

## New Jersey's First Female Daguerreotypist: Charlotte Prosch and Her Family

by  
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The decade of the 1840s, when Charlotte Prosch opened a daguerreotype portrait studio in Newark, New Jersey, was marked by significant political, social, and economic events, worldwide and in the state and nation.<sup>1</sup> Railroads, a relative novelty in 1840, expanded from about 3,000 miles in the U.S. to more than 9,000 by the end of the decade.<sup>2</sup> Samuel B. Morse, after conducting some of his research and development work near Morristown, sent his first long distance telegraph message in 1844. In 1845, the Potato Famine began in Ireland, the United States annexed Texas, and the Mexican War began the following year. Gas street lighting began in Newark in 1846. The California gold rush started after James Wilson Marshall, who grew up in Lambertville on the Delaware River, reported the discovery at Sutter's Mill in January 1848, the same month that a revolt in Sicily initiated a series of revolutions across Europe that resulted in a wave of immigration of mostly Central European refugees to the United States. Later that year, Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized the Seneca Falls Convention that adopted the milestone Declaration of Sentiments calling for equal rights for women. In 1850, the Fugitive Slave Act further polarized the North and South, adding to the seemingly irreconcilable divisions that led to the Civil War.

Among the most remarkable technological achievements of the decade was the perfection of the daguerreotype process, the initial version of which had been publicly released in Paris by Daguerre in August 1839. Early techniques required long exposures but methods were soon found to increase the sensitivity of the silver-coated copper plate.<sup>3</sup> By 1840, a minutely accurate transcription of a human face could be recorded in seconds at a price that within a few years the average American could afford, approximately the cost of dinner with two bottles of ale in a

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<sup>1</sup> A substantially shorter version of this article previously appeared in the author's "Charlotte Prosch: New Jersey's First Female Daguerreotypist," *Garden State Legacy*, 31 (March 2016). [https://gardenstatelegacy.com/files/Charlotte\\_Prosch\\_New\\_Jerseys\\_First\\_Female\\_Daguerreotypist\\_Saretzky\\_GSL31.pdf](https://gardenstatelegacy.com/files/Charlotte_Prosch_New_Jerseys_First_Female_Daguerreotypist_Saretzky_GSL31.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Adam Burns, "Railroads in the 1840s, A New Industry Takes Flight," <http://www.American-rails.com/1840s.html>.

<sup>3</sup> The most significant improvements in 1840 were increased sensitization of the plate through fuming with bromine vapors in 1840, credited to John Frederick Goddard in England and Paul Beck Goddard working with Robert Cornelius in Philadelphia; chlorine vapors, introduced by several innovators, including Franz Kratochvila in Vienna; the Petzval portrait lens that passed much more light; and gold chloride toning introduced by Hippolyte Fizeau to improve contrast and stability. M. Susan Barger and William B. White, *The Daguerreotype: Nineteenth-Century Technology and Modern Science* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991); William F. Stapp, et al., *Robert Cornelius: Portraits from the Dawn of Photography* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1983).

Jersey tavern.<sup>4</sup> The demand for portraits led some to conclude that one was more likely to obtain gold selling portraits in New Jersey than to find it in California.

In the United States and Canada, only about one hundred women are known to have made daguerreotypes during the decade after it was introduced.<sup>5</sup> One who has drawn the attention of historians was Bertha Wehnert-Beckman (1815–1901). Born in Cottbus, Germany, she learned daguerreotypy in Prague and began working independently in Dresden in 1843. Toward the end of that year, she moved to Leipzig, where she became the assistant to portrait photographer Eduard Wehnert, whom she married in 1845. After her husband's death in 1848, Bertha, who was known as “an emancipated woman,” continued the studio. On August 6, 1849, she emigrated to New York with her brother Rudolph and by early 1850 established a branch studio at 62 White Street, where she specialized in William Henry Fox Talbot's calotype process, which used paper negatives from which multiple prints on paper could be made; easy duplication was the calotype's chief advantage over the daguerreotype. She was one of the few photographers in the United States to use this process. In 1850, she moved to a better location at 385 Broadway before moving back to Leipzig in August 1851 to manage her Leipzig studio.<sup>6</sup>

Another woman preceded Wehnert-Beckman in New York and then relocated to New Jersey, where she was the only female daguerreotypist operating in the 1840s who has been positively identified: Charlotte Prosch, who offered portraits in Newark from 1847 to 1854. Prosch's business is distinguished for lasting longer than most other New Jersey photographers, male or female, that opened to the public in the first decade of the medium. In those early days, the typical portrait studio lasted from one to three years.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In 1849, according to tavern rates set by the Court of Common Pleas in New Jersey, dinner and two bottles of ale cost a maximum of \$1.11, compared to \$1 for a typical daguerreotype portrait. Rates for Inn Keepers, 1849, Hunterdon County, New Jersey, <https://dspace.njstatelib.org/xmlui/handle/10929/34765>.

<sup>5</sup> Naomi Rosenblum, *A History of Women Photographers* (NY: Abbeville, 1994), 43. Rosenblum only mentions a handful of these women by name and suggests that there were about fifty times more men than women who tried to earn a living by photography in the 1840s. She also commented that, in England, 22 of 750 studios (2.9%) that opened between 1841 and 1855 were run by women. Page 42.

<sup>6</sup> David R. Hanlon, *Illuminating Shadows: The Calotype in Nineteenth-Century America*, Nevada City, California: Carl Mautz Publishing, 2013), 101–104; Hans W. Gummersbach, “A Contrasting Study of Three German Daguerreotypists,” *The Daguerreian Annual* (Pittsburgh: Daguerreian Society), 181–194. The latter source reproduces five German daguerreotypes by Wehnert-Beckman and her husband and a calotype by Wehnert-Beckman of Commodore Matthew Perry that is reproduced better in Hanlon's book.

<sup>7</sup> Compared to New Jersey's professional women photographers later in the century, only a few were in business longer than Prosch. For a list of more than one hundred female photographers active in New Jersey in the 19th century, see New Jersey Women Photographers List, <http://gary.saretzky.com/photohistory/NJWomenPhotographers.html>.

Born in about 1821 in Pennsylvania, Charlotte Prosch was a member of one of the “first families” of photographers in the United States.<sup>8</sup> A daughter among ten children of German-born William Prosch and Christiana Dotter, Charlotte had two brothers, George W. and Andrew, who were pioneers in photography.<sup>9</sup> Through marriages of her siblings, Charlotte also was related to other daguerreotypists.

Her oldest sibling, George W. Prosch, was born in 1812. On January 1, 1836, he married Catherine Insley.<sup>10</sup> With her brother Henry Earle Insley, George became one of the first professional daguerreotypists in New York. Insley, who began his career as a broom maker and lived with George before his marriage, partnered with George as early as July 28, 1840.<sup>11</sup> Insley married Sarah Babb, the sister of New York daguerreotypist William G. Babb, who was active in the profession at several locations from 1847 to 1857.<sup>12</sup>

Insley and Prosch briefly operated their daguerreotype portrait studio at Broadway & Liberty in the summer and fall of 1840, with the financial backing of New York University professor Samuel F.B. Morse, who had been shown the daguerreotype in Paris by Daguerre himself. Morse’s letter to his brothers in New York, who published the *New York Observer*, appeared in that newspaper on May 18, 1839, and was the first description of the daguerreotype published in the United States, although it did not include instructions on how it was made.<sup>13</sup>

Insley and Prosch’s technique, in 1840, based on Daguerre’s, was insufficiently light sensitive for them to be financially successful at portraiture since it required 10-20 minute exposures. Nevertheless, they did do some portraits. Their first paying sitter was a Professor Charles E.

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<sup>8</sup>According to her Dartmouth, Massachusetts, death record, Charlotte Prosch was born in June 1821. Census records give varying ages for her, indicating a birth between 1818 and 1822.

<sup>9</sup> William Prosch died in Newark, New Jersey, June 15, 1863. His wife Christiana died there on February 17, 1866. Thomas W. Prosch, *The Conkling-Prosch Family* (Seattle: General Lithographic and Printing Co., 1909), 92.

<sup>10</sup> George and Catherine Prosch had two sons. Frederick became a school teacher. Another son, Cyrus, is discussed in the text.

<sup>11</sup> “A Veteran Photographer,” *Photographic Times and American Photographer*, 25:675 (August 24, 1894), 134. Daguerreotypes by Insley of his family, as well as self-portraits, are reproduced in Jane Aspinwall, “Henry Earle Insley: Artist and Entrepreneur,” *The Daguerreian Annual 2007* (Cecil, Pennsylvania: Daguerreian Society, 2009), 76-87. Before becoming a daguerreotypist, in addition to brooms, Insley sold brushes, combs, and perfume, both wholesale and retail, at 198 Bowery. Ad, *A.E. Wright’s Boston, New York, Philadelphia & Baltimore Commercial Directory, and Advertising Medium*, 1840, 261.

<sup>12</sup> Julia Driver, *Women Photographers at the Dawn of Photography*, Ch. 4, draft, 2005 (unpublished); Craig, Vol. 2, 22.

<sup>13</sup> William Welling, *Photography in America: The Formative Years, 1839–1900* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1978), 7, reproduces Morse’s letter.

West, principal of the Rutgers Female Institute, which at the time was located in the same building as Prosch's shop at 142 Nassau Street, where he also made cameras and other equipment. Because their exposures were so long, the sitters' eyes were closed in their early daguerreotypes. After improvements in technique and equipment, especially the use of bromine fuming that increased the light sensitivity of the daguerreotype plate, Insley claimed to make the first daguerreotype of a moving object, a man walking on the Bowery, in 1841.<sup>14</sup>

Insley has been credited with the technique for adding color to daguerreotype portraits, most commonly to the sitter's cheeks.<sup>15</sup> After working as an itinerant daguerreotypist in Canada in the early 1840s, he returned to New York, where his gallery moved several times on Broadway.<sup>16</sup> In 1843, he had one in Newark at 150 Broad Street.<sup>17</sup> By 1848, he was living in Jersey City.<sup>18</sup> Insley operated a portrait studio at 47 Montgomery Street in Jersey City from 1856 until 1866, when he retired to his 35-acre farm in Nanuet, New York, and turned over gallery management to his sons Albert Babb Insley and Henry Aretas Insley.<sup>19</sup> Albert soon focused his attention on landscape painting, while Henry A. continued working as a photographer, later in Bloomfield and then in Montclair.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> "Early Photography," *Cheyenne Daily Leader*, June 17, 1887, 4. This article claims that West was the first person to pay for a photographic portrait but that is doubtful, as A.S. Wolcott had already opened the first daguerreotype portrait studio in New York in March. Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 34. Regarding West's portrait, see West's letter to the Editor, *New York Times*, February 18, 1883, reprinted in *The Daguerreian Annual 1993* (Eureka, California: Daguerreian Society, 1993), 104–105.

<sup>15</sup> *Buffalo Courier* (from *New York Sun*), September 3, 1894, 7.

<sup>16</sup> Aspinwall, 78.

<sup>17</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, June 30, 1843, 3; *True Sun*, December 25, 1845, 2. Insley's Newark gallery was opposite the Episcopal Church, on the second floor. He also offered instruction in photography there.

<sup>18</sup> In 1845–1846, he lived in Orange, New Jersey. Craig, Vol. 2, 296.

<sup>19</sup> Insley moved his family to New Jersey by 1845, while working in New York. In 1862, he bought a farm in Nanuet, Rockland County, New York, where he became a gentleman farmer who continued to make photographs. He died in early August 1894 and was buried in Green-Wood Cemetery, Brooklyn, with other family members. His son, Albert Babb Insley (1842–1937), later became a well-known Hudson River School landscape painter. Henry Aretas Insley (1840–1939) continued the gallery with Albert until 1870 and then partnered with C.J.J. Martyr for a few years. The brothers operated a stationery and frame business in Jersey City until 1879, after which when Henry continued it on his own into the 1880s. Insley Brothers also were art dealers and sold stereographic views. By 1887, Henry A. had established a photography business in Nyack, New York, where he made enlarged crayon portraits of family photographs. In New Jersey, Henry A. also was a photographer in Plainfield (1862–1863), Bloomfield (1895–1899), and Montclair (1897 until at least 1914). He retired to Spruce Hill Township, Juniata County, Pennsylvania, where he died at age 98. Jersey City directories; Jane Aspinwall, "Henry Earle Insley: Artist and Entrepreneur," *The Daguerreian Annual 2007* (Cecil, Pennsylvania: Daguerreian Society, 2009), 76–87; *The Valley Spirit* (Chambersburg, Pennsylvania), May 19, 1887, 3; Henry A. Insley death certificate, [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com).

<sup>20</sup> Author, New Jersey Photographers database, abstracted at <http://saretzky.com/history-of-photography-indexes-to-photographers.html>.

There was another daguerreotypist in Charlotte Prosch's extended family. George W. Prosch's wife, Catherine Insley Prosch, had a sister, Sarah A. Insley (1819–1858), who in 1840 married Nathaniel Crosby Jaquith (also known as Jacquith) in New York. Born in Massachusetts on April 30, 1816, Jaquith bought out a dry goods store at 276 Broad, Newark, in Spring 1843 and continued operating it until early in 1848, when he sold out. While in Newark, he and Sarah had their third child, Emma, in 1843, and their fourth, Theodore, in 1846. Advertising regularly in the *Newark Daily Advertiser*, he sold silk, woolens, and other types of cloth.<sup>21</sup> By 1850, the Jaquiths had moved their residence to Jersey City and Jaquith had opened a daguerreotype gallery at 98 Broadway in Manhattan. There he competed with nearby photographic luminaries, notably Mathew Brady at 205 and 359 Broadway, Jeremiah Gurney at 349 Broadway, and Martin M. Lawrence at 381 Broadway, among others. In 1857, Jaquith relocated his gallery to 167 Broadway and remained in business until at least 1864.<sup>22</sup> After a lingering illness, Sarah died in 1858 and Jaquith married Emma Stokes Simpson (1824–1886), with whom he had his sixth and last child, Joseph, in 1863. The Jaquiths moved to Elizabeth a few years before his death on June 24, 1879, after which he was interred in Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn.<sup>23</sup>

Charlotte's brother, George W. Prosch, had a business relationship with Samuel Morse that predated their involvement with daguerreotypes. Prosch was a scientific instrument maker who supplied Morse with telegraph equipment.<sup>24</sup> He became the first camera manufacturer in the United States, when he made one for Morse in the fall of 1839, immediately after news of the

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<sup>21</sup> Ad, *Newark Daily Advertiser*, April 21, 1843, 3, announced the store's opening. M. Headley announced in an ad taken out on March 11, 1848, that he had bought out Jaquith's stock, *Newark Daily Advertiser*, March 17, 1848, 3. Between these dates, Jaquith had numerous ads describing his offerings, e.g. October 30, 1843, 3; November 30, 1843, 3; June 14, 1844, 3; January 27, 1848, 3.

<sup>22</sup> John Craig, ed., *Craig's Daguerreian Registry*, Vol. 2 (Torrington, Connecticut: Craig, 1996), 301. Jaquith paid for an annual photographer's license at 167 Broadway on May 1, 1864. U.S., IRS Tax Assessment List, New York, District 4. [ancestry.com](https://ancestry.com). In 1867, Jaquith was not listed with a profession in the Jersey City directory and thereafter was listed in different years as clerk, salesman, broker, and "insurance."

<sup>23</sup> Jaquith, who married Sarah A. Insley on November 1, 1840, lived on Mercer, near Washington, Jersey City, 1850–1852, with studio at 98 Broadway, New York. In 1853, he moved his residence to 12 Warren Place, Jersey City, and continued at 98 Broadway. In 1859–1861, his gallery was at 167 Broadway, New York, and his residence was 103 Warren, where he remained there until 1875 or 1876, when he moved to 645 Madison Avenue, Elizabeth, until his death. Many of Jaquith's descendants remained in New Jersey and at least nine are buried in Evergreen Cemetery, Hillside, Union County. Find-A-Grave. <https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/185168/memorial-search?firstname=&middlename=&lastname=jaquith&cemeteryName=Evergreen+Cemetery&birthyear=&birthyearfilter=&deathyear=&deathyearfilter=&memorialid=&mcid=&linkedToName=&datefilter=&orderby=&plot=>; Jersey City directories; Janet Wethy Foley, *Early Settlers of New York State - Their Ancestors and Descendants* (Akron, New York: T.J. Foley), Volume 1, 381, <https://archive.org/details/earlysettlersofn13fole>.

<sup>24</sup> Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 15.

procedures for making daguerreotypes reached American shores. That camera and a fuming box Prosch made for Morse to sensitize and develop silver plates for daguerreotypes are now at the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.<sup>25</sup> Possibly with Morse's assistance (there are different versions of this story), Prosch used the Morse camera first, probably in September 1839, to make a faintly visible view of City Hall and environs from his window of his shop on the northeast corner of Nassau and Beekman streets.<sup>26</sup> Prosch then made cameras for Professor John W. Draper of New York University and Dr. Charles E. West. West later claimed that the Morse, Draper, and West cameras were "the first three made in America" but another photographic pioneer in New York, D.W. Seager, had made a daguerreotype on September 16.<sup>27</sup> By early November 1839, Prosch was making excellent cameras for sale at forty dollars.<sup>28</sup> He continued to manufacture cameras in the 1840s, as well as other "philosophical instruments," including a galvanic battery, an air pump, and an apparatus for solidifying carbonic acid.<sup>29</sup> By March 1840, he was selling complete daguerreian outfits, including the camera, mercury and iodine fuming boxes, a box with the required chemicals, a plate box, and a spirit lamp, all contained in a handy metal box for traveling.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The camera is reproduced in Sarah Kate Gillespie, *The Early American Daguerreotype: Cross-Currents in Art and Technology* (Cambridge, Massachusetts & London, England: MIT Press, 2016), 29. The fuming box is cataloged as NMAH-NMAH2001-10545.

<sup>26</sup> Morse lived at the same address as Prosch's shop at 142 Nassau. Gillespie, 29. In the 1882 memoir of Andrew Prosch, reprinted in Welling, 9, Morse was present when the first daguerreotype was made with the camera. Another account stated that Morse was called away and Prosch made the first daguerreotype on his own. *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin*, April 24, 1886, 250. The oldest extant daguerreotype taken in the United States was likely by Joseph Saxton of Philadelphia, taken of Central High School next to the Armory, on October 16, 1839, using a cigar box fitted with a lens. Arthur H. Frazier, *Joseph Saxton and His Contributions to the Medal Ruling and Photographic Arts* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1975). [https://repository.si.edu/bitstream/handle/10088/2431/SSHT-0032\\_Lo\\_res.pdf#:~:text=The%20daguerreotype%20Saxton%20took%20of%20Philadelphia%27s%20first%20Central,of%20the%20Historical%20Society%20of%20Pennsylvania%20in%20Philadelphia.](https://repository.si.edu/bitstream/handle/10088/2431/SSHT-0032_Lo_res.pdf#:~:text=The%20daguerreotype%20Saxton%20took%20of%20Philadelphia%27s%20first%20Central,of%20the%20Historical%20Society%20of%20Pennsylvania%20in%20Philadelphia.) Some authors have written that Saxton made this daguerreotype in September but the October date is more likely. See *The United States Gazette* (Philadelphia), October 24, 1839.

<sup>27</sup> Evelyn Clark Morgan, "The First Camera Victim in America," *Photo Era* 4: (1900) 13. Seager made a small view of St. Paul's Church and surrounding houses, which historian Helmut Gernsheim believed was the first in the United States. Gernsheim noted that Seager's daguerreotype preceded the arrival of the London newspapers with reports of Daguerre's process so it is plausible that he had obtained the secret from a French source after August 20, when Daguerre published his instruction manual. It is plausible that Seager used a camera obscura to make his daguerreotype. Helmut Gernsheim, *The Origins of Photography* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1982), 99.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel F.B. Morse to Alfred Vail, November 4, 1839, cited in Floyd and Marion Reinhart, *The American Daguerreotype* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1981), 431, note 37.

<sup>29</sup> "Philosophical Instruments," ad, *New York Journal of Commerce*, January 6, 1842, 2. The term "philosophical instruments" encompassed a wide variety of devices, including the camera obscura.

<sup>30</sup> "The Daguerreotype Apparatus," ad, *New York Observer*, March 7, 1840, 3. Similar ads elsewhere, including *Evening Post* (New York, New York), February 25, 1840, 4, et seq.



With and without Insley, George W. Prosch was active as a daguerreotypist from 1840 to 1856, in both New York City and New Jersey.<sup>31</sup> At his gallery at 112 Broadway, he offered daguerreotypes for \$1 in 1845.<sup>32</sup> In 1846, he moved his studio to 179 Broadway.<sup>33</sup> That year, he made his first documented visit to the Garden State when he came to Princeton to make portraits.<sup>34</sup> He is mentioned in several *Princeton Whig* articles, April 20 and 21, and June 2, 1848, as operating in a house next to the bank.<sup>35</sup> On April 21, the editor wrote that Prosch “cannot be excelled as an artist.” The same issue contained a statement by the daguerreotypist:

Mr. Prosch respectfully gives notice to the Ladies and Gentlemen of Princeton and vicinity of his return and having increased facility by reason of various and superior instruments, suited to the different kinds of Likenesses, and having had much experience in the Daguerreotype art since last here, he with increased confidence offers his services to this respectable community, most heartily wishing to Daguerreotype every one of them. Mr. P. has taken [a] room in the house next the Bank, recently occupied by Mrs. Skelly, where he will be happy to see his friends who on a former occasion gave him so flattering a reception. Mr. P. is prepared to take the Likenesses of small children having an instrument specially adapted. Also Daguerreotype and other Portraits copied.

On January 28, 1852, George W. Prosch’s brother-in-law Henry E. Insley assigned him the rights to his patented “Illuminated Daguerreotype,” explaining, “Having long known Mr. Prosch as one of the earliest and most skillful artizans [sic] and artists in the country, I feel confident that my beautiful improvement will not suffer in his hands, nor the confidence of the public be misplaced by their patronage.”<sup>36</sup> Insley’s innovation created an impression of a halo around the sitter’s head. In the 1850s, George W. Prosch moved to Ridgefield in Coytesville, a suburb of Fort Lee, and there had an instrument fabrication shop. His nephew, Thomas W. Prosch, related in a family history that George lived in seclusion for the last

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<sup>31</sup> In September 1840, Prosch was operating without Insley at the corner of Liberty Street and Broadway. *New York Morning Express*, September 23, 1840, 2.

<sup>32</sup> *New York Evening Express*, October 1, 1845, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Ad, *New York Daily Herald*, October 30, 1846, 3.

<sup>34</sup> John Robert Buhler, “My Microscope,” 1846, MSS CO199, Firestone Library, Princeton University; *Princeton Whig*, April 20, 21 and June 2, 1848. In addition to George, other Prosches, Catherine J., Catherine A., and Peter, were buried in the Coytesville cemetery between 1882 and 1895. Dave Coyte, email message to author, May 5, 2005.

<sup>35</sup> Clippings on file at Mudd Library, Princeton University.

<sup>36</sup> Patent #8,633, awarded January 6, 1852. *Newark Daily Advertiser*, March 18, 1852, 3 (ad placed Jan. 28). Insley’s Illuminated Daguerreotype was a vignette achieved by differential fuming with mercury development. For a description, see Floyd and Mary Rinhart, “The Illuminated Daguerreotype Process,” *The New Daguerreian Journal* 1:5 (April 1972), 4–6, available at [http://www.cdags.org/cdags\\_resources/ndj\\_01\\_05.pdf](http://www.cdags.org/cdags_resources/ndj_01_05.pdf)

twenty years of his life on account of the ill health of his wife Catherine, who outlived him.<sup>37</sup> Thomas W. Prosch also recalled that Thomas Edison learned his trade in Prosch's shop.<sup>38</sup> George W. Prosch died August 29, 1876, and was buried in the Coytesville Cemetery (also known as Woodland Cemetery). After his death, his son Cyrus succeeded him as president of the Prosch Manufacturing Company at 389 Broome Street, Manhattan.<sup>39</sup> In the 1880s, Cyrus patented a telegraph key and two types of camera shutters that he manufactured, the Duplex and Triplex.<sup>40</sup> Carrying on the tradition of family-owned equipment businesses, Cyrus' grandson Richard Eliezer (1943–2019), owned Rochelle Park Electrical Supply in Rochelle Park, New Jersey.<sup>41</sup>

Given that George was Charlotte's oldest sibling and that he was active among the daguerreotype pioneers from its inception in the United States, it seems plausible that she learned the process from him and/or her brother Andrew. Andrew also became a manufacturer of "philosophical instruments" and a distributor of daguerreian supplies beginning in 1842, and offered instruction in the art. He continued to make scientific instruments until his death in 1897.<sup>42</sup> Possibly, Charlotte ordered some of her chemicals and equipment from him.

While it is not known when Charlotte acquired the requisite knowledge to perform the complicated and health hazardous steps involved in making a daguerreotype, by no later than 1845, she opened her own portrait studio at 235 Broadway, New York.<sup>43</sup> To make a daguerreotype, Charlotte first would have polished a rectangular piece of silver plated copper to

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<sup>37</sup> Catherine Insley Prosch is listed in the 1880 U.S. Census in Coytesville, Bergen County.

<sup>38</sup> Thomas W. Prosch, 90.

<sup>39</sup> In the 1880 U.S. Census for Coytesville, Cyrus was living with his widowed mother Catherine in Coytesville and his occupation was brass worker. "Baby's Face Was Raw," testimonial for Cuticura Remedies by Mrs. Cyrus Prosch, *Evening Journal* (Jersey City), December 31, 1890, 6, includes information about her husband's business in New York City. By 1910, Cyrus had become a house painter. 1910 U.S. Census, Bergen County, Coytesville, Fort Lee. Cyrus (1848–1929) is buried in Woodland Cemetery, Englewood Cliffs. His wife was Louisa (Kurt) Prosch (1858–1917). Find-A-Grave; Thomas W. Prosch, 90.

<sup>40</sup> "Prosch Shutters," <https://www.antiquecameras.net/proschshutters.html>.

<sup>41</sup> Obituary. <https://www.northvillefuneralservice.com/obituaries/Richard-Eliezer/#!/Obituary>. Richard Eliezer's mother was Margaret Prosch Eliezer, wife of Rene Eliezer and daughter of Cyrus Prosch and Louisa (Kurt) Prosch. See also obituary for Margaret Prosch Eliezer, *Lancaster New Era* (PA), September 5, 2000, B-3.

<sup>42</sup> "Superior Daguerreotype Portrait Apparatus," Andrew Prosch ad for business at 139 Nassau Street, *New-York Tribune*, April 20, 1842, 1; John Craig, ed., *Craig's Daguerreian Registry*, Vol. 3 (Torrington, Connecticut: Craig, 1996), 466. Andrew Prosch advertised in *Photographic Times*, 1881, as manufacturer and repairer of photographic tubes at 36 Platt St., New York. He died a widower without children in 1897. Thomas W. Prosch, 91.

<sup>43</sup> Craig, Vol. 3, 466.



a mirror finish. The plate was then placed in a fuming box and exposed to iodine vapors, to create a light sensitive surface of silver iodide. Additional fuming with bromine and/or chlorine gas made the plate sufficiently sensitive for portraiture. After exposure in her camera, which had a brass name plate reading “C. Prosch” over the lens, the silver-coated plate was placed in a development container and exposed to mercury vapors.<sup>44</sup> (Figure 1) Fixation in sodium thiosulfate and toning in a bath of gold chloride solution followed to give the image stability and more contrast. The plate was then sealed in a case with a brass mat and cover glass to protect the very fragile surface from tarnishing and physical damage.<sup>45</sup> In 1846, she moved her New York studio to 179 Broadway, the same address as her brother George, and changed her residence from 64 Gouverneur Street to 26 Dey Street, the same home address as her brother Andrew Prosch, whose business was then at 187 Broadway.<sup>46</sup> Later that year, she moved her business to 285 Broadway, where her brother George also worked. Her December 24, 1846, ad in the *New-York Tribune* read, “Daguerreotypes taken in the best style, add at the lowest prices, by a Lady.”<sup>47</sup>

Some of Charlotte Prosch’s customers from Newark encouraged her to relocate to New Jersey. Another factor prompting her setting up in Newark may have been the competition on Broadway that included Mathew Brady near the corner of Fulton, over a saloon with a large model of a camera hanging on the front of the five story building. Many other daguerreotypists, some with very little ability, were opening up locations in the city. By 1850, there were more than seventy in New York.<sup>48</sup> By comparison, Newark offered a better opportunity to capture a substantial market since it was then in a period of industrialization and growth and there were far fewer daguerreotypists there. While there had been daguerreians operating in Newark for brief periods, Charlotte Prosch had little competition there when she opened in the spring of 1847.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Charlotte Prosch’s lens was offered for sale on eBay in April 2016.

<sup>45</sup> M. Susan Barger and William B. White, *The Daguerreotype: Nineteenth-Century Technology and Modern Science* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) includes a thorough explanation how daguerreotype are made and how they deteriorate over time. Hand applied color was an option at extra cost to the customer. Standard daguerreotype sizes included whole plate, 6.5 x 8.5 inches; half plate, 4.25 x 5.5 inches; quarter plate, 3.35 x 4.25 inches; sixth plate, 2.75 x 2.5 inches; ninth plate, 2 x 2.5 inches; and sixteenth plate, 1.375 x 1.625 inches. Known examples of Charlotte Prosch’s daguerreotypes have her name and Newark address on a label under the image.

<sup>46</sup> Craig, Vol. 3, 466.

<sup>47</sup> Page 3. Similar ad in *True Sun* (New York), December 24, 1846, 2. In his own ad just below Charlotte’s in *True Sun*, George W. Prosch advertised his portrait daguerreotypes at 179 and 285 Broadway, stating that he had “operated longer in this art than any other daguerreotypist in the city.” Other George W. Prosch ads in the *True Sun* earlier in December 1846, and into 1847 listed only the 179 Broadway address, as did his ads in *The Evening Mirror* (New York), in October and November 1846, e.g., November 27, 1846, 3.

<sup>48</sup> “The Daguerreotype Medium,” <https://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/dag/medium.html>.

<sup>49</sup> Author’s database of 19th century New Jersey photographers, abstracted on Saretzky Online. <http://saretzky.com>.

Before 1847, there had been at least thirteen portrait daguerreotypists in Newark, all men, and all for brief periods. For example, as mentioned above, her brother-in-law Henry E. Insley operated there in June 1843. Other notable predecessors included George S. Cook (1845–1846), who during the Civil War would become “the Mathew Brady of the South” with a base in Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>50</sup> In September 1844, George N. Barnard, later a famous Civil War photographer for the Union army, could be found making portraits at 346 Broad Street when he was just starting his lengthy career.<sup>51</sup> But at the time Prosch opened in Newark, there were only one or two competitors, John Ford and possibly William Pirsson, who also established his portrait gallery in 1847.<sup>52</sup> By the end of the century, after a substantial population increase, more than two dozen photographers could be found on Broad Street.<sup>53</sup>

Daguerreotypes in Newark began with Seth Boyden (1788–1870), whose mechanical shop was near where his statue now stands in Washington Park.<sup>54</sup> Boyden was probably the first in New Jersey to make a daguerreotype in the fall of 1839 or early in 1840.<sup>55</sup> He perfected the process of making patent leather, invented malleable iron, and made other discoveries that helped establish Newark as an important industrial center. The city’s transportation system, including the Morris Canal, completed to Newark in 1831, and the railroad which connected in 1834, enabled raw materials to be brought to its factories and finished products to be shipped out. When Charlotte Prosch arrived in Newark, she found a bustling city that would become even more densely populated with the influx of German immigrants after the failed revolutions of 1848, joining the many Irish who were crossing the Atlantic as a result of the Potato Famine that began in 1845.

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<sup>50</sup> Jack C. Ramsey Jr., *Photographer... Under Fire: The Story of George S. Cook* (Green Bay, Wisconsin: Historical Resources Press, 1994).

<sup>51</sup> Ads, *Newark Daily Advertiser*, September 5–27, 1844, 3.

<sup>52</sup> John Ford in *Newark Daily Advertiser*, December 16, 1846, 2, and January 13, 1847, 3. Pirsson recorded in Craig, Vol. 3, 452. Although there were but a few daguerreotypists in Newark in 1847, the city was a nationally important center for daguerreotype plate manufacturing, with Edward White’s Phenix [a.k.a Phoenix] Works, as well as John Stanley’s factory.

<sup>53</sup> Author’s database of 19th century New Jersey photographers, abstracted on Saretzky Online. <http://saretzky.com>.

<sup>54</sup> The inscription on the statue probably incorrectly claims that Boyden made the first daguerreotype in the United States. He was likely one of the first.

<sup>55</sup> Examples made with a camera he built himself were mentioned in *Centinel of Freedom* (Newark), April 21, 1840, 2. Boyden’s uniquely designed and self-built camera, which featured a built-in mirror to reverse the image, is now at the Newark Museum. O. Henry Mace, “The Boyden Daguerreotype Camera: A History and Analysis of One of America’s First Photographic Instruments,” in *The Daguerreian Annual 2005* (Pittsburgh: The Daguerreian Society, 2006), 134–143; O. Henry Mace, *Seth Boyden: Unsung Pioneer of Photography* (Jackson, California: privately printed, June 1991).

The earliest mention in the press of Charlotte Prosch in New Jersey was on April 7, 1847, when The *Newark Daily Advertiser* carried her ad, “Miss Prosch, an experienced Daguerrian Artist, from New York, has by request of her patrons of Newark, opened a Gallery in this City.” Prosch’s gallery was at 259 Broad Street and she would remain there with only a brief interruption until 1854.

The nature of Charlotte Prosch’s business is documented by her ad in 1848: “... Pictures are usually taken in five to ten seconds. particular attention paid to taking Family groups; also portraits of deceased persons. Price of Pictures, One Dollar, and upwards according to size of plate and richness of case or frame.”<sup>56</sup> Taking post-mortem photos at home was not at all unusual at this time and have been described eloquently by Sarah M. Iepson as “ubiquitous artifacts of mourning that pervaded antebellum life.”<sup>57</sup> The family would seek out a daguerreotypist to set up in the home’s front parlor where the deceased would be laid out for relatives and friends to visit for the last time. In the case of small children, the mother sometimes sat and held the baby in her arms. Often these children had not been photographed before they died and the family desired an image for a sentimental keepsake that would trigger memories of the deceased. The prevalence of child mortality in the daguerreian era increased the market for this type of photograph. In 1850, the rate in the United States was 400 deaths under five years old per 1,000 births.<sup>58</sup> Although the child mortality rate was cut in half by 1900, the practice of post-mortem photography remained popular through the end of the century.<sup>59</sup>

In addition to ads, Prosch sought to market her services through publicity achieved at Essex County fairs. At the 1848 Essex County Fair, she was awarded a discretionary premium and diploma for Daguerreotype Portraits. At the 1849 Fair, she was awarded a diploma for “largest

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<sup>56</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, April 8, 1848, 3.

<sup>57</sup> Dr. Sarah M. Iepson, “A Lasting Touch: Corporeal Affect and the Photograph,” *The Daguerreian Annual* 2014 (Cecil, Pennsylvania: Daguerreian Society, 2015, 220.

<sup>58</sup> “Child mortality rate (under five years old) in the United States, from 1800 to 2020,” <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1041693/united-states-all-time-child-mortality-rate/>.

<sup>59</sup> For an overview of early post-mortem photography, see Dr. Stanley Burns, “Postmortem Photography and Memorializing the 19th Century,” lecture, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?312747-1/postmortem-photography-memorializing-19th-century>. Photographer C.C. Kenney of Hackettstown, New Jersey, went to considerable trouble to take a post-mortem photograph in 1885. The *Courier-Post* (Camden, New Jersey), October 3, 1885, in “A Disgraceful Act,” described as “a violation of decency,” reported that on September 22, George Colclough, an old hatter and sexton of the Presbyterian Church, died in Hackettstown and was buried in the Union Cemetery. He had lost one of his eyes and wore a green shield over it, and on that account always objected to having his photograph taken. After his death, the family wanted a photo but Mr. Kenney was out of town. On October 2, Kenney returned and with the help of the undertaker and his assistant, and with the consent of the family, removed the coffin from the vault and carried the corpse to a rustic seat under an old oak tree. They propped up the head and crossed the legs, and thus secured an excellent photo of the aged sexton apparently sleeping beneath the old oak.

display.”<sup>60</sup> Apparently, Prosch was successful in growing her business and took steps in 1849 to bring it to a higher level. On May 12, 1849, she made two important announcements in the *Newark Daily Advertiser*. First, she stated that her gallery, with the “addition of a large Sky-Light now possesses facilities unequalled in Newark and not surpassed elsewhere, for producing Daguerreotypes of every size, single or in groups, with the greatest despatch and perfection.”

Previously, she had only used a window or “side light,” which she retained “for the accommodation of those whom [sic] may prefer side light pictures.” In the era when daguerreotypists used natural lighting almost exclusively, the manipulation of large “lights” (windows) with shades for best effect was critical to success. But getting the sitters to visit at the right time of day was also important. As Prosch advised her clients, “To PARENTS, to CHILDREN, to FRIENDS, it is respectfully advised to ‘secure the shadow ere the substance perish.’ N.B. The earlier part of the day is most favorable for good pictures--the light is never so good late in the afternoon, and children especially should be taken in the middle of the day.”<sup>61</sup> Stronger light meant shorter exposure times, necessary to freeze the wriggles of fidgety small fry and prevent blur, particularly important for larger plates because exposures had to be longer. Also, more time was needed in the cooler months when the sun was weaker. To stabilize her sitters, Charlotte would have used an immobilizer, a clamp behind the sitter’s head. Exposures were controlled by taking the lens cap off and putting it back on; timing was determined by the photographer’s experience.

Prosch’s second announcement on May 12, 1849, was the addition of an important member to her staff: “Miss Prosch having engaged the assistance of her brother, Mr. G.W. Prosch, long known as a Daguerrian Artist in New York, feels much more confidence in again calling the attention of the citizens of Newark and vicinity, to her establishment. . . .”<sup>62</sup> Although her daguerreotypes included a label, “Miss C. Prosch,” with the address at the bottom of the brass mat that framed the image, it was common practice for daguerreotype gallery owners to take credit for photographs made by hired lensmen, so after bringing George on board, she may not have taken all the daguerreotypes with her name on them.<sup>63</sup>

While the reasons why George W. Prosch would agree to work for his younger sister Charlotte are unknown, his joining the firm suggests that her business had expanded to the point where she could not handle it by herself. George worked for Charlotte until no later than May 1850, when

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<sup>60</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, September 21, 1848, 2, and October 1, 1849, 2.

<sup>61</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, ad placed June 22, 1849, and still appearing as late as January 3, 1850.

<sup>62</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, May 12, 1849, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Since examples of daguerreotypes with this label are uncommonly seen today, it is possible that Prosch did not use the label during all the years she was at 259 Broad Street. Examples I have seen have estimated dates of from about 1847 to about 1850.

he opened a new gallery just down the street at 250 Broad.<sup>64</sup> There he lowered the price for “a good colored Daguerreotype Likeness” to seventy-five cents (a dollar previously was typical).<sup>65</sup> A year later, he would move again to a larger space at 244 Broad, which he called “The New Jersey Daguerreotype Gallery. . . the largest and best arranged establishment of the kind in Newark. . . .”<sup>66</sup> His studio adjoined the Morris Canal, which extended from Phillipsburg through Newark to Jersey City.

Once George opened his own gallery, he was in direct competition with Charlotte. In his *Newark Daily Advertiser* ad of January 2, 1852, he concluded, “N.B. In consequence of their being another Gallery in Newark, whose proprietor is of the same name, please take particular notice of my address. . . .” At 244 Broad, George’s gallery was still very close to Charlotte’s at 259. Was it a friendly competition or did they have a sibling rivalry? Evidence is lacking but they must have been on good terms by 1857, when Charlotte named her only son, George W. Both galleries continued in business for several years. By 1850, Newark featured about a dozen daguerreotypists vying for the public’s patronage, as well as a daguerreotype case maker, Ebenezer Larwill, and daguerreotype plate makers to supply them.<sup>67</sup> In that year, Charlotte had other family members in Newark to keep her company. Her parents, her brother William Jr. (possibly a widower), his four young children, and Maria Prosch (age 19, likely a sister) had relocated to Newark and Charlotte moved in with them.<sup>68</sup> The paterfamilias, William Prosch, was then in the oyster trade.

In November 1851, Charlotte Prosch advertised that she had hired a “Gentlemanly operator, seldom surpassed in a knowledge of the art.”<sup>69</sup> This cameraman has not been identified. That year, she was charging a dollar for daguerreotypes with hand applied color.<sup>70</sup>

A fine example from the Prosch studio is the daguerreotype of three children, now in the collection of the Houghton Library at Harvard University. (Figure 2) The two girls and a boy

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<sup>64</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, Apr. 25, 1850, 3.

<sup>65</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, May 29, 1850, 3.

<sup>66</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, May 30, 1851, 3; December 31, 1851, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Larwill introduced the “double door” case, which opened in the middle instead of the side as in conventional cases. For an illustration of a Larwill case, see Mark S. Johnson, ed. *The Daguerreian Annual 2013* (Cecil, Pennsylvania: Daguerreian Society, 2014), 216. See also note above re Newark plate makers.

<sup>68</sup> William Prosch, William Prosch Jr., and Charlotte Prosch are listed at 24 Market Street in the 1850 Newark city directory. In the 1850 Census, they are found with the surname Prush. William Prosch Jr. had a son named George W. Prosch, not to be confused with his uncle of the same name.

<sup>69</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, November 26, 1851, 3.

<sup>70</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, December 31, 1851, 3.

stand facing the camera, with the tallest girl on the left (the photographer placed her on the right side knowing that the daguerreotype, being a mirror image, would reverse the order). Each of the children has red tinting on the cheeks and the two girls, wearing identical outfits, hold flowers that have been colored red and a bluish green. The boy holds a tome, suggesting studiousness. A soft, even light, likely from the skylight, illuminates the siblings. The two older children each have a hand on the shoulder of the one next to them, creating a dignified, yet close-knit familial group. In another daguerreotype, Emma J. and Charlotte W. Ford sit closely together. The older sister also rests her hand on the shoulder of the younger one, but as her palm is partially visible, there is a less definite impression of sibling harmony.<sup>71</sup>

Another daguerreotype that likely was made by Charlotte Prosch personally is the portrait of an unidentified woman wearing a bonnet. (Figure 3) The woman's posture and gaze at the camera lens is very relaxed and serene.<sup>72</sup> Prosch posed a different woman with an elbow and hand on a table and her other hand in her lap holding a book. (Figure 4) Her head and hands form a scalene triangle, a compositional strategy often used by photographers, who were also careful to pose the sitter's head and hands about the same distance from the lens to maintain them in focus and to avoid distortion.<sup>73</sup> All of the five portrait daguerreotypes from Charlotte's gallery that I have seen are of women or children, a small sample, but suggestive that men in Newark may have tended to go elsewhere for their portraits. (Figures 5, 6)

By the early 1850s, Charlotte's was the longest running daguerreotype studio in the city of Newark and she pointed to that fact with pride in her ads. For example, on March 18, 1852, she stated that hers was the "oldest in the city [and offered] a greater variety of Daguerreotypes than in any other Gallery in this State. Her pictures cannot be excelled in deepness of tone or richness of finish even in New York."<sup>74</sup> She continued at 259 Broad Street until 1853, when she briefly operated a second location at 274 Broad, then returned to "her old rooms" "at the sign of the American Flag."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> In the collection of Bob Goller, who believes that the sisters attended Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in Massachusetts.

<sup>72</sup> This daguerreotype, now in the collection of Julia Driver, was found in an antiques shop in Reno by Paul Thompson and published with a story of its discovery in *Daguerreian Society News* (15:4, July-Aug 2003), 8.

<sup>73</sup> Henry H. Snelling, *The History and Practice of the Art of Photography* (Hastings-on-Hudson, New York: 1970), 41. Reprint of 1849 edition.

<sup>74</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, March 18, 1852, 2.

<sup>75</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, June 9, 1853, 3.



Charlotte's expansion to two locations may have been related to her marriage in Newark on March 9, 1853, to Alfred Day, who was a few years younger than his bride.<sup>76</sup> That year, both Mr. and Mrs. Day were listed in the city directory as daguerreotypists. Evidence that Alfred had any previous photographic experience has not been found. Possibly, he was the "gentlemanly operator" Prosch had hired in 1851. In earlier and subsequent references, he is usually listed as a baker but he did do some photography later as will be discussed below.

The marriage of Charlotte Day has been erroneously reported in previous publications, including my own. In "Nineteenth-Century New Jersey Photographers" (*New Jersey History*, Fall/Winter 2004), I relied on *Craig's Daguerreian Registry* (1996, 1997), which stated that Charlotte Prosch married a Moses Day. That, it turns out, was a reference to another Charlotte. Charlotte Prosch's marriage to Alfred Day is clearly documented by an Essex County Marriage Record, available at the New Jersey State Archives, as well as by subsequent references.<sup>77</sup>

As Mrs. Day, Charlotte continued to operate her gallery for about a year after her marriage. In her ads, as late as October 1853, she offered daguerreotypes from .75 up to \$10 and began calling her studio the Excelsior Daguerreotype Gallery. In addition to standard cased portraits, she offered a large assortment of frames and cases and insertion of pictures into lockets, breast pins, and bracelets. Daguerreian jewelry is highly prized by collectors today although it is rare to find the maker identified.<sup>78</sup>

By April 1854, Charles Brewster had taken over Mrs. Day's gallery and advertised as "Formerly Miss Prosch's Rooms," offering daguerreotypes "at reduced prices, from 50 cents upwards, much

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<sup>76</sup> Newark Marriage Record, Volume K, 32, New Jersey State Archives. According to later census records, Day was a native of New York. His father was born in New York and his mother was from England. The 1850 census lists an Alfred Day in Newark, 22 years old, born in New Jersey, and living with a baker, Andrew Johnston, 34, born in Scotland, Johnston's family, and five other young adults, none of whose professions are listed. No better match for Charlotte's husband has been found in that census. Note that Charlotte's husband Alfred later worked as a baker.

<sup>77</sup> Professor Julia L. Driver, then at Dartmouth University, was the first to draw my attention to the error concerning Charlotte Prosch's marriage. In his *Daguerreian Registry* (<http://craigcamera.com/dag/>) the late John Craig mentioned Alfred Day as having the "same business address used by Charlotte Prosch Day, after her marriage to Moses Day." Craig seems to have been misled by references to another Mrs. Charlotte Day, listed in Newark city directories as the widow of Moses Day for many years beginning in 1854. A corrected and revised version of my *New Jersey History* article, without illustrations, is available at [http://gary.saretzky.com/photohistory/resources/photo\\_in\\_nj\\_july\\_2010.pdf](http://gary.saretzky.com/photohistory/resources/photo_in_nj_july_2010.pdf) Another published error about Charlotte Prosch, that I did not repeat, was that she was African American, in Robert Hirsch, *Seizing the Light: A Social History of Photography* (NY: McGraw Hill) 2000, 1st edition; this reference was removed in the 2nd edition in 2009.

<sup>78</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, October 13, 1853, and earlier. See Larry J. West and Patricia A. Abbott, *Antique Photographic Jewelry: Tokens of Affection and Regard* (Nevada City, CA: Carl Mautz), 2005.

lower than can be had at any other establishments in New Jersey.” He would remain there until the second half of 1856 or 1857.<sup>79</sup>

Charlotte probably gave up her business in Newark after the birth of her first child, Mary L. Day, in March 1854.<sup>80</sup> Soon thereafter, Charlotte, Alfred, and Mary relocated to Michigan, where the Days’ second child, Ada, was born in 1855 and where Charlotte’s last known daguerreotype was made in Paw Paw on March 12, 1856, showing storefronts, including the printing office of a newspaper, *The Free Press*. (Figure 7) Unlike most daguerreotypes, which are mirror images and reversed left to right, this extraordinary sixth plate image, made while there was still snow on the ground, shows the signs on the building and in the windows reading correctly, so a mirror must have been used to reverse it during exposure. She presented it to the newspaper’s editor.<sup>81</sup> This is the only known daguerreotype Charlotte made in Michigan, her only known outdoor view, and her last photograph of any kind that has come to my attention.

Upon their return to New Jersey, Alfred opened “Day’s Excelsior Bakery” at 36 Academy Street where he sold what he claimed as “the largest and best bread in Newark,” a three-pound loaf for twelve cents. An ad placed in the *Newark Daily Advertiser* on June 26, 1857, added, “Mrs. Day (formerly Miss C. Prosch) has opened an ICE CREAM SALOON in connection with the bakery, and would respectfully invite her old friends and the public in general to call and give it a trial.”<sup>82</sup> Charlotte’s next child, George W., named after her older brother, was born October 20 that year and their fourth and last, Sarah Amelia, in March 1860.

Charlotte’s subsequent life is by and large undocumented, as not much information about her has been found other than in census records and directories. In the 1860 U.S. Census, the family was still in Newark, with Charlotte listed as a homemaker. Alfred gave his personal worth as a modest \$300, equivalent to about \$10,771 in 2021 dollars.<sup>83</sup> He is listed in directories as a baker

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<sup>79</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser* (1854–1855), including April 13, 1854, 3; May 23, 1854, 3; December 28, 1855, 3; March 24, 1856, 3; June 9, 1856, 3. Brewster operated at 192 Broad, 1857–1859. Craig, Vol. 2, 70.

<sup>80</sup> Mary’s birth month and year, 1900 U.S. Census, Dartmouth, Bristol, Massachusetts. She was unmarried and living with her sister younger Sarah and Sarah’s husband, Thomas Jenkins. For Charlotte Prosch Day in Michigan, see also David V. Tinder, *Directory of Early Michigan Photographers* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2013), [http://clements.umich.edu/eadadd/tinder\\_directory.pdf](http://clements.umich.edu/eadadd/tinder_directory.pdf).

<sup>81</sup> Information provided by the current owner, Greg French, from a slip of paper found with the daguerreotype. The *Paw Paw Free Press*, depicted on the left of the image, changed its name in 1855. See *History of Van Buren County, Michigan* (1855), 354, et seq., at [https://books.google.com/books/about/A\\_History\\_of\\_Van\\_Buren\\_County\\_Michigan.html?id=zcqnFOSY2RQC](https://books.google.com/books/about/A_History_of_Van_Buren_County_Michigan.html?id=zcqnFOSY2RQC).

<sup>82</sup> *Newark Daily Advertiser*, June 27, 1857, 3. This ad ran at least until October 28, 1857. Birth record, male child of Alfred Day, baker, Book L, 490A, New Jersey State Archives.

<sup>83</sup> <https://www.in2013dollars.com/us/inflation/1860?endYear=2022&amount=300>.

in Newark at 61 Market Street from 1861 to 1864, then in 1866 at 190 Broad in Elizabeth, with his home at the same address.

By 1869, the Day family moved to Rhode Island, where Alfred was a baker in Warren, Bristol County, and then opened a bakery in Providence in 1870. In that year's census, the family was living in Warren. Alfred, the baker, was 46; Charlotte, homemaker, 48 (she was probably closer to 52); and their four children ranged in age from 10 to 16. Also with them was a 20-year-old female servant and a 19-year-old baker from England. In 1871, still listed as residing in Warren, Alfred worked as both a photographer in Newport and a confectioner in Lincoln, north of Providence.<sup>84</sup> Alfred's frequent job changes suggests at best a certain restlessness; at worst, a series of career disappointments that may have caused stress in his family.

In 1872, Alfred and Charlotte bought a store for \$3,500 at 243 Purchase Street, New Bedford, Massachusetts.<sup>85</sup> Their timing could not have been worse, for The Panic of 1873 initiated an economic depression that lasted for years and caused thousands of bankruptcies. Alfred and Charlotte sold the property at a very substantial loss on November 2, 1876, for only \$1,300.<sup>86</sup> A possible indication that the store was not viable is that in 1873, Alfred was listed in the New Bedford directory as a baker and confectioner in the same building where he lived, not at the store, but at 52 Third, corner Walnut. After that he no longer appears in New Bedford directories. His teenage son George, who had become a photographer, lived on his own in New Bedford and

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<sup>84</sup> Providence city directories, 1870–1871; Newport city directory, 1871. By 1871, Alfred would have been using the collodion wet plate process, which superseded the daguerreotype, to make either glass plate negatives for printing on albumen paper or tintypes.

<sup>85</sup>*Rhode Island Press* (Providence, RI), May 11, 1872, 2. The article clearly states that the store was purchased by both Alfred and Charlotte Day but doesn't indicate what kind of store it was. It included about 13 rods of land, equivalent to about 214 feet, presumably extending behind the building. Due to renumbering, the current address of the lot is 1367–1369 Purchase Street. Deed, Edward Milliken and Lucia Ann Milliken of New Bedford to Alfred Day and Charlotte Day of Warren, Rhode Island, consideration of \$3,500, April 19, 1872, recorded May 6, 1872, Book 71, 307. Emails, Sue Morris to author, February 22–23, 2016.

<sup>86</sup> Deed, Alfred Day and Charlotte Day to Nathan Chase, consideration of \$1,300, November 2, 1876, recorded November 2, 1876, Book 84, p. 173, Bristol South Registry of Deeds. The lot is currently Parcel 66, Lot 9 in City of New Bedford Assessor's records available online. Alfred and Charlotte Day took out two mortgages on the property in 1872, totaling \$3,500. Recently, the building has been the site of a friendly neighborhood pub, The Dipper Cafe.

was listed in the directories in 1873 and 1875.<sup>87</sup> In January 1877, George Day was described as a New Bedford photographer when he dislocated his right knee in a sledding accident.<sup>88</sup>

By 1880, Charlotte and her three younger children, including George, resided in Dartmouth, Massachusetts, just a few miles from New Bedford, with her sister-in-law, Mary E. Day, 38. Recorded in the 1880 census, Charlotte, 60, was a homemaker and head of household because her husband was not present. Her son George was not recorded with an occupation. In the 1880 census, Alfred, age 52, was a baker in Girard, Kansas, a new town on a surveyed railroad line running south on the plains from Kansas City.<sup>89</sup> That year, Girard became the Crawford County seat, with a population of 1,289. Alfred lived with his older brother Samuel W. Day, 55, also a baker, from New York; Sam's second wife, Mary E. Day, 38 (thus listed twice in the census, the other time in Rhode Island with Charlotte); and Sam's son, Francis W., 26. Whether Charlotte and her husband separated as a result of marital discord or economics, or both, is a matter for speculation but some evidence discussed below suggests that the former played a role.

In Dartmouth, on April 14, 1881, Charlotte's daughter Ada married young Charles Howland, a next door neighbor according to the 1880 census. Unfortunately, on December 14, 1883, she died of "phthisis," one of the terms then used for consumption, more commonly known today as tuberculosis. She was only 26 years old, and left a daughter Lucy, born in 1882. It is likely that Lucy was the only grandchild of Charlotte's to reach maturity; she died in 1960 and was probably her last living descendant.<sup>90</sup>

Charlotte's daughter Sarah was the next to marry; in 1882, she wed Captain Thomas H. Jenkins, a master mariner who was older by 14 years. This Dartmouth couple had two children, neither of whom survived to 1900.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup>In 1873, George W. Day, at the age of 16, had his own photography business in New Bedford and lived independently until at least 1875. George's business in 1873 was at 134 1/2 Union St., and in 1875 at 64 1/2 Purchase Street. With the daguerreotype long out of fashion by 1873, George would have been using the collodion wet plate process for negatives or tintypes. In 1873, Alfred Day was a baker at 52 Third corner Walnut, with the same home address. *New Bedford (MA) City Directories, 1873–1875*.

<sup>88</sup> New Bedford news column, *Fall River Daily Evening News*, January 6, 1877, 2.

<sup>89</sup> Note that Alfred had aged only six years over the past decade according to the 1880 census.

<sup>90</sup> Death record, Dartmouth, Massachusetts, for Ada Howland, [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com). Her precise age at death was 26 years, 3 months, 17 days. According to this record, she was born in Michigan to Alfred and Charlotte Day, which means Charlotte gave birth at the end of August 1857 before returning to Newark. See also Ada's record, which mentions Lucy, in Find-A-Grave, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=113680019>.

<sup>91</sup> Marriage date from 1900 Census, Dartmouth, MA. Sarah's older sister Mary lived with her. Captain Jenkins (1846–1916) had a son, Horace Gray Jenkins (1868–1944), from a previous marriage that ended in divorce.

With one exception noted below, where Charlotte lived between 1880 and her death almost twenty years later in Dartmouth has not been found. Census records are lacking and Dartmouth directories are not available for that era. In all likelihood, she stayed most of the time in Dartmouth, where her surviving two daughters were still living in 1900.

Sam and Alfred returned from Kansas in the early 1880s, but if Alfred came back to Dartmouth, he didn't stay long, for he is listed in Brooklyn directories for most years from 1882 to 1894. Since the directories did not list wives domiciled with husbands, it has not been determined if Charlotte lived with him or not. Alfred and Sam continued to be bakers, shared homes, and worked together some of the time. Sam's son Francis also became a baker and was in the firm of Samuel W. Day & Son beginning in 1885.

Alfred's son George W. Day resided with him in 1883 and worked as a baker, but does not appear again in Brooklyn directories until 1889–1891, when he was listed as a photographer and lived separately from his father. In a remarkable reference regarding his mother, in the 1890 Brooklyn directory, published in 1889 for the year ending May 1, 1890, Charlotte is with her son at 451 Classon Avenue. It is plausible that she was helping him with his photography business. Hopefully, that was a bright spot in Charlotte's life after losing her daughter Ada in 1883 and two grandchildren in 1885 and 1890.<sup>92</sup>

Curiously, in that 1890 Brooklyn directory, Charlotte is listed as the widow of George W. Day. George, of course, was her son, not her husband. In that era, women living apart from their husbands were sometimes referred to as "widows," perhaps to try to avoid embarrassment. While the evidence is scanty and directories are not very reliable, it seems plausible that Charlotte and Alfred were separated by 1880.<sup>93</sup>

Alfred is not listed in the Brooklyn directories after 1894 but he died there on March 24, 1896, and was buried in the South Dartmouth Cemetery. Charlotte succumbed to "apoplexy," most likely a sudden cerebral or other hemorrhage, on November 5, 1899, and was interred in the

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<sup>92</sup> Sarah Amelia Jenkins had two children: Arthur S. Jenkins, 1885–1885, and Thomas Herbert Jenkins, 1887–1890, who was born in Brooklyn and died at sea, suggesting that Sarah sailed with her husband, Captain Jenkins. Find-A-Grave, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/113694475/arthur-s-jenkins>. In the 1900 census, Sarah is listed as having had two children, none living.

<sup>93</sup> The 1891 Brooklyn directory, which showed George W. Day at 451 Classon Avenue, listed a Charlotte Day, widow, who could have been Charlotte Prosch Day, at 211 Gates. Brooklyn directories in this period also list another Charlotte Day, widow of Thomas Day, who was an electrician; she lived at 120 Suydam around the time Charlotte Prosch Day lived in Brooklyn. I have not found a relation between Alfred Day and Thomas Day. Alfred Day is not listed in the Brooklyn directories between 1891 and 1893, then appears again for the last time in 1894. From 1896 to 1898, George W. Day had a photography studio at 628 Washington, Hoboken, and by 1920, had returned to Dartmouth, where according to the census, he lived with his widowed sister, Sarah Amelia Jenkins. Between these dates, no confirmed trace of him has been found. He could have been one of several George W. Days in the metropolitan area and elsewhere. One mentioned in New York newspapers around 1900 was an entertainer who gave comedic monologues in blackface at vaudeville shows.

South Dartmouth Cemetery with her husband. (Figure 8) Also listed on the family tombstone are the names and death dates of her children who remained single, Mary L. Day, Oct. 5, 1907, and George W. Day, Sept. 29, 1921.<sup>94</sup>

It is tempting to aver that Charlotte Prosch's career as a daguerreotypist, from 1845 to the mid-1850s was important merely because she was a woman when most daguerreotypists were men. But she is also memorable as one of New Jersey's first photographers, male or female, whose studio lasted longer than most at that time and whose work was comparable to the best of her competitors. Americans, perhaps more than citizens of other countries, had an insatiable desire for portraits of themselves. Charlotte Prosch satisfied their "picture hunger."<sup>95</sup> The meager facts that have been found about her life suggest that while she had professional success until her marriage, her subsequent life as a homemaker was punctuated by financial straits, premature death of family members, and possibly marital problems—all issues that many 19th century women had to face. In those respects, her experience was probably typical of her time.<sup>96</sup>

### **Author Biography**

Gary D. Saretzky, archivist, educator, and photographer, worked from 1968 to 2019 as an archivist at the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Educational Testing Service, and the Monmouth County (NJ) Archives. He also taught the history of photography at Mercer County Community College, 1977–2012, and served as coordinator of the Public History Internship Program for the Rutgers University History Department, 1994–2016. His website, <http://saretzky.com> includes his photos, history of photography resources, and an online photo bookstore. Saretzky has published more than 100 articles and reviews on the history of photography, photographic conservation, and other topics, including "Gustavus W. Pach: A Nineteenth-Century New Jersey Photographer," in *The Daguerreian Annual 2021*, 140-159.

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<sup>94</sup> Death records, [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com). Also, death notice for Alfred Day, *New York Herald*, March 26, 1896, p. 1. For tombstone, see Find-A-Grave, <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GSln=Prosch&GSiman=1&GRid=113376276&>.

<sup>95</sup> I first came across this expression in *John Raeburn, A Staggering Revolution: A Cultural History of Thirties Photography* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2006). Although Raeburn used it in connection with the 1930s, it seems apt for the entire history of photography.

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