

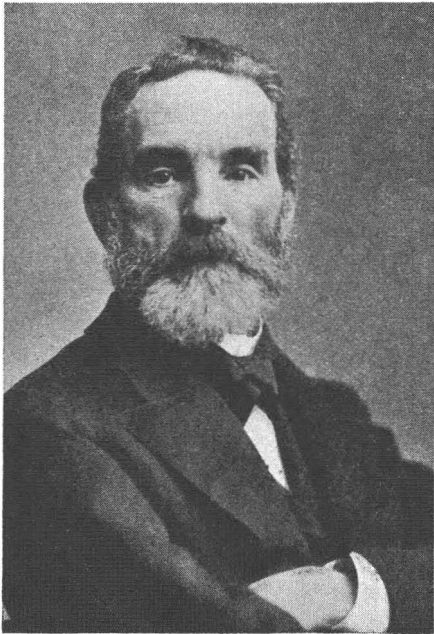
## THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS ARE THE HARDEST

### (A Brief History of Agfa AnSCO)

*Don D. Nibbelink, A.R.P.S.*

THE decade of the 1840's is not distant. It is an intimate close-at-hand part of the same fabric and pattern of which today is woven. One of the strands which was woven into this decade and which heralded the development of one of the largest photographic enterprises in the world was the birth of Agfa AnSCO's predecessor company in 1842 organized by a young man named Edward Anthony.

In those exciting days when the world was still startled by the news of the greatest scientific achievement of the era, namely that of photography, a young man walked into the laboratory of Samuel F. B. Morse, famed inventor of the telegraph. This young man was Edward Anthony who had recently completed a course at Columbia University and, having a natural bent for science and an ardent desire to learn the daguerrian art, asked the inventor for advice.



EDWARD ANTHONY

The conversation that took place between these two men is not reported. What is known, however, is that Morse promised to teach the art of making daguerreotypes, the first practical process of photography, to Anthony for a nominal fee. Lessons commenced immediately. Within a few months Anthony had mastered the process and was looked upon as an authority concerning its manipulation. Of course, in those days there were no texts one might consult on the subject and Anthony was forced to gain most of his knowledge from experimentation and also to prepare many of his own chemicals. Much of his experimenting was pursued while Edward Anthony was em-

ployed as a surveyor for the route of the Croton Aqueduct, an American engineering wonder of the time. That Anthony was one of the earliest pioneers in the development of the daguerreotype in America is written in a score of places, and is largely in the form of reminiscences by old-time daguerreotypists who were on the American scene themselves and came to know Anthony as a friend and advisor.

In 1841, although at the time Anthony was but 22 years old, he had an opportunity not only to help to make American history but to contribute to photographic history. For many years the boundary between Maine and Canada was a vexed problem of international relations. Finally, in 1841, the United States and Great Britain succeeded in arriving at an agreement, and the boundary was established. However, the line which was established had to be interpreted. This line, according to the treaty, was located along the "high lands" which

divided the watersheds of the St. John, Penobscot, and the rivers flowing into the St. Lawrence. Britain maintained that no such highlands existed, but the United States contended that the highlands were a reality. In order to settle the question, a survey of the area was projected.

James Renwick was put in charge of the survey for the United States Government, and knowing of Anthony's great success with the daguerreotype process, asked Anthony to become a member of the survey party, believing that some practical advantage might be enjoyed by the use of this strange apparatus. An-



A CLOSE-UP OF AN OLD-TIME PHOTOGRAPHER

thony joined the expedition, quite confident that his "sun pictures" would prove to be visible evidence that the highlands did exist.

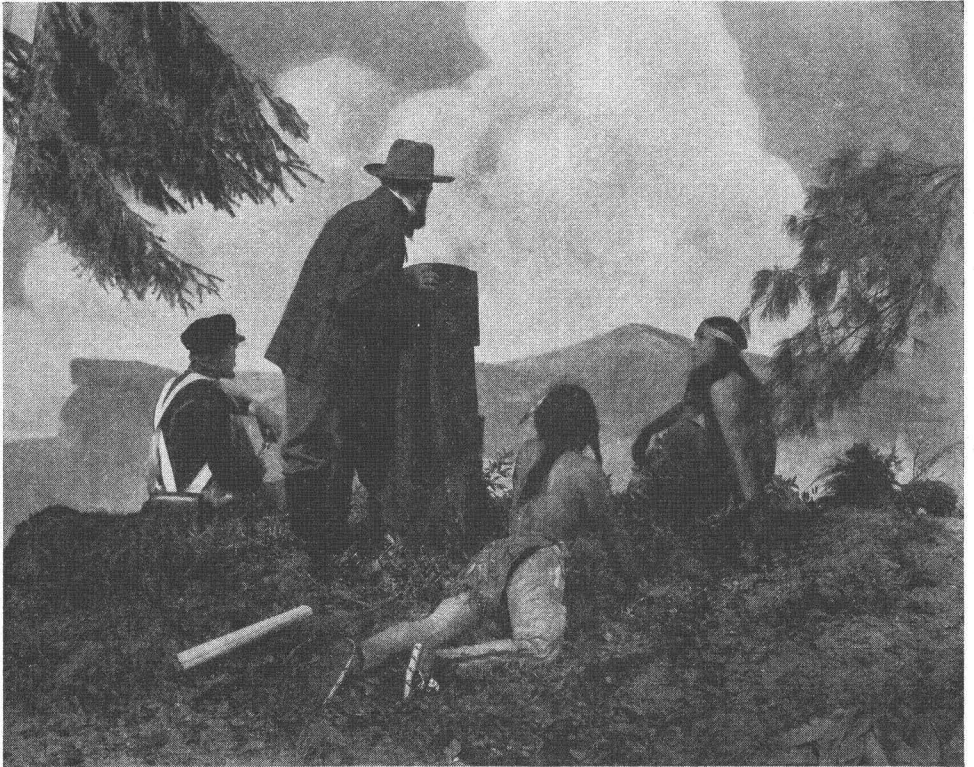
Taking pictures in the wilderness country of the North nearly a century ago was not a lark. Horses, boats and broad shoulders were the only modes of transportation. Photographic apparatus was very heavy then, and yet very delicate. To get an outfit safely to the locality where it was needed was itself no easy task. Aside from the transportation question, it should be remembered that the tripod as applied to cameras had not yet been invented. A matter of several minutes were required to expose a daguerreotype plate. Of course, there were no shutters, but fortunately, none were needed. The camera was set on stumps, logs and stones, or anything that happened to be convenient, when pictures were taken.

In spite of the primitive conditions of transportation and picture-making, Anthony was able to make many wonderful daguerreotypes of the highlands. These pictures were indisputable evidence that the highlands did exist, and it is said that largely due to these daguerreotypes, the boundary question was disposed of at the time.

As for the contribution to the history to photography adverted to, one writer said that "it may be safely assumed that this was the first practical scientific

use of the art that had ever been made." It was the first time in the history of the world when a government had made practical use of photography.

Directly after the conclusion of this expedition, Anthony went to Washington, where he made daguerreotypes of members of Congress. The Committee of Military Affairs, of which Thomas H. Benton was chairman, gave Anthony the use of the committee room for his photographic practice. It is almost certain that Anthony was the first practical daguerreotypist in Washington, and since the art at this time was in its infancy, doubtless the novelty, if, indeed, not the beauty, of the artist's daguerrean accomplishments tempted the law-makers to



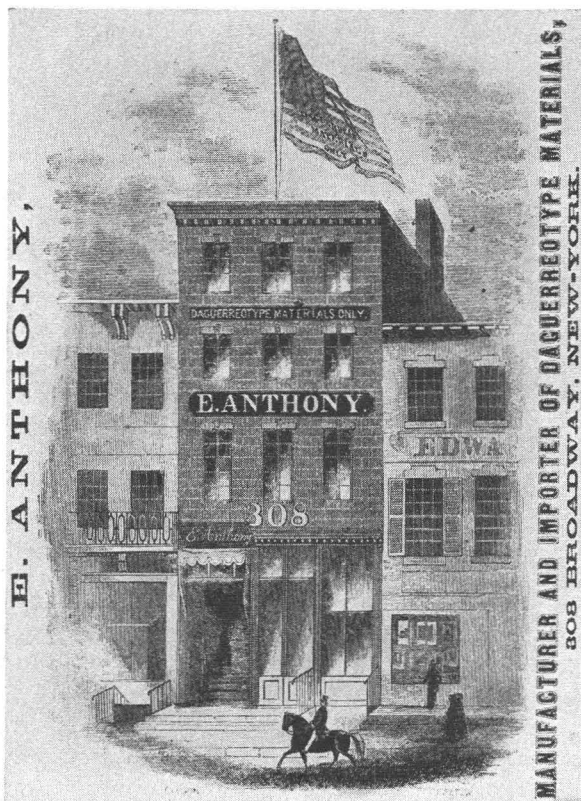
ANTHONY PHOTOGRAPHING MAINE-CANADIAN BORDER

absent themselves, temporarily from their duties in order to be painted "by the pencil of light."

Thomas H. Benton, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Military Affairs, offered the partners the use of the Committee Room, and daguerreotypes were secured of all the members of Congress, these daguerreotypes later forming the basis of a National Daguerrian Gallery which was on exhibition for many years in New York City. The entire invaluable collection, with the single exception of the daguerreotype of John Quincy Adams, was unfortunately destroyed by fire in 1852. Before this catastrophe occurred, however, a remarkable steel engraving based on daguerreotype likenesses of noted men, taken originally by Edward Anthony in the early forties, was executed in 1846 by T. Donley, an artist of wide repute. The scene, which was appropriately entitled "Clay's Farewell to the Senate," represented the Senate Chamber upon the retirement in 1842 of

Henry Clay. A few slight anachronisms committed intentionally contributed to the interest of the scene without materially detracting from its historical accuracy.

The magnitude of the task will be better appreciated if it is borne in mind that all the heads were accurately copied from Anthony's daguerreotypes which had been procured with great difficulty in many instances. An idea of the enormous photographic work involved can be gained by mention of a few of the celebrities included. In the group on the Senate floor are found: Clay, Calhoun, Webster, Van Buren, Benton, and all the old fighters of that time. In the gallery



FIRST PHOTOGRAPHIC SUPPLY COMPANY IN AMERICA

are, among others, Samuel F. B. Morse, John Audubon, Mrs. John Quincy Adams, Henry W. Longfellow, Albert Gallatin, and James K. Polk—all of them having been photographed by Anthony. Concerning the steel plate reproduction which was the largest (32 by 40 inches) ever made up to that time, the *New York Tribune* stated: "It forms one of the noblest adornments for a parlor or library we have ever seen."

His success in Washington did not, however, content the imagination of the young photographer permanently, for within a short time he returned to New York City where he opened a second Daguerrean gallery.

Anthony's name can always be found in any list of leading daguerreotypists in New York. A typical appraisal, made in 1888, of the now famous old-timers stated: "... we find that during the first decade of its (the daguerreotype)





OLD-TIME PORTRAIT STUDIO

practice in this country, many pictures were palmed off upon the people that were perfect abortions in all points. If it had not been redeemed by such men as Edward Anthony, Abraham Bogardus, Matthew Brady, Jeremiah Gurney and others of their caliber, the daguerreotype would have been consigned to oblivion before the close of the first decade."

"DAGUERREOTYPE MATERIALS ONLY"

The success of the Washington and New York studios—plus the fact that new portrait galleries were springing up in all parts of the country—prompted Anthony to go into business as a dealer in photographic materials. In spite of his friends' criticism of "There are too many in photography already," in 1842 Anthony hung a large sign out in front of 308 Broadway which read "Daguerreotype Materials Only." It is interesting to note that this was one of the first photographic supply companies in the world and was the earliest predecessor of the company that is now Agfa Ansco (the familiar "Ansco" being a contraction of the first two letters of "Anthony" and the first syllable of "Scovill," an early American brass-manufacturing concern whose photographic department merged with Anthony).

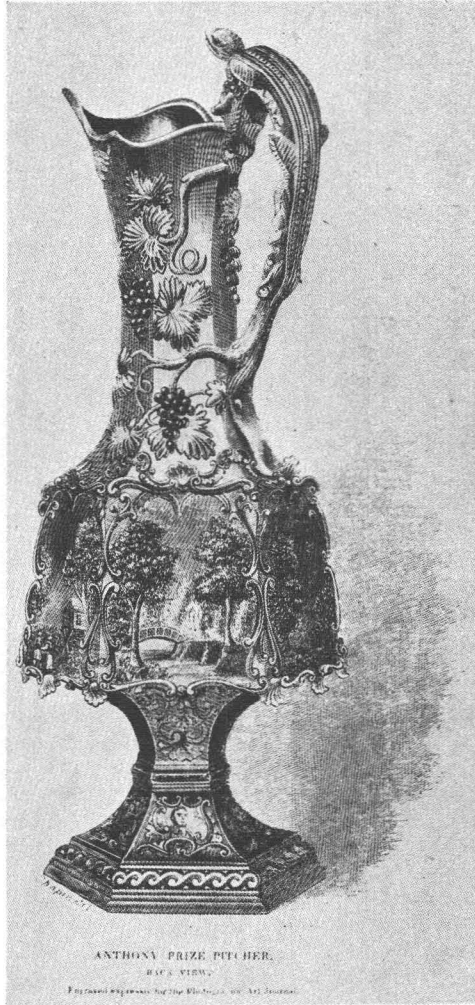
Experience quickly proved the wisdom of his decision. The demand for daguerreotypes on the part of the public, and the number of studios, constantly increased. Since at first daguerrians mainly depended on a few French importers for photographic apparatus, there was very little produced domestically. Later, however, in order to meet the rising demand for cameras, chemicals and other equipment, Anthony became a manufacturer of these materials, as well as a dealer. Before the decade of the '40s drew to a close, the variety and quality of Anthony's materials had made Anthony's National Daguerrian Depot respected by photographers "from Philadelphia to California as there is not an article in any degree connected with photography that they do not either manufacture or supply."

#### A WORLD-WIDE ENTERPRISE

Although new photographic processes involving the use of the negative were being developed, the daguerrotype, which required a separate plate for each finished picture, was still at the height of its vogue when in 1852 Henry T. Anthony (1814-1884) joined the firm his brother had founded. The Company, which had grown into what then was an enormous enterprise—with three factories and a world-wide distribution, soon changed its name to "E & H. T. Anthony & Co." Henry, who later worked out many improvements over existing methods and formulas, is officially credited with: (1) being foremost in the introduction and practical use of collodion and paper printing processes; (2) the discovery of the ammonia fuming process by which paper prints were immensely improved in quality and sensitivity; and (3) having been the first to produce an instantaneous picture, thus becoming the father of the modern snapshot.

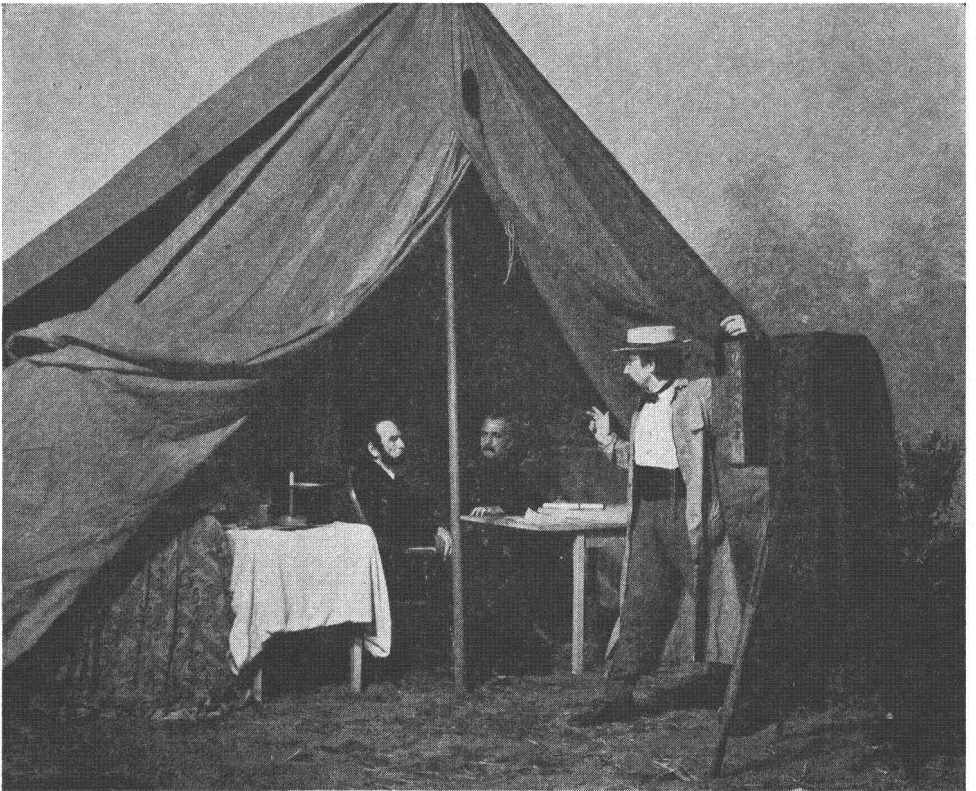
By conducting the world's first daguerreotype prize contest, as a means of encouraging a higher development of the daguerrean art, Edward Anthony achieved another important photographic "first." Awards were offered for the best group of four pictures submitted between July 1 and November 1, 1853. The first prize, "A handsome silver pitcher highly ornamented and valued at \$500.00" was awarded to Jeremiah Gurney, a well-known New York photographer.

Although the world's first photographic publication was the short-lived



FIRST PHOTOGRAPHIC CONTEST AWARD

*Daguerrian Journal* which appeared in New York in 1850, the enterprising Edward Anthony soon followed with a journal of his own. *Anthony's Photographic Bulletin* really had its origin in 1855 when a periodical was issued yearly under the title of *Anthony's Bulletin of Photographic Invention and Improvement*. In 1870 it emerged under the former name as a full-fledged magazine so valuable to photographers that a demand arose for a monthly issuance, in which form it continued until the turn of the century. This note-



MATTHEW BRADY PHOTOGRAPHING LINCOLN AND  
MCCLELLAN DURING CIVIL WAR

worthy publication then was taken over by the American Photographic Publishing Company and today is generally regarded as the oldest ancestor of the present *American Photography* magazine.

During the last half of the 1850's, the collodion wet-plate process was announced. This process incorporated the use of a glass negative from which any desired number of positive prints could be obtained, and greatly reduced the time of exposure. The Anthonys pioneered again by introducing a collodion of superior merit which was used universally by photographers for the next twenty years. Among the outstanding contemporary workers who used these Anthony materials were such men as Matthew Brady and Thomas Roche, famed Civil War stereoscope photographers, and William H. Jackson whose photographs of the West prompted Congress to set aside Yellowstone as the country's first national park. Incidentally, the stereoscopes, many of which were manufactured by Anthony in the '60s and '70s, were the earliest photographic instruments to

enjoy a tremendously popular position in the American home equal to that of today's modern camera.

The end of the wet-plate era was foreshadowed when the Anthonys made successful dry plates in their own experiments, and again in 1880 when the dry plate process reached a stage of development which permitted commercial production. In May of 1880, a year before Edward died, the Anthony firm offered the Defiance plate for sale, a dry plate of their own manufacture. Shortly after this (1887) the company bought a controlling interest in the manufacture of the first flexible, transparent photographic film, invented by Reverend Hannibal Goodwin who had consulted frequently with the Anthonys during the course of his experiments. This roll film is responsible for the great motion picture industry and picture-taking as it is practiced today.

In 1900, just prior to the formation of Anthony & Scovill, Anthony's manufacturing operations had been moved from New York City to Binghamton, for with an expanding demand for bromide and other papers, new quarters and an assured supply of well water were essential.

Shortly afterwards, the Scovill Camera Works moved to Binghamton, and since then, Binghamton has been the home of Ansco film, paper and camera production and sales.

Mention of film brings up the very celebrated patent litigation between Goodwin Film and Camera Company, in which Anthony and Scovill had acquired a 51% interest, and Eastman Kodak Company. Begun in 1902, it ended in 1914, with a Circuit Court of Appeals verdict which awarded the Reverend Hannibal Goodwin (then dead some 14 years) the sole right to the invention of flexible, transparent photographic film. This legal controversy is the most important in the whole history of photography, and without lessening in any way acknowledgment of the many important contributions to photographic progress made by Mr. George Eastman and the company he founded, it seems fitting to accord the Reverend Hannibal Goodwin his proper place in photographic history.

There is not much to record in the way of new photographic processes from the Ansco of 1907 to 1928, when through an exchange of stock with Agfa, the Binghamton enterprises became Agfa Ansco. The merger resulted in addition of many new products, including, in 1937, the first high speed film "Superpan Press."

In regard to the contributions in the field of photogrammetry, Agfa Ansco designed several photographic film emulsions which are used explicitly for aerial photography,\* including the new Ansco Color.

The basis of the new type of color film we call Ansco Color was made available in 1938, but the intricate manufacturing technique was not worked out until a few months ago, when some special photographic needs of the Armed Services brought along a successful concentration of research and development efforts—and Ansco Color emerged.

Ansco Color Film, a laboratory product six months ago, is now in continuous but limited production, and each month that goes by brings a little improvement in color balance here, and a little improvement there in methods of production. These are days when individual leisurely approaches to problems must give way to continuous attack along all available avenues, and it would be remiss not to extend full credit to our Binghamton technicians for their effective work in overcoming very real difficulties.

\* See the article entitled, "Progress Made in Sensitized Materials Used in Aerial Photography," by Verne H. Reckmeyer, in the October-November-December 1938 issue of *PHOTOGRAMMETRIC ENGINEERING*.



Unlike most direct color films, Ansco Color can be developed under ordinary darkroom conditions. It does not have to be returned to Binghamton for processing—a tremendous advantage in these days when almost immediate production of a color photograph may be needed at some quite distant point.

Unfortunately for the civilian color enthusiast, there will be no immediate opportunity for meeting his needs; he simply has to be patient and await the coming days when war needs and priorities will be things of the past.

And finally, Ansco in 1942 presents the latest addition to its operations. Converting the Camera Works to war materials production, it became evident that the supply of optical parts might become a bottle neck. In April, we decided to undertake optical grinding and polishing. In July, we finished the first group of prisms, the first fruits of a new Ansco venture which promises to become an important part of our present and future operations.

So today, Agfa Ansco, as it did in the days of the Anthonys, Anthony & Scovill, and Ansco, stands once more on its own feet—an American enterprise with an unbroken record now entering upon a second century of service to American photography.

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