



# The Photogram

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DISDÉRI

*Tokugawa Akitake* (1853-1910), the younger brother of the shogun, at fourteen years of age by A.A.E. Disdéri. Carte de visite, 1867. Collection of Tony Ventimiglia.

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June 1 (July-Summer issue)  
August 1 (September-October issue)  
October 1 (November-December issue)  
January 1 (February-March issue)  
March 1 (April-May issue)

The MICHIGAN PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORICAL SOCIETY is an organization dedicated to advancing an understanding and appreciation of the history of photography through membership meetings, special events and publications, and through shared endeavors with other organizations and the general public. The MiPHS is a 501(c)3 non-profit corporation chartered by the State of Michigan.

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## MiPHS DINNER & PRESENTATION

**LORNE SHIELDS**, *The Bicycle in Vintage Photographs*, Saturday, APRIL 24, at the Birmingham Athletic Club, 4023 West Maple Road, Bloomfield Hills, MI. 6:00PM reception with cash bar, 7:00PM dinner followed by lecture; silent auction throughout the evening. Lorne has collected early cycling photography for over 40 years. Images encompass social history, fashion, mechanical development, sport, circus and theatre, commerce and just plain fun. **RESERVATIONS REQUIRED. PLEASE** make a donation to the SILENT AUCTION. Proceeds to benefit the educational programs of MiPHS. Call Cindy Motz @ 248.549.6026.

## COLLODION WET PLATE DEMONSTRATION

**ROBERT SHIMMIN**, photographer and MiPHS member, Saturday, RJUNE 12, Noon, at Cindy Motzenbecker's house, 2625 Benjamin Ave., Royal Oak, 248.549.6026. Using hand built equipment, modern lenses and cameras, Robert works in the essentially unchanged wet plate method of the nineteenth century. He will demonstrate and discuss the making of tintypes, ambrotypes and glass plate negatives. A selection of his wet plate work and albumen prints will be included in the presentation, along with historical examples from his collection.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**H**ey members . . . Well, spring is on deck for sure, and so is the next MiPHS dinner meeting with Lorne Shields, "king" of bicycle history! Some of the board members heard him last fall at PhotoHistory and we knew he would make a wonderful dinner speaker. Hope to see you there! Also one of our new members doing a tintype demo in Royal Oak in June. So please consider coming to that too, OK? We want to meet more of you! Don't do too much yard work the first time in the yard. Remember, you have all summer! Hang in there  
— CINDY MOTZ

## MIPHS PHOTOGRAPHICA SHOW & SALE

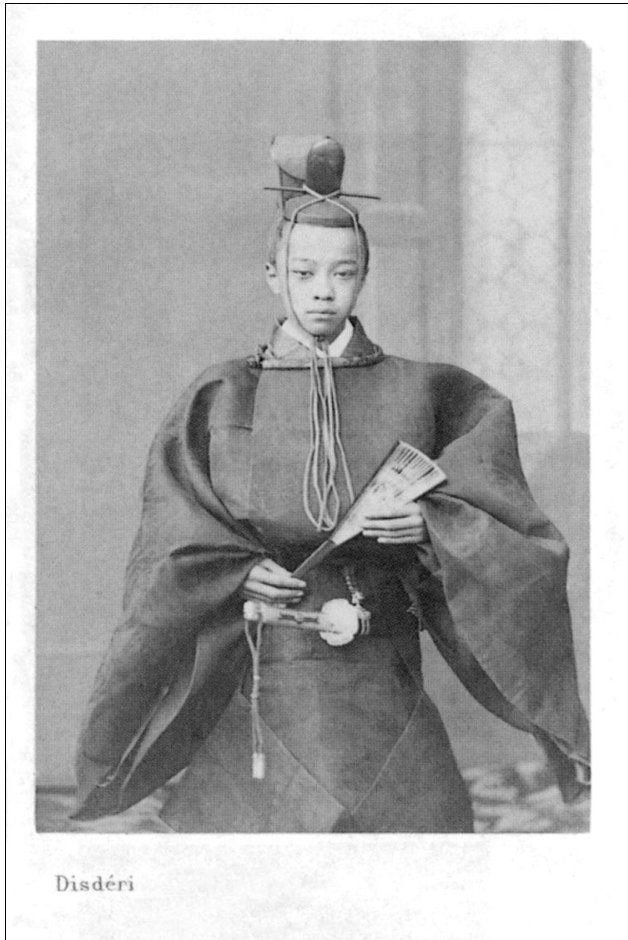
**M**ark your calendar now for Sunday, OCTOBER 17 for the Annual MiPHS Photographica Show and Sale. It will be held at the Royal Oak Elks Lodge, 2401 E. Fourth Street, just south of 11 Mile and west of the I-75 service drive. Table applications will be included in the July issue of *The Photogram*.

## PHOTO-HISTORY CALENDAR

April 11: Michigan Antiquarian Book & Paper Show, Lansing Center, Lansing, MI [www.curiousbooks.com/shows.html](http://www.curiousbooks.com/shows.html)  
April 24: **MiPHS** - Dinner and Lecture, Birmingham Athletic Club  
May 16: PHSC Photofair, Woodbridge, Ontario, [www.phsc.ca](http://www.phsc.ca)  
May 16: London Photograph Fair, London, [www.photofair.co.uk](http://www.photofair.co.uk)  
June 5-6: Bièvres International Photofair, Bièvres, FRANCE, [www.foirephoto-bievre.com](http://www.foirephoto-bievre.com)  
June 12: **MiPHS** - Collodion Wet Plate Demonstration by Robert Shimmin, Noon, at the Motzenbecker's

## SEPTEMBER MEMBERS' PORTFOLIO ISSUE

Once again the September-October *Photogram* will be a Members' Portfolio issue in which MiPHS members share photos, hardware and ephemera from their personal collections. As this issue will be in COLOR, please submit a color jpeg (300dpi) along with a short description or anecdote to Jan Schimmelman. E-mail: [schimmel@oakland.edu](mailto:schimmel@oakland.edu). Please let her know a.s.a.p. if you plan to submit an item. Donations to offset the cost of color printing are most welcome. DEADLINE- AUGUST 7



# East – West Diplomacy Through Photography

by Tony Ventimiglia

Figure 1. Carte de visite portrait of Tokugawa Akitake taken by Disdéri in 1867, one of two poses made at this sitting. Collection of Tony Ventimiglia.

In Paris in 1867, A.A.E. Disdéri photographed Tokugawa Akitake, who was the younger brother of Tokugawa Yoshinobu, the last shogun or hereditary military dictator of Japan. Akitake was sent to France as his government's lead representative to the Paris Exposition Universelle where each attending country proudly displayed their culture and products. He was also sent for schooling under the guardianship of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte. Akitake was but fourteen years old.

When the youthful emissary presented himself to the Napoleon III court in full diplomatic splendor, it was as though he was greeting the emperor of Japan. The French emperor was surprised and very impressed. So much so that he envisioned a photo opportunity unique in itself, but also possibly politically motivated.

Louis-Napoleon loved photography. He and empress Eugenie, along with their children frequently had their likenesses made. Their favorite photographer was Andre Aldophe Eugene Disdéri, whose portrait studio was close enough so that the emperor could 'pop-in' often which he did. According to Josef Maria Eder in his *History of Photography* (pp. 351-52), "Disdéri was considered the outstanding portrait photographer of his time in Paris. Napoleon III appointed him court photographer." Eder further states that "the entrance (of Disdéri's studio) on the boulevard des Italiens is decorated with many photographs. One mounts a stairway . . . On arriving at the top of the stairs, one is directed . . . to the reception room . . . In the waiting room are the finest furnishings, but only one portrait, that of the emperor."

Disdéri was a creative and innovative artist. He was not the first photographer to make cartes de visite, but history credits him with popularizing the style. He made thousands of well-posed portraits, unique and varied within an elegant, luxurious setting. This no doubt contributed to his growing popularity. All the pro-government personages went to his studio.

There are two known poses taken of Akitake at this time. Example one shows the young man looking directly into the camera lens, while wearing the uniform of a Japanese dignitary, including short sword (figure 1). This plain pose is direct, attractive and somewhat informal. The longer focal-length lens used here produces a larger subject in the carte de visite format. Disdéri's earlier portraits were full length, showing more of the stage sets and props, thus rendering the subject smaller. The other pose (cover photo) was also made with the longer focal-length lens, but this one was clearly influenced by the Japanese officials who are part of the embassy entourage, and is a masterpiece of carte de visite portraiture. One of



these knowledgeable men who knew the art of Japan, suggested this more formal style of pose that was reserved for very high dignitaries (see figure 2). It appealed to a more 'Eastern' aesthetic. Akitake was placed low, seated or kneeling. His head is turned to the oblique which displayed the headgear more clearly for the camera. From this position, Disderi portrayed Akitake as a dignitary: a boy becoming a man, and perhaps a future shogun; an official becoming a leader; and even a once closed Japan now open to the world.

At this very 'Exposition' there were two factions representing Japan. France was the only Western country that still supported the shogun as the current leader of the Japanese government at a time when an internal power struggle was taking place within the island nation. Other European nations as well as America and Russia, wanted a change in power.

Figure 2. Minamoto no Yoritomo (1147-1180) Shogun. This style of portrait pose is an example used in art of 'Eastern' cultures and is usually reserved for very high dignitaries.

Who would have suggested a visit to the Disderi studio? Certainly not the Japanese, as photography, although known, was simply not yet utilized as part of their current diplomacy. It was clearly suggested by Napoleon III, perhaps as a deliberate political gesture in supporting the French position. Did Louis-Napoleon explain the diplomatic importance of such an official portrait to his court photographer? It remains an intriguing question. Did Disderi have knowledge of Japanese art that would have allowed him to imitate the historical pose? Perhaps, but doubtful. The idea for the more formal pose had to come from the visiting envoy. At this time, the Japanese were looking for opportunities to achieve recognition from Western countries. They wanted to be included in the community of nations and 'catch up' to the rest of the world after being a closed society for so long. Since these ambassadors were not the only faction representing Japan in this foreign setting, it was very important for some form of recognition to occur. Here is a case for just such a situation. Wise Japanese officials saw this as an opportunity to aid their young leader and benefit their position. This clever political maneuver may never have occurred without the enthusiasm of one French emperor, one experienced portrait photographer and the knowledge of at least one unknown Japanese official.

Up to this time, no Japanese shogun or emperor ever officially sat for his photograph, although Japanese dignitaries who visited Western countries were almost always pictured. After Akitake's cartes de visite were seen at home, photography seemed to 'open-up' to the leadership as part of Japan's quest for Western knowledge. Tokogawa Yoshinobu was soon pictured (figure 3). The emperor Meiji was also photographed — the first Japanese emperor to do so.

Figure 3. *Tokugawa Yoshinobu* (1837-1913). Also known as Keiki, he is the older brother of Akitake and the last shogun. Collection of Tony Ventimiglia.



TONY VENTIMIGLIA is a photographer, collector of Japanese images and an amateur historian. He is a graduate of California State University, Fullerton. He also studied art history at Wayne State University and is now retired and living in Saint Clair Shores, Michigan.





A simple still life of a basket of yellow onions, lifted from my kitchen counter, as I packed for the trip, looked beautiful, rendered by the nineteenth century wetplate collodion process.

# MiPHS Members Learn the Wetplate Collodion Photographic Process

by Judith Harrison Kalter

In June 2009 Cynthia Motzenbecker, Cindy Greig and I participated in a workshop taught by Bill Schwab and Joe Smigiel in a northern Michigan woodland near Good Hart. Each of us had brought a different level of experience with the medium but each left excited with the knowledge of how to make these marvelous nineteenth century Civil War era photographs. Following the path started by hoop skirted, nineteenth century women photographers, we too stained our fingers dark brown, when the silver nitrate solution reacted with sunlight on our skin; evidence of any sloppy technique. Using the wet plate collodion process to make photographic images was once the providence of only wealthy or aristocratic women and men. In the mid- nineteenth century Queen Victoria had darkroom facilities available at Windsor Castle.<sup>1</sup> This space was used by ladies of her court, who along with The Queen, enjoyed photography as an artistic pastime. Lady Jocelyn, a Lady of the Bedchamber to Queen Victoria would set up friends and family members in scenes depicting their daily lives and used the laborious wet-plate-collodion method to record these portraits.<sup>2</sup> The group meeting in Bill Schwab's wooded yard were of a much more democratic mix.

Bill and Joe carefully explained the process to the group of nine eager students, sitting in a circle around the outside demonstration table much like the Native Americans, who originally had inhabited this area of northern Michigan, might have sat around their campfires. Even with the precaution of working out of doors, the aroma of the ether made its way to some of us and we needed to move further back. Bill and Joe were constantly reminding us of the safety precautions to keep in mind while working with the hazardous materials required for this process.<sup>3</sup> One of the great pleasures of attending this workshop was our ability not only to see the process from the start; how to mix the chemicals and select the base materials, but having ample time to make our own glass plate ambrotypes or tintypes using the wet-collodion process. My reward for making the long trek north was the thrill of watching the developer release the image captured on the metal plate of my first tintype.

## STEPS IN MAKING THE WETPLATE

1. The preparation of the chemicals is the first step; salted collodion solution, silver nitrate sensitizing solution, developer and fixer.



Bill Schwab measuring cadmium bromide that when in solution with potassium iodine and distilled water will be mixed with a solution of collodion USP diethyl ether and grain alcohol for the resulting salted collodion solution.

2. The glass or metal plate must be cut to size and prepared to be coated with the collodion solution.



Joe Smigiel polishing glass plate with a calcium carbonate solution.

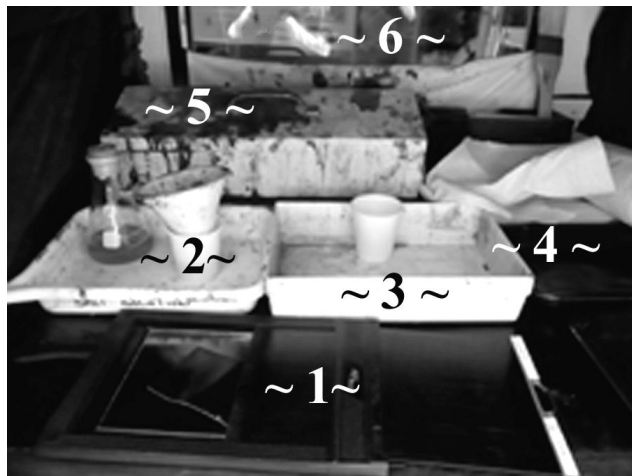


A dark glass bottle is used for storing the working solution for future use.



Cindy Grieg practices pouring the salted collodion solution onto a glass plate.

3. The prepared plate is coated first with the salted collodion, then, after an important wait of 15-30 seconds, placed into the silver nitrate solution for 3-5 minutes and then carefully placed into the specially designed negative carrier. This step must be done under amber or red safelight.



Inside Joe Smigiel's portable out door darkroom.

1. adapted negative carrier
2. salted collodion solution
3. developer
4. wash water
5. silver nitrate solution
6. amber glass window

4. The still wet, now light sensitive, plate is slid into the camera's back. The camera has already been set up for focus and exposure. Time for the exposure is determined by the amount of UV light; experience of the photographer with the process is vital as trial and error is costly in materials and time. Exposure time may be in seconds.



Cynthia Motzenbecker counts off the seconds while exposing the wet plate to her still life.

5. Quickly returning to the darkroom, the plate is removed from the carrier and the developer is carefully poured over it. The plate is developed for 15-90 seconds depending on the final use. Ambrotypes on glass plates and tintypes (ferrotypes) on thin metal plates require less exposure time than plates used as negatives for printing out with any of several alternate process such as cyanotype, gum or platinum.



The author is removing the plate from the negative carrier and pouring on the developer solution in the outdoor "darkroom."

6. Fixing the negative is the next step and this can be done under normal daylight before washing the plate in several changes of water.



Bill Schwab washing a plate in water.

7. The plate must be dried thoroughly before applying a coat of varnish for protection.



Gum Sandarac nuggets are crushed in mortar for making varnish.



The plate is heated before the image is coated with varnish and allowed to air dry.

JUDITH KALTER studied photography at Wayne State University and the Detroit Society of Arts and Crafts. She has taught photography classes to elementary and middle school students in Detroit and Birmingham, and has catalogued photographs, provided displays, and given workshops for the Oakland County Pioneer and Historical Society at the Wisner house in Pontiac, Michigan. Judith moved from suburban Detroit to a small town in northwest Michigan last summer where she is eager to set up a new darkroom to continue working with the wet plate collodion process, in addition to her previous work with cyanotypes.



The author's first tintype, varnished and drying on a rack.

Frederick Scott Archer wrote about the introduction of the wet-plate-collodion process in 1851 and the method continued to be used for scientific work into the 1940s.<sup>4</sup> It was replaced in popularity by dry-plates in the last quarter of the 19th century and eventually film and today digital images. There are many reasons why an artist/photographer would enjoy the wet-plate-collodion process in spite of the effort involved when compared to the ease of digital or even conventional darkroom processes. There is the excitement of learning a method used more than 150 years ago and the satisfaction of meeting challenges faced by photographers of that era plus the sheer beauty of the image. Decisions regarding the color of glass or type of base material, timing of exposures or development make each photograph unique — an original, never to be duplicated.

### Endnotes

1. Naomi Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1994), 49.
2. Elizabeth Siegel, *Playing with Pictures: The Art of Victorian Photocollage* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2009), 17.
3. Bill Schwab and Joe Smigiel, *Wetplate Collodion Workshop* (2009), 6.
4. Marc Osterman, *The Wet-plate Process: A Working Guide* (Rochester, NY: Scully & Osterman, 2002), 2.

All photographs by JUDITH HARRISON KALTER