

Inside SPNEA:

Daguerreotypes of Plymouth

The SPNEA Library and Archives' collection of more than eight hundred daguerreotypes is significant not only because of its size but also because of the many daguerreotypists represented in it, among them Albert Sands Southworth and Josiah Johnson Hawes, Mathew B. Brady, John Adams Whipple, and John Plumbe, Jr. The collection, which dates from the early 1840s to the early 1860s, consists largely of portraiture and includes images of such well-known Americans as Zachary Taylor, Daniel Webster, Horace Mann, and Charles Goodyear as well as hundreds of portraits of lesser known men, women, and children. In addition to the portraits, there are approximately forty views of objects and outdoor scenes. Among this latter group is a remarkable set of fourteen daguerreotypes made in Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1853.

In 1961, William L. Warren gave the Plymouth daguerreotypes, which depict views of Plymouth Rock, Pilgrim Hall, Elder Brewster's chair, Peregrine White's cabinet, and a panoramic view of Watson's Hill, among others, to SPNEA. According to a note in SPNEA's accession records, Warren acquired the daguerreotypes at an auction in or near Suffield, Connecticut. The note stated that they had been made by a Calvin Wheeler Philco, an amateur photographer who traveled to Plymouth to make the views and then wrote an article using them for *Harper's Monthly* in 1855 or 1857. The accession records also note that the daguerreotypes had remained in the possession of Philco's family until the auction.

In 1990, Alan Trachtenberg, professor of American studies and English at Yale University, viewed the Plymouth images on a research trip to SPNEA. He later wrote to Ellie Reichlin, then director of the Library

and Archives, that Mr. Philco was really a Mr. Philleo and that wood engravings based on the daguerreotypes had indeed been used in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, in a December 1853 article by Philleo entitled, "A Pilgrimage to Plymouth."

Further research has uncovered additional information about Calvin Wheeler Philleo, Jr. (1822-58), a lawyer and part-time author.¹ In August of 1853 Philleo left his home in Suffield, Connecticut, and traveled to Plymouth, Massachusetts, presumably with the intention of writing an article about the town. However, it now seems unlikely that he made the daguerreotypes.

Earlier in the month, Plymouth had been the focus of a great deal of interest and activity when the Pilgrim Society sponsored the first celebration of the anniversary of the Embarkation of the Pilgrims from Delft Haven in 1620 and inaugurated a campaign to raise funds to construct a monument to the Pilgrims.² Approximately 2,500 people attended the celebration on August 1, which included a religious service, a great procession, and a dinner under a pavilion tent. Massachusetts governor John H. Clifford, Edward Everett, and Charles Sumner were among the speakers. The homes and businesses of Plymouth were lavishly decorated with flags, streamers, bunting, and wreaths. Decorative arches spanned the streets. No fewer than fifty-three editors and reporters covered the event for papers such as *The New York Courier and Enquirer*, *The New York Evening Mirror*, and *The New York Tribune*.

Whether Philleo's journey to Ply-

mouth was in response to this event or had been planned previously is unknown. In any case, he set out on August 9 and returned home to Suffield on September 1. As a result of his trip, he wrote the long manuscript that was later published in *Harper's*.³ In 1856 Philleo wrote that there was a need for the article because "Plymouth, in one sense one of the most celebrated places in the world, is in another sense one of the most obscure. A readable description, therefore, of this unknown locality with a familiar name was just the thing to attract attention and excite interest."⁴ The nineteen-page article provides a description of Philleo's train journey from Boston to Plymouth, historical background about the town, and a street-by-street tour, including descriptions of historic sites, homes, churches, and businesses (and even a mention of a daguerreotype saloon on Main Street). Two and one-half pages of the article are given over to a description of Pilgrim Hall and its collections. In addition, Philleo commented upon issues of preservation and industrialization and visited and described surrounding areas of historic interest.

Eighteen wood engravings of maps, views of the town, and furniture and artifacts from Pilgrim Hall illustrate the article. Of these eighteen engravings, all done by the New York firm of Benson J. Lossing and William Barritt, eight are based on the quarter- and sixth-plate daguerreotypes in SPNEA's collection.⁵ The other ten are based on maps, a painting, engravings, and possibly other daguerreotypes. Eight of SPNEA's daguerreotypes still have original handwritten labels on the back that not only describe

the image but also, by means of a letter designation, indicate the position of the image in the *Harper's* article. Of the six daguerreotypes from SPNEA's collection not included in "A Pilgrimage to Plymouth," four are variations of views in the article, and two were not used at all.

In the 1850s, in an effort to achieve a greater degree of visual accuracy, illustrated magazines such as *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* (which in 1855 became *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*) and *Harper's Weekly* used photographs as the basis for wood engravings. According to Sally Pierce in *Whipple and Black: Commercial Photographers in Boston*, "the phrase 'from a daguerreotype by' became the new guarantee of authenticity."⁶ For some reason, however, *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* chose not to indicate anywhere in the captions or the text that some of the images in "A Pilgrimage to Plymouth" were based on daguerreotypes.

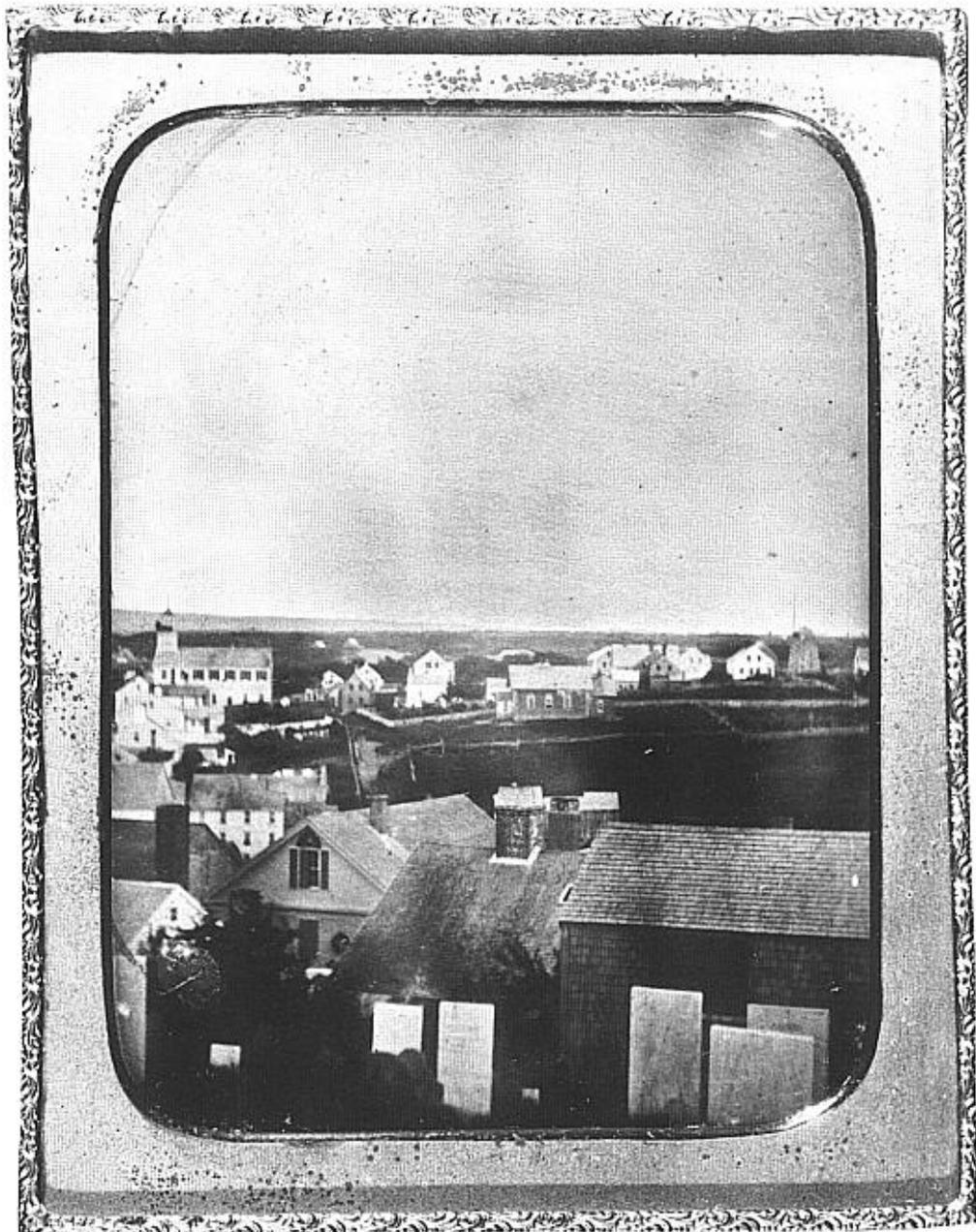
To date no indication has been found in written accounts about Philleo or in the Philleo family papers at the Connecticut Historical Society that he was a daguerreotypist. He was, however, a prolific part-time author. From the late 1840s until shortly before his death in 1858, he wrote for publications such as *The New York Tribune* and *Putnam's Monthly*. His serialized story, "Akin by Marriage," appeared in the first issue of the *Atlantic Monthly*. A novel, *Twice Married: A Story of Connecticut Life*, was published in 1855. By his own admission, however, he was "not an author by profession but a lawyer with a practice that from September to May keeps me too busy to attend to a pursuit which I must confess I like better to follow than the

avocation of my profession."⁷

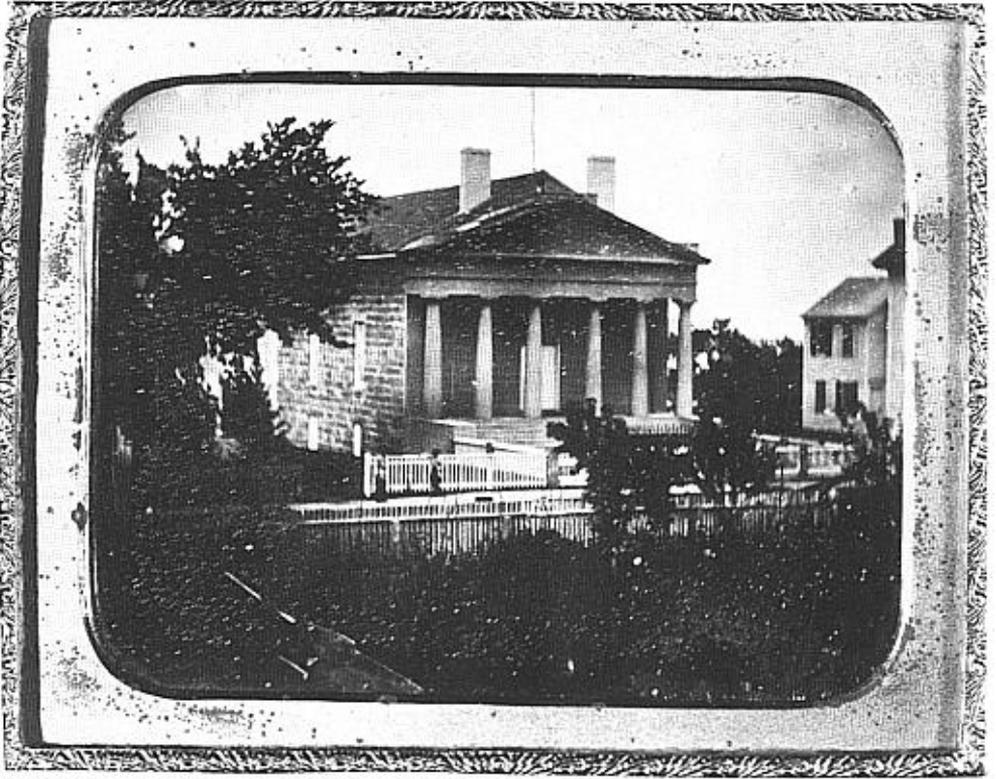
Philleo had hoped to expand "A Pilgrimage to Plymouth" into a book that he thought would have great appeal as a holiday book and as a guide book for visitors to Plymouth. To this end, in July 1857, he struck a bargain with Boston publisher and bookseller John P. Jewett, but Philleo died before the project could be completed.⁸

If Calvin Wheeler Philleo did not take the Plymouth views, who did? An entry in Philleo's account book suggests an answer to the question. In August of 1853 Philleo paid Stephen Lucas of Plymouth \$13.00 for "services in taking photographs."⁹ The *Plymouth Almanac, Directory, and Business Advertiser, for 1851* confirms that a Stephen Lucas practiced as a daguerreotypist in Plymouth, and an advertisement for "S. Lucas & Co., Daguerreotype . . . Artists, Main Street, Plymouth" exists in a private collection. Lucas may indeed have been the maker of the daguerreotypes long attributed to Philleo.

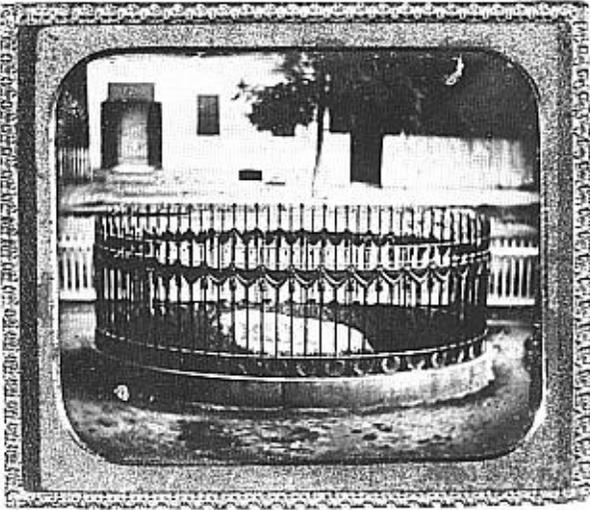
Attributable to a known daguerreotypist and created for a specific purpose, these early photographic images depict an identified panoramic view, specific buildings, and objects that have become icons of American material culture. Their survival in SPNEA's Library and Archives is a rare and fortunate occurrence.



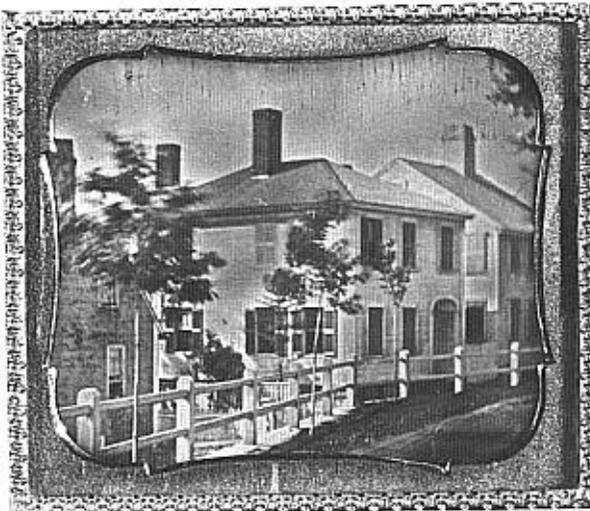
Watson's Hill from Burying Hill, quarter-plate daguerreotype, 1853. Probably owing to lack of space, a wood engraving based on this daguerreotype was not included in the Harper's article.



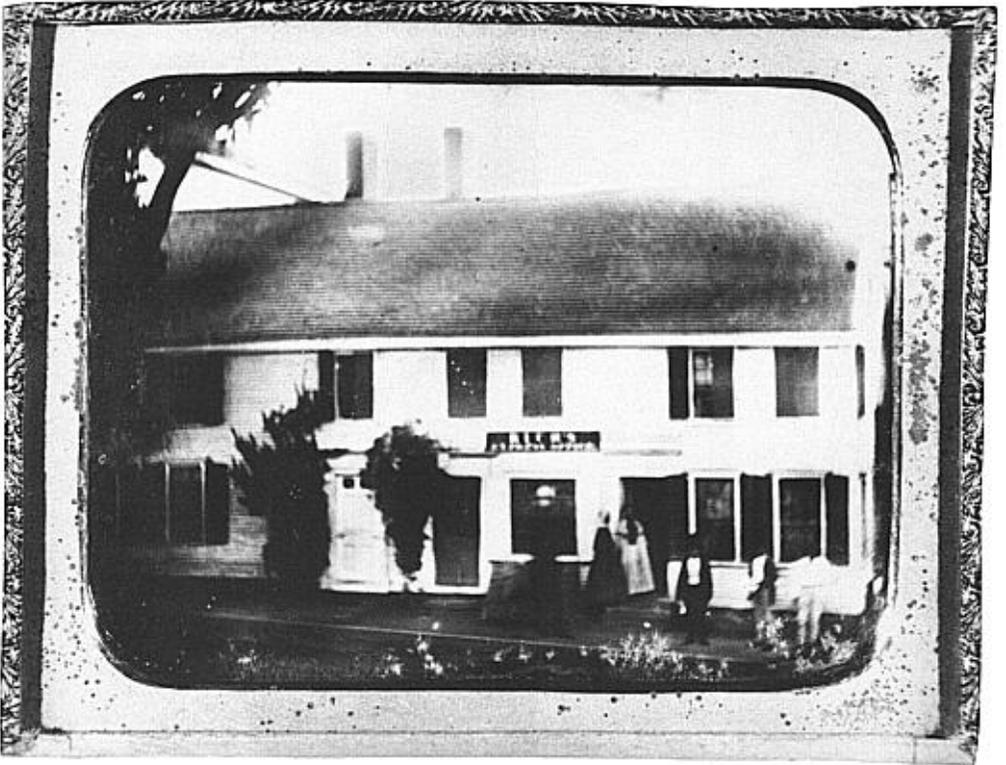
Pilgrim Hall, Plymouth, Massachusetts, quarter-plate daguerreotype, 1853. This building was constructed in 1824 by the Pilgrim Society as a memorial to the Pilgrims. Philleo described it as "a Grecian temple, of rough granite, with a wooden front, and a colonnade of wooden Doric columns, painted in imitation of wrought granite." He wrote that there was a dining-room, "where the Pilgrim Society and their fortunate guests are wont to eat capital dinners, on appropriate occasions, in commemoration of the famines experienced by their forefathers. Truly a most pleasant custom." He added that the hall above was "fitted up for...the preservation of interesting memorials of the Pilgrim Fathers and the ancient times of the Old Colony."



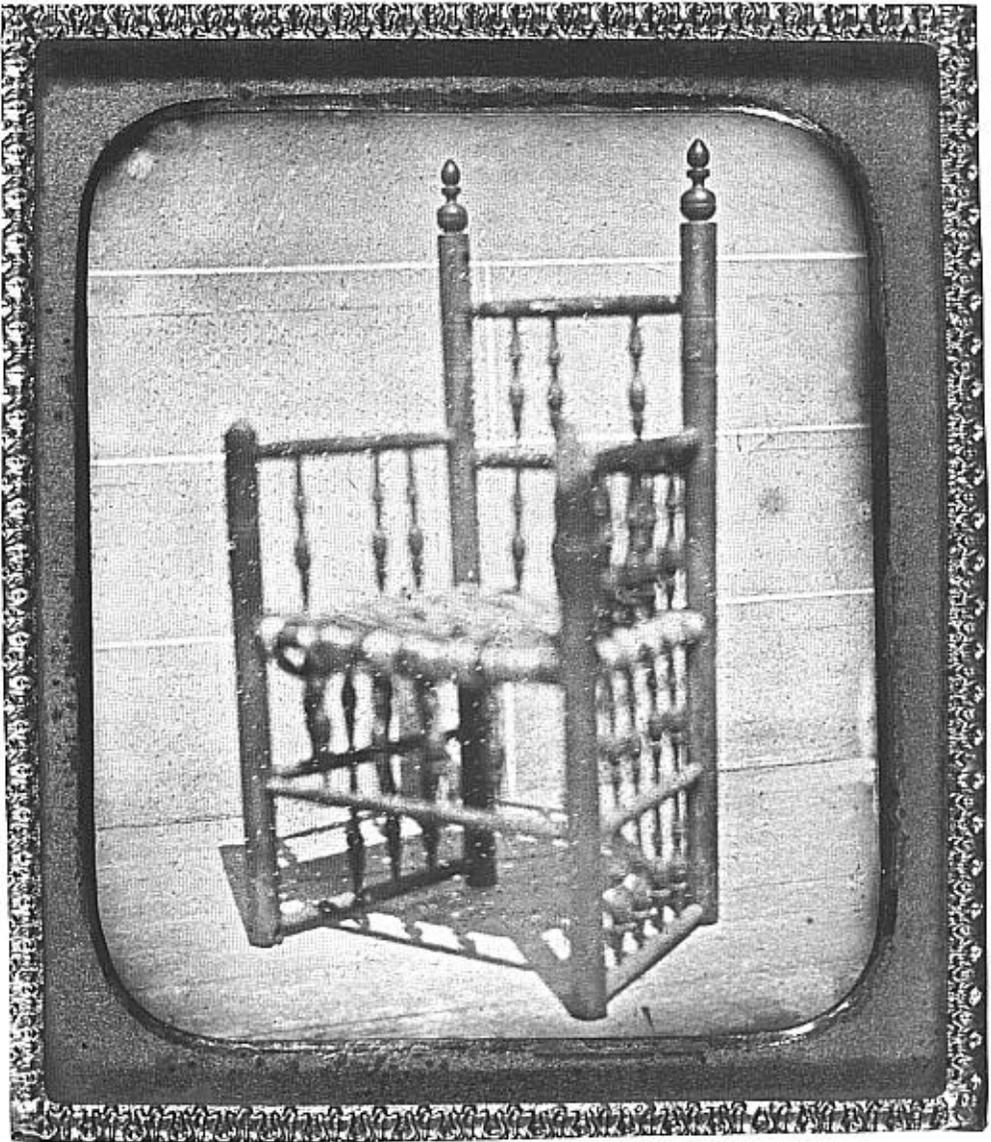
Fragment of Plymouth Rock, sixth-plate daguerreotype, 1853. In 1834 this fragment was moved from Town Square to the front of Pilgrim Hall. Philleo described the iron railing around it as "composed of alternate harpoons and boat-hooks, and inscribed with the names of the illustrious forty-one who subscribed the compact on board the Mayflower."



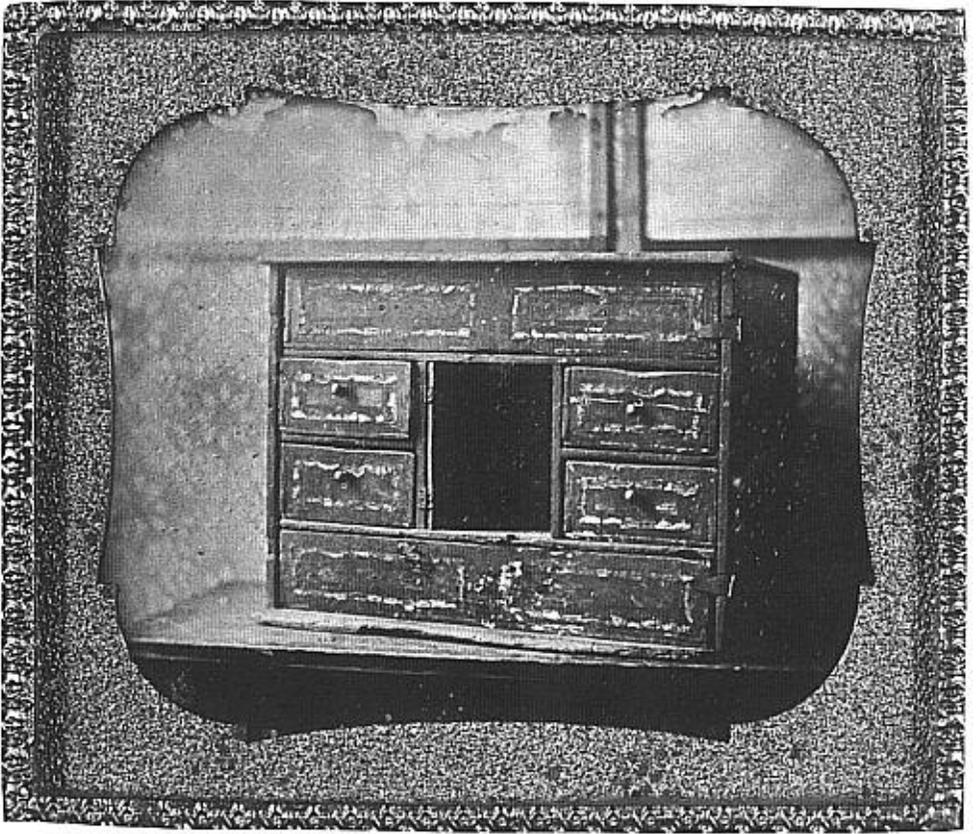
Captain Samuel D. Holmes house, Leyden Street, sixth-plate daguerreotype, 1853. This house was built on the former site of the Common House.



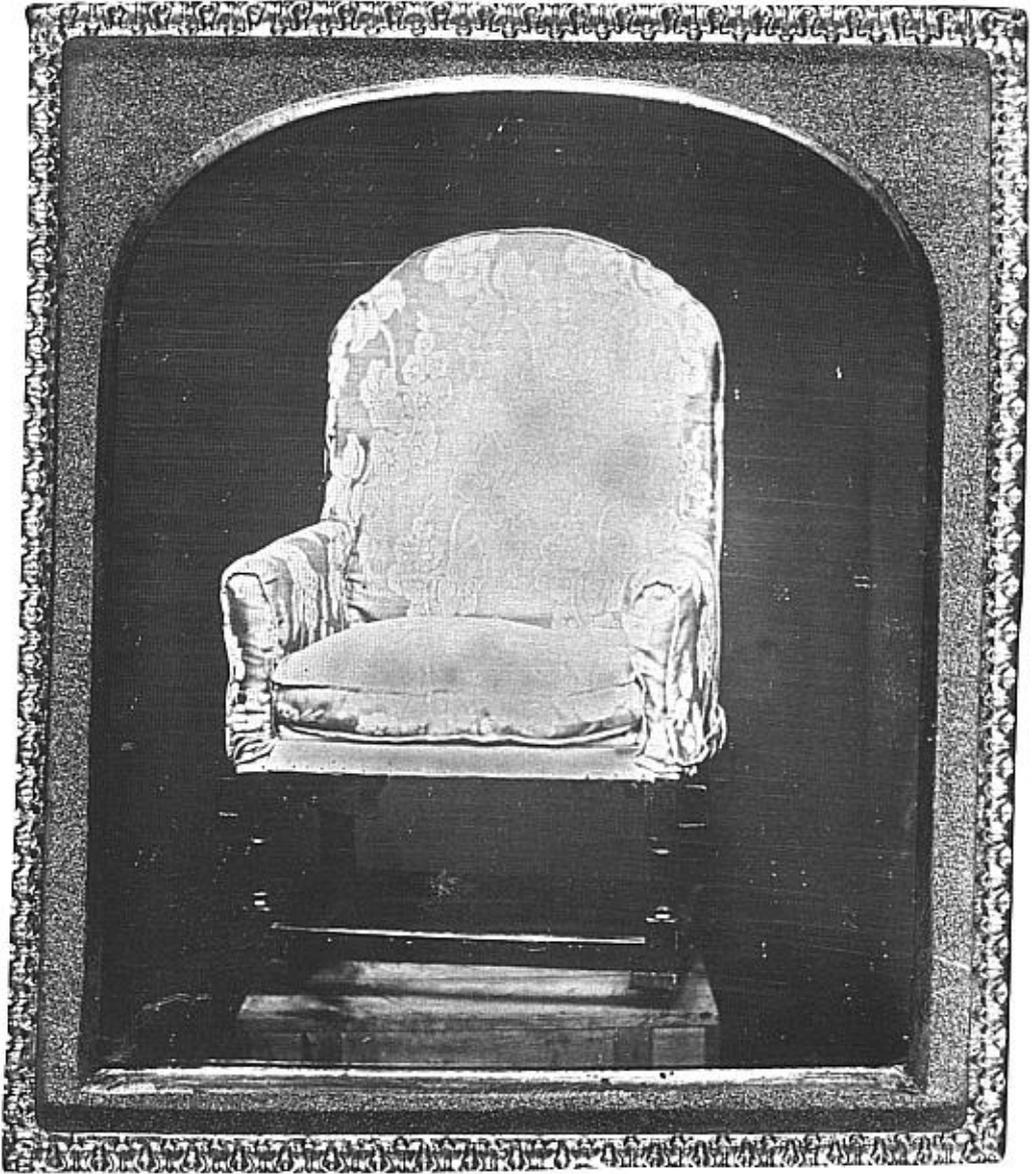
Post Office building, on the site of Governor Bradford's mansion, quarter-plate daguerreotype, 1853.



William Brewster's chair, Pilgrim Hall, sixth-plate daguerreotype, 1853. Two daguerreotypes were made of the chair, one inside Pilgrim Hall, the other outside on the porch of the building. Of Governor Carver's and Elder Brewster's chairs Philleo wrote that "each of these sacred relics had suffered from the pilferings of whittling tourists."

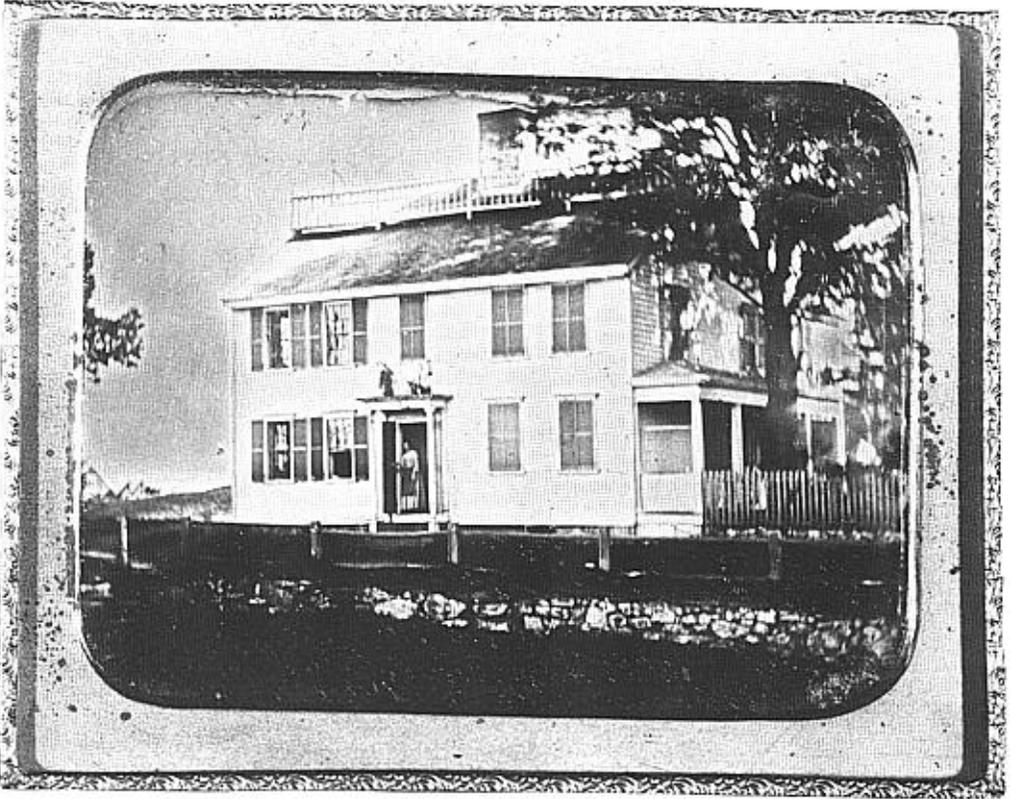


Cabinet of Peregrine White, the first child born to English parents in New England, sixth-plate daguerreotype, 1853.



Edward Winslow's chair, sixth-plate daguerreotype, 1853.

This daguerreotype records the appearance of the Winslow chair before it was restored. It was not included in "A Pilgrimage to Plymouth."



Joanna Davis house, North Street, quarter-plate daguerreotype, 1853. What appear to be ship models above the door may be decorations remaining from the celebration of the Embarkation of the Pilgrims that took place on August 1, 1853.



Joanna Davis house, wood engraving by Benson John Lossing and William Barritt for "A Pilgrimage to Plymouth," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, December 1853. Courtesy The Boston Athenaeum.



Hedge's Wharf, site of Plymouth Rock, quarter-plate daguerreotype, 1853. One of two similar daguerreotypes in the Plymouth collection (see cover), this image is probably the one that was used as the source for the wood engraving in Harper's. Philleo stated that "for scores of years [the rock] has remained a part of the pavement of the street, trodden under foot of man and beast . . . lying here covered with the sand and mire of this obscure street." The man in the top hat in the center of the group appears to be pointing at the rock.



Plymouth Rock, wood engraving by Benson John Lossing and William Barritt for "A Pilgrimage to Plymouth," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, December 1853. Courtesy The Boston Athenaeum. As in the daguerreotype, the man in the center appears to be pointing at Plymouth Rock.

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*Advertisement for S. Lucas and Co. This advertisement is attached to the back of a ninth-plate ambrotype portrait of a young man. Courtesy Chris Steele.*

NOTES

I wish to acknowledge Sally Pierce of the Boston Athenaeum, Chris Steele of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Peggy Baker of the Pilgrim Society, Lee Regan of the Plymouth Public Library, and David Bohl, Ann Clifford, and Richard Nylander of SPNEA for their help in preparing this article.

- 1 Philleo was the son of the Baptist minister and abolitionist Calvin Philleo and Elizabeth Wheeler Philleo. He was also the stepson of the teacher and abolitionist Prudence Crandall, who is known for her unsuccessful effort to establish a boarding school for black girls in Canterbury, Connecticut. In 1849 Philleo married Elizabeth Pease Norton of Suffield, Connecticut. They had no children.
- 2 For a recent and informative discussion of the motivation for this event and a history of the construction of the monument, see James F. O’Gorman, “The Colossus of Plymouth: Hammatt Billings’s National Monument to the Forefathers,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 54, 3 (September 1995): 278-301.
- 3 The Connecticut Historical Society holds a collection of Philleo family papers, including Calvin Wheeler Philleo’s diaries, account book, literary manuscripts ( including “A Pilgrimage to Plymouth”), and correspondence. According to an entry in Philleo’s account book, Harper and Brothers paid him \$182.50 for the article.
- 4 The quotation is from a letter Philleo wrote to Martin Johnson dated June 12, 1856, Connecticut Historical Society.
- 5 Daguerreotypes were available in sizes ranging from a whole plate (8 1/2" x 6 1/2")

to a sixteenth plate (1 3/8" x 1 5/8"). The most frequently used sizes were the quarter plate (3 1/4" x 4 1/4") and the sixth plate (2 3/4" x 3 1/4").

- 6 Sally Pierce, *Whipple and Black: Commercial Photographers in Boston* (Boston: The Boston Athenaeum, 1987), 8.
- 7 Philleo to Johnson, June 12, 1856, Connecticut Historical Society.
- 8 Although the manuscript for “A Pilgrimage to Plymouth” was never published as a book, seventeen of the eighteen wood engravings were reused by Harper and Brothers in *Nooks and Corners of the New England Coast* by Samuel Adams Drake, which was published in 1875. I am indebted to Lee Regan for this reference.
- 9 Account book of Calvin Wheeler Philleo, Jr., Connecticut Historical Society.