

Lycoming County Genealogical Society

Williamsport Photographers

Williamsport Photographers 1867 to 1930

Preface

Many of us have old photographs taken in the early years of photography. Often we are not quite sure of the identity of the people in the picture. Many of the photographs have a “photographers mark” on either the front or back, or are mounted in a folder that includes a galley name. These names sometimes include an address which can be clues to the time period in which the photograph was taken.

Profiles of Williamsport Photographers

Jacob Lyons Mussina, was born at Aaronsburg, Centre County, April 29, 1807. Orphaned at the age of 11, he apprenticed in the jewelry business in Bellefonte. After a few years in Jersey Shore, he came to Williamsport in 1830, and worked in the Prothonotary’s Office for four years until he opened his own jeweler’s shop. He conducted that business for over 35 years. In 1842 he opened the first daguerreotype gallery in connection with his other business. He was strongly interested in the mechanical (sic) arts. He was also the first telegraph operator in this city when the line was opened through to Jersey Shore and filled that position for several years.

Thomas J. (Jefferson) Trapp arrived in Williamsport in 1852, driving a horse drawn wagon outfitted as a photograph gallery. Mr. Trapp was searching for a place to locate and practice his profession, and set up his wagon in Market Square. Business was good and as was Mr. Trapp’s work. He liked Williamsport and it was not a difficult matter for Abel DuBois to persuade him to establish himself here. He continued to use his wagon “gallery” for some time after he purchased the property at 317 Market Street.

Mr. Trapp retired about 1909, and died April 1914. Godfrey Hess was the successor to T. J. Trapp.

Eugene Stuart arrived in Williamsport from Susquehanna County in 1858. He practiced photography for about 31 years until 1889. He died in 1891.

John F. Nice first had his business in Lewisburg 1864-1866. In 1867 he bought out Jacob Mussina's photography business[1]. His business was on the north side of Market Square, where he continued until 1883. His brother, Robert Y. Nice (born June 1849) joined him about 1879 and continued the business after John's retirement, until sometime in the 1920s[2] at 3 East Third Street. John died in May 1924. Robert died December 1929 at 81 years of age.

Godfrey Hess, the son of Godfrey Hess, Sr., was born in Williamsport in December 1844, in what was then the Hess block, at the corner of Fourth and Pine streets. He received a common school education and then began to clerk in his father's general store. He was educated in the city and learned the shoemaker's trade, and later the photographer's and carpenter's trades. He was involved in a number of businesses: Edison Electric Co.; Williamsport Steam Co.; Wilkinson Truss Co.; and his own wet photography business.

Later he clerked for other merchants, afterwards purchasing the photograph gallery of T. J. Trapp, over Muir & Scott's store, corner of Third and Market streets. In 1878 he removed the gallery to 348 North Avenue and added a copying department and a camera supply store. Here he conducted a thriving business up to the time of this death.

When the electric light project for Williamsport was first talked of, Mr. Hess was a prime mover in the enterprise and with P. B. Shaw, built the first electric light plant for the city. Messrs. Hess and Shaw conducted the business for over 14 years, when they sold out to the Edison Illuminating company, retaining some of the stock. Mr. Hess was president of the United Gas, Water and Electric Company, of Sunbury, the Williams Valley Water company, the Williams Light, Heat and Power company, and Provident Manufacturing Company, and president and one of the organizers of the Wilkinson Trust company, limited. He was a stockholder and director in the Savings institution, a stockholder in the Merchants' National Bank and interested in the Williamsport Steam company. Mr. Hess died August 1903, at 58 years of age.

Daniel R. Stiltz, born in Baltimore about 1837 and came to Williamsport after the Civil War. He had originally studied for the Episcopal ministry, but later took up photography. During the Civil War he was the photographer for the corps unit to which he was attached. He originally opened and operated a studio gallery for several years, and later formed the National Copying Company, which had its headquarters in Williamsport, and branches in other cities. He died in June 1903.

William F. Dean was born in Canadaigua, NY, November 1856, and came to Williamsport with his family in 1867. He first engaged in the mercantile business after his father, but in 1883 he established the firm of Dean & Cornwell and engaged in photography. Mr. Cornwell retired in 1887, and William Dean continued alone. He developed a leading photographic establishment, employing six assistants. He had the exclusive right to the photographing at thirteen furniture factories. In 1895, Mr. Dean adopted "Terms Cash" for his business, and found that without a bookkeeping

department the photographs turned out “were superior in quality, mounting and finish to anything produces heretofore”. He died in 1899.

The Dean Studio name was retained by J. M. Pottenger, first as P. M Pottenger/Dean Studio and later becoming Pottenger & Sargent.

Charles A. Shempp, a native of South Williamsport, born January 1867, and was a photographer for 38 years, operating shops at Laurel and Fourth and later on Fourth Street opposite the YMCA. His interest in photography grew out of a teenage enthusiasm for the Indians that visited Williamsport with Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show and Pawnee Bill’s Circus. He followed them westward and spent months in South Dakota taking pictures of Indian camps, ceremonials and domestic scenes.

After retiring from photography because the silver nitrate used in developing pictures poisoned him; he had a second career as inspector of streets and sidewalks in Williamsport, holding that position for an additional 30 years. He was on duty when the first brick streets were laid and also witnessed the replacement of thousands of feet of boardwalks. He inspected the flagstone and concrete walks which took their place. [Mr. Shempp was the father of LaRue D. Shempp, who donated his extensive model train collection to Thomas Taber Museum.]

Albert F. Zimmerman joined Godfrey Hess in 1880 and worked with him until Mr. Hess’s death in 1903. In 1904 he went into business for himself at 148 West Fourth Street, moving the business to 12 West Fourth Street in 1922. During his career he took many thousands of photos of Williamsport and its vicinity and was especially interested in documenting Williamsport’s past. He was particularly interested in the lumbering boom that was occurring at that time. He died in 1938.

Mr. A. W. F. MacCollin (1878 had a gallery and practiced photography, but also performed vocally, doing recitations, opera and as an actor in various community productions and benefits. He was a member of the Acting Academy, and the Handel and Hayden Association (1875). In 1882, he left Williamsport to follow a career in the theatre as a stage director.

CdeV: On back: photographer: "A.W.F. MacCollin, Imperial Photographic Rooms, S.E. Cor. 3d & Pine Sts. Opposite City Hotel, Williamsport, Pa. Negatives Preserved."

Edmund MacCollin, his brother was also a photographer, and continued (what is assumed) to have been a joint business. The E. N. MacCollin Gallery moved to W 4th opposite Government building in April 1st, 1890. The Daily Gazette and Bulletin carried a article “MacCollin’s New Gallery” that was part of the newly built Troxell Building on West 4th Street: “Five of the rooms on the second floor are occupied by E. N. MacCollin, the well known skillful photographers, who moved lately from the southeast corner of third and Pine streets. Mr. MacCollin has long desired to get located on a second floor, easy of access, and now that he has been successful, some description on his present gallery may prove of interest to his many patrons. His gallery consists of five

rooms in this beautiful building, and all are located on the second floor, at the rear end. The first room is the parlor of reception room, which is elegantly furnished, the floor is covered with Brussels carpet, and beautiful upholstered chairs are spread over it, the windows display lace curtains, and the wall fine photographs, etc. From this room the visitor comes direct to the operating room, where are seen all the latest improvements connected with that department. The sky light top and side are composed of ground glass, and the curtains are so arranged the softest kind of a light can be obtained at all times. Connected with the operating room is the ladies' toilet room. From his operating room Mr. MacCollin steps into his "dark room" and from there into the finishing room, both of which are of excellent size, and where he has all the requisite facilities for turning out first class work. As M MacCollin has long been recognized as a photographer so superior ability, and now that he has the convenience he so long has desired, he, no doubt, will succeed in largely increasing his business. He has engaged as an assistant to take charge of one of the departments of his gallery, a Philadelphia artist of fine ability."

In 1894, Edmund MacCollin was appointed to a position at the Philadelphia Mint. Edmund died in Philadelphia March 1913.

Some galleries employed one or more photographers who worked under the "gallery" name, such as Hunt & Ellinger's.

Henry C. Yarrington operated a photographic establishment in Williamsport from 1885 to 1893. In the 1880 census, Henry in is Carbondale, Lackawanna County, employed as a photographer.

For a short time, he was associated with Arthur Rapperite. Arthur Rapperite left Pennsylvania and travelled to Victoria, British Columbia, where he became an associate of Hannah Maynard, the wife of Richard Maynard. Both of the Maynard's were on the forefront of the art and composition of photography.