

Collecting Nineteenth-Century Books with Photographs

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Abstract

In the years before photographs could be reproduced in ink alongside letterpress text, some publishers experimented with photographic illustration by pasting original photographs into books. Most of these books went unnoticed in library collections and used bookseller shops until a sudden interest in photography and photographic history in the 1970s turned the attentions of librarians, scholars, curators, and collectors to the treasure trove of historical photography that could be found between the pages of a book. Since that time, only a few institutions with an interest in photography have attempted to identify and promote these materials, despite the fact that these books may reside in the stacks of any institution with holdings dating back to the nineteenth century. This article considers the reasons why this may have happened, primarily by examining the attitudes toward collecting nineteenth-century photographically illustrated books that emerged in the late twentieth century.

Keywords: photographically illustrated books, nineteenth-century photography, collections management

Collecting Nineteenth-Century Books with Photographs

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In 1974, Lucian Goldschmidt and Weston Naef curated an exhibition at the Grolier Club in New York of nineteenth-century books illustrated with real photographs. These were not one-off examples of personal album-making or extra-illustration, but published works in which original photographs and early photomechanical prints had been pasted or bound into the text, imaginatively bridging the gap between the invention of photography and the later introduction of the halftone process that made it possible to print a photograph directly onto a page of a book. The exhibition revealed a rich store of historical photographs hiding between the covers of nineteenth-century books, just when the collector market for photography was expanding rapidly. Christie's and Sotheby's had begun offering photography at auction, museums were actively building and exhibiting photographic collections, and among academic institutions, a critical discourse around photographs as aesthetic objects emerged. It is into this environment that the Grolier Club exhibition, *The Truthful Lens* appeared, and it was quickly followed by a stream of exhibitions and bibliographic publications devoted to 'the new incunabula.'¹ Julia van Haften (1977), Van Deren Coke (1977), Goldschmidt and Naef (1980), Helmut Gernsheim (1984), and Robert Holden (1988) all published lists that proved some significant historical photographs could be found in nineteenth-century books.²

Despite this initial wave of excitement over the treasures found in public and private libraries, comparatively little has been done to collect and describe these works in recent years. This is peculiar, not simply because photography has continued to grow in importance both on

1. Many scholars from this period equate the introduction of photography into publishing with Gutenberg's invention of moveable type. Helmut Gernsheim (1984) and Stuart Bennett (1979) even borrow the term *incunabula*, usually applied to the earliest books printed on a press, to refer to photographically illustrated books and early photographic literature. Bennett specifically uses *incunabula* to refer to photographically illustrated books published prior to 1860 (p. 164).

2. This is not a complete list of authors who published lists of photographically illustrated books, but rather a significant group of authors active in the 1970s and 80s. Additional lists are available in the bibliography (for example, Guillemain, 1950-53; Schultze, 1961; Krauss, 1975; Heidmann, 1984; Joseph, 1992-1993).

the art market and in academia, but because many of these books were acquired long before they became valuable. Their identification has the potential to enhance the research value of existing collections with little to no cost to the institution. Why then, are these hidden gems not more apparent in the catalogs of most libraries?

The simple explanation may be that photography is a specific subject area, and therefore a photographically illustrated book collection would seem to be the province of those institutions that actively collect in that area. Discussions of these books tend to be restricted to the literature on photography, and so it is not widely known that books with original photographs can be found in all genres and formats. For example, photographs appear among travel books and tourist literature, (*Kingsbridge Estuary, with rambles in the neighbourhood*, 1864) (FIG 1); scientific textbooks (*Instructions to Observers Connected with the Meteorological Service of the Dominion of Canada*, 1878) (FIG 2); art books and catalogs (*The Life and Genius of Rembrandt*, 1867) (FIG 3); poems and stories (*Hyperion: A Romance*, 1865) (FIG 4); numerous biographical works (*Portraits of British Americans*, 1865-8) (FIG 5); documentary records (*Paris Incendié*, 1871) (FIG 6), and even sports manuals (*Lacrosse: The National Game of Canada*, 1869) (FIG 7). This list could go on as government reports, auction sales catalogs, memorial pamphlets, and periodicals have been found to include original

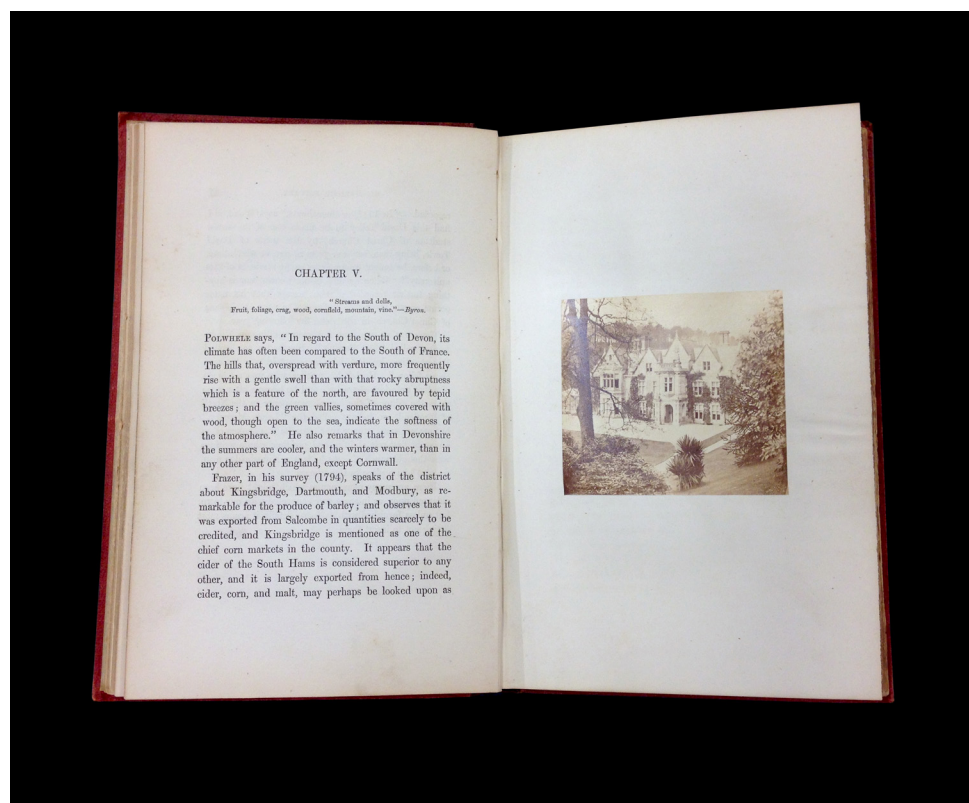


Figure 1. An example of travel books and tourist literature. *Kingsbridge Estuary, with Rambles in the Neighbourhood*, 1864. Image courtesy of W.D. Jordan Special Collections & Music Library, Queen's University.

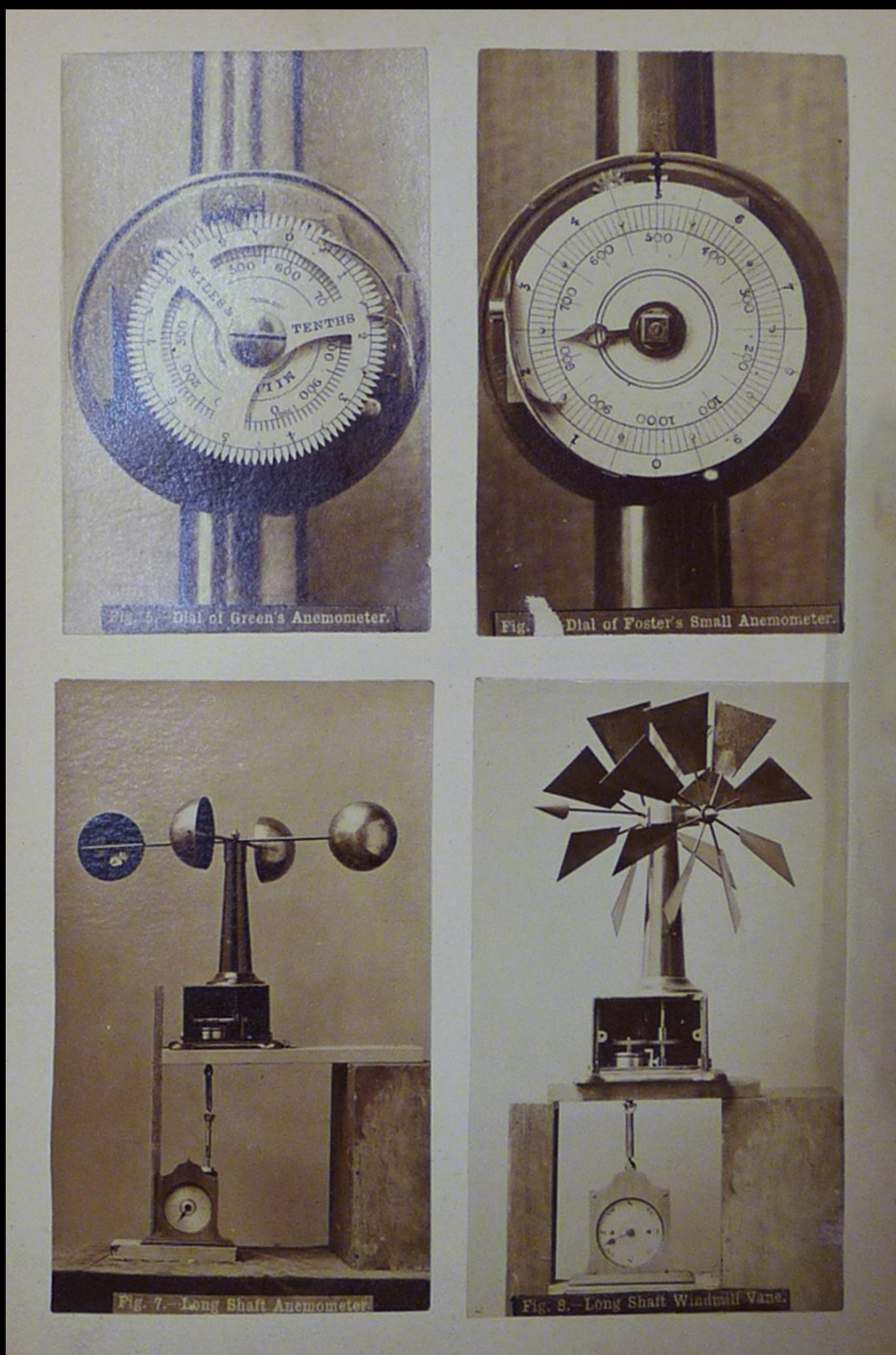


Figure 2. Scientific textbook. *Instructions to Observers Connected with the Meteorological Service of the Dominion of Canada*, 1878. Image courtesy of W.D. Jordan Special Collections & Music Library, Queen's University.



Figure 3. An example of art books and catalogs. *The Life and Genius of Rembrandt*, 1867.
Image courtesy of W.D. Jordan Special Collections & Music Library, Queen's University.

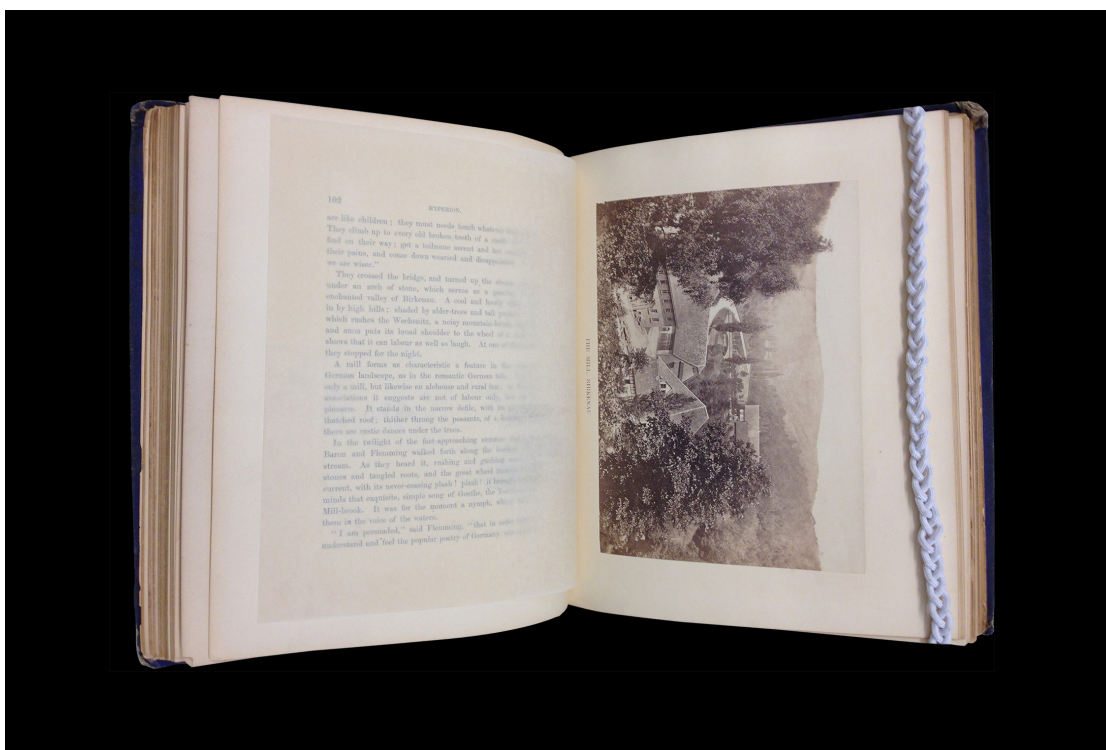


Figure 4. An example of poems and stories. *Hyperion: A Romance*, 1865.
Image courtesy of W.D. Jordan Special Collections & Music Library, Queen's University.



Figure 5. Biographical work. *Portraits of British Americans*, 1865-8.
Image courtesy of W.D. Jordan Special Collections & Music Library, Queen's University.

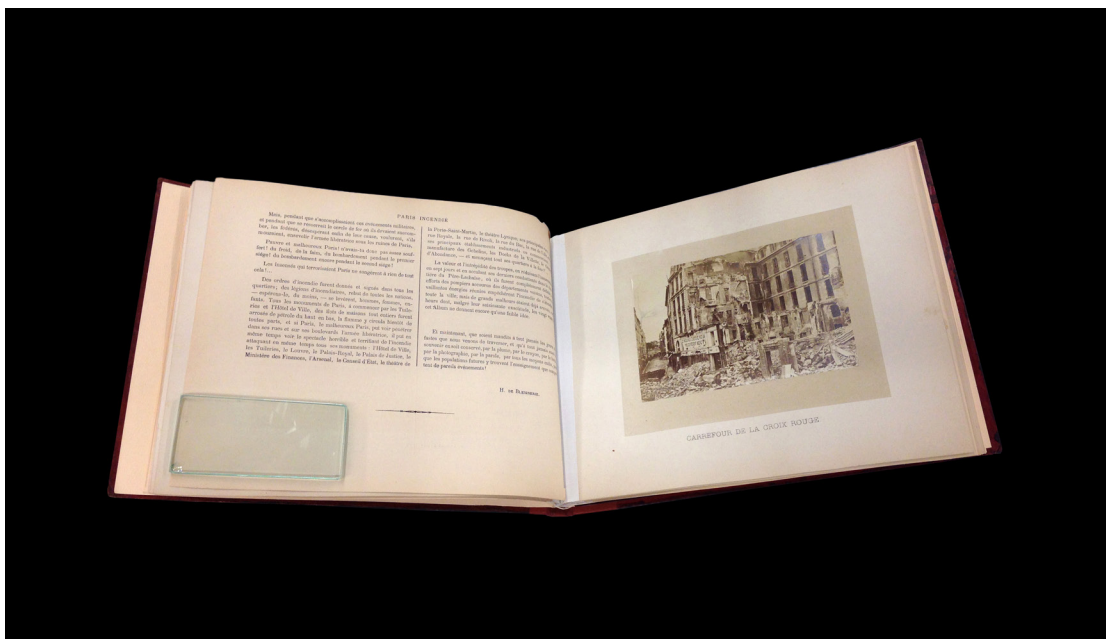


Figure 6. Documentary record. *Paris Incendié*, 1871.
Image courtesy of W.D. Jordan Special Collections & Music Library, Queen's University.



Figure 7. Sports manual. Lacrosse: *The National Game of Canada*, 1869.
Image courtesy of W.D. Jordan Special Collections & Music Library, Queen's University.

photographs as well. Across the whole book trade, photographs fulfilled a number of practical and imaginative illustrative roles.

If photographs can be found in any subject, then the situation is clearly more complex than a simple misunderstanding of the material's disciplinary relevance. Perhaps the real reason why these books have not been widely acknowledged in library collections is simply that they were never identified. Second-hand booksellers in the late nineteenth century did not differentiate between photomechanical illustration and original photographs (Wilson, 1995), glossing over an important material distinction, with the practice continuing through the twentieth century. Fifty years ago, R. S. Schultze (1963), Honorary Librarian for the Royal Photographic Society, complained "catalogs of libraries and of booksellers either do not state whether the illustrations are original photographs, or are utterly misleading: '13 photographs' or '13 photographic plates' may mean '13 photomechanical prints after original photographs'" (p. 5). The problem persists today, as the standard vocabularies and thesauri used in libraries do not offer a distinct word or phrase with which a cataloger might distinguish books with original photographs from books with photographic reproductions.³ Further, the Association of College and Research Libraries Rare Books and Manuscripts Section advises in *Descriptive Cataloging of Rare Materials (Graphics)* (2013) that all photographic and photomechanical media be described with the simple word 'photograph':

5B6.1. Photographs printed photomechanically. If a photographic image has been printed photomechanically (halftone, photogravure, Woodburytype, dye transfer print, ink jet print, etc.), describe it as a photograph. Record the medium or process of production in the other physical details element (p. 99).

Photographs produced by light-sensitive substances are thereby indistinguishable from photomechanical prints produced with ink, as both an original albumen print and a modern halftone print would be described with the same word – photograph. Although information about specific processes can be added to a bibliographic record in order to clarify this information, there are too many instances where this clarification has not been provided.⁴

Over the years, there have been a few efforts at producing collection lists in order to bring these works to light. The work involved examining library shelves, searching the sparse bibliographic literature, and importantly, exchanging ideas and information with collectors, auction houses, and booksellers participating in the burgeoning photographic

3. The term 'photobooks' appears in both the Library of Congress Subject Headings and the Getty Art and Architecture Thesaurus, but the term refers to books that are aesthetically or thematically photographic. Martin Parr and Gerry Badger (2004-6) defined the term as "a book – with or without text – where the work's primary message is carried by photographs" (p. 6). In other words, it is the expressive use of photography that differentiates these books from the widespread use of photographic reproduction and not the use of an original or historical photographic process.

4. It should be pointed out that since these books might not have been considered rare – either because the content is mundane, the author unremarkable, or the photographer unknown – it is highly likely that many of them will not have received the attention of a cataloguer trained to identify special image media.

art market.⁵ Van Haaften described her approach to collection-building at the New York Public Library in the 1970s as “hunt[ing] through the book-stacks for likely candidates. Using publication date, subject, and, frequently, outward appearance as an indication of potential photographic content, I found numerous additional titles” (p. 360). Anne Gilbert and Ilse Sternberg (1996) reported that some discoveries were made at the British Library by happening upon photographs in adjacent volumes when they went to retrieve a documented one (p. 193). Collections work in this area continues to be aided by chance as well as careful research,⁶ but the continued publication of reference lists over the years has greatly increased the likelihood of finding photographically illustrated books based on title searches in catalogs (see Wilson, 2000; Parr and Badger, 2004-6; or the online *Catalogue of Photographically Illustrated Books* provided by the British Library).

Unfortunately, the fact that many library catalog records do not distinguish between original photographs and photomechanical reproductions is not solely the result of bibliographic omission. In looking at the lists that have been produced on photographic illustration, it becomes clear that scholars and collectors have provided conflicting information on how to evaluate rarity and importance when conducting these searches. In other words, the authors responsible for creating the bibliographies of photographic illustration have made it difficult to determine exactly what needs to be described, and why that description is important. This last issue requires an explanation.

What is a Photographically Illustrated Book?

The catalogs published in the late twentieth century, which were responsible for introducing the photographically illustrated book to collectors and researchers, outlined two very simple criteria for distinguishing these books as rare: chronology and process. The authors all seemed to agree that the books belonged to the nineteenth century, and that the technologies described should be unique in some way, either because the processes involved light-sensitive chemicals, or because they represented an intermediary stage between the use of photographic originals and the emergence of halftone screen reproductions. On closer inspection of the parameters each author used, however, it becomes apparent that they did not agree on whether the whole nineteenth century should be considered, or what processes can be considered original.

First of all, while it is clear that photographically illustrated books did not exist before the introduction of photography in 1839, there is no

5. Van Haaften (1977) thanked Naef for sharing his notes for the Grolier Club exhibition in a footnote to page 360, and Naef indicated that his findings were aided by the community of researchers working parallel to the exhibition (W. Naef, personal communication, September 23, 2014).

6. My own experience at Queen's University was greatly aided by the information generously shared by Dr. Joan M. Schwartz, Professor of Art History and Geography at Queen's University, and by David Harris, Professor in the School of Image Arts, Ryerson University. Several discoveries of photographically illustrated books were also made in the daily course of library business by Alvan Bregman, Curator of Special Collections, Barbara Teatero (former Curator of Special Collections), Lucinda Walls, Public Service Librarian for Music and Art, and Pamela Manders, Reference Assistant for Special Collections and Music.

single point on the timeline that marks the period after which scholars can agree that photographically illustrated books ceased to be produced. Gernsheim used 1875 as an end date for his list; Schultze, 1885; Van Haaften and Holden, 1900; Goldschmidt and Naef, 1914. Recent scholars have also chosen different dates: Foster, Heiting, and Stuhlman (2007) took Goldschmidt and Naef's 1914 end date for their work, while Hamber (2011) selected 1880. It does seem safe to say that the photographically illustrated book belongs to the nineteenth century (or rather, the long nineteenth century),⁷ but this is clearly up for debate.

The moving end date for photographic illustration is partly tied to the popularity and use of certain technologies. Original photographs were used for book illustration as early as the 1840s, but photographic imagery greatly increased in the 1870s as a number of continuous-tone photomechanical processes were developed which could reproduce images in ink on a press. (Hannavy et al., 2013). Woodburytypes, collotypes, and photogravures transformed the printing process from a purely chemical one into a mechanically predictable and repeatable activity, and these processes gradually replaced the use of original photographs. However, they were still specialized technologies that had to be printed on a separate press from the text, so they are generally found mounted or inserted as extra pages in books. Van Haaften, Coke, and Goldschmidt and Naef included these early photomechanical processes in their surveys, while Gernsheim and Holden restricted themselves to silver-based, chemically produced photographs. Each of these authors based their decisions on what they felt were the most important technologies to document and collect, and either adjusted their timeframes to avoid dealing with the exponentially larger amounts of photographic illustration around the turn of the twentieth century, or adjusted their choice of processes to eliminate the more common ones.⁸ It would seem then that chronology is not an important criterion after all, and is only used to avoid addressing the enormous volume of photographic illustration that appeared in the twentieth century. Likewise, the processes considered important change from author to author, suggesting that anything remotely photographic from the nineteenth (or long nineteenth) century may be considered important to research on photographically illustrated books.

The choice to include some processes and not others is not completely based on the volume of material, but also stems from the fact that several important photographers in the history of photography created what are considered to be 'original' or 'vintage' prints with photomechanical processes, and not (chemically-speaking) original photographs. If the goal of identifying photographically illustrated books is partly motivated by a desire to capture all the valuable, artistic, or iconic photographs that have

7. The long nineteenth century was defined by Eric Hobsbawm as ending in 1914, or the beginning of the first World War (Stearns, 2012). Other end dates have been proposed and used by later scholars, so even this is a flexible and fuzzy end date.

8. Almost all of the lists completely ignore halftone letterpress prints despite their invention in the 1860s (see McIntosh, 1996), probably because the halftone came to dominate all forms of printed illustration in the twentieth century and so it would seem highly arbitrary to include some, but not all, books with halftone prints.

been distributed in book form, then eliminating some photomechanical processes would also exclude some prized artworks. Beaumont Newhall (1983), the first scholar to put forward a critical and aesthetic history of photography, argued that P.H. Emerson's *Marsh Leaves* (1895) should be considered "one of the rarest books in the collection" at Harvard University (p. 36), even though the book contained images made with the photomechanical photogravure process. Aesthetic value and authorship clearly influenced some authors to cast a wider net.

Returning to Goldschmidt and Naef, and their landmark Grolier Club exhibition, we find that neither was afraid to argue that some photographically illustrated books were better than others, opening up a parallel discussion of these books as artistic products with value beyond the application of a process.⁹ They saw photographically illustrated books as both a mechanism for delivery and display, and as a new medium capable of expressive meaning, and they reasoned that those two categories were not equal. Naef stated that while the first book illustrated with photographs appeared in 1844, the first truly *successful* book did not appear until 1852 (p. 10).¹⁰ Although he argues this illustrates the slow start photography had in publishing, it is not only technical achievement that forms the basis for his judgment, but also the later work's success in attaining "the goal of marrying printed words with pictures" (p. 18). These comments can be directly related to the contemporary scholarship on twentieth-century photographic books (Newhall, 1983; Sweetman, 1986; Hunter, 1987), which explored how books transform the photographs from objects merely presented on a page to a medium of visual communication that derives meaning from sequencing, layout, and interplay with the printed word—what Robert Frank referred to as "a new method of photographic description" (as cited in Sweetman, 1986, p. 23). This may be the source of Naef's desire to divide photographically illustrated books "between creative art and commercial application of photography... between those [books] in which photographs are presented for their own sake and those that are made for the express purpose of illustrating texts" (p. 20).

This elevation of the photographically illustrated book to the realm of *art* is part of the reason why Douglas Crimp (1995) took aim at Van Haaften and the New York Public Library in his influential essay, "The Museum's Old, the Library's New Subject." He argued that the removal of materials from the stacks and "reclassifi[cation] according to their newly acquired value" (p. 74) would erase the original context for these books. While this may have been a bit of an exaggeration on Crimp's part,¹¹ it is true that Van Haaften was unabashedly *curating* (to use Crimp's emphasis) examples of "the first art form to emerge from the technological age" (p.

9. Goldschmidt and Naef were not the first to put forward the idea that a photographically illustrated book could belong to, and thereby be judged according to, the discourse on art and photography. But, the positioning of their book as a reference text on the photographically illustrated book has resulted in a more profound impact of these ideas on collections practice.

10. It is unclear which books Naef is actually referring to with this statement as he does not discuss the probable books until a few pages later in the text. The first book is likely the *Record of the Death-bed of C.M.W.* (1844), which he discusses on page 13, although it could also be *The Pencil of Nature* (1844-46), the first issue of which was produced in the same year and arguably was more book-like than the privately printed *Record*. The 'successful' book is meant to be Maxime Du Camp's *Egypte, Nubie, Palestine, et Syrie* (1852), which is lauded on page 20 as "successful...in amplifying an important subject through the conjoining of complex texts with photographs."

11. Crimp's contention that the library should have left the original classification alone is problematic primarily because it presumes that classification should preserve nineteenth-century organizational principles at the expense of the needs of the contemporary user. In my opinion, libraries hold living collections that do occasionally need to be adapted for new audiences, and in fact, the NYPL has adjusted the unique system developed by former director John Shaw Billings in 1896 over the years to do just that. ("With a New Classification System, the New York Public Library Makes a Change for the Clearer," *The New York Times*, August 17, 2006.

355). She physically removed the books from their original locations to the newly created Photography Collection, and many of the images have since received item level catalog records that do not make it immediately apparent which prints can be found in books, and which are individual items.¹²

Although these bibliographic publications¹³ were aimed at identifying original examples of nineteenth-century photography in books, they were clearly responsive to the stylistic and technological accounts being written for the history of photography at that time. This has led to a fragmented understanding of the photographically illustrated book today as a unique historical remnant and/or an object significant for its authorship. The label used to distinguish these books as rare and valuable, “photographically illustrated,” can be interpreted to include or exclude any number of processes and time periods. The implication for collections work is that photographically illustrated books may be defined by any number of parameters responsive to the aims of the institution. The publications meant to expose these books have instead created an aura of exclusivity around them, leading back to the first problem discussed in this essay, that photographically illustrated books are often sought out by those libraries that specifically collect photography.

Future Work

While there are good reasons to collect and curate examples of photographically illustrated books that represent the unique, artistic, or expressive vision of an author/creator, or which demonstrate the adoption of certain materials and processes, this highly selective and subjective collection building clearly needs to be accompanied by more pragmatic description of all photographic media in order to be useful to future scholarship – particularly for those scholars who may approach a library with specific, but divergent, criteria for photographic illustration in mind. Acknowledging these books exist within collections does not commit an institution to a special collection of photography, nor does it require any more detailed cataloging than is already employed to provide enhanced description of other forms of illustration. At Princeton University Library, photographically illustrated books are identified in the OPAC with a local genre/form heading: “Photographs, Original – Illustrations in books” (Mellby, 2007). Similarly, the Rijksmuseum Research Library uses the descriptor “fotografisch geïllustreerde boeken (vorm)” to isolate all of their photographically illustrated books in the online catalog (M. Stijkel, personal communication, September 26, 2014 and G. Koot, personal communication, December 5, 2014). At Queen’s University Libraries, the books have been given the unique subject heading “Illustrated books, Photographic.”

12. For instance, the bibliographic record for Maxime Du Camp’s *Égypte, Nubie, Syrie* (1852) can be found in the NYPL’s main catalog, while records for the individual plates are found in the Prints & Photographs Online Catalog. The call number, title, and relevant bibliographic information for the book is not repeated in the Prints & Photographs catalog, nor is the individual record linked to the main catalog.

13. These catalogs were based on extant collections and as such they represented only what the collectors could lay hands on. However, that did not preclude them from being positioned as reference tools. Goldschmidt specifically saw its value primarily as a reference tool, since “libraries do not yet index photography as a mode of illustration” (1980, p. ix). Together with Van Haften and Gernsheim’s publications, *The Truthful Lens* is still the most cited resource in contemporary auction catalogs and bookseller’s sales lists.

The simplicity of the idea to append a single subject heading or genre/form term in order to distinguish these works in the online catalog should not disguise its importance. There is still a significant amount of work to be done to identify all the titles that contain photographs, and it is not until scholars have this data, gathered from countless individual catalogs, that they can truly begin to interpret the scope and influence of photography as book illustration (see Hamber, 2011). Improving access to this material through enhanced metadata may prompt any number of projects similar to the *Fox Talbot 1846 Art Union Journal Project* (<http://www.1846artunion.org>) established to identify and index surviving copies of the original 6,000 photographs that were pasted into the June 1846 issue of the *Art Union*. As many as twenty-four variant photographs have been found according to the published list, highlighting the importance of amassing data which describes individual impressions and states. It is not uncommon to find photographically illustrated books with variant photographs from different negatives, or even a different number of prints. The British Library lists *Family Recollections of Lieut. General Elias Walker Durnford* (1863) as containing a frontispiece albumen print of a crayon drawing by Durnford's daughter Elizabeth Sewell, but in viewing the copy at Queen's University, issued by the same publisher and in the same year, a lithograph of the drawing is found instead. Differences between texts can often be explained by pointing to either grangerizing or removals,¹⁴ but the Durnford book appears to have been created with different image media. Since publishing and binding remained separate activities for much of the nineteenth century, it is possible that the person who bound the British Library copy had difficulty obtaining a lithograph and so copied the image via photography instead, but it is equally possible that one buyer simply preferred the look and feel of a photograph and requested that medium for their copy. It is precisely these issues that are interesting to a study of nineteenth-century photography, and highlight the importance of cataloging.

Preservation

Documenting books with original prints, variant prints, and even missing prints, will also help libraries to make informed decisions about security, storage, and conservation. While a detailed discussion of the preservation concerns associated with the photographically illustrated book is beyond the scope of this article, it remains important to observe that books with light-sensitive materials do require a specific preservation storage environment, and will benefit from handling instructions tailored to their particular needs. Photographs in books are naturally protected

14. Carol Armstrong (1998) refers to the history of photography as being 'rife with removals from the photograph's printed context' (p. 2).

from light damage by virtue of the fact that the books are stored closed, but the effects of repeated or long-term exposure of a silver-based photograph to a light source during reading or display are cumulative and irreversible (Wagner et al., 2001). Collections managers may wish to advise researchers not to photocopy these materials or use a camera flash, and should be careful about choosing books for exhibition. Albumen prints are extremely sensitive to changes in relative humidity, which causes surface cracking and curling of the paper support (Baas et al., 1999), so keeping these prints in a controlled storage environment will help to prevent further deterioration. If these materials reside among books that have been selected for mass deacidification, they should be set aside and left untreated. Finally, the way these images were attached to the text may allow them to be easily removed, whether deliberately through theft, or accidentally, simply falling out of the book as glue weakens or sewing supports break. Inspecting books for torn pages and loose sewing each time they are used may be advised. Action taken now to prevent damaging activities from taking place, and to remedy inadequate storage and remove deterioration catalysts, will greatly prolong the life of the photographic object. It is therefore advisable that in addition to providing descriptive metadata in the catalog records, the more sensitive materials are removed to a special collections department or archives for safekeeping.

Conclusion

Photographically illustrated books are artifacts of a changing relationship between image and text, and should be preserved for the insight they offer into the history of visual communication. Books that employed photographs often drew attention to their presence in the text, imploring the reader to appreciate the value of this particular type of image. More often than not, the author remarked upon the truthfulness of the representation, lauding photography for removing the need to rely on a fallible human copyist. With the flood of new scholarship in the fields of book history and print culture, the history of photography, and the new arena of illustration studies, it is time that more institutions became involved in identifying, preserving, and promoting the photographically illustrated book. Collections work in this area has been based on trial and error, careful research, chance encounters, and, importantly, the exchange of ideas and information among librarians, booksellers, scholars, and collectors. The continued participation of the library in this dialogue is desperately needed to bring more of these works to light. The books are in the stacks, simply waiting to be found.

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