

AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN SOCIETY
MANUSCRIPT COLLECTIONS

NAME OF COLLECTION:

Collins Daguerreotype Business Registers, 1845 – 1854

LOCATION(S):

Folio volumes "C"

SIZE OF COLLECTION:

2 folio volumes

SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON COLLECTION:

For biographical information on T.P. & D.C. Collins, see "The Eye Perfected: The Daguerreotypes of T.P. and D.C. Collins", by Rebecca Norris (*The Daguerreian Annual* 2006).

SOURCE OF COLLECTION:

Purchased from Kelly Kinzle, 2010.

COLLECTION DESCRIPTION:

Brothers Thomas Painter Collins (1823 – 1873) and David Chittenden Collins (1825 – 1909) were the sons of Simeon and Cynthia Painter Collins. Along with four sisters, the Collins were a politically and socially progressive family, active in both women's rights and the abolitionist movements. Thomas Painter Collins (T.P. Collins) and David Chittenden Collins (D.C. Collins) made their career as daguerreotypists based in Philadelphia.

In 1840, Thomas and Simeon Collins moved from Connecticut to Philadelphia for Simeon's work as an itinerant bookseller. It was in Philadelphia that Thomas learned the art of daguerreotype. In 1845, Thomas formed a partnership with daguerreotypist Montgomery Pike Simons. David, who later joined Thomas and Simeon along with the rest of the family, was not part of this partnership, but had his own partnership with daguerreotypist Stephen Root. It is believed that both David and Thomas worked together with Root before Thomas formed his partnership with Simons in 1845. By 1846, however, Thomas was in business by himself. David worked for Thomas in his studio, and the two later became partners. What originally was a partnership turned into a family business, the tensions of such prompting Thomas to leave Philadelphia. He became an itinerant daguerreotypist across New England, eventually settling in Westfield, Massachusetts. David carried on the family business.

The ledgers document the over 23,000 customers who visited the company's daguerreian rooms in Philadelphia. For the decade covered by the ledgers (1845-1854), each sitter signed the register or was recorded by a clerk. One of the Collins brothers often added comments regarding the weather ("Cloudy day," "Stormy day," "Clear day," etc.), payment, size of plate taken, and type of case used. Sitters also gave their address; while most came from Philadelphia, more distant locations, such as Memphis, TN, Shrewsbury, MA, and Trieste, Austria, are also recorded. The information about cases and plate size is often written in the margin, along with notes about whether payment was owed. Returns and refusals are also noted in the ledgers, although these occur infrequently, indicating that the photographers tried

their best to get clear images that pleased their clients. Some notable sitters recorded in the ledgers include Philadelphia lithographer Albert Newsom (who sat on the very first day the business was open) and the nationally known temperance lecturer John B. Gough (who sat on a cloudy January day in 1846).

The first volume of registers is for the Simons & Collins partnership formed in 1845. The second volume of registers is for D.C. Collins & Co. (1849 – 1854), the family business after Thomas left Philadelphia.