck in 1843. So, during his stay of several weeks in Emden it turned out for the daguerreotypist Hünerjäger, that because of unexpected demand his plate stock came to an end until on July 25th, 1848, he advertised in the local newspaper “that he is now supplied with plates of all sizes” again and kindly asks all ladies and gentlemen, which still wish to be daguerreotyped by him to inform him before August 10th, "because then he definitely will depart”.

Christian Jørgensen (1811-1878), in his main profession as painter and also daguerreotypist in the small village Rackebüll (Ragebøl), who operated as a photographer from 1848 to 1858, kept a very precise account of his expenditures until 1861, probably to assure the livelihood of his family, which underlined their status with all the insignia of the elevated bourgeoisie. In the country the citizens and prosperous farmers became the customers of the itinerant daguerreotypist.

WHAT DID THEY OFFER?

The services offered were not different from those of their settled colleagues. Besides portraits they offered, from the mid of the 1840s, reproductions of oil paintings, drawings and other objets d’ art - a profitable business, which could be done outside the opening hours for portraiture. Some also introduced the technique to the audience and sold cameras to interested ones. “Tasteful frames ... as well as Berlin and Parisian products in a great choice”, recommended the itinerant daguerreotypist G. Hünerjäger in an advertisement before Christmas. Because of the sensitivity of the polished surface, daguerreotypes were handed over only in air tight boxes and dustpan protection. Customers were therefore also potential buyers of additional items such as frames, cases or pieces of jewellery to house the silver-plated copper plates. This presentation increased the value of the objects, as it had done previously for miniature and medallion portraits, and therefore they were popular presents for relatives and friends. Initially only for the aristocracy and the prosperous bourgeoisie could afford daguerreotype portraits. In 1844 a quarter plate cost approximately two Thaler in Berlin, which corresponded to two weeks wages of a carpenter. These customers wished to possess a representative portrait, and their family, which underlined their status with all the insignia of the elevated bourgeoisie. In society some resistance to overcome.

FOR THE DAGUERREOTYPE?

The itinerant daguerreotypists were confronted not only with admiration, curiosity and appreciation by the population. They were credited with magical power, so even a paralysed person was dragged in front of Carl Dauthendey’s camera, who hoped for a cure from the apparatus12. They were also regarded as magicians, who are paying homage to a mysterious and wonderful magic in the darkroom. In the eyes of the common people, they were similar to prestidigitators. However, curiosity for the technology prevailed and gained approval, as the daguerreotype corresponded with the ambition for precision and truth, which was already present in painting. And it is exactly this precision and truth in the daguerreotypes, which is always admired and pointed out by the contemporaries in newspaper articles and in letters.

WHAT WAS THE INCOME AND LIVELIHOOD FOR THE DAGUERREOTYPISTS?

In general, photography was still a risk within the first years. Whether it would be profitable or not, was unforeseeable. There were not only technically difficulties, but also in society some resistance to overcome. Moreover, the daguerreotypical images were not affordable for the broad population. In Schleswig-Holstein there were still more portrait painters working than daguerreotypists between 1840 and 1850, as Uwe Steen stated. Not until approximately 1850 did the ratio change and the daguerreotypists experience a lucrative business for a couple of years. August Petersen from Rekjaer at Tondern stayed in Tondern for 14 days in 1859. It is known, that he took between 300 and 400 daguerreotypes in these two weeks, for three Marks per piece. By comparison, in 1854 the average annual income of a journeyman was approx. 300 Mar13. The introduction and spread of the photographic method into the provinces is due to the itinerant daguerreotypists. However, their pioneering work is not a history of “great” names, many remain unknown, because they have not advertised in any newspaper. On the other hand there are names for which not a single daguerreotype is known. Some of them had a good income, however, some died impoverished, like the previously mentioned Carl Heinrich Neupert, who travelled extensively in North and Eastern Europe. After 12-years of daguerreotyping he returned to his hometown Schleswig in spring 1856. He announced in the local newspaper his photographic work, but a declamatory entertainment as an actor, his original profession. He died of seizes as a result of a brain disease and neuropathy in the Schleswig poorhouse on January 28th, 1857. His illness presumably can be explained by mercury poisoning, the chemical that was needed for the development of the daguerreotype plates.

NOTES


8. See Gebhardt, p. 75


12. See Gebhardt, p. 59

13. See Fritz Kempe, Daguerreotypie in Deutschland. vom Charme der frühen Fotografie, Sebeck am Chiemsee: Heering-Verlag, 1979, p. 170