

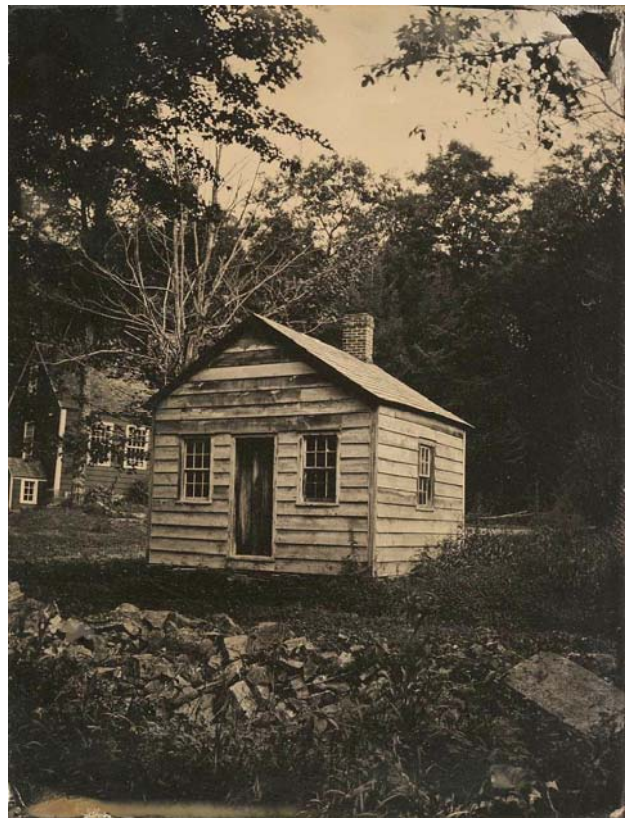
ALCOHOLIC MYTH: “You can’t use Denatured Alcohol in your working collodion formula”.

So the so-called “Experts” flatly say. They generally leave it at that with little or no explanation. If you are a good devotee, you dare not question their edict. So you are left with the daunting and expensive task of finding the more traditional 190 proof Grain Alcohol, such as the venerable “Everclear” brand. You soon find out you can only buy it, or an equivalent brand, in only a few states you probably don’t live in or near. But, of course there’s always the Internet, at “bootlegger” prices, if you can find the guy. All because of this lingering dumb myth.

The truth of the matter is you don’t have to use any 190 proof Grain Alcohol. You can mix up your working batch of collodion with plain, cheaper, easy to find hardware store variety Denatured Alcohol. I use “Sunnyside” brand. It is actually labeled as “denatured alcohol solvent”. It works beautifully! You cannot tell any difference in the image quality verses collodion that has been prepared using grain alcohol. The fact is Denatured Alcohol is mostly grain alcohol with less than 4% Methanol added to make it “denatured” (poisonous to drink), so, no liquor tax is added. That’s why it’s so much cheaper. I personally, when first starting out doing wet-plate, went several years using only Denatured Alcohol until I landed on a source for 190 proof Grain Alcohol. Since then I have gone back and forth with it. The only downside of denatured alcohol I have been able to detect is that the collodion doesn’t smell as pleasant and you need to be a bit more careful about breathing the fumes on account of the Methanol in it. As far as the shelf life of your working collodion, it is no different than if you used 190 proof grain alcohol.



**5x7 Tintype of three students at '08 workshop.
"Poe Boy Collodion" formula.**



**Quarter Plate Tintype of old building, '05.
Done with "Old Workhorse" mixed only with
Denatured Alcohol and no ether or grain alcohol
added to the collodion.**



**Half-plate size Albumen print from
"Poe Boy Collodion" negative, '08.**



**Half-plate size "Poe Boy Collodion" negative,
mildly intensified, used to make albumen print.**

Here's a very fine working collodion formula I came up with a few years ago that I and many of my students have used with great success:

"Poe Boy Collodion"

240 ml plain Collodion
300 ml Denatured Alcohol
6 ml Distilled Water
3 grams Potassium Bromide
5 grams Potassium Iodide

Mix as follows: Add 300 ml of Denatured Alcohol to the 240 ml of plain Collodion. Stir with a glass rod till clear. Next, add 5 grams of Potassium Iodide to 6 ml of Distilled Water in a separate small beaker. Stir till it is thoroughly dissolved. Now add 3 grams of Potassium Bromide to the same beaker and stir till it is completely dissolved. If it has trouble dissolving and clearing, warm the solution over a heat source, while stirring, till it does. If it still hasn't dissolved completely, add a little more distilled water drop by drop, till it does. Now, add this mix to the collodion and denatured alcohol mix and stir with a glass rod to uniformity. Add a couple drops of red Tincture of Iodine to help speed the ripening process up or you can add some old "Poe Boy" collodion instead, if you have that on hand. Set aside for a couple of days for it to clear and settle out and then it will be ready to make splendid images. Shelf life is about half a year.

Notice: This formula uses no Cadmium salts in it, like so many other popular working formulas. This should be a boon to those who fear Cadmium (of which I am not one), or just can't get any, or find them too expensive. Also, notice this formula calls for no "ether". This can often be a difficult and hard to get chemical as well and yep, some people have phobias about it, too.

"O.K., fine," you say, "but what about the varnish formula? It's got to have 190 proof grain alcohol, right?" Nope! Not even it. Again, I went for years using Denatured Alcohol in the varnish and it worked fine. All you have to do in your standard Sandarac varnish formula is use denatured alcohol volume for volume in place of the grain alcohol and also, and very importantly, add twice as much water to the formula.

Now, a word about Chloroform added to your varnish formula, as some current and some early wet-plate era formulas spout. It does absolutely nothing for it. No difference in the results, whether you use any in it or not. And if you thought grain alcohol and ether were hard to get, try getting Chloroform!