



Photographer Profile: Ezekiel Cooper Hawkins

(May 27, 1808 to September 7, 1862)

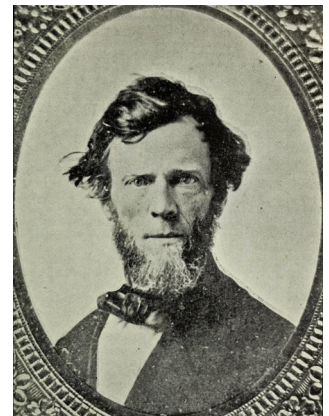
Summary

Ezekiel Cooper Hawkins was one of the first professional daguerreotypists in America, establishing a photographic studio in Greater Cincinnati in 1841. Hawkins claims he opened the second Daguerrean studio in the U.S. (Doyle, 1910). Ezekiel Hawkins contributed exceptional artistry and technical innovations during the first three decades of American photography. His daguerreotypes are prized artworks in the photographic collections of the Nelson-Atkins Museum in Kansas, City, the National Gallery of Canada, the Cincinnati Art Museum, and the Cincinnati Museum Center.

Despite his long, innovative career, Ezekiel Hawkins is one of the least known figures from early American photography. Hawkins is an “overlooked Ohio master,” according to David R. Hanlon, in his definitive article “E.C. Hawkins: History of a Photographic Pioneer,” published in *The Daguerreian Annual*, 2016.

Background

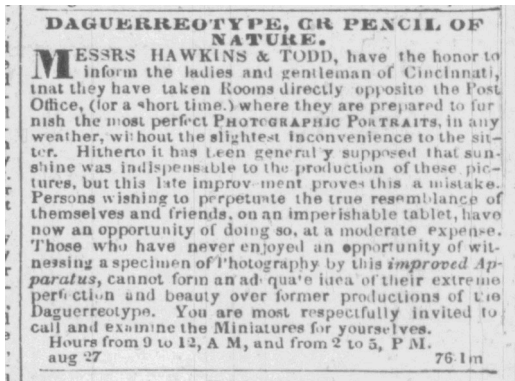
Ezekiel Hawkins, the son of Reverend Archibald and Amy (Harrison) Hawkins, was born in Baltimore, Maryland on May 27, 1808 (Ancestry, 2024). The Hawkins family moved to Steubenville, Ohio in 1811. Ezekiel Hawkins worked as an artist, house painter and sign maker in Steubenville, and Wheeling, Virginia (now West Virginia) during the early stages of his career. (Hunter, 1898) While living in Wheeling, “Zeke” Hawkins learned about the daguerreotype process through correspondences with Samuel F.P. Morse in 1840. (Hanlon, 2016) Morse is well known for inventing the telegraph. Morse is also called the “father” of American photography for introducing the daguerreotype process to many early American photographers. Hawkins claimed to have taken the first daguerreotype west of the Allegheny mountains (Hunter, 1898). He married Frances (“Fannie”) Todd on June 3, 1832. The couple had three children: Noble, Jonetta and Rembrandt.



Ezekiel Hawkins, “The Pathfinders of Jefferson County,” W.H. Hunter, *Steubenville Gazette*, published in the *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 6, 1898.

Cincinnati Studios

Hawkins & Todd.



By August of 1841, Ezekiel Hawkins set up a temporary studio in rooms “directly opposite the Post Office” in downtown Cincinnati, according to an advertisement in the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*. Hawkins’ studio partner is listed only as Todd, who quickly fades from the historical record. Todd may have been a relative of his wife, Frances Todd Hawkins (Hanlon, 2016). The Hawkins & Todd advertisement provides insights into the early nomenclature used to describe what would become known as photography. The headline, “Daguerreotype, or Pencil of Nature” reflects both the Daguerreotype process of Louis Daguerre and the “photogenic drawings,” later called the Calotype process, of William Henry Fox Talbot.

Remarkably, one daguerreotype, *Portrait of a Man*, made in 1841 at the Hawkins & Todd studio is preserved today in the archives of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art in Kansas City. It is the oldest known daguerreotype ever made in Greater Cincinnati.

Portrait of a Man, sixth plate daguerreotype, 1841, Hawkins & Todd, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.



Hawkins & Faris (1843-1846)

By 1843, Hawkins had formed a partnership with Thomas Faris (1816 – 1885) who also had a distinguished career as an early American photographer. Thomas Faris was born in St. Clairsville, Ohio on July 15, 1816. Faris lived in Newton, Ohio before moving to Cincinnati. He established a photographic studio on Fourth and Main in March of 1842 (Hanlon, 2016). Thomas Faris advertised daguerreotypes for three to five dollars, which is about \$126 to \$210 dollars in 2024.

PHOTOGENIC MINIATURE PORTRAITS,
BY
HAWKINS & FARIS.
FIFTH STREET, BETWEEN MAIN AND WALNUT,
CINCINNATI.

These pictures are not merely a fac-simile of nature, arrived at only by this process, but their extreme beauty of finish, and the low price at which they are obtained, should render it an object for all. They have for sale the latest and most improved apparatus, with instructions complete, and every thing appertaining to the art. Terms reasonable.

Also—Ornamental, sign, and fancy painting, executed in a manner inferior to none, at the shortest notice, and on reasonable terms.

The Hawkins & Faris Daguerreian Gallery operated in Cincinnati from 1843 to 1846. Their advertisement in the 1843 City Directory of Charles Cist provides insights into their services. The ad calls daguerreotypes “Photographic Miniature Portraits” and highlights both quality and a low price. Hawkins & Faris also report that the studio created “ornamental, sign and fancy painting.” In subsequent ads, Hawkins & Faris stated they could take pictures every day, “without regard to the weather.” Hawkins & Faris even offered to teach the photographic process to others.

Hand-Colored Daguerreotypes

By March of 1843, Hawkins & Faris began to offer the “recently discovered” art of “colored photographic miniature portraits” (*Enquirer*, 1843). Photographers quickly found they could hand color or hand tint a daguerreotype, “thereby imparting to them a warmth and life-like tone far more beautiful than any of the kind yet offered to the public.” In their advertisement, Hawkins & Faris list

prices. Three dollars for a plain daguerreotype. A colored daguerreotype was two dollars and fifty cents. It's not clear if color was in addition to the cost of the original daguerreotype.

Ezekiel Hawkins' hand colored daguerreotypes show exceptional skill, blending the clarity of a black and white portrait with the subtle application of color and tint. The Hawkins & Faris gallery was "a resort of all the prominent artists of Cincinnati," according to a biographical sketch compiled by W.H. Hunter, *Steubenville Gazette*, 1898.



Hawkins and John Quincy Adams (November, 1843)



John Quincy Adams, half-plate daguerreotype, Philip Haas, March 1843, National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

In November of 1843, Ezekiel Hawkins photographed John Quincy Adams, the sixth

President of the United States. He was not the first to photograph Adams. In March of 1843, Philip Haas took the first daguerreotypes of John Quincy Adams during a studio session in Washington, D.C. Adams was the first American president ever photographed. A half-plate daguerreotype from this session was recently purchased by the National Portrait Gallery.

Adams was not only a politician and statesman. He was also an accomplished scientist who studied many academic fields, including astronomy. Craig Niemi, Facilities and Collections Manager, Cincinnati Observatory Center, says regional leaders invited Adams to Cincinnati to dedicate the cornerstone for a new astronomical observatory being built on Mt. Ida, soon to be renamed Mt. Adams, on November 9, 1843. Adams was ill after several days of travel, including a stop in Lebanon, Ohio. The dedication day was "sleety, rainy, nasty," says Niemi, adding, "Adams had prepared a two-hour, sixty-page dedication speech, that he cut basically in half and presented to probably about ten-thousand people." Adams attended numerous dinners and balls held in his honor while in Greater Cincinnati. In his diary, Adams also wrote that he sat for a daguerreotype portrait during his visit.

Portrait of an Unidentified Man and Woman, quarter-plate daguerreotype with applied color, c. 1846, Ezekiel Hawkins, National Gallery of Canada.

Before returning to the Henrie house we stop'd at a Daguerreotype Office where three attempts were made to take my likeness - I believe neither of them (succeeded).

- Adams Diary transcript, 11-13-1843, Massachusetts Historical Society. The word *succeeded* was not in Adams' original handwritten diary excerpt. It was added with parenthesis in a published version, *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, J.B. Lippincott, 1876 v 11, p 430.

Bonnie Holliday Speeg, Owner, Tracing Papers, has researched the 1843 visit of John Quincy Adams to Cincinnati. Based on Cincinnati City Directories, Speeg notes that the Hawkins & Faris Daguerrean Gallery was the only active photographic studio in downtown Cincinnati. The studio on Fifth Street was close to the Henrie House on Third Street where Adams was lodging. Therefore, it is highly likely that Adams sat for the portrait in the studio of Hawkins & Faris. However, their original daguerreotypes of Adams have been lost to time. Adams understood the political power of photography, but he described many of his daguerreotype portraits as "hideous."

Hawkins' Gallery of Pioneers (September 1845)

The Hawkins & Faris Daguerreian Gallery was lavishly adorned with furnishings, his daguerreotypes, and the paintings and sculptures of local artists. Ezekiel Hawkins wholly embraced the vital role of photography in preserving history. In September of 1845, Ezekiel Hawkins presented a

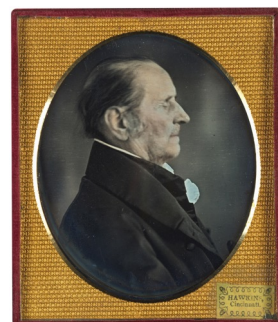
retrospective exhibition of daguerreotype portraits entitled “Gallery of Pioneers of this City.” The acclaimed history, Charles Cist, described the exhibit in his annual chronicle *The Cincinnati Miscellany*.

The fact is, Hawkins’ Gallery of Pioneers of this City, is the most interesting tableau vivant imaginable, and will compare advantageously with Anthony & Edwards’s very interesting collection of the Heads of American People, which no other collection we have before seen, or will. One reason is, Mr. H. is at once an artist and daguerreotypist – the father of the art in the West, an operator from predilection and not for petty lucre’s sake alone; but, from a passionate preference and devotion to the art – hence his success. We have no disposition to extol Mr. H. beyond his merit – to over praise or puff any one or lessen others – for good artists in this way abound in our city; but we wish our citizens to be aware that they need not cross the Atlantic for the finest daguerreotypes.

– Charles Cist, *The Cincinnati Miscellany*, Vol II, p. 127, September, 1845

There are no records of specific daguerreotype portraits that Hawkins displayed in his exhibit “Gallery of Pioneers of this City.” However, several early daguerreotype portraits of older residents of Greater Cincinnati that are attributed to Ezekiel Hawkins have survived.

The Cincinnati Art Museum preserves a hand-colored daguerreotype portrait of Ethan Stone taken by Ezekiel Hawkins in the mid 1840s. Ethan Stone was a lawyer, businessman and philanthropist who lived in Cincinnati from 1802 until his death in 1852. Stone was forced to retire in the 1820s due to failing eyesight (Spangenberg, 1989). That may be why he was photographed in profile.



Ezekiel Hawkins (American, 1808–1862), *Ethan Stone*, mid-1840s, daguerreotype, sixth plate, Cincinnati Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Alexander G. Cummins, 1939.129



Portrait of a Woman Wearing Glasses is a sixth-plate daguerreotype, attributed to Ezekiel Hawkins, in the personal collection of Kristin L. Spangenberg, author of *Photographic Treasures from the Cincinnati Art Museum* published in 1989. The daguerreotype shows an unidentified woman dressed in a bonnet and print dress.

Ezekiel Hawkins (American, 1808–1862), *Portrait of a Woman Wearing Glasses*, 1840s, daguerreotype, Collection of Kristin L. Spangenberg.

Hawkins and Faris - Competitors

In the winter of 1845, Ezekiel Hawkins traveled to New Orleans where he operated a temporary studio for a few weeks (Hanlon, 2016). By 1847, Hawkins and Faris dissolved their partnership. Thomas Faris opened his own studio in the Melodeon Building on the corner of Fourth and Walnut. Hawkins operated his studio out of the Apollo Building at Fifth and Walnut. In 1847, Hawkins took four photographs of Henry Clay that were used by sculptor Joel T. Hart to create a statue of Henry Clay. Ezekiel Hawkins and Thomas Faris worked as photographers in Cincinnati at several locations, and with multiple associates, until the early 1860s. They were both artistic innovators and creative competitors.



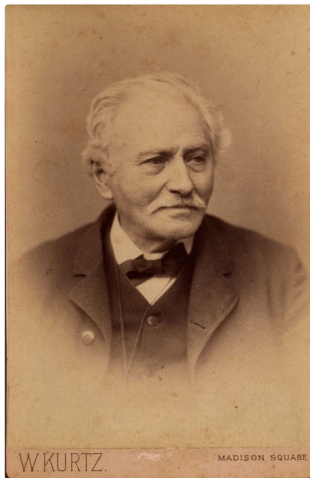
In 1847, Ezekiel Hawkins made a daguerreotype of the celebrated animal tamer Herr Driesbach, a favorite subject of Ezekiel Hawkins and several other early American photographers. The daguerreotype is preserved in the archive of the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art. Four years later, Hawkins conducted an even more daring photographic session with Herr Driesbach, a tiger and two children. While the daguerreotype has been lost to time, the event was recorded by a reporter with the *Cincinnati Enquirer*.

Wild animal tamer Herr Driesbach with jaguar, half plate daguerreotype, 1847, attributed to Ezekiel Hawkins, The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

An Original Group. We had an opportunity of witnessing a group yesterday, in the Daguerreotype line, that was indeed truly original. It consisted of three figures, two little girls, four and five years of age, sitting upon a sofa, and the other the full-grown tiger of Herr Driesbach, with which he performs so many wonderful feats. The children are reposing, perfectly unconscious of harm, and the animal reclining at full length, with his head resting upon their laps. We were strongly reminded, on gazing at the picture, of the lion and the lamb lying down together. Mr. Hawkins, the artist, at whose rooms we saw it, took considerable pains to make a good picture of the scene, and, in our view, he succeeded admirably. One of the little girls is the daughter of Mr. Hawkins, which shows that he had all the confidence in the docility of the tiger, particularly as he was under the immediate eye of his master. The picture can be seen for a few days at the rooms of Mr. H. on Fifth Street.

- *The Cincinnati Enquirer*, February 20, 1851

One of the little girls was Jonetta Hawkins, the only daughter of Ezekiel Hawkins. The newspaper article fails to record the opinion of Mrs. Hawkins about the photo session.



Thomas Faris, carte-de-visite, undated, W. Kurtz, Ancestry.com.

Thomas Faris was not about to be overshadowed. Faris wrote about the early days of American photograph in a paper published by *The Photographic Times and American Photographer* in 1884. His memoir includes insights into technical advancements and the competitive nature of the business.

In the early days of the business (daguerreotyping soon became a business) the fight to secure the patronage of the public was as furious as it is at the present day, with the exception that we did not then, as now, use "clubs" in order to knock our business opponents "out of time." An incident in illustration. One of my competitors for the privilege of taking "the heads of the people" induced Herr Driesback [sic], the famous lion-tamer, to visit his gallery with his pet tigers. He succeeded in making a very fine whole plate group of Mr. Driesback and his two pets. This regular "ten-strike," and for some time I was beaten; but at length I got even, if not a little ahead, by having two elephants brought to my gallery. As we were unable to induce them to go upstairs, we had to be satisfied with taking their portraits in the street, which was accomplished successfully by calling the police to our assistance.

- "Personal Reminiscences," by Thomas Faris, pages 490-493, published in *The Photographic Times and American Photographer*, Volume XIV, J. Traill Taylor, Editor, Scovill Manufacturing Company, Publishers, New York, 1884.

The competitor noted in Faris' article must have been Ezekiel Hawkins. Sadly, the elephant daguerreotype taken by Thomas Faris has also been lost to time. However, Faris illustrates that American photographers not only had to be technical masters and savvy business operators, they also had to be creative promoters in order to gain the attention in what was becoming a saturated market.

Hawkins – studio fire (1851)

From 1848 to 1851, Ezekiel Hawkins brought on two relatives as associates, including two nephews, John P. Hawkins and Robert C. Hawkins. In 1851, his studio suffered from a devastating fire. In the 1850s, fire was a common threat in American cities and Cincinnati was no exception. Two years before the first full-time, professional fire department was established in Cincinnati, a fire destroyed most of Hawkins' studio in the Apollo Building. The fire started in the Wood's Museum, but quickly spread to other offices in the five-story building including Hawkins' Daguerrean Gallery (Hanlon,



Fifth Street Market, (Hawkins studio in the Apollo Building on right, Cincinnati, Schnicke, Onken's Lithography, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1850s, Yale University Art Gallery.

2017). Hawkins wrote about the fire in a letter to *The Daguerreian Journal*. His letter reinforces his strong belief in photography as a vital tool in preserving history.

The important parts of all the Cameras were saved, and about one-third of all the specimen pictures hanging on the walls. My loss in stock and pictures (to me is heavy, having no insurance) will not fall short of One Thousand Dollars, besides the interruption of business. All of my glass negatives (of which I had a number and very fine ones,) as well as the Negative paper I had, was lost. What I regret most is the loss of my collection of old pioneers that I had been collecting for the past ten years, and which is irreparable.

- E.C. Hawkins letter, p 242, *The Daguerreian Journal* 2:8 (September 1851)

Hawkins & Mullen (1853-1855)



After the fire Hawkins, formed a new partnership with James Mullen, and relocated a studio to a four-story building at 168 Vine Street. Around this time, Ezekiel Hawkins, and other American photographers, began to take their cameras out of the studio and into the field. One example is a half-plate daguerreotype taken by Ezekiel Hawkins of a sidewheel steamboat named after its captain, Jacob Strader, and built in Cincinnati in 1853..

The Jacob Strader at Wharf, Cincinnati, ca. 1853, daguerreotype, Ezekiel Hawkins, Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art.

Hawkins – Photography Innovator

Hawkins continued to make improvements on numerous aspects of photography throughout his career. In 1846, Hawkins experimented with the calotype process introduced by William Henry Fox Talbot in England in 1839. As early as 1847, Hawkins reportedly explored use of collodion and glass with Dr. John Locke (Hanlon, 2016). Frederick Scott Archer published a paper in 1851 on what would become known as the wet-plate collodion process, which revolutionized photography by combining the clarity of a daguerreotype with the reproductive capability of a calotype.

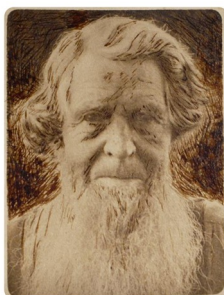
Hawkins also experimented with miniature, colored photography printed on paper that he called solographs. Hawkins submitted a patent for a “Mode of Treating Photographs and other pictures” in December of 1857. The patent models are in the archive of the National Museum of American History. Hawkins won a silver medal for his solograph prints at the Fair of the Ohio Mechanic’s Institute in 1852. He exhibited innovative works at the American International Exhibition in New York City in 1853. (Hanlon, 2016)



Hawkins advertisement, p.188, *Williams’ Cincinnati Directory*, 1853, Cincinnati Public Library.

Epilogues

Ezekiel Cooper Hawkins



Ezekiel Hawkins, suffering from rheumatism, moved to Covington, Kentucky toward the end of his life. He died at age fifty-four on September 7, 1862 in the resort community of Latonia Springs, in Kenton County, Kentucky. Hawkins is buried in Highland Cemetery, Fort Mitchell, Kentucky. During production of the documentary “Capturing Life” (1839-1869), Arabeth Balasko, Curator of Photographs, Prints and Media, Cincinnati Museum Center, uncovered a heavily modified print identified on

Print, undated, possibly of Ezekiel Hawkins as an older man, Cincinnati Museum Center,

the back as Ezekiel Hawkins. More research is needed to positively identify this as an older photograph of Ezekiel Hawkins.

David R. Hanlon provides this conclusion in his detailed biography, "E.C. Hawkins: History of a Photographic Pioneer," *The Daguerrian Annual*, 2016.

Separated from eastern cities where press and notoriety could be more easily gained, Hawkins steadfastly sought to reinvent and diversify his photographic output. In doing so, he helped to build a foundation for the medium's second generation.

– David Hanlon, E.C. Hawkins: History of a Photographic Pioneer," pp141-159, *The Daguerrian Annual*, 2016.

Thomas Faris

In 1851, Thomas Faris photographed P.T. Barnum and Jenny Lind (The Swedish Nightingale) who were in town during their famous national tour, which depicted in the contemporary movie *The Showman*. The portrait of Jenny Lind is in the National Portrait Gallery. By 1860, Faris had moved to Brooklyn, New York, where he continued to work as a photographer. Thomas Faris died at the age of seventy-nine on September 1, 1895. He is buried in the Evergreen Cemetery in Brooklyn, New York.

Author

Thomas M. Law, Project Director, "Capturing Life" (1839-1869), Voyageur Media Group, Inc. © 2024, Voyageur Media Group, Inc. This profile is provided free for research and educational purposes.

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