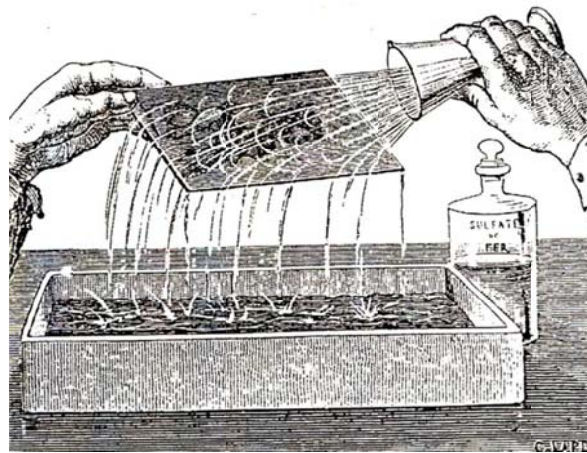


Myth: If it came out of an old 19th century manual or journal it is always right.

Wrong! Only some of the time is the information in those old manuals and papers right on the money. Some of the time it may be sorta right or half right, and then there's times it's pure rubbish. You can easily be bamboozled by formulas, text or old woodcut illustrations. In my many years of researching wet-plate photography and trying a whole slew of collodion formulas, I found many to be a total waste of chemistry and time. Same goes for some developer formulas. Then there is stuff in the text of old manuals and write ups that did not prove out and should not to be taken literally. The "Yellow Light" safelight is one case in point. It appeared numerous places in the old manuals and photography journals of the day. At least one source suggested making a field darkroom tent out of yellow calico fabric. Oh! how pretty that would be, but fatal to your images. They would be totally fogged. This would also be true if you put yellow fabric over a window or used yellow stained glass in your darkroom window or dark box window. Experienced wet-platers all know today that yellow light will fog their plates and so they use red, reddish orange, or dark amber light to work under during those steps in the process that require safelight conditions. Be hanged old manuals!

Then there is this woodcut, called Developing the Plate, often seen in the old literature and even in a few modern write ups.



If you try to imitate this picture with your developer pour, you will get weak and uneven development, big time. Where the developer first slams onto the plate you will end up with a black hole on the end of the plate with the rest of the image being fairly faint and uneven in overall density. This happens because you have driven off much of the necessary silver salts on the plate's surface needed to build up the image properly. When you do in-hand-development, as this cut is trying so poorly to represent, the idea

is to keep as much developer on the surface of the plate and as little as possible from running over the edges. Granted, a heap of developer being dashed upon a plate in one big mighty splash looks really exciting and obviously is not a hard technique to master. But it simply isn't the right way to do it. The correct way to do it is much more subdued, gentle, and far more even and thorough. That too is in the old manuals. Sorting out the fact from fiction has taken me a lot of years.

Now, you would think a U.S. Patent would be as correct as it gets, wouldn't you? Well, not the one Hamilton Smith took out on the Melainotype {latter known as a Ferrottype or Tintype} in 1856! It, like a lot of patents that had secret proprietary information in them, was doctored up with false ingredients in order to trip up anyone who would try to take that information and produce the same product without paying any royalties to the guy who invented it and held the patent. I know first hand about this, having long ago mixed up a batch of Black Japan using Hamilton Smith's formula from the patent description. Yes, it produced a fine glossy black finish, but it totally reacted with the collodion yielding completely fogged images. Only after playing some hunches I gleaned from several old manuals did I finally get the basis together for a working Black Japan. It's in my manual now. There's no patent on it. You just must buy my manual. Heck, it took me many years to perfect it! But, like I said at the beginning of this piece, there is gold in them thar old archives. You just have to bust a lot of rocks and go through a heap of tailings for it. At the least, they can be fun to read and especially after you have done the wet-plate process for awhile and are into a comfortable working routine. A routine that you of course learned from the "Doers Guide" and possibly from a workshop or tutorial at "Camp Tintype"!