THE DAGUERREIAN ANNUAL 1991

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The dawning of 1850 in Baltimore, Maryland, shed light upon a dynamic and prosperous city. Streets and canopied sidewalks teemed with the bustle of business activity from factories, mills, markets, and mercantile houses. Its renowned clipper ships plied the oceans making the harbor a doorway to the world. Being the fourth largest urban center of the increasingly fragile Union, the growing population presented a fertile market for the local portrait trade. At least nineteen daguerreian galleries operated during the year on Baltimore Street (the city’s primary retail avenue) and its environs.¹ In less than a decade since the first studio opened during the summer of 1840, the daguerreotype had become part and parcel of the community.²

At the end of the year, an event occurred that not only made a mark in the annals of Baltimore history, but was an early media-event for the city’s daguerreians as well. Jenny Lind, the “Swedish Nightingale” on her first American tour, presented four evening concerts on December 9, 11, 12, and 14 at the Front Street Theater. Brought to this country by P.T. Barnum, the “King of Advertisers,” the “Queen of Song” and her reception in New York and Philadelphia had been carefully reported in the local press. Since Barnum had to initially put up $187,500 before the tour (between one and two million dollars in today’s money) as a guarantee, the promoter took care to stir up the paying public with plenty of advanced publicity.

To capitalize on the demand for seats to her first Monday night concert, tickets for the choicest locations were auctioned off on the Saturday morning before her premiere. Though a drenching rain fell, a large crowd filled the theater in anxious anticipation of claiming one of the 1,200 precious pieces of pasteboard. The auctioneer, a Mr. Gibson, began the bidding as the sums of $10, $20 and $30 were offered. “Why gentlemen, this will never do,” exclaimed Gibson in response to the disappointing offers. “The ticket should at least bring $700, and I hope you won’t let all Eastern cities get ahead of you,” he chided the onlookers. “Where’s the $500 man I heard of yesterday?” Successive bids of $40, $50 and $75 were then made, and, at last, a small voice in the gallery shouted, “$100!”³ This was followed by groans, cheers and yells from the audience. It was then announced that the agent for Jesse Whitehurst, the daguerreotypist, was the fortunate man. Whitehurst, a promotional expert in his own right, had not failed to recognize the potential value of his investment. Perhaps, he hoped, this would serve as the inducement needed to encourage Miss Lind to sit for her daguerreotype at his gallery. His agent quickly chose seat 1005 in the dress circle, placing the daguerreotypist directly opposite the stage, front row center, for the opening performance.
and later at Barnum’s Hotel (no relation to the promoter) on Calvert Street, where she lodged during her visit. On Monday evening, the gifted visitor conquered the hearts of Baltimoreans as she delivered a performance that won over even the most hardened critic. For the next week, the “Queen of Song” ruled the city.

On Thursday afternoon, Jesse Whitehurst’s gamble paid off as Miss Lind chose his gallery over the others in town to have her shadows secured by the daguerreian art. Word spread quickly of Jenny’s appearance there, and soon, a large mob of well-wishers gathered in the street to greet her. Fearing their enthusiasm, the singer sneaked out the backdoor of the building and walked anonymously by foot back to her hotel, while another lady was led to her carriage through the crowd. Thinking the surrogate was the Swede, since they had no photographs to identify her by, the citizens jubilantly followed the vehicle back to Barnum’s where the real entertainer had already been sequestered.

During the week, local daguerreotypists rushed to meet the public demand for images of the Swedish Nightingale. Palmer Perkins announced that visitors to his gallery could see “a splendid likeness of Jenny Lind” among his many beautiful daguerreotypes on display. Henry Pollock claimed that he had “the best likeness that had yet been taken” and that copies could be purchased from his studio. Jesse Whitehurst outdid them all when he smugly touted the sale of daguerreotypes made from his “original portrait of Jenny Lind.”

The competition over marketing Lind’s images produced the first major rift among members of Baltimore’s daguerreian fraternity. Since there was no negative produced in a daguerreotype, each image was a unique original much like a modern instant photograph. To get a duplicate, either another view of the subject was made or a copy of the original was produced. All of the studios on the itinerary of Jenny Lind clamored for the opportunity to take her likeness and reproduce them for sale to her admiring public. Only a few galleries, however, were granted the privilege. The others had to work from a portrait drawn by hand instead of light which they copied with the daguerreian process. This prompted Jesse Whitehurst to issue a warning in the press to the community:

Fig. 1: Though seen here about fourteen years later, Baltimore’s Front Street Theater had changed little since Jenny Lind appeared upon its stage in 1850. This was also the site of the convention where the Democratic Party suffered its final split before the 1860 presidential election. (Author’s collection)
Fig. 2: Daguerreians Jesse Whitehurst and H.R. Marks advertised their services in Jenny Lind’s opening night program. Each had been successful in bidding for seats to her premiere. (Author’s collection)
JENNY LIND’S DAGUERREOTYPE
NO IMPOSITION

“Look Upon this Picture—And on This.”
J.H. Whitehurst takes this method of cautioning the public against purchasing spurious LIKENESSES of JENNY LIND copied from a print, (a fact not denied,) and which are offered as the “best” ever produced! He freely invites his friends to call and examine the only Daguerreotype of the sweet Vocalist taken in this city—and, if they choose, order copies. They can examine the “best” “Caricature,” opposite the Museum, and then pass their opinion. J.H.W. does not pretend to more than he can really accomplish, and those who need “Caricatures” must seek them elsewhere that at either of his Galleries, from whence more Pictures are issued than from any other like establishment in the world.8

Henry Pollock, operator of one of Baltimore’s emerging “artistic” daguerreian galleries and subject of this caveat, replied directly below the accusations of his critic in an attempt to explain his Lind daguerreotype:

POLLOCK’S DAGUERREAN SALOON, OPPOSITE THE MUSEUM.—Some men, Mr. Sun, are singularly stupid in comprehending a few sentences of plain English. Others, again, are stupidly singular in not comprehending the level on which their professional talents and contemporaries place them; and, in overrating the emotions which their long unwhipt conceit tells them they are capable of exciting in others. I am honored with the acquaintance of “the distinguished daguerreotypist of this city,” who, above all I “ever loved or knew,” appear pre-eminently to possess these traits. It may, however, be a man’s misfortune, not his fault, to know more about making bedsteads and cradles (or building houses as I do) than about the meaning of a sentence in parentheses, or the difference between “envy” and that feeling which prompts a gentleman to turn and kick a puppy that is barking at him. Mr. P did RECEIVE and HAS and SHOWS A SILVER MEDAL, (the highest premium awarded to daguerreotypists, at the late [Maryland Institute] Fair.) He also has the best arranged Light in Baltimore—as fine a German apparatus as ever imported—a comfortable and Handsomely furnished receiving room—private apartments for ladies replete with every convenience, and in charge of a lady—Has had five years experience and makes his pictures himself.9

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Fig. 3: The demand among daguerreotypists to obtain a sitting from Jenny Lind was so great that only a few were granted the privilege. The less fortunate had to resort to making daguerreotype copies of “caricatures” of the “Swedish Nightingale,” such as this sixth-plate, to sell to her admiring public. (Author’s collection)
JENNY LIND DAGUERREOTYPES ARE OUT OF DATE
FREE EXHIBITION

Splendid picture of JEMMY LING [sic], from a sketch by DENNIS McSHANE, revised and corrected by Mons. Blarney-yum, the only, and consequently the best in town. Also, that DISTINGUISHED PUPPY. Also, a view of that HOUSE, furnished with some of those bedsteads and cradles. Call early and get the first sight at MARS-TER'S Skylight Daguerrean Rooms, 147 Lexington St., near Howard St., opposite Hart's store, where you can get your own likeness in the best style, very cheap.¹⁰

Jenny Lind serenaded Baltimoreans for four nights and even added a free performance for the city's school children. As she departed to continue her tour, "Lind Mania" and the "Lindotype" controversy gradually settled down. Four months later, she revisited the city for two concerts, but the public response was somewhat less enthusiastic, and she left after a few uneventful days. For a time, the galleries of Baltimore returned to the business of making likenesses of less prominent, but no less important, faces of the day though the gulf that now divided two of the city's most illustrious daguerreians remained.

¹Though the United States Census of Manufacturing recorded nine daguerreian galleries in Baltimore for 1850, other sources document as many as nineteen in operation during that year. For their identity, see the author's Supplemental Directory of Baltimore Daguerreotypists (Baltimore: Historic Graphics, 1989).
²For more information on this early period see the author's "Dawn of the Daguerrean Era in Baltimore, 1839-1849," Maryland Historical Magazine, Summer 1989.
³The Sun, December 9, 1850; Whitehurst was also the highest bidder when Lind's opening night tickets were auctioned in Richmond, Virginia.
⁴American and Commercial Daily Advertiser, December 14, 1850.
⁵The Sun, December 9, 1850.
⁶Ibid.
⁷Ibid., December 21, 1850.
⁸Ibid., December 30, 1850.
⁹Ibid.; though the most enduring and among the most prolific of Baltimore's pioneer photographers, Pollock remains an enigmatic figure. This advertisement has shed the most light on his background before he took up daguerreotypy.
¹⁰Ibid., December 31, 1850.