The Curious, Little-Known Photography of Lloyd Mifflin (1846-1921)

Yitong Wang ’11
Submitted for Departmental Honors to: Department of Art & Art History
Course Title: Uncovering Lloyd Mifflin’s Identity as a Photographer
Graduation Date: 05/14/11
Submitted on: November 22, 2011
Abstract

The honors thesis presents a study of Lloyd Mifflin’s (1846-1921) photography. By closely examining selected images from the relatively unknown corpus of extant glass-plate negatives, it argues for his identity as a serious amateur photographer who inventively explored photography’s visual potential. Mifflin is mostly known as “painter of the Susquehanna River,” while his activity as a photographer largely has been neglected. The Lancaster County Historical Society holds a collection of 150 glass negatives and the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg holds another collection of over 300. Digitally generated positive images from these glass-plate negatives (around 500) constitute the body of evidence upon which this study relies. Until now, two scholars have briefly discussed Mifflin’s photography, and both primarily argue that these photographs served merely as visual aids for Mifflin’s painting practice. After offering an overview of late 19th and early 20th century American photography, the thesis then analyses Mifflin’s extant photographs in relation to his biography as well as the photographic and artistic trends contemporary to his time that may have shaped his response to photography as an expressive medium.

Keywords: Lloyd Mifflin, Lancaster County amateur photography, Late 19th century American photography, American vernacular photography
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Thesis Statement

There is very little written about Lloyd Mifflin’s (1846-1921) photography. Born to an eminent family in Columbia, Pennsylvania, Mifflin is best known as a regional painter of the Susquehanna River and its environs, whereas his work as a photographer has been a recent discovery. Dr. Irwin Richman, a professor emeritus at Pennsylvania State University, has done perhaps the most extensive study of Mifflin’s paintings and sketchbooks. He briefly discusses Mifflin’s photographic practice in two published articles about the artist. Dr. Richman sees Mifflin’s attitude towards photography as in accord with the view of James Jackson Jarves (1818-1888), an American newspaper editor and art critic whom Mifflin met while in Europe. In *Art Thoughts*, Jarves comments that “photography is not art, but a process of science to which art may add grace and beauty...further, it is a useful servant of the artist.”¹ Dr. Richman thus claims that for Mifflin photographs were “studies or aide-memoire” for his paintings.² He then goes on to point out that occasionally the photographs were exact prototypes for the paintings. Moreover, Richman sees Mifflin as not a serious photographer because he was seldom concerned about exposure and was a sloppy technician, which has led to the poor preservation state of his plates.³

While I find aspects of Richman’s argument reasonable, I also regard it as taking too narrow a view of Mifflin’s photography by emphasizing his putative intention. In approaching an artist’s body of work, the biographical method regards

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² Ibid., 341.
³ Ibid., 341.
the artist as the primary source of information about the art. Other approaches such as the stylistic method or the social historical method, on the other hand, treat a body of work as an aesthetic construct in and of itself, or as a reflection of larger socio-political values and pressures. These methods place the works in a particular context and study the connection between the two regardless of the artist’s intention. Tribal sculpture or anonymous religious murals, works produced in response to devotional ritual, invite this approach. Should we disregard the aesthetic quality of these works simply due to an absence of knowledge about their makers’ intentions?

I thus propose that the formal properties of Mifflin’s photography speak for Mifflin’s identity as a serious amateur photographer. That a portion of Mifflin’s photographs were studies for his paintings is admittedly true, yet it only represents one aspect of Mifflin’s experimentation with the photographic medium. As Richman notes in his articles, there are approximately 2,300 extant negatives, of which a large portion displays varying themes and styles.\(^4\) As a painter, Mifflin focused on scenes of the Susquehanna River and rural landscapes. There are a few extant painted self-portraits as well. However, with the camera, Mifflin created quite a large number of photographs that are entirely different from the themes he explored as a painter. For instance, images of different city streets and architecture, horses and carriages, portraits of possibly family members and friends, different interiors, theatrical and still life setups, numerous snow scenes, and even snapshot-

\(^4\) Ibid., 341.
like photographs that, with their unconventional visual traits, were quite unusual at the time.

The portrait shown below is one instance of Mifflin’s more innovative photographs. *Chuckling Woman* is arguably semi-composed, in that Mifflin set up the white drapery as the backdrop. He was also conscious of the figure’s shadow cast upon the draped cloth. The lighting is unconventional in that it does not illuminate the figure from a full-frontal angle. Yet this lighting creates an atmosphere that teeters between a consciously composed picture reflecting an aesthetic intention and a mundane moment in everyday life. In any case, the play between the shadow of the figure and the lit up side of the woman’s face and hand makes the image more vibrant and spontaneous than a formal photographic portrait.

![Figure 1: Chuckling Woman](image)

The woman appears to be chuckling as she holds the napkin up to her lips, and Mifflin captures this precise moment with his camera.
Chuckling Woman possesses characteristics of vernacular, snapshot photography because of the impression of spontaneity it communicates. Yet the image, with its adroit visual arrangement and subtle lighting, also reveals Mifflin’s careful design and serious artistic considerations. Mifflin’s lifelong artistic training and intuitive romantic vision enabled him to create certain exquisite photographs such as this, and he was evidently not aiming to replicate a conventional photographic composition. Rather, he deliberately strived to create an image that plays with visual conventions and accords more with the pictorial experimentation of amateur photographers.

Fig.2  Coach Almost in Motion

Coach Almost in Motion is another snapshot-like photograph that speaks to Mifflin’s diverse experiments with the photographic medium. Quite pioneering is the sense of the “traveling/moving photographer” the image conveys. The strange perspective from which the horse is seen reveals Mifflin’s position when he took this
photograph. He was most likely sitting in the carriage behind the horse with his
photography equipment, and he captured this peculiar view as the coach moved
down the country road. The stripe of shadow that runs diagonally along the horse’s
back may have been cast by Mifflin’s tripod, since the distinct shadow of the mailbox
indicates the strong natural light at the time of exposure.

Chuckling Woman and Coach Almost in Motion, two examples among other
inventive images, suggest that in taking up photography as a serious practice Mifflin
certainly did not settle for simply setting up the camera in an interior or an outside
scene in and in order to photograph neatly composed subjects. He seems to have
given free rein to a curiosity towards the kinds of images this new medium could
create. These curious photographs contradict Richman’s conclusion that Mifflin’s
photographic practice was merely an “aide-memoire” for painting. The experimental
subjects and peculiar visual properties that characterize this portion of Mifflin’s
work indicates that he regarded photography as a medium for self-expression,
rather than a mere aid to his painting practice.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Mifflin underlined Jarves’ comment
on photography around 1872, when he sailed to Liverpool and later traveled to Italy
with Jarves.\(^5\) Based on the clothing worn by subjects in Mifflin’s photographs, his
highest period of photographic activity occurred in the 1880s through the early
1890s. Thus, it is entirely possible that he was more conservative, and even critical
of the medium during the early years of his artistic career, whereas he later formed

\(^5\) Irwin Richman, ”Lloyd Mifflin, Pennsylvania Painter and Photographer,” (Antiques
Magazine August 1984), 341.
a new and evidently more progressive understanding of and approach towards photography.

Mifflin’s extant photography gives ample proof to his awareness of the various photographic trends at the time, and thus his serious involvement with photography. There is evidence that Mifflin visited Philadelphia frequently and attended various art-related events. Philadelphia was one of the most prominent locations where numerous amateur photographers promoted different styles and approaches to the medium. Philadelphian photographers were the first to embrace Peter Henry Emerson’s theory of naturalistic photography.6 The surprisingly close stylistic and thematic correspondence between many of Mifflin’s photographs and that of the Philadelphia naturalistic photographers’ suggests that Mifflin was very much in sync with the popular trends among amateur photographers there.

This strong visual evidence and Mifflin’s frequent visits to Philadelphia encourages a reconsideration of his photographic practice in relation to a larger context of amateur photographic activity during the 1880s. Furthermore, as Philadelphia naturalistic photography was in tune with the Back-to-Nature movement in America, the portion of Mifflin’s work that coincides with the trends in Philadelphia may reveal Mifflin’s nostalgic longing for a more pastoral time because of the rapid industrialization occurring in the area of Columbia, Pennsylvania, where he had grown up and lived.

Mifflin was much like the art-enthusiasts nowadays—passionate and romantic, nostalgic toward a time that is no longer yet fascinated by the new and

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daring. Mifflin’s wealthy family background certainly afforded him the leisure to indulge in various types of artistic practices. Free of financial concerns and practical issues, he had the luxury to visit cities and to roam about the countryside, to delight in beauty and lament the poignancies of life, to paint and write poetry, as well as to explore various facets of photography. In Mifflin I see a complex encounter between lofty and somewhat sentimental ideals and reality, between the conservative and the vanguard. It is this opposition in pictorial form that we see in the photographs.

The narrow conclusion about Mifflin’s photography reached by Richman neglects a large portion of Mifflin’s work, but it is these images that provide evidence for Mifflin’s identity as a serious amateur photographer. To quote Edward Leos, another author who has written about (but not at great length) Mifflin’s photography, “though on the surface Mifflin’s images may have served mostly utilitarian needs, his imagination and visual training operated full time, many of his images project a contemporary feeling, both in design and expression—more so, perhaps, than his paintings.” The following examination of Mifflin’s photography extends Leos’ insight and offers the most detailed analysis of it to date. The pictures themselves argue for Mifflin having been a serious photographer who explored the medium’s expressive potential.

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7 Edward Leos, "Mifflin and Engle: the Painter and the Practitioner," (Pennsylvania History 64.2 Spring 1997), 300-09.
Photographic Trends in Late Nineteenth-Century America

The late nineteenth century was a time during which amateur photography flourished in cities such as New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., Baltimore, Cleveland, Chicago, Portland (Oregon), and San Francisco. As Mary Panzer notes in *Philadelphia Naturalistic Photography 1865—1906*, with the development of new technologies, smaller, cheaper cameras, tripods, ready-made paper and pre-mixed chemicals became available in 1879, this opened the field to a new generation of workers who photographed for pleasure rather than scientific or material profit. Camera clubs were overrun with amateurs seeking instruction and the opportunity to show their work. Panzer notes that from this time on, exhibitions eventually brought attention to every kind of photographic achievement, including the capacity of photographs to capture beauty and express emotion. As do many modern scholars, Panzer highlights Philadelphia as an important location in the history of American photography. She states that photography, as the "handmaid of science and art alike" flourished in Philadelphia with many applications for its inherently pleasing images; and that photographic industries and commerce in images fueled a general climate of interest and enthusiasm in this city.⁸

Recent publications such as *Peter Henry Emerson and American Naturalistic Photography* by Christian A. Peterson tend to link the photographic practice in Philadelphia at the turn of the twentieth century primarily to British photographer

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Peter Henry Emerson’s treatises on naturalistic photography. However, Panzer, writing in 1982, did not attribute to Emerson such importance in American photographic circles. She claims that although forward-looking Philadelphians were sympathetic to Emerson’s work, his ideas had little impact on the American photographic scene. She defines photographs by Philadelphian photographers such as John Moran, John G. Bullock and Robert S. Redfield as having a “distinctive regional style” that “combined influences from England and the expeditions in the American West with a local appreciation for nature.” She goes on to stress that most American photographers were suspicious of self-conscious tradition and the temptation to place photography among the fine arts.

By the end of 1889, about seventy photographic organizations were in existence with memberships overwhelmingly composed of amateurs. In the meantime, magazines and publications dedicated to an audience of amateur photographers began to emerge with tremendous popularity. The Photographic Society of Philadelphia was arguably the most authoritative among the photography associations throughout the nation. A number of distinguished figures in American photography were members of the Photographic Society of Philadelphia at the turn of the twentieth century, among them John G. Bullock, Robert S. Redfield, Coleman Sellers, William H. Rau and John C. Browne. These photographers, together with

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10 Panzer, Philadelphia Naturalistic Photography, 1865-1906, 8-11.
11 Ibid., 8-11.
numerous other amateur enthusiasts, produced a large variety of works that constitute what is now regarded as “American naturalistic photography”.\(^{12}\)

Scholars writing more recently, such as Christian A. Peterson and Keith Davis, generally attribute Philadelphia naturalistic photography to the influence of Peter Henry Emerson’s photographic naturalism. Peterson in particular begins with an in-depth discussion of Emerson and his essential photographic treatise _Naturalistic Photography_. The author notes that this treatise was published in America in 1890 and gained immediate popularity among American amateur photographers. To elaborate, Peterson explains that the first edition of _Naturalistic Photography_ sold out in three months, and that an American publisher issued a second edition in 1890, with more than ten positive reviews of the first edition from four different countries. Peterson states that although the first edition was published only in London, it was widely and positively reviewed in American periodicals such as _American Amateur Photographer_ (Brunswick, Maine), _American Journal of Photography_ (Philadelphia), _Wilson’s Photographic Magazine_ (New York), _Anthony’s Photographic Bulletin_ (New York) which reviewed the publication twice with words of praise, and likewise _The Photographic Times_ (New York). Peterson further mentions that mainstream periodicals such as _Cosmopolitan and Scientific American_ also recommended _Naturalistic Photography_, proclaiming that the book “contains a greater amount of information on the artistic elements to be considered in photography than any that we know of.”\(^{13}\) Meanwhile, first, second and third

\(^{12}\) Keith F. Davis. _An American Century of Photography, From Dry-Plate to Digital._ (Kansas City, Missouri: Hallmark Cards, Inc., 1995), 28-29.

\(^{13}\) Peterson, _Peter Henry Emerson and American Naturalistic Photography_, 11-20.
editions of *Naturalistic Photography* found their way into countless private and institutional libraries in the United States.

Not only did Emerson publish his writings in America, he also wrote for the American photographic press and exhibited widely. His work was first shown in the United States at the American International Exhibition of Photography, in Philadelphia, during January 1886. The exhibition featured over seventeen hundred photographs by more than one hundred contributors from seventeen different countries. The Photographic Society of Philadelphia sponsored this massive exhibition. The prestigious Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts was the location at which the works were displayed. Emerson also sent work to the first and third Joint Exhibitions cosponsored by a few of the most prominent camera clubs in America. The first Joint Exhibition occurred in 1887 in New York City, and the third one was held in 1889 in Philadelphia. Peterson also introduces the friendship between Emerson and Alfred Stieglitz, “the individual who would do the most for American creative photography in the early twentieth century.”¹⁴ The two photographers apparently maintained close contact from 1888 to 1933, exchanging letters and constantly giving each other favorable reviews. Peterson states that such a relation sustains a vital link between artistic photography in England and the United States.¹⁵

At the time when Emerson published his volumes in the late nineteenth century, America was at the height of its back-to-nature movement. This movement

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¹⁴ Ibid., 18-23.
¹⁵ Ibid., 18-23.
occurred as a response to the rapid urbanization and industrialization, and has its genesis in the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson, the poet Walt Whitman, and *Walden Pond* by the naturalist Henry David Thoreau. Peter Henry Emerson’s most significant aesthetic consideration, which regards nature as the primary muse to all creative expression, is in accord with this movement. American naturalist photographers quickly adapted Emerson’s view.\(^\text{16}\) Equally as important is his theory of differential focusing whereby he emphasized that the center of one’s vision is the sharpest. Therefore, photographs should mimic the effect of natural human eyesight, and should be clear, detailed and finished at the center while suggestive and subdued throughout the rest. Emerson also stresses compositional simplicity—that the photographer is to select a limited number of elements appropriate for one image, and that generally a simpler composition is preferable. Emerson’s treatises define some of the main visual characteristics of Philadelphia naturalistic photography.\(^\text{17}\)

The release of the first Kodak camera in 1888 launched the invention of the photo-finishing industry and enabled anyone who could press a button to become a photographer. This initiated another major trend in American photography. Scholars nowadays refer to the phenomenon as vernacular photography.\(^\text{18}\)

The first generation Kodak camera was a box weighing about 1.3 pounds. It had a string mechanism to cock the shutter and a button to release it, making exposures at a shutter speed of 1/25 second. The first model cost twenty-five

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 23-31.  
\(^{17}\) Ibid., 15-16.  
dollars. The price was comparable to other hand cameras on the market at the time, but was nevertheless a large sum for middle-class Americans. Several new models quickly became available within the next decade and, by 1895, models such as the Pocket Kodak were sold at pharmacies and department stores at prices of 10 dollars or less. In the meantime, Eastman's company offered film-developing services with the famous slogan "you press the button, we do the rest." In all, Eastman made the practice of photography affordable and technique-free for the general population. Consequently, Kodak reported an impressive sale of 100,000 cameras in 1898, and an annual sale of 150,000 cameras in 1900 with the introduction of the 1-dollar Brownie camera.  

This new generation of hand cameras resulted in a new generation of photographers from all classes and walks of life. With little concern for professional knowledge or stylistic conventions, Kodak consumers created curious and revolutionary images of daily life and outdoor events regarded now as “snapshots.” Some of Kodak’s advertising slogans were “At home with a Kodak” and “Let Kodak keep the story.” These slogans describe some of the typical properties of snapshot photography. People frequently documented family gatherings, outings in the countryside and tours in the city with their Kodak cameras. Among these snapshots were also portraits of family members and friends, women, children and even pets.  

The primary use of Kodak cameras was not on a public scale to define issues of national character or relevance, but on a very personal level as a means of self-expression. Snapshots from the turn of the twentieth century are, as Sarah

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19 Davis. *An American Century of Photography*, 16-18.
Greenough describes in her essay "The Curious Contagion of the Camera," fractured and disjointed, without traditional compositional structure, and with people looking and moving in several different directions. The edges of the frame sever arms and legs from the rest of the body, rendering them useless and bizarre; parts of objects are separated from the whole and dangle in space without meaning or function. Greenough explains that in part this kind of cropping and framing was the result of the primitive view finders of many early hand cameras, which were not much more than point-and-shoot contraptions that did not allow for careful pre-visualization.\textsuperscript{21}

The early hand cameras, nonetheless, led to a common understanding of photography as a very personal tool and the camera as a ubiquitous companion in modern life. Greenough states that at this point, photography became both commonplace and intimate, whereas the camera was seen almost as extensions of the hand and eye. She concludes that this new generation of photographers was concerned with seeing, knowing and defining personal, social and emotional life through the rectangular frame of the little black box.\textsuperscript{22} Alexander Black, in 1887, discusses in The Century the "gentle madness" of the "enthusiastic amateur" who has succumbed to the curious contagion of the camera. He wrote that he was, in actuality, witnessing not only the revolution of photographic practice, but also the "establishment of a vernacular tradition."\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 130-32.
Diane Waggoner talks about camera club members’ reaction towards the Kodak phenomenon in the recent exhibition catalogue *The Art of the American Snapshot 1888-1978*. She notes that there was a natural tension between amateurs who considered themselves not only artists but also technically proficient and the flood of newcomers purchasing hand cameras that required only the push of a button. Fine art photographers at the time, such as Alfred Stieglitz, supported the adoption of the hand camera for artistic work, but was also critical: “thanks to the efforts of these persons (general Kodak users), hand camera and bad work became synonymous.”

To the photographic community of serious amateurs, good pictures had to adhere to the compositional rules of traditional art forms such as painting, drawing and printmaking.

However, as far as the criticisms go, Greenough points out that the subjects of these snapshots and their methods of pictorial construction were so characteristic of hand camera work that any visually sensitive person growing up at the turn of the century was exposed to their influence. Amateurs’ snapshots were seen daily in family albums, newspapers, magazines and even schoolbooks. The “vernacular” style and subject matter became so commonplace that they faded into the general fabric of modern bourgeoisie life. Thus, although it was many years before the photographic vanguard had the self-confidence to embrace the mundane incidents of modern life as worthy subjects or appreciate the snapshot-style, hand camera

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25 Ibid., 15-18.
work from this time did serve to, in Greenough’s words, “educate the public eye and demonstrate the graces which exist in the bourgeoisie as worthy models in art”\textsuperscript{26}.

Categorizing Mifflin’s Photographs

This section examines Mifflin’s extant body of photography with respect to biographical information and in relation to contemporary artistic trends as well as the larger social historical context. The section examines in detail the considerable number of diverse themes and the various visual constructs Mifflin’s photographs encompass. While it is possible to organize the images into categories in terms of their subject matter and visual properties, in doing so I admit that some of these categories overlap and share similar visual or thematic sources. It is also unlikely that Mifflin saw his own works as fitting into distinct categories. Some exposures he created as studies for his painting practice, whereas others reflect experimentation with the photographic medium. Thus, besides the group of pictures that clearly served as photographic studies for paintings, the other categories constitute my effort to make sense of Mifflin’s thematic and pictorial interests and tendencies. Essentially, the analysis presented here seeks to define Mifflin’s vision as a serious amateur photographer.

I organize the images according to a few attributes. The first attribute is an image’s visual characteristics. I select those images with similar visual characteristics, and propose possible trends and conventions from which these visual characteristics may have derived. This is the main means I use to categorize his extant photographs. The second attribute concerns themes and functions. For instance, some images served as studies for painting and some served to document property (such as horses) or possession. Lastly, some of Mifflin’s photographs seem to reflect Mifflin’s reaction toward the changing world in which he lived. In
particular, Mifflin’s elitist aspiration and nostalgic romanticism may have been a response to the drastic industrialization and modernization occurring in Columbia and in other parts of the United States toward the end of the nineteenth century. Mifflin’s response to a changing environment possibly affected much of his photography and therefore it transcends my discrete categories. For instance, both the category that corresponds with naturalistic photography and that which shares traits with vernacular photography reveal Mifflin’s interaction with his contemporary circumstances.

Furthermore, the images of architectural structures in Columbia as well as in New York City are especially tricky to neatly categorize. These images are obviously not consistent with Mifflin’s painting practice, for Mifflin did not paint cityscapes or interiors of buildings. On the other hand, daguerreotypists and photographers producing stereoscopic views in the United States had long photographed urban architecture. These images then suggest that Mifflin may have been inspired by this ubiquitous format, that he traveled in cities such as New York with his photography equipment and recorded the buildings and streets he found visually interesting.

In analyzing a body of work, categorization helps to make more intelligible a spectrum of the types of pictorial experimentation Mifflin “conducted” with the camera. Despite the ambiguous boundaries between and among the categories I propose, this section and its organization aim to highlight the variety of aesthetic constructs seen in Mifflin’s extant works. At the same time, it gradually illuminates Mifflin’s curious and creative mind as he explored the photographic medium.
In addition, the entire Mifflin photographic oeuvre consists solely of negatives, and there are no known surviving prints. Thus, all of the works by Mifflin I select to discuss in this section are digitally inverted images of glass-plate negatives. Throughout the paper I refer to these digitized positive images as “photographs.” I also provide titles based upon what is pictured.
A number of Mifflin’s photographs display a distinct snapshot quality that is not at all in accordance with his painting practice. These images, which appear to be experimental, become more intriguing when one takes Mifflin’s aesthetic views and customary habits into consideration. Judging from the memoir about Mifflin by the Minich sisters as well as other primary archival sources, Mifflin regarded himself as a gentleman with a strong sense of nostalgia towards a classical past; and indeed he lived his life inhabiting such an identity. He dressed and behaved as a gentleman, favored conventional compositions when he painted, and practiced diligently the traditional poetic form of sonnets. In fact, he produced approximately five hundred sonnets, and many of these were published as volumes during his lifetime.27 Contemporaries such as E. Hershey Sneath (1857-1935), professor emeritus of the philosophy of religion and religious education at Yale University, praised him as “America’s Greatest Sonneteer.”28

Dr. Irwin Richman elaborates on Mifflin’s aspiration to be a classic gentleman. Richman states that “in his (Lloyd Mifflin) unpublished journal, ‘Crude Thoughts Book,’ the artist-aesthete wrote, ‘It is certainly pleasant to be thought by everyone to be a gentleman; but the vulgar cannot tell a gentleman when they meet him if he wears not the outward badge; so the cheapest way to get along with people...is to wear the badge of a gentleman, i.e. dress well fine boots always

27 For instance, Lloyd Mifflin’s sonnet volume The Fields of Dawn and Later Sonnets (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1900).
polished; silk hat always bright; clean shirt and collar always so;’ extant
photographs suggest that Mifflin rigorously adhered to his own sartorial advice.”
Indeed, Mifflin’s overall conservatism shaped his practice as a painter. Thus it was
almost no surprise that one of Mifflin’s most important painting teachers, Thomas
Moran (1837-1926), was among the more conservative artists of the time. It is also
hardly surprising, then, that upon Mifflin’s first visit to Europe in 1872, he wrote
that he found the works of French modern landscapists to be poor, especially when
compared to painters he preferred such as J. M. William Turner (1775-1851). He
also commented that Courbet would be his choice of French artist, while at the same
time noting that Courbet has no poetry in him. Then how might Mifflin respond to
the modern and daring approaches to picture-making such as those prevalent in
American vernacular photography? That one finds aspects of this practice appearing
in his photographs is noteworthy.

Not surprisingly, to become an artist and a gentleman fulfilled the goal
Mifflin’s father held for him. A classically educated man himself, J. Houston Mifflin
read Shakespeare and Tennyson to his sons as a crucial part of their upbringing. He
brought back dozens of paintings from his tours to Europe. Among these paintings
were works by John Hoppner, Thomas Lawrence, Salvator Rosa, Titian, and a copy
of the renowned Venus de Milo, which he prominently installed in a niche in his
house.31

30 Ibid., 339.
31 Ibid., 337.
Lloyd Mifflin grew up in this nostalgic atmosphere created by his father, and thus followed in his father’s footsteps. However, Lloyd Mifflin lived in an era that was dramatically different from his father’s time. America was undergoing drastic industrialization and modernization during the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. In other words, Mifflin adopted the type of elitist persona that was gradually vanishing from his contemporary social scene. This caused him to become disconnected with his social surroundings. More often than not, in his notes and correspondence, he expresses frustrations due to people’s inability to recognize the image of a fine gentleman he longed to embody.

Judging from Mifflin’s paintings and poems, one would never guess that Columbia at this time was a railroad center. The area was served by five railroads during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1840s, Columbia became a center for anthracite iron furnaces and rolling mills. The canal and railroads facilitated the transportation of coal, iron ore, and limestone to the furnaces, and shipment of pig iron and wrought iron shapes from Columbia. The industries in this area made major contributions to Lancaster County’s economy during this time. Many small foundries produced iron casting for the railroad and industrial trade. The Keeley Stove Works, for example, manufactured cook stoves and parlor stoves that were found in homes across the nation.³²

Mifflin, in contrast, belonged to the refined crowd that celebrated the “Gilded Age” in Lancaster County. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, fine carriages drawn by sleek, matched horses paraded the streets of downtown Lancaster, as

their owners in luxurious attire waltzed at balls and assemblies under glowing gas chandeliers.\textsuperscript{33} As discussed previously, Mifflin possessed one such carriage with matching horses.

![Lloyd Mifflin and His Coach](image)

Fig.3  \textit{Lloyd Mifflin and His Coach}

Yet the radically changing social and historical circumstances in which Mifflin lived might have disappointed him and his elitist aspirations. In a strange way, photography as a new medium and a product of a rising tide of technological invention may well have served as an alternative means of expression and experimentation for him. Having received little recognition for his identity as a gentleman and a classically trained painter, one can assume that Mifflin turned to photography, intentionally or unconsciously, to seek comfort in creating in private what would have been viewed as bold and informal in relation to his projected public persona.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 64-65.
Coming back from Europe and experiencing the changes brought about by industry and modernization, Mifflin, however dissatisfied with this new reality, to some extent submitted to it, while at the same time clinging to a pastoral ideal. By the time several versions of Kodak cameras had appeared on the American photographic scene, Mifflin too would have been exposed to the widely accessible, new visual language that was beginning to crop up in vernacular (i.e., amateur photography) photography. His photographs show that he obviously moved away from the earlier and more conservative understanding of photography in the 1870s, and willingly accepted new and modern visual expressions as possible forms of self-expression. He was eager to experiment so as to discover the potential of the photographic medium. The portion of snapshot-like images among Mifflin’s extant photographs suggests that he felt free to begin using the camera in a more idiosyncratic manner. After all, in photography he was not burdened by his aspirations as a painter to receive recognition.

If, according to primary sources, Mifflin stopped photographing right before the turn of the twentieth century, he would have made these images at least a decade ahead of when vernacular photography truly became widespread in the decade after 1900.34 This is to speak strictly of what scholars now regard as

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34 Kodak’s most widely purchased camera at the turn of the nineteenth century, the Brownie Camera, was introduced in the spring of 1900. This particular model was sold for merely a dollar. Such an affordable price enabled a larger population than ever before in the United States to purchase and put into frequent use the Brownie Camera. Meanwhile, the majority of the turn-of-the-century snapshots are dated to the first few decades of the twentieth century. But there are certain gelatin silver prints produced in the last two decades of the nineteenth century that show visual similarities with Kodak snapshots. However, these prints at the time were most likely not a predominant trend in photography. Thus, I think it inappropriate to draw a direct comparison between Mifflin’s snapshot-like photographs and those snapshots by Kodak hobbyists, or to place Mifflin among “the Kodak generation.” The fact that Mifflin, at the end of the nineteenth century,
“vernacular photography”; however, amateur photographers had long been a prominent part of the American photographic scene since the beginning of 1880, when new technology brought to the market smaller, cheaper cameras, tripods, dry plates and pre-mixed chemicals. In other words, Mifflin was certainly not alone with his oddly composed images at this time. As Keith Davis notes in An American Century of Photography, From Dry-Plate to Digital, the new ease of the photographic process allowed travelers and explorers to take cameras almost anywhere and to make images under the most adverse conditions. Davis provides the example of the amateur photographer Henry N. Cady (1849-1935), and refers to Cady as “one of the first wave of dry-plate amateurs.” Much like Mifflin, Cady was passionate about painting and was in fact an accomplished landscapist in the Luminist tradition. Mifflin’s landscape paintings, too, bear visual similarity with the Luminist school. Cady worked with a small tripod-mounted camera and created many photographs that Davis regards as “snapshots.” Cady’s photographic work, as Davis notes, suggests the novelty of amateur photography in the 1880s. Davis describes these images as having “tilted horizons, unwanted intrusions, and off-center subjects.” These are suitable descriptions for Mifflin’s more experimental images as well.

produced images with distinctly vernacular qualities poses one of the most intriguing questions concerning his extant work.

Fig. 4  Henry N. Cady, *Alice with Her Doll*, June 1, 1884.

Fig. 5  Henry N. Cady, *Lawrence and Dewees and Their Mother, Taken From garret Window, Warren*, June 22, 1882.
Cady’s case, then, perhaps sheds light on a rather unnoted phenomenon before vernacular photography became even more commonplace with the introduction of the Kodak Brownie. In the 1880s and 1890s, there were perhaps a number of conventionally trained, aspiring artists who took up photography as an alternative means of expression. These artists made images that contradicted their painting practice and challenged traditional photographic compositions. Cady was one such artist, and Mifflin conceivably another. A close examination of the visual properties of certain images by Mifflin reveals formal and conceptual correspondences between these and images from the later vernacular tradition.
City Playground is an appropriate example of the snapshot-like images among Mifflin’s photographs. The image depicts a view of what is likely a playground in the city, with tall apartment buildings and numerous children. Such a theme is entirely non-existent in Mifflin’s paintings. The overall composition of City Playground is far from conventional. Mifflin crops the picture rather abruptly, leaving body parts of the three boys in the foreground outside the frame. We cannot see the feet of the boy to the very left, the boy at the lower middle has only a capped head, and the boy to the very right appears faceless. The large wooden structure boldly interrupts spatial continuity, while a large portion of the image surface is but a crowded, chaotic assembly of barely discernable figures. There is very little or no focus distinction between foreground and background, unlike those images by Mifflin that correspond to the visual tradition of naturalistic photography. There is a strong immediacy to this picture. It seems as if Mifflin traveled with his photography
equipment to the city and, for whatever reason, captured a fleeting moment at the click of the camera lens. He even might not have considered the composition very carefully. Rather, he may have acted spontaneously, trying to experiment with the photographic medium. He would have been exposed to snapshots in newspapers and magazines, and thus was willing to experiment with picturing a scene that relied on improvisation and chance.

In any event, the visual traits of City Playground demonstrate more or less the frontier of experimental amateur photography at the time. In fact, a number of Mifflin’s pictures exhibit these traits, such as Children and Interior.

![Children and Interior](image)

The photograph shows the interior of a spacious room with children seated in an orderly fashion. The particular event recorded is unknown and rather unimportant to this discussion, whereas the mere pictorial arrangement or, to a
certain degree, the lack thereof, defines the characteristic of the photograph. Similar to City Playground, the cropping of the picture frame in Children and Interior reveals what appears to be the photographer’s spontaneous response to the scene. The room is seen from an oblique angle, whereas a large, blurry head appears abruptly in the immediate foreground, challenging any type of conventional spatial organization of the image surface. Mifflin obviously did not compose this image according to his knowledge of classical painting traditions. The photograph does not reveal any attempt to find and frame the type of inherent balance or symmetry that typify earlier photographic conventions. Instead, such a casual and impromptu view in itself mimics images produced with Kodak hand cameras.

Both City Playground and Children and Interior present a kind of unscripted and rather casual vision. That is to say, these two images convey a sense of the photographer moving through different spaces and positioning the camera in alignment with the eye to record what his sight encountered. In other words, aside from the moment the shutter is clicked, neither the subject nor the photographer remains still in the process of the picture-making. This strong sense of the momentary conjoining of life and the “eye of the camera” speaks to the core of snapshot photography. Thus, Mifflin and his camera presumably traveled and acted together, as would the Kodak enthusiasts and their hand cameras. 36

Children and Country Road demonstrates similar visual qualities with that of Coach Almost in Motion (which I have previously discussed in the “Thesis Statement” section), and further suggests that Mifflin made photographs from his moving coach.

The obscure object shown along the lower left of *Children and Country Road* may well be an exposed part of the carriage in which Mifflin, his camera, and tripod were situated. To a large extent, the image shows Mifflin’s immediate vision as he traveled down the country road in his coach. The children to the side of the road and the cow in the far distance create a rather amusing impression. The seemingly unrehearsed composition resembles that of snapshots. Thus, it is highly probable that Mifflin included these elements in the photograph mostly by chance. On the other hand, if one assumes that Mifflin in fact made arrangements with the children beforehand as to their position and poses, or that he intentionally included part of the carriage in the image, the result still remains akin to the improvised visual quality of vernacular photography.

![Children and Country Road](image)
Four Horse Heads is yet another work by Mifflin that seems to abandon conventional formulas in the painting and older photography of his time. The lighting in this photograph is comparable to that of Chuckling Woman. The subject is not brilliantly lit; and the two horses to the right are entirely in the shadow, since Mifflin may have taken the picture from an angle that was partially against the light. Yet he seems less concerned with desirable lighting than he was in capturing a beautiful and instant vision of the horses resting behind the rugged fence. There is a delicate yet recognizable differential focusing in the photograph. The two horses to the right and the fence in front of them are slightly closer to the viewer/photographer. Therefore, these elements appear with greater visual clarity than the two horses and the part of the fence that are further back. This suggests that the photograph was semi-composed like Chuckling Woman (previously

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37 Differential focusing is one of the essential elements Peter Henry Emerson introduces in his treatise on naturalistic photography. A number of Mifflin’s photographs display a distinct quality of differential focusing. I discuss this in detail in the section “Landscape Photography, Peter Henry Emerson, and Photographic Naturalism.”
discussed in the “Thesis Statement” section). However, one perceives from the horses’ wind-blown manes the sense of a soft breeze in the air. From this detail, one sees the very moment at which the picture was taken so vividly. This kind of vivid moment captured is precisely one of the key elements that give life to snapshots.  

Fig. 11  Woman with Fan

Similar to *Chuckling Woman* is a quite beautifully photographed yet unconventional portrait that I entitle *Woman with Fan*. The woman sits in a traditional pose. She wears an elaborate dress, holds a fan in one hand, and looks to the side with a slight smile. Natural light gently illuminates the figure and the interior, casting soft shadows onto the wall and revealing the delicate patterns on the carpet. All of the aforementioned visual components are typical of traditional portraits. However, and quite unexpectedly, Mifflin includes the window from which

the natural light comes into the room. One also catches a glimpse of the random objects lying on the windowsill, as well as the wooden board leaning against the wall below the window frame. These elements distinguish Woman with Fan from conventional portraits, and add to the image a sense of informality. The random objects contradict the sitter’s composed posture, producing a rather whimsical impression. The blurred curtain to the very right, too, conveys a sense of immediacy. Moreover, Mifflin chooses to include a protruding section of the room’s back wall along the picture’s left-hand edge.

To some extent, these unanticipated visual features disclose the process of picture making. As opposed to creating an iconic portrait in a traditional way, Mifflin allows within the composition the presence of casual objects and thus invites the randomness of everyday life into the overall composition. The portrait becomes a photographic record of its own making, as if it was not meant to be simply a portrait, but a snapshot of the space Mifflin transformed into a photography studio during the setup of the portrait.
Much like the case of *Children and Interior* and *Coach Almost in Motion*, Mifflin photographs *Figures on the Beach* from an oblique angle. The shadow of an unknown figure (Mifflin himself?) at the lower right corner recalls the stripe of shadow that runs across the horseback in *Coach Almost in Motion*. The figures are spread across the picture surface in a casual manner. They do not look towards the camera to address the photographer or the viewer. Rather, the photographer captures these figures engaging in various activities—some seated, some standing or walking, some conversing, with two groups of people on the far side busy stretching fishing nets.
In some ways, the shadow at the lower right corner and the empty space in the foreground put the viewer in motion, and invite the viewer into the picture frame. It is as if the picture is a glance of what is ahead as one approaches and joins the figures at the middle and background; meanwhile, one receives an instant snapshot of this very glance. Thus, the photographer, the viewer, and the eye of the camera merge into one united body. In other words, unlike conventional compositions in which the photographer remains invisible, in *Figures on the Beach* Mifflin makes known that he exists in the same space as the various figures, and that he lives in this very moment the photograph records.

Fig. 13  *Haying (Circular Image)*
Fig. 14  *Painting Against Background of Woods*

*Haying (Circular Image) and Painting Against Background of Woods* are two especially perplexing photographs by Mifflin due to their circular form. It may only be a coincidence that the first two models of Kodak camera produced in 1888 and 1889 were only capable of making circular images. It is highly possible that Mifflin was aware of the new Kodak cameras on the market, since the Kodak-hand-camera phenomenon received comments from a wide range of magazines, periodicals and newspapers. The Kodak Company also used adroit, forceful advertising strategies to promote its products. The late 1880s and early 1890s was a period of high photographic activity for Mifflin. Might these two photographs imply Mifflin’s attempt to imitate the circular format particular to Kodak hand cameras?

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40 Admittedly, he might have made them purely by accident as a result of not having the proper lens at the moment of exposure.
At the turn of the century, numerous Kodak camera users shared with certain amateur photographers, such as Henry N. Cady, what might be described as an untutored yet powerful passion towards life and its many moments of beauty. The smaller, less professional and more affordable cameras brought into being a whole new generation of amateur enthusiasts. These cameras inspired the general eye to observe more diligently, while the easily adaptable technology both enabled and triggered the desire to record and to create. The close examination of Mifflin’s snapshot-like images in this section makes it quite clear that, much like other serious amateur photographers at the time, Mifflin responded to momentary beauty and arresting visual configurations and embraced the kind of “Kodak impulse” or “Kodak curiosity” in his experiments with photography as a new medium. 41

Landscape Photography: “Aide-Memoire” for Paintings

It is certain that a portion of Mifflin’s photography served as studies for his painting practice. Among his glass-plates are many images of the Susquehanna River from various angles and at various times of day. During his own lifetime, Mifflin was known as a painter of the Susquehanna and its environs, and indeed the majority of his paintings are of rustic life and rural landscapes. At the Mifflin summer estate “Norwood” near Columbia, he occupied a small room that looked out to the Susquehanna River. According to the memoir about Mifflin by his close friends, the Minich sisters, Mifflin spent much of his time in this room.42

It was at “Norwood” that Mifflin created a number of paintings depicting views of the Susquehanna and landscapes of the rural area around Columbia.43 Some of these paintings are now in the State Museum of Pennsylvania, some in the hand of private collectors, and some given to Columbia High School by Lloyd Mifflin’s brother, Dr. Houston Mifflin, after Lloyd Mifflin’s death. Many of Mifflin’s paintings are not easily accessible at this point. Fortunately, Mifflin documented with the camera a portion of his paintings and sculptures. These photographic documents of them are the primary sources I look to when comparing his paintings with his photographs.

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42 Memoir about Lloyd Mifflin by the Minich Sisters, Genealogical and biographical material on the Mifflin family, Lloyd Mifflin Collection, MG-165m.7, Box 1, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.
43 Ibid..
The oil painting *The Susquehanna Valley* describes a grand scene of the Susquehanna River. A field with plants and rocks occupies the foreground, whereas the vast river, illuminated with dramatic light, extends into the far horizon. An extremely small human figure sits in the near-foreground in contrast to the grand scale of the natural environment. The photograph *Study of the Susquehanna Valley* could well have been a photographic study for this particular painting. The two images are similar in the angle from which the river is seen. In both images, the
shoreline in the middle distance curves at the center, although Mifflin exaggerates this curve in the painting in order to create a more dramatic visual effect. Nevertheless, the two images have almost identical compositions. It is most likely that Mifflin referred to the photographic study when he painted *The Susquehanna Valley*.

![Susquehanna River and Rocks](image1)

*Fig. 17  Susquehanna River and Rocks*

![Susquehanna River with Exposed Rocks](image2)

*Fig. 18  Susquehanna River with Exposed Rocks*
This second pair of images is again of the Susquehanna River seen from a similar perspective. The rocks rising up from the river’s surface are prominent features in both images. The subdued contour of the distant mountains, too, appears in the far background in both images. *Susquehanna River with Exposed Rocks* was arguably one of the studies Mifflin consulted as he painted *Susquehanna River and Rocks*. Mifflin took many photographs of the Susquehanna River’s flowing surface. These photographs were mostly taken when there was abundant sunlight. Similarly, his paintings of the Susquehanna often show the river with brilliant, intense lighting. This suggests that Mifflin used photography to better understand the visual properties of water in strong lighting so as to paint such surfaces more realistically.

Fig.19  *Path and Rocks*
Close-up View of Rocks is very possibly one of the studies for *Path and Rocks*. Among the extant Mifflin photographs, there are a number of photographs of rocks and rough cliff surfaces. Mifflin may have used these photographic studies of rocks as the basis for paintings that involve views of rocks and cliffs. Mifflin’s appreciation of the documentary function of photography is much like that of the renowned American artist Thomas Eakins (1844-1916).⁴⁴ Although Eakins mostly focused on making photographs of figures in motion, Mifflin and Eakins are similar in that they both used photography to create detailed records of objects in life so as to grasp the visual characteristics of these objects more accurately.

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Landscape Photography, Peter Henry Emerson, & Photographic Naturalism

A portion of Lloyd Mifflin’s extant photographs display, in subject matter and style, a surprising degree of correspondence with Peter Henry Emerson’s photographic naturalism and Philadelphia naturalistic photography. Although I have yet to discover Mifflin’s comments on his photographic practice, it seems quite reasonable to assume that he was exposed to the naturalistic photographic works circulating in Philadelphia at the end of the nineteenth century. According to the Minich sisters’ memoir about him, Mifflin began photographing in 1885.45 Mifflin studied painting with Thomas Moran in Philadelphia, and paid visits to the city frequently throughout his life. Meanwhile, some photographs by Mifflin give evidence of his having been to New York City. Thus, he very possibly attended at least one, if not all, of the exhibitions in which Emerson’s work as well as other naturalistic photographs were shown.46

On the other hand, Columbia was the primary location that produced pig iron and wrought iron. An industrial profile of Lancaster County, The Red Rose of Pennsylvania ranks pig iron and wrought iron among the top three of all the major industries in Lancaster County from the 1860s through the 1880s.47 This fact indicates the high degree of industrialization occurring in the area where Mifflin

45 Genealogical and biographical material on the Mifflin family, Lloyd Mifflin Collection, MG-165m.7, Box 1, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.
46 As I have noted in the section “Photographic Trends in Late Nineteenth-Century America,” Emerson’s work was first shown in the United States at the American International Exhibition of Photography, in Philadelphia, during January 1886. He also sent work to the first and third Joint Exhibitions cosponsored by a few of the most prominent camera clubs in America. The first Joint Exhibition occurred in 1887 in New York City, and the third one was held in 1889 in Philadelphia.
dwelled, and perhaps provides a context in which much of Mifflin’s photographic practice may be seen in deliberate opposition to this reality. Such a pictorial interest in the pastoral scene and subjects thus accords with that of the Philadelphia naturalist photographers, as well as the back-to-nature movement informing American naturalistic photography. Indeed, quite a number of Mifflin’s photographs support this assumption.

Fig. 21  Two Sisters

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Two Sisters exemplifies Emerson’s discussion of compositional simplicity. It also accords with the theory of differential focusing. The photograph is carefully constructed, with the two sisters at the center. The sitters’ faces and upper bodies
appear detailed and clear, offering a view of the vivid interplay between light and shade on the women’s faces; moreover, the photograph concentrates on the varying textures of the hair, the skin, and the different fabrics. The blouses are light in color and occupy a large area in the photograph. This again gives prominence to the figures themselves. The central portion has the sharpest focus in the entire composition, whereas the surrounding grass field blurs to become secondary to the subject. The skirts are slightly softer in focus than the women’s faces and their blouses. The tone of the skirts as well blends in with the background, allowing, again, the dominance of the central vision. *Two Sisters*’s differing focus recalls Emerson’s *Poling the Marsh Hay*. Emerson renders the girl to the right with the greatest visual clarity, as if one’s eyes are fixed on her. Consequently, the other figures and the landscape become more and more hazy as the distance extends back into space.

In *Four Women Reclining on Grass*, Mifflin places the sitters in a way so that their reclining bodies form an “x” with the diagonal line in the background, thus stabilizing the composition to a certain degree. The subject is clear and focused, whereas the surrounding meadow is soft and vague. Meanwhile, the crispness declines as the distance between the eye and the figures increases. The woman holding the hat, for instance, is more distinct than the woman just behind her. This woman is the faintest of all sitters since she is the most distant from the camera. Again, the detailed folds of the dress at the lower left corner contrast with the overall obscurity of the woman furthest away. *Four Women Reclining on Grass*, much
like *Two Sisters*, seems to mimic what Emerson stresses as “the effect of natural human vision.”

Both photographs by Mifflin present a casual, pastoral mode favored by Philadelphia naturalistic photographers. The women’s garments are decent yet not lavish. The skirts in both images extend beyond the picture frame. This gives the photographs something of an unrestrained quality. The sitters’ facial expressions are rather informal and not at all idealized. In *Two Sisters*, for example, the figure on the right squints her eyes as an indication of the intensity of the sunlight. The other sitter’s slight frown again indicates this brightness. This adds a sense of immediacy to the photograph. In addition, the women in both photographs are in physical contact with one another. The unaffected physical connection and the relaxed, natural appearance create a casual feel of everyday life. Likewise, Philadelphia naturalistic photographs oftentimes show field laborers wearing informal clothing, comfortable in their own environment, and sometimes busy doing farm works or chores. These photographs embody the uncomplicated and tranquil mood of an idealized rustic life, and express the nostalgic sentiments prevalent in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century America.

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50 Ibid., 23-31.
Fig. 24  Horses, Farmers and Hay

Fig. 25  Farmers Loading Hay
Haying and other farming activities alike were among the most popular themes for naturalistic photographers.\textsuperscript{51} Mifflin created images of similar subjects.

\textsuperscript{51} Peterson, 45-51.
And thus it is informative to turn to two Mifflin photographs of haying that vary in composition and compare them separately to two images from the naturalistic photographic tradition to establish certain visual connections.

*Horses, Farmers and Hay* recalls *During the Reed Harvest* by Emerson in its spatial arrangement. *During the Reed Harvest* defines the recession into space with the shape of the landscape and the placing of figures at various distances, as does *Horses, Farmers and Hay*. In Emerson’s work, the stripes of marshy land and the waterway extend back towards the horizon, forming lines that lead the eye to a vanishing point and thus convey a clear indication of spatial depth. Similarly, in *Horses, Farmers and Hay*, the delicate fringe of dried stalks at the lower right corner establishes a frontal plane closest to the viewer. The expanse of alfalfa at the center and the line of trees to the right in the distance create a landscape that stretches into space. There are multiple figures in both images, including the horses in the Mifflin photograph. Both Emerson and Mifflin set the camera from an angle at which the figures are shown reducing in scale as the landscape expands back into space.

*Horses, Farmers and Hay* is partially blurred to suggest a visual hierarchy among the various visual components. Although the effect of differential focusing is undoubtedly much more sophisticated in Emerson’s work, the two photographs share similarities in composition and spatial orientation.

*Farmers Loading Hay* also may be compared to slightly later naturalistic photography as exemplified by Louis F. Stephany’s *The Last Load*. Both works have horizontal compositions, and both are views from an angle slightly below eye level. The visual elements in the two photographs are almost identical. For instance, the
wide field that spreads towards the horizon, the vast sky above, the busy working farmers, the horses, the wagon, and the man to the right who holds up a load of hay. In *The Last Load*, the area immediately between the viewer and the figures is in soft focus, the horizon is abstract whereas the subject has the most visual clarity; the same is true of *Farmers Loading Hay*. Moreover, the figures in both images are engaged in their own activities, and therefore are as if unaware of the camera. Both images capture these farmhands at their work. This sense of spontaneity is evident in many Philadelphia naturalistic photographs of similar subjects. Again, to show farmers at work using traditional methods, with wagons, cattle, and physical labor is in a way looking back in time and rejecting the current moment at which man is beginning to operate machines and rely on technology. American naturalist photographers directed their cameras to the more old-fashioned aspects of rural life, as Mifflin did and seen through his numerous negatives that capture pastoral scenes in the rural area around Columbia.
Fig. 28  Winter Creek
Fig.29  *Ribbon of River*

Fig.30  Henry Troth, *Untitled (Marsh Landscape)*, platinum, 1897.
Inspired by Peter Henry Emerson’s writings and the back-to-nature movement, Philadelphia naturalistic photographers passionately pursued views of unspoiled nature. Members of various amateur photography clubs at the time would go on picnics or hikes, exploring, sometimes on bicycles, unvisited paths in the wild, and recording picturesque scenery with the camera. A large segment of Mifflin’s photographic work, too, depicts such types of landscape. Mifflin spent most of his lifetime at his family’s country estate, and lived among views of farms, of the Susquehanna River, of hills dotted with foraging cattle, of scenery changing as the seasons rotate. He was a lover of nature and was helplessly obsessed with its beauty, as he writes in his diaries and letters. Many of his sonnets describe views of nature at different times of the day, and many are hymns that praise nature enthusiastically. In many ways, Mifflin shares with Philadelphia naturalist photographers the kind of nostalgia towards a past during which man and nature were imagined to have been in harmony.

Winter Creek resembles, in subject matter and visual traits, works by celebrated amateur photographers such as John G. Bullock (1854-1939), Robert S. Redfield (1849-1932), or in the case of this particular comparison, Untitled (Marsh Landscape) by the Philadelphia naturalistic photographer Henry Troth (1815-1885). Troth was a faithful follower of Emerson. His photographs demonstrate an explicit

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52 Ibid., 33-51.
53 Lloyd Mifflin’s sonnet volume “The Fields of Dawn and Later Sonnets” published in 1900, for instance, is a collection of sonnets that portray various views of nature through the poet’s most loving and romantic vision. Mifflin includes the following note as a preface to the volume: “The period referred to in these Pastorals is supposed to be in the Author’s youth. The time occupied is one year—beginning with early April, running through the seasons, and ending with the following Spring. The region described is in southern Pennsylvania bordering upon the Susquehanna.”
intention to embody the theories of differential focusing and compositional simplicity.\textsuperscript{54}

Analogous to the previous comparison between \textit{Farmers Loading Hay} and Stephany’s \textit{The Last Load, Winter Creek} and \textit{Untitled (Marsh Landscape)} closely echo one another in their simple arrangement of visual elements. Both works include a creek (or it may have been a drainage channel) amidst a marshy field and distant trees. The creek emerges abruptly from the bottom edge of both photographs. The limpidity of the water contrasts with the field’s rough and somewhat messy visual plane, while the water surface carries reflections of the distant trees. In both images, the focus begins to soften at approximately the middle distance. This haziness continues through the background. \textit{Ribbon of River} resembles Troth’s work in the extending length of the creek. Despite the damaged condition of \textit{Ribbon of River}, one can recognize that the creek distinguishes itself from the rest of the composition through its light tone and mirror-like appearance. The body of water, much like that of \textit{Untitled (Marsh Landscape)}, extends far back to the distant horizon and encourages the eye to travel into the pictorial space along its slender, graceful thread. Much like the previously discussed images of pastoral life, these photographs of creeks portray a serene yet vibrant image of nature.

City Scenes

Mifflin documented with his camera a wide range of subject matter he never portrayed in his paintings. For instance, there is a small group of photographs depicting city blocks with various architectural structures. *City View of Columbia* shows an unidentified street in Columbia, with trees and houses neatly aligned side by side. The picture presents in sharp focus details of the architecture. *Central Hotel* displays a similar sense of attention towards the architectural design of the particular hotel building. More intriguing are the tiny figures standing behind the second-floor windows. They look out towards the street, and perhaps even at the photographer, curiously. With this, the photograph not only documents a view of the city, but records as well a fleeting moment in the lives of these city dwellers. Most importantly, both images give proof to Mifflin’s traveling through city blocks with his camera, and photographing subject matter irrelevant to his painting practice.

Fig.31  *City View of Columbia*
Interior of a Store gives further evidence of Mifflin’s interest in recording city life. The type of store and its location are unknown, and the photograph is evidently
overexposed. Nonetheless, the image reflects one aspect of Mifflin’s photographic activity. In this particular instance, in order to create this image, Mifflin presumably appeared before the store staff as a serious amateur photographer who recorded various facets of life with his camera, and it is amusing to imagine the conversation that must have taken place between Mifflin and the staff. How might Mifflin have explained himself and his camera, especially in that it seems he never once wrote down anything about such forays in his diaries, notes, and correspondence?

Fig.34  National Academy of Design

Among Mifflin’s photographs of city views, National Academy of Design is one that features truly prominent architecture. The Ruskinian-Gothic structure on the left side of the street can be identified as the National Academy of Design on
Twenty-third Street and Fourth Avenue in New York City. The building, as the new home of the academy, was completed in 1865 with much excitement and celebration. Previous to this time, the academy did not have its own designated building, and instead went through decades of renting undistinguished rooms above stores, libraries, stables, and even the Arcade Baths. Mifflin's photograph shows the academy building as well as the street on which it is located. Although the photograph may not be properly exposed or carefully composed, it indicates Mifflin’s attempt to document an architectural structure particularly significant to the art world of his time. The fact that Mifflin evidently took the trouble to lug and set up his photographic equipment on the streets of Columbia and New York reveals his desire to create photographic documents of what he considered as worthy subjects. Once again, these photographs reflect his appreciation of the documentary function of the photographic medium, that a photograph could be a reliable visual record and, most importantly, his serious and evidently diligent photographic practice.

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Photographic Documents of Possession

Mifflin’s many photographs of his horses and his fancy carriage might further indicate his use of the camera as a means of documentation. Moreover, since the horses and carriage belonged to him, the photographs offered evidence of his elite gentry status; that he so frequently photographed them may speak to his desire to create concrete record of ownership and his pride in such possessions. He also took photographs of his own paintings and sculptures, artworks by his friends, statuettes in the backyard of his family’s summer estate “Norwood,” the estate itself and its interior. Photography seems to have been a means to create a kind of concrete inventory. Aside from his artworks, his coach appears in more photographs than any of the other subjects mentioned above.

Mifflin often includes himself in the photographs of his coach. Dressed in fine attire, Mifflin portrays himself as well-to-do, showcasing his aristocratic means of transportation as seen in Mifflin Driving His Coach. In the case of this picture, one notes that Mifflin’s own presence is equally as important as the presence of the coach itself. The image is more than self-expression; it is also proof of ownership. That he poses as the one who drives the coach is an immediate announcement of such ownership.
In her book *Scenes in a Library, Reading the Photograph in the Book, 1843-1875*, Carol Armstrong discusses William Henry Fox Talbot (1800-1877), one of photography’s inventors, and the first photographer to have brought forth the concept of photography as being the equivalent of a written inventory and even a lawful document. In her second chapter, Armstrong describes two images by Talbot, “each presents the viewer with objects arrayed symmetrically on horizontal shelves, parallel with the top and bottom edges of the image, as if the photographs were two matching glass cases enclosing and displaying precious possessions, china and glassware owned by Talbot and housed at Lacock Abbey.” Meanwhile, Talbot makes in-depth comments about his own images. “From the specimen here given it is sufficiently manifest, that the whole cabinet of Virtuoso and collector of old China might be depicted on paper in little more than it would take him to make a written inventory describing it in the usual way. The more strange and fantastic the forms of his old teapots, the more advantage in having their pictures given instead of their

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descriptions...however numerous the objects—however complicated the arrangement—the Camera depicts them all at once. It may be said to make a picture of whatever it sees.”

Here Talbot presents himself both as the photographer and as the collector, thus paralleling photographic records with written inventories because of the factual nature of both. In fact, from Talbot’s writing, one sees the clear implication that the photographic document is in ways superior to an inventory or written description. As he explains, the photographic medium is capable of recording the most complex subject matter at one instance, and that the camera is so accurate and truthful that it “makes a picture of whatever it sees.” In other words, Talbot speaks of the photograph as an irrefutable evidence of one’s possessions, more so than any other form of documentation.

*Horse #1, Horse #2, Horse #3 and Carriage* are, then, instances of what Talbot calls “the irrefutable photographic evidence” of Mifflin’s possessions. In all three images of Mifflin’s horses, the horses are situated at the very center of the composition in the rather empty, spacious setting of the barnyard. Mifflin took the photographs from an angle that is slightly below eye level. Thus, the horses take on a rather monumental appearance. Again, Mifflin includes a human figure in all three images, be it the owner himself or his servants that take care of the horses. This is likely to indicate that these are horses of good pedigree, and that they belong to a household capable of caring for the horses appropriately. The photograph of the carriage, too, displays similar visual properties. The carriage is the sole monumental

57 Ibid.
element in the entire composition. This gives the subject absolute prominence, thus signifying that the photograph serves a primary function of documentation.

Mifflin frequently painted cattle. However, he seldom painted horses, either in close-up views or as parts of a larger, rustic landscape. Yet he photographed his horses quite diligently. The horses either appear as the main subject, or along with the carriage as a full coach set. In my opinion, the prior example of Talbot provides a likely explanation for the motivation behind these photographs. Taking into consideration Mifflin’s elitist aspiration, his obvious affection towards his coach and team, and the numerous photographic records of his artworks and other possessions, it is reasonable to assume that Mifflin recognized the indexical function of the camera. Therefore, these images may be seen as an assertion of ownership, or a pictorial inventory affording truthful evidence of Mifflin’s property.

![Horse #1](image)

Fig.36  Horse #1
Fig. 37  Horse #2

Fig. 38  Horse #3
Fig.39 Carriage
Trompe L’oeil Inspired Photographs

Self Portrait with Laurel and Panpipes is one of the most intriguing images among Mifflin’s extant works. Firstly, as a self-portrait, the work speaks to Mifflin’s fascination for the classical past. With the symbolic elements of laurel and panpipes, Mifflin appears to portray himself as a Greek god. One related image would be the renowned painting by Caravaggio, Bacchus Holding a Wine Cup that Mifflin, one suspects, knew well. Thus, the Caravaggio painting may well have been one source of inspiration for Mifflin’s rather daring and bizarre self-portrayal. It is more
significant to note that Self Portrait with Laurel and Panpipes is among the few pictures by Mifflin that include other photographs pinned up onto a wall or a wooden board. Figures with Straw Hats is another such instance.

Fig. 41 Caravaggio, Bacchus Holding a Wine Cup, c. 1595, oil on canvas.
Figures with Straw Hats

The nails, pen marks, and the masking tape in *Self Portrait with Laurel and Panpipes* seem to refer to visual traits in the trompe l’oeil tradition, as if Mifflin is alluding to it. This is true of the slightly ripped edge and the strange arrangement of the two pictures in *Figures with Straw Hats*. Artists such as John F. Peto (1854–1907) and William Harnett were among the prominent American trompe l’oeil painters active during the last few decades of the nineteenth century. Peto, in particular, studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia, and he submitted paintings such as *Office Board for Smith Bros. Coal Co.* to the annual exhibitions at the Philadelphia Academy until he went into seclusion in 1889.  

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Motifs in *Office Board for Smith Bros. Coal Co.* such as the pink masking tape, pins, pictures and letters with ripped edges and the deliberate arrangement of these pictures and letters typify trompe l’oeil works of the late nineteenth century. As discussed previously, *Self Portrait with Laurel and Panpipes* and *Figures with Straw Hats* include such elements, and one wonders if Mifflin had direct knowledge of Peto’s painting. Mifflin, too, studied at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, and he frequented arts-related events in Philadelphia throughout much of his lifetime. Such works as *Office Board for Smith Bros. Coal Co.* would have been readily available to him for study because of exhibitions in Philadelphia. Familiar with the

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art scene in Philadelphia, it would have been almost inevitable for Mifflin to encounter Peto’s trompe l’oeil paintings.

We will never know for sure if the visual correspondence between Mifflin’s photographs and trompe l’oeil paintings was deliberate. However, the trompe l’oeil works to which Mifflin was very likely exposed may have influenced his photographic aesthetic—if unconsciously. An artist’s visual construct or aesthetic need not always result from the artist’s conscious decisions. More often than not, in creating their own works, artists may unconsciously borrow from, transform, or reinvent visual traditions and conventions they once encountered. This especially may be true with a medium as spontaneous as photography. This was quite possibly the case with Mifflin. Moreover, in contrast to the restrictions and conventions to which he was beholden in his painting practice, the photographic medium offered him the means to explore visual curiosities and adventures unfulfilled through his experience with the classical tradition of painting.
Snow Scenes and Other Unusual Images

The wide range of themes and pictorial experiments we have surveyed so far do not include Mifflin’s photographic interest in winter, which might even be termed “exploratory” because of the difficulty posed by photographing in cold weather. *Man with Buckets in Snow*, for instance, represents one of many images of snow scenes. In his sonnets, Mifflin often praises the beauty of nature, of dawns and dusks, and of the four seasons. In the case of photography, he seems to have had considerable interest in capturing snowy landscapes. *Woods in Snow* and *Snowy Path and Houses* further represent Mifflin’s effort to record different impressions of winter with his camera. The mere fact that, despite the difficulty of setting up photographic equipment in the cold and snow, he created quite a number of such pictures suggests a strong desire to experiment and a distinct curiosity with regard to the photographic medium and its potential.⁶⁰ For he was not simply satisfied with photographing snowy views from an interior through a window, but evidently he took his camera out along snowy paths in order to make these photographs at various locations. As with many of the images we have already examined, these pictures find no counterpart in his painting.

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⁶⁰ We should keep in mind that Mifflin was photographing such scenes before Alfred Stieglitz, who used a hand-held camera, produced *Winter-Fifth Avenue* in 1893.
Fig. 44  Man with Buckets in Snow

Fig. 45  Woods in Snow
Another unusual type of experiment Mifflin conducted with his camera is manifest in a series of rather mysterious images, *Man with Flute and Woman Resting* and *Man and Woman with Stage Setup*. The photo-shoot may have occurred in Mifflin’s studio adjacent to “Norwood.” The two images were shot in the same space, while the props and the overall setup differ somewhat. The man and woman are obviously posing deliberately in both photographs. For what reason might Mifflin have created such strange staged tableaux? What might have been the purpose behind this series? Could it be that Mifflin intended to create photographic illustrations to accompany certain sonnets of his? Or are these images yet one more example of experimentation? Was he examining the theme of refined domesticity and perhaps alluding to a tradition in painting that can be traced back to Vermeer? The many questions triggered by these images may never be settled with assured explanations. What the series does suggest, however, is the wide variety of “tasks”
Mifflin assigned to his camera, and again, the mere fact that he undoubtedly recognized and used the camera’s potential to make a variety of images that struck him as worthy of recording or, as in this case, constructing.
As we come to the end of this honors thesis, I hope that my close analysis of Mifflin’s photographs has provided sufficient evidence for his identity as a serious amateur photographer who explored the medium’s capacity to produce strikingly different kinds of pictures than those he made as a painter. Mifflin’s story presents what we might regard as a phenomenon typical of the modern age. He is rooted in a respect for traditional cultural values and yet subject to a strange and contagious excitement towards the possibilities a new technology offers. Just as we ourselves might find pleasure in reading a book of ancient poetry in the warmth of afternoon sunlight, we are equally drawn to browsing web pages and “skyping” with faraway friends. Perhaps, then, there is a little bit of Mifflin’s story in my own experience and in the reader’s as well.
Afterword: Exploring Lloyd Mifflin’s Photography

In the winter of 2009, the curator at the Lancaster County Historical Society, Barry Rauhauser, invited my academic advisor, Professor Richard Kent to examine an exquisite daguerreotype in the LCHS’s collection. Prior to this, I had expressed to Professor Kent my interest in applying for a Hackman summer research grant for the summer of 2010. With that in mind, Professor Kent invited me to come along to the LCHS. The daguerreotype is a beautiful self-portrait by J. Houston Mifflin, a nineteenth-century painter and daguerreotype portraitist from Columbia, Pennsylvania. J. Houston Mifflin worked at various locations throughout the United States during his lifetime, and received commissions from a number of wealthy patrons. In this daguerreotype, he presents himself as the portrait painter, with paintbrush and palette in hand, and an unfinished portrait of a lady on his easel.

During the conversation regarding this daguerreotype’s origin, Mr. Rauhauser explained that it was in fact part of a large collection of artifacts and documents from the Mifflin family donated to the LCHS by the family’s recently deceased close friends, the Minich sisters. The majority of these artifacts, Mr. Rauhauser noted, related to J. Houston Mifflin’s son, Lloyd Mifflin.
We then proceeded to look at a few small oil paintings by Lloyd Mifflin. The paintings were of a dreamy, colorful palette, and the scenery depicted seemed to resemble that of Venice, Italy, with ships and exotic palaces. Mr. Rauhauser told us that Lloyd Mifflin, much like his father, was a classically trained painter, and that Lloyd toured Europe a few times to further his painting study. I was fascinated by the delicacy and romantic atmosphere of these small oil paintings, and asked to see more of the Mifflin collection. However, it turned out that these were the only paintings by Lloyd Mifflin at the LCHS. Thereupon, Mr. Rauhauser told us that the collection held a self-portrait bust by Mifflin, a few of his volumes of sonnets, and, more intriguingly, one hundred and fifty glass plate negatives by Mifflin that had never been catalogued.

At this point I could tell that Professor Kent became very interested, and he inquired if we could see them. That led to a march down to the LCHS basement and
Mr. Rauhauser disappearing into a locked vault. He emerged with a non-descript, dusty cardboard box heavy with glass plates. During the next hour or so, we started going through the negatives; as we did we held them up to the light. Because for decades these negatives were in the hands of private collectors unkownledgeable about professional preservation, the plates show, in some cases, considerable damage. Nevertheless, the images’ unusual visual quality and bizarre themes immediately appealed to Professor Kent and me as worthy of further exploration and study. With abundant primary sources available at the LCHS and, as Mr. Rauhauser pointed out, an even larger Mifflin collection at the State Archives in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, we were convinced that there was ample material to conduct a research project that delved into Lloyd Mifflin’s little-known photography. Professor Kent applied for funding and thus began my Hackman project in the summer of 2010. At the LCHS, Marianne Heckles became my supervisor.

During the first few months of the research process, I was uncertain as to how far we could take the project. The plan was to go through all of the primary documents at hand, and also for me to acquire a thorough knowledge of nineteenth-century American photography so as to be prepared to study Mifflin’s glass plate negatives. That summer was indeed a special and quite memorable one. I worked at the LCHS to catalogue the Mifflin photography collection, examining each plate carefully, scanning the plates into the archive’s computer system, inverting the negative images into digital positives, and recording information about the plates one by one.
Aside from this, Professor Kent and I paid two visits to the State Archives and State Museum. The weather was hot and humid, the streets of Harrisburg crowded with honking cars and people. Yet, in the research room at the State Archives, sitting in front of boxes of files and negatives, we were as if a world apart from all the outside noise and heat. On this visit and the next, we were completely drawn to the elegant handwriting of Mifflin’s notes and letters, lovely little sketches of European scenery, and most of all, Mifflin’s photography that, to us, posed so many questions and mysteries.

Shadek-Fackenthal Library’s archives also hold a rich trove of material related to the Mifflin family. Thus there were three main locations I traveled between and among during my three months of summer research. As I intensely studied all the bits and pieces of information about Lloyd Mifflin, the man began to come alive in my mind’s eye. Frequently I had to consult others in order to read Mifflin’s nineteenth-century calligraphy. Frequently I found myself bemused as I probed the history of the Mifflin family and Lloyd Mifflin’s many strange and sentimental thoughts and ideas. The Hackman project continued into a yearlong independent study, and as pieces of the puzzle gradually came together, I felt like I had truly befriended a man from a century ago, and that, sometimes, I had been transported to his time.

It was a strange delight that, born and raised in an entirely different culture, I felt so involved and so intimate with a time, a place, and a life that I had never imagined myself able to identify with. Mifflin’s photographs offered a brand new perspective to me: that there is much to learn and appreciate besides the well-
known names recorded in textbooks or the notable works exhibited in museums, that the value and lessons of a research project often depend upon the passionate and determined heart of the scholar. Most of all, I increasingly wanted to share with a larger audience what I saw in Mifflin’s photography as a tremendous amount of visual interest and a most vivid sense of life and romance.

During the seemingly countless discussions and meetings with Professor Kent regarding the Mifflin project, we often joked about being the only two members of the “Mifflin Fan Club.” Yet we persevered, even though at times we felt as if we relied on much surmise. I describe the project as such, because I understand clearly its rather problematic nature and the difficulties of method it poses. In writing this honors thesis on a topic without a substantial literature of secondary sources, let alone Mifflin’s own comments on his photography practice, I am aware that a large portion of my work depends upon my own thoughts and analysis as opposed to existing scholarly views.

Essentially, the purpose of my thesis has been to uncover and draw attention to an otherwise forgotten vision, that of a serious amateur photographer—Mifflin’s curious eye behind the camera lens. In other words, with this paper, I invite the reader to walk into a space much like a gallery with Mifflin’s work on display. A part of my paper—especially its second section, serves to provide the reader with necessary information with regard to the larger social, historical, and artistic circumstances contemporary to Mifflin’s time. The major portion of the paper then guides the reader through a survey of Mifflin’s photographs that are organized according to categories. It would certainly be most ideal if the reader becomes as
touched and inspired by the images as I am. That is my hope, but I must leave it to the mind of the reader.
Works Cited


Genealogical and biographical material on the Mifflin family, Lloyd Mifflin Collection, MG-165m.7, Box 1, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.


