



Hawks Sisters
Daguerreotype, c. 1858

With interlocking arms, sisters Sarah (Hawks) Lawrence (1813-1884), Elizabeth (Hawks) Arms (1815-1874), and Alma Hawks (1821-1888) pose with Elizabeth's husband, Thomas Arms (1810-1867), a Boston merchant. Sarah, on the left, reared her young son alone after her husband died. Alma, on the right, remained single and lived in the Hawks family homestead. In 1870, after Thomas Arms and their other five siblings had died, the sisters reunited and lived together in Deerfield.

PHOTO ESSAY

Don't Smile for the Camera: Expression in Early Photography

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Editor's Introduction: *In our effort to expand HJM's focus to include artistic and material culture, we are initiating a new "Photo Essay" feature which will appear in each issue. Here we offer selections from a photography exhibit on display at Memorial Hall Museum in Deerfield. Because HJM is now available in several online academic databases, reproducing this exhibit in our pages makes it available to a much wider audience and preserves it for future generations of readers and researchers. Suzanne L. Flynt is Curator of Memorial Hall Museum, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, Deerfield, Massachusetts.*

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Staged smiles have been part of our cultural consciousness for the past hundred years, so the solemn expressions and idiosyncratic poses in early photographs can be unsettling. Today, social convention dictates that we smile for the camera. Although we know they are facades, smiling faces reassure us of happiness. So when we view early photographs, we ask, why didn't people smile?

Before sitters were prompted to "put on a happy face," a trend that began in the 1920s, many poses appear restrained, emotionally and physically. Sometimes they literally were. Long exposure times required one to

Mary and William Starr

Daguerreotype, 1855

Six-year-old Mary and her brother, William, children of Caleb and Susan Starr of Deerfield, strike an affectionate pose for a Greenfield photographer before their family left Massachusetts for Laona, Illinois.

**Tryphena and Wealthy Abell**

Daguerreotype by Jeremiah D. Wells, Northampton, MA; 1851

Tryphena Abell (1809-1854), of Goshen, MA, holds her five-year-old daughter to keep her from moving. Looking unwell and older than her forty-two years, Tryphena died three years after this photograph was taken.

remain motionless for up to twenty seconds, and some commercial photographers used iron head braces to keep their subject still. The grim faces in early photographs have been blamed on exposure times and head braces, but we are fully capable of staying still for that long, and the brace was more humiliating than painful. Was it because they had bad teeth? True, poor teeth were hidden behind many a closed mouth, but self-consciousness does not account for their expressions.

Early photographs offer a window on how people presented themselves. Social convention frowned on excessive familiarity, and a smile, particularly a teeth-revealing smile, could be perceived as unbecoming or inappropriate. People accustomed to sharing their smiles only in domestic spheres were reluctant to be visually immortalized that way. Having a portrait taken was considered a serious matter and there was little spontaneity in the experience. Traditional portraiture had long prescribed a dignified pose with deportment, expression, clothing, and surroundings all carefully scripted.

Once the camera was taken out of the studio and put into the hands of family and friends, smiles begin to appear in photographs. They, after all, want us to look happy.

EARLY PHOTOGRAPHIC PROCESSES

Daguerreotypes, known for their mirror-like surface, are made on silver-coated copper plates. They were popular from the early 1840s to about 1860. Ambrotypes, silver images in a collodion binder on glass, were widely produced between 1855 and about 1865. They are distinguished from daguerreotypes for their non-reflective surface. Tintypes, silver images in a collodion binder on lacquered sheets of iron, were prevalent from the late 1850s to about 1910.

Daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and tintypes are all processes that produce unique, one of a kind images. With the collodion process, one could also make a negative on glass, allowing practitioners to make multiple prints of the same image. Albumen prints (1855 to 1895) were distinctive for their glossy surface, high contrast, sharp details, and rich tones.

Compared to more costly oil portraits, photography allowed people from all walks of life to have their likeness taken, at least once. Families had pictures taken for occasions such as marriage, the birth of a child, or a family reunion. When necessary, they also photographed their dead.



Zebina Stebbins

Albumen print, c. 1859

Stebbins (1797-1879) was a South Deerfield farmer and miller. This albumen print harshly records every detail of his appearance. Although he wears a frown, his eyes suggest sorrow more than anger.

Given the high mortality rate for children in the nineteenth century, it is understandable why so many parents had their children photographed.

The Civil War created an unprecedented demand for small, inexpensive portraits to document those participating in the war effort as well as those left behind. During this time, photography became accessible to less privileged people, and portrait photographs of the poor or disenfranchised began to be taken.

Up until the 1900s, daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, albumen prints, and tintypes were almost exclusively taken by professional male photographers. Itinerant practitioners traveled in horse-drawn wagons with their cameras and chemistry to visit homes in rural communities or they set up temporary photography studios in towns. Commercial studios in larger towns such as Greenfield, Turners Falls, Shelburne Falls, Northampton, and Amherst, Massachusetts sustained photographers such as Benjamin Popkins and Jonas K. Patch. Unfortunately, most surviving photographs lack the identities of the photographer.

THE ALLEN SISTERS

By the end of the nineteenth century, photography had been transformed. Working within the aesthetic of the “Arts and Crafts” movement, Frances Stebbins Allen (1854-1941) and Mary Electa Allen (1858-1941) created exquisite photographs of their family and neighbors in Deerfield. Their innovative compositions portray men, women, and children who are at ease and unconscious of the camera, allowing the viewer to comfortably inhabit their world.

The Allen sisters’ models are typically engaged – reading, playing, or working – with their faces averted. Some even face away from the camera. Some of their subjects wear work clothes; others wear clothing from an earlier era, or costumes. Masters at capturing a mood or an emotion, the Allen sisters idealized their subjects through the careful choice of light, and by using platinum paper which has a matte surface and low tonality. Although the people in Frances and Mary Allen’s photographs rarely smile, they appear serene and content to be in front of the camera, a striking contrast to earlier generations.



Alanson Loveridge

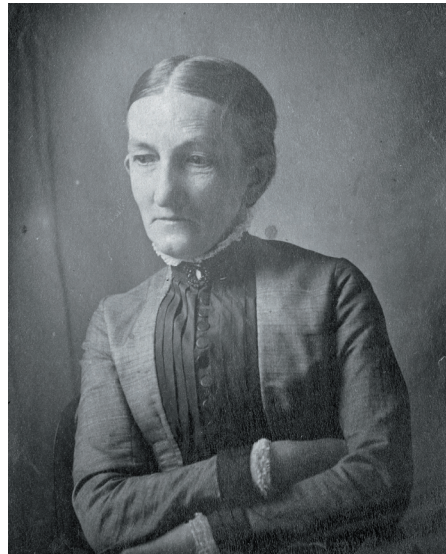
Albumen print by Horton and Davis, Greenfield, MA; 1872

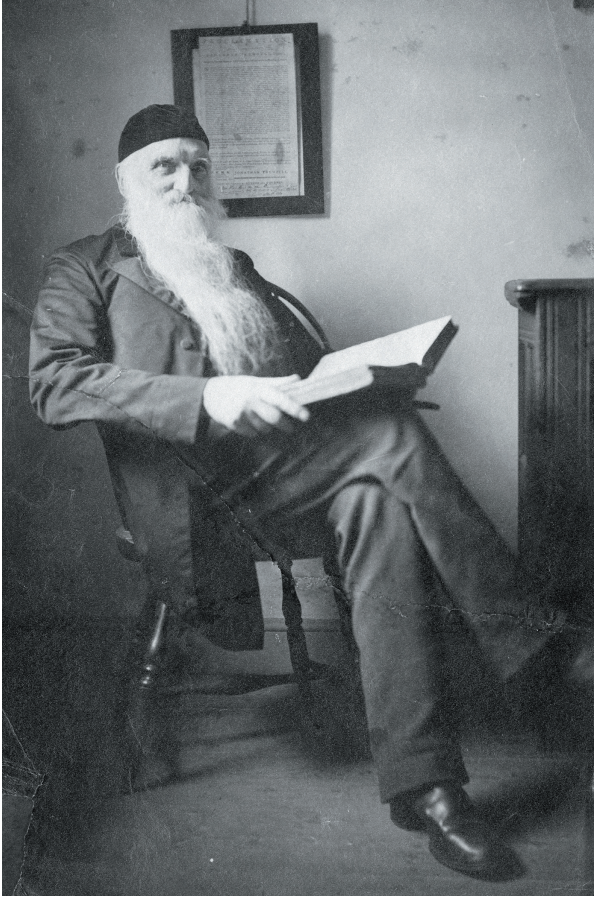
“Lanse” Loveridge (1812-1882), known as the “Governor,” was a farm laborer who was well-liked in Deerfield.

Martha Goulding Pratt

Albumen print by Emma L. Coleman (1853-1942)
Deerfield, MA; c. 1891

Pratt (1830-1894) was the venerated postmaster of Deerfield from 1870 to 1894. In her honor, the women of Deerfield raised the funds to build the Martha Goulding Pratt Memorial, a community center. With arms wrapped around her waist and tensely leaning right, Martha Pratt appears uneasy about posing.





George Sheldon, 1895

Albumen print by Emma L. Coleman (1853-1942)
Deerfield, MA

Deerfield museum founder George Sheldon (1818-1916) strikes a confident pose surrounded by the tools of his trade. Staring directly at the camera, the seventy-seven-year-old historian is depicted at the height of his career in 1895, the year the first volume of his *History of Deerfield* was published. Note the contrast between these photos from the 1890s with the earlier photos from the 1850s-60s. Most subjects appear relaxed and are photographed in more naturalistic settings. The lighting is also less harsh.

**Roana Sweeping**

Platinum print by Frances S. Allen (1854-1941)
and Mary E. Allen (1858-1941)
Deerfield, MA

In describing the Andrews children, Mary Allen wistfully noted, “the little things run around like the herd of ducks.” Childhood was fragile and mortality rates were high even into the 20th century, and sadly, Roana Andrews didn’t live to see her third birthday. Soon after this photograph was taken she died of cholera infantum, a fatal form of gastroenteritis occurring in children.

Editor's Note: The Allen sisters' photography will be profiled in a future issue. The full exhibit of Don't Smile for the Camera is on view daily from 11-5 through November 1, 2009. Admission is \$6 for adults, and \$3 for youth ages 6-21. Memorial Hall Museum, 8 Memorial Street, Deerfield, MA. For more information call 413-774-3768 or visit the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association's website: www.deerfield-ma.org

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Seeking Future Photo Essays: If you have seen a recent photography exhibit featuring an intriguing aspect of Massachusetts history, please let us know.