SMITHSONIAN
PRESERVATION
QUARTERLY

THE OFFICE OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY & HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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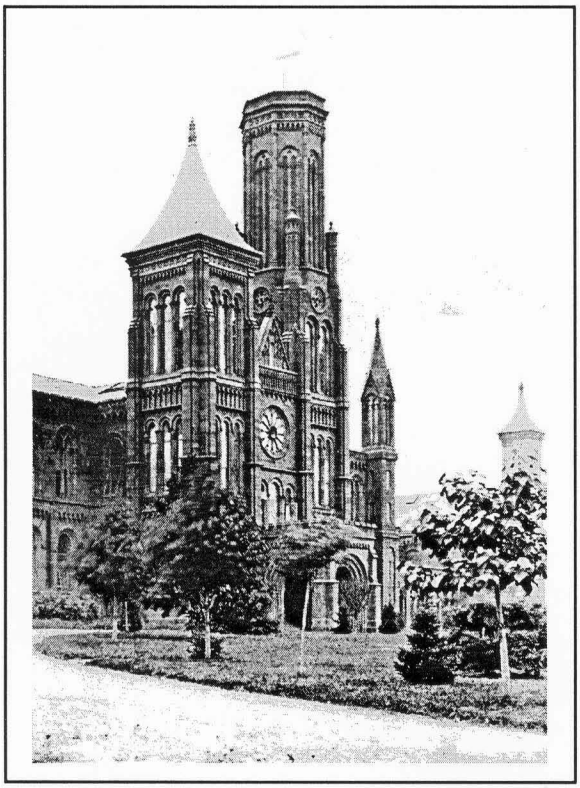


The Smithsonian Building, ca.1856 - 1865.

DIRECTOR'S COLUMN

A First

For the first time the Smithsonian Preservation Quarterly is dedicating an issue to a single topic: photography at the Smithsonian. We are especially aware of the importance of photography to architectural history and historic preservation. Photographs of the Smithsonian Building cover over one hundred years of the building's history. Much of the visual information so important to preservation and restoration exists in those and other Smithsonian photographs.

In OAHP's files are copies of two hundred photographs of the Smithsonian Building (Castle). Our research is geared to matching the visual images with textural sources such as the Annual Reports and the papers of Smithsonian notables such as Samuel Pierpont Langley (Secretary from 1887 to 1906) and Leonard Carmichael (Secretary from 1953 to 1964) or William J. Rhees (Chief Clerk 1869 to 1905). Without the valuable visual evidence in the photographs we would be puzzled by some textual references. In other cases, we have searched the records for information on something we have found in a photograph. As a result, we have been able to create a book illustrating the Castle's architectural history to be published by the Smithsonian Press in the fall of 1993. Now everyone with an interest in the architectural history of the Smithsonian Building will have ready access to the images of this changing building.

Inside:

THOMAS W. SMILLIE

The Smithsonian's First Photographer

The use of photography within the Smithsonian for illustration of specimens and documentation of events is today taken for granted. Prior to 1868, however, the guidebooks and scholarly reports of the Institution were illustrated with images hand-drawn by artists and transferred to wood by copyists to be reproduced as woodcut prints. A process of photographing directly on wood, perfected by Thomas W. Smillie, changed dramatically the way these woodcuts were made. In 1868, at the request of then Assistant Secretary Spencer Fullerton Baird, Smillie was commissioned to begin photographing the museum's specimens for illustrations. Smillie experimented with various techniques for about a year until he found one that "produced a picture of exquisite delicacy." These photographs on wood were then converted into line engravings for printing, resulting in the creation of more exact renderings requiring less time than the old process. For the following fifteen to twenty years, nearly all the illustrations for Smithsonian publications were produced by Smillie's method until the cheaper photo-engraving processes supplanted wood engraving.

During his first two years at the Smithsonian, Smillie made many other innovations which are still common practice in specimen photography. One such innovation, an idea which Smillie credited to Baird, was the mounting of the camera on a vertical stand in order to facilitate the photographing of natural history specimens. Smillie also made improvements in the lighting of the specimens, devising a method to eliminate shadows in the background while retaining those within the object. During this early period, the photographic work of the Institution was carried out by the light of the large oriel window in the Smithsonian Building's Regents' Room. Smillie continued working on a commission basis until late in 1870 when he left to work elsewhere, but after only a few months he was persuaded by Baird to return to the Institution on a full time basis, becoming in June, 1871 the Smithsonian's first photographer.

Joseph Henry's Bedroom in the Smithsonian Building.

Upon Smillie's return, a photographic studio was established in a room adjacent to what is now the Associates' Lounge in the West Range of the Smithsonian Building. This room was undoubtedly chosen for the studio because of its row of large windows which provided even, diffused northern light. In 1875, the studio was moved to a small building erected in the south yard of the Smithsonian Building expressly for the use of the photographer and the taxidermists preparing exhibits for the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

In addition to photographing the museum's collections, Smillie also produced pictures of the Smithsonian's first three buildings. These photographs serve as valuable documents illustrating the Institution's early architectural history. For instance, the living quarters of the Smithsonian's first Secretary, Joseph Henry, located on the second floor of the Smithsonian Building, were photographed by Smillie soon after Henry's death in 1878 and prior to the conversion of the rooms to office use. Because no other Smithsonian Secretary since Henry has lived in the building, these photographs provide rare views of a period unique in the building's history.

Smillie not only served as the Smithsonian's chief photographer but he was also the first custodian of the Section of Photography, created in 1896 under the Graphic Arts Department. As early as 1888, Smillie began assembling a collection of artifacts relating to the history of photography; in that year, he acquired for $25.00 the daguerreotype apparatus used by Samuel F.B. Morse. Over the years, Smillie diligently solicited photographs and equipment for the collection through loans, gifts and

purchases. The collection Smillie launched in 1888, is now part of the collection of the Smithsonian's Division of Photographic History.

When Thomas Smillie died on March 7, 1917, at the age of seventy-four, he was widely regarded as the foremost scientific photographer in the country. Recognizing his forty-eight years of service to the Institution, the Smithsonian's press release eulogized him as "the Dean of Federal Photographers." RS

A&I:

Home to the Photo Lab for Over 100 Years

The Smithsonian's photographic studio, housed for about six years in a shed in the south yard behind the Smithsonian building, was moved to the southeast corner of the Arts and Industries Building immediately after the building's completion in 1880. Headed by Thomas W. Smillie, the department was responsible for photographing thousands of museum specimens as well as the buildings in which they were housed. These early photographs documenting the architecture and its interiors have proved invaluable to the OAHP staff. As an example, for the recreation of the stencil in the Children's Room in the Smithsonian Building's South Tower Room conservators relied heavily on vintage photographs.

In 1906, a darkroom was built on the third floor of the southeast pavilion of the A&I Building, and a skylight installed for camera-work. The photograph on the folowing page shows a camera for photographing scientific specimens in use in the newly equipped studio.

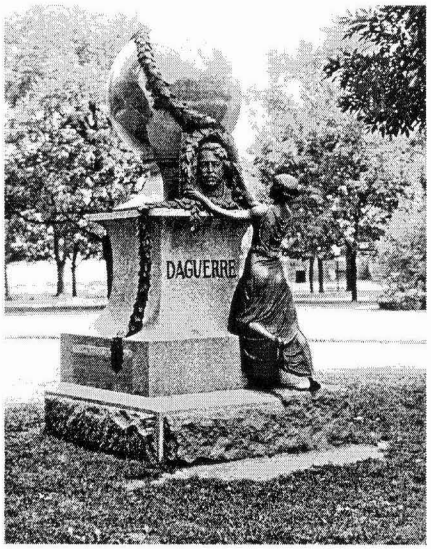


PHOTO-OP

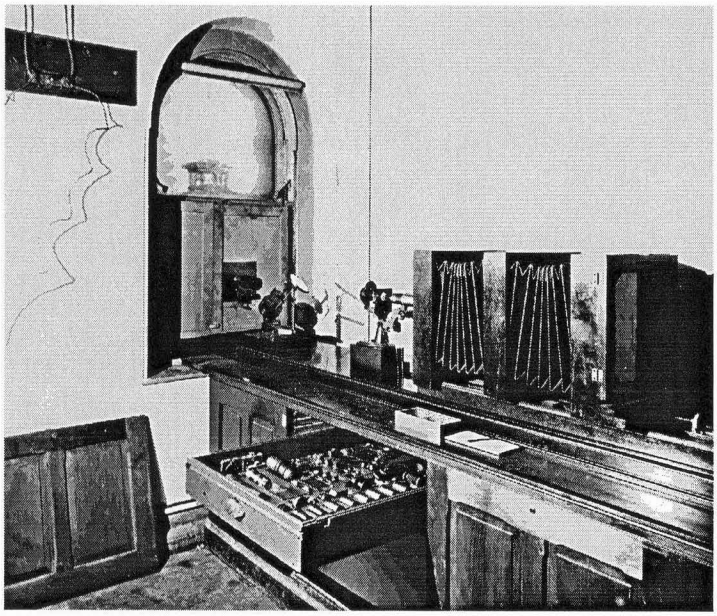
WHO: Louis J. M. Daguerre (1787-1851), the French father of photography. In 1839 he published his method: a silverplated surface on a copper sheet was polished and rendered light-sensitive by iodine fumes. The sheet was placed in a box, exposed to a brightly-lit view, and developed with heated mercury. The silver thus became a single, permanent, but very fragile image. The inventor termed his photographic products *daguerreotypes*, and specially-designed cases were manufactured to hold and protect them. Even before publishing his methods, Daguerre was elected an honorary member of the National Academy of Design in America on the strength of his invention.

WHAT: Monument, 12 feet tall, 23 tons, of granite and bronze, sculpted by Jonathan Scott Hartley. The woman, representing *Fame*, is reverently placing a laurel wreath around a high-relief portrait of Daguerre, set in front of a globe whose garland symbolizes the universal influence of photography. For the portrait, Hartley worked from the subject's own self-portrait daguerreotype.

WHERE: On the Mall, east of the Arts & Industries Building.

WHEN: 1897. It was unveiled at a ceremony in the Arts & Industries Building rotunda in 1890, then later moved to the grounds east of the building in 1897. The monument was placed in storage at Suitland, Maryland in 1969 and reerected in 1989 on the east lawn of the National Museum of American Art and the National Portrait Gallery, facing 7th Street.

WHY: Given to the American people by the Photographers Association of America, honoring the fifty-year anniversary of Daguerre's photographic process. The recent rededication commemorated the sesquicentennial of the invention. An inscription on the pedestal's base reads: "Photography, the electric telegraph, and the steam engine are the three great discoveries of the age. No five centuries in human progress can show such strides as these." MCH



The photo lab in the Southeast Pavillion of A&I, ca.1906.

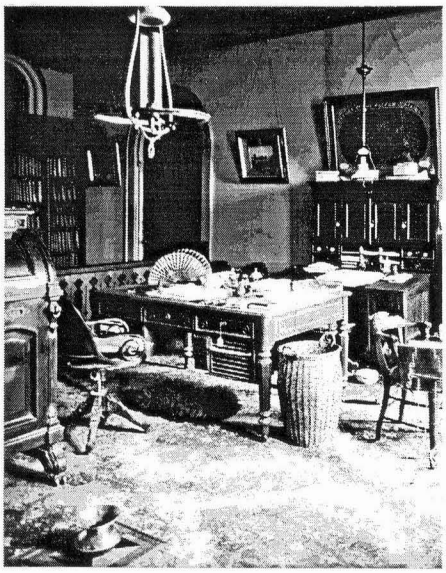
A portion of the Institution's photography department remained in the pavilion for over one hundred years. Until 1973 the A&I studio and laboratory carried out only black and white photographic work; the Institution contracted out all color work. In 1973 Lorie Aceto, currently the Deputy Director of OPPS, established the Color Lab on the second and third floors of the A&I southeast pavilion, creating the entire facility from scratch. To keep the light out when necessary, black curtains were installed over the heavy wooden blinds already in place. Once the film was loaded, however, the window coverings could be removed and the photographers could enjoy the activity on Independence Avenue.

In 1985 the Color Lab was removed and transferred to the basement of NMAH. The enormous, unwieldy film processors were rolled out on dollies onto a temporary deck built on the A&I roof, from which they were lowered onto a flatbed and transported to their new quarters. The new rooms in the basement were designed by the current head of the Color Lab, Joe Goulait. In his basement offices Goulait stores a number of artifacts that were rescued from the original photography lab in the A&I building, including one of the old windows (probably dating to 1906). With its red pane of glass, this safe light would have provided workers with some light, without affecting the film. Although Goulait was able to design the NMAH space specifically to suit the Color Lab's needs, he still misses the view from the original A&I offices. HE

INTERIORS OF THE "CASTLE" IN NINETEENTH CENTURY PHOTOGRAPHS

The Victorian-era photographs of the Smithsonian Institution Building are an invaluable visual record, which complements written records, giving a glimpse of the early character of this picturesque nineteenth-century building. Today, the "Castle" Collection furnishings are used with the curatorial assistance of photographic evidence to add coloration and substance to the interior of the "Castle". Photographs are especially exciting documents because they place many types of familiar artifacts in their proper historical and aesthetic context, and yield a wealth of cultural information regarding a context that has changed dramatically. Photographs depict not only vanished architectural settings, but contemporary, carpets, window treatments, lighting, technology, furnishing forms and arrangements.

A handful of furnishings original to the building and now belonging to the "Castle" Collection, which still remain in use, can be glimpsed in Smithsonian nineteenth-century interiors. This particular photograph shows the office of the Smithsonian's second Secretary, Spencer Fullerton Baird on the first floor of the "Castle's" east range, ca. 1878. Baird's office had been the site of the original Laboratory of Natural History, before the space was converted for administrative purposes in the early 1870's. The desk, at the left edge of the image, and desk chair with spiral arms and swivel seat, are two pieces that remain in the Smithsonian's collections. Thankfully the spittoon, which sits in the foreground, has perished from daily usage, but it was quite a necessary object at the time. Chewing and spitting were so common here that when Charles Dickens visited Washington he warned others "not to look at the floor, and if they happen to drop anything... not to pick it up with an ungloved hand...." The spitoon sat on a small square mat to protect the handsome ingrain carpet.



S.F. Baird's office in the Smithsonian Building, ca.1878.

Secretary Baird's desk is a *Wooton Cabinet Office Secretary*, a design patented in October 1874, which won commendations at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia for "compactness convenience and utility." While serving as Assistant Secretary, Baird had ordered one of these desks from the Wooton Desk Company of Indiana, and had the interior shelving modified to his own specifications. Secretary Baird's Wooton desk can now be viewed in the Smithsonian's 1876 Exhibit, in the North Hall of the Arts & Industries Building. When closed, the cabinet-secretary resembles a cylinder roll-top desk, but practically doubles in size when opened. The Wooton desk opens vertically at the center with two hinged compartments swinging outward to reveal an interior of drawers, pigeonholes, vertical and horizontal shelves, and a fold- out writing surface. With its many small compartments, and its ability to fold up when not in use, this desk was promoted around the world with the popular Victorian phrase, "A Place for Everything & Everything in its Place." PLM

THE CHANGING FACE OF PHOTOGRAPHY AT OPPS

Every employee at the Smithsonian - perhaps without knowing it - uses the services of the Office of Printing and Photographic Services (OPPS). The blue staff bulletin that wends its way to you is printed by the Duplicating Branch of OPPS; the *Torch* you read each month is also printed by Duplicating and many of the photographs throughout are taken by the photographers of OPPS. Anytime an office wants to document an event, or a curator document an object, who do they call? OPPS!

OPPS has come a long way since the days of the Smithsonian's first 'official' photographer, Thomas Smillie. Today, OPPS encompasses over 60 employees under the guidance of director Jim Wallace. The staff includes administrators, photographers and laboratory technicians, each part of a team that contributes to the finished product, whether it be a color print, a black and white glossy, or an Office Directive.

A native of Washington, Jim Wallace arrived at OPPS in 1974. "At that time, OPPS was in the process of rebuilding - revitalizing. We were dedicated more to doing laboratory work, with a lot of photography done on the outside," says Wallace. Wallace knew that photography in the Federal section had a poor reputation for quality and he was determined to strengthen the photographic arm of his office. He also knew that using outside photographers proved difficult for the Institution because of copyright regulations and questions of ownership. From Wallace's point of view, having photographers on the Institution's staff would save money, eliminate security problems, and more importantly, the Institution would actually own the negatives and have photographs on file.

One of the first people Wallace hired for his new program was Dane Penland, now Chief of the Photography Branch. Penland has seen great growth in OPPS since his first job putting together slide kits for schools. "Our photographic quality over the past 16 years has improved 100%. We're competitive with every major museum, newspaper and magazine all over the world and can meet their quality," says Penland.

Four photographers and numerous interns work under Penland's direction, and other photographers are assigned to specific museums who work independently of Penland's group but report to the Deputy Director and the Director of OPPS. "For example," explains Penland, "the photographers at Natural History are an extension of what we do here. They do a lot of underwater pho-

tography and environmental shoots."

Smithsonian staff often see photographers at special events, outdoor functions such as the Folklife Festival, and cruising Washington by air in helicopters as they photograph events on the Mall. A glamorous life? Not according to Jim Wallace; most of the photographers' work is done in the studio located in the basement of the National Museum of American History where they photograph objects. "The outside event work tends to look flashy but it is a small part of the work we do," states Wallace.

Both Wallace and Penland feel that OPPS provides a valuable service to the Institution by photographing events such as the Inauguration, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Dedication and the Desert Storm Homecoming. "Big events are very important for us to cover," says Penland. "We cover them for Military History, Political History - it's not something OPPS is doing for themselves. Our documentation of the Vietnam Memorial, for example, was requested by more than four divisions of the Institution. Inagurations are the same way. The skyline of the city and the way people dress show a period of history and technology."

Notice

Movement or breakage of any "Castle" collection objects should be reported at the earliest convenience to the OAHP Preservation Studio. E-Mail may be addressed to AHHPEM01, or phone messages may be left at 357-1409.

As OPPS produced more photographs over the years, it was important to devise an appropriate method of storage. The development of the cold storage room in the 1980s turned the negatives of OPPS into a real collection. "Before the cold storage room," recalls Wallace,"everything was in filing cabinets, above the old lab at A&I - it was everywhere!" As curator of the collection, Wallace is frequently asked to submit papers on the methodology of cold storage to professional societies.

The cold storage room led to the production of video discs for easy reference of images and the implementation of *CompuServe* and *Genie* systems for the transmitting of electronic images. With this amazing technology, OPPS can send a selection of its photos to anyone on the system, and receive requests from photographs from news agencies, professional societies and the general public. Eventually, OPPS hopes to increase its involvement with the *Internet* system. With this system, one office could scan a negative and a finished print would arrive within minutes at another office with a special printer. "With Internet," says Wallace, "I received a photo from Japan in six minutes!"

The study of new technology to provide interactive services to its customers is one priority OPPS has no trouble keeping in the forefront of its goals. OPPS is considered on the cutting edge of new innovations and they are often asked to 'test' products although they may not endorse any new items due to Smithsonian policy.

Looking into the crystal ball of the future, Jim Wallace sees the printing the photographic arms of OPPS expanding and working together as new technology is developed. "We want to do more varied printing," says Wallace. "We should be in the position to do the same quality of high commercial publication - it's a matter of the right equipment. With Jim Wallace's vision and the dedication of his colleagues, there is no doubt that the marriage of printing and photographic services will continue to endure for years to come.

AB

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