

“Daguerreotype,” 9 March 1840

(keywords: David Seixas, history of the daguerreotype, history of photography)

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Published in:

Daily National Intelligencer (Washington, D.C.) 28:8444 (9 March 1840): n.p. (fourth page of issue).

DAGUERREOTYPE.—An exhibition of these sun-painted pictures will commence on Tuesday next, at the Hall of the Medical College, corner of 10th and E streets. The images seen in the Camera Obscura are made permanent on plates of silver by the agency of light. *All* stationary objects preserve their forms in the most minute detail, with perfect exactitude. The effects of linear perspective, and the gradations of tone depending upon aerial perspective, are presented with wonderful delicacy on these pictorial duplications of Nature.

A lecture on the art of Daguerreotype will be delivered on days to be hereafter announced, and the process of producing such pictures popularly explained, and performed by means of a complete apparatus. Tickets for the exhibition of the pictures, to admit one person, twenty-five cents; for the lecture, demonstrations, and exhibition included, to admit a lady and gentleman, \$1.

Tickets may be had at Mr. Fischer’s, Stationers’ Hall, at the bar of Brown’s Hotel, and at the lecture room.

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[End of text.]

EDITOR’S NOTES:

The unnamed exhibitor / lecturer is—with good certainty—a Mr. Seixas, who is identified in a notice (dated 14 March 1840) in “Daguerreotype,” *Daily National Intelligencer* 28:8451 (17 March 1840): n.p. (third page of issue).¹ Seixas also exhibited and lectured in Baltimore in April—May 1840.

David G. Seixas (1788–1864) was the son of Shearith Israel’s famous minister, Gershom Seixas.² The historian John Craig informs the present author that Seixas was “an inventor and teacher of sign language, many aspects of his non-photographic life are reported at the website of the American Jewish Historical Society. (<http://www.ajhs.org>).”

Accompanying a seven paragraph biography of Seixas is the summary:

David G. Seixas, one of the New York hazzan’s several sons, manufactured sealing wax printers’ ink, and enamel-coated visiting cards. He opened a brewery, pioneered in making crockery, and experimented with daguerreotype photography. There is no question that he was a skillful technician; it is equally true that he was egregiously unsuccessful in everything he undertook.³

Seixas is also discussed in Clifford Krainik, “National Vision, Local Enterprise: John Plumbe, Jr., and The Advent of Photography In Washington, D.C.” *Washington History*:

Magazine of The Historical Society of Washington, D.C., 9:2 (Fall–Winter 1997–98): 11–13.

It has been suggested that Seixas may have learned the process from Daguerre. The present editor finds nothing to support the suggestion but leans toward the possibility that that Seixas learned the daguerreotype process from François Gouraud.

Seixas is included in an 1840 silhouette of the Kursheedt family by the noted silhouette artist, Auguste Edouart. The silhouette is reproduced in Norman L. Kleeblatt and Gerard C. Wertkin, *The Jewish Heritage in American Folk Art* (New York: Universe Books, 1984): 50.

1. http://www.daguerreotypearchive.org/texts/N8400004_SEIXAS_NTL-INTEL_1840-03-17.pdf
2. Jonathan D. Sarna, "The Freethinker, the Jews, and the Missionaries: George Houston and the Mystery of 'Israel Vindicated'" *AJS Review* vol. 5 (1980): 112.
3. Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry: 1776–1985* vol. 1 (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1989): 186; entry for David G. Seixas: pp. 433–36.

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