

# Carroll History Journal

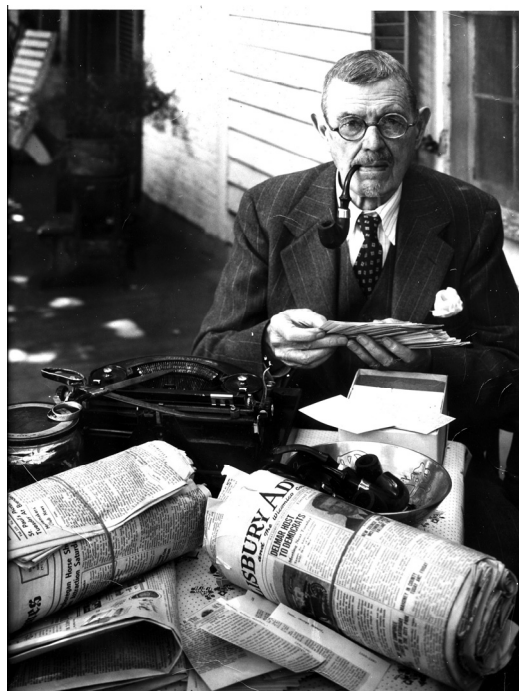
Historical Society of Carroll County, Maryland

## CATCHING LIGHT AND SHADOW: THE PHOTOGRAPHY OF LOUIS H. DIELMAN

BY FRANK J. BATAVICK

Photography, without the added sleight of hand of digital editing, allows one to see exactly what someone else saw, whether yesterday or in 1890. This is the attribute that 140 years ago caused artists, when challenged to compete with a camera's eye, to despair and seek radical, less figurative approaches to art. It is also the feature that causes historians to rejoice, because photos can recreate long-lost streetscapes and natural vistas; show characters, both the famous and the ordinary, as they actually looked and dressed; and depict activities that today we consider lost or folkloric.

The New Windsor Heritage Committee is proud to be the conservator of a collection of photographs and glass photographic plates of one of its native sons, Louis Henry Dielman. In the early to mid-20th century, Dielman sported an enviable résumé among Maryland's librarians and historians. After brief stints at the Maryland State Library in Annapolis and the Enoch Pratt Free Library in Baltimore, he became the second editor of *Maryland Historical Magazine* (1910-1938), executive secretary of the



Louis H. Dielman on a balcony of the Dielman Inn preparing to mine newspaper obituaries for his *Index of Maryland Names* which, when given to the Maryland Historical Society, contained over 200,000 entries. Today the collection is known as the Dielman-Hayward Card File and is twice as large. The scissors, index cards, typewriter, and ever-present pipe shown in the photo were Dielman's tools of the trade. (Photo by Aubrey Bodine; courtesy of New Windsor Heritage.)

Peabody Institute (1911-1942), chairman of the Maryland Historical Society's library committee (1914-1943), co-founder and first President of the Maryland Library Association, and the co-creator of the Dielman-Hayward Card File, which contains biographical information on over 400,000 Marylanders and is housed in the Maryland Historical Society's research library. Oh, and Louis also liked to take pictures.

Before he rose to prominence in Baltimore, "Mr. Lou," as he preferred to be called, was the town pharmacist of New Windsor, where he was born on January 16, 1864. His family owned the town's popular Dielman Inn, and his sisters, Lena and Agnes, continued to manage the inn until 1927. Dielman's artistic eye proved to be a family trait. His brother was the noted artist Frederick Dielman, illustrator of many books of poetry and fiction,

designer of multiple mosaic panels, including two for the Library of Congress, president of the National Academy of Design, and a professor of drawing at the City College of New York and Cooper Union.

Mr. Lou was educated in local schools and attended New Windsor College where his father once taught as a music and German language professor when it was called Calvert College. Dielman went on to attend the Maryland College of Pharmacy in Baltimore and received his degree from the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy in 1885. For the next 15 years he operated an apothecary in New Windsor right up the street from the family's inn, and he also served at varying times as postmaster, town commissioner, and justice of the peace. Despite these protean work habits, Dielman found some spare time to practice photography, and today his images offer a time-capsule vision of life in a small town, circa 1890.

The prized feature of Dielman's photos is that he preferred to shoot people rather than scenery. Most of the many prints and negative plates he left behind feature his family and the colorful guests who frequented the inn, from children frolicking in the gardens to a mounted hunting party with dogs in the countryside.

Dielman also sought out African-Americans for his subjects. Some of his strongest images are of the black kitchen help at the inn, preparing a Maryland-style meal. There is also the scene of an elderly black couple, he sitting on a chest in the foreground bent with age and she standing on the porch of their modest log cabin. Whether free or slave at the time of the Civil War, the old man's weary face betrays the harsh wages of second class citizenship and perhaps the feeling of abandonment after emancipation.

According to local vintage photography expert Bob Porterfield, Dielman used a tripod-mounted view camera with a fixed lens for his pictures. Since there are no close-ups and most of his photos are medium to medium-long shots, he probably relied on a 200mm lens. Back then, four to five seconds were considered sufficient time for a photo's exposure, during which the subject had to remain perfectly still to avoid blurring. Dielman preferred natural light and even his interior shots used nearby windows for illumination.



Dielman stored some of his 5" x 8" glass plates in this slotted wooden box. The surrounding photos comprise a unique record of life in a small town as the 19<sup>th</sup> century wound down.

New Windsor Heritage has many photographs ascribed to Dielman but only forty-one of his glass-plate negatives. Most of them are 5" x 8" but a few are 4¼" x 6½" and 4¼" x 3¼". These smaller sizes suggest that Dielman also had a hand-held camera. The 4¼" x 3¼" plates could have been made into positive images and used in a lantern slide projector, a popular entertainment medium during this time.

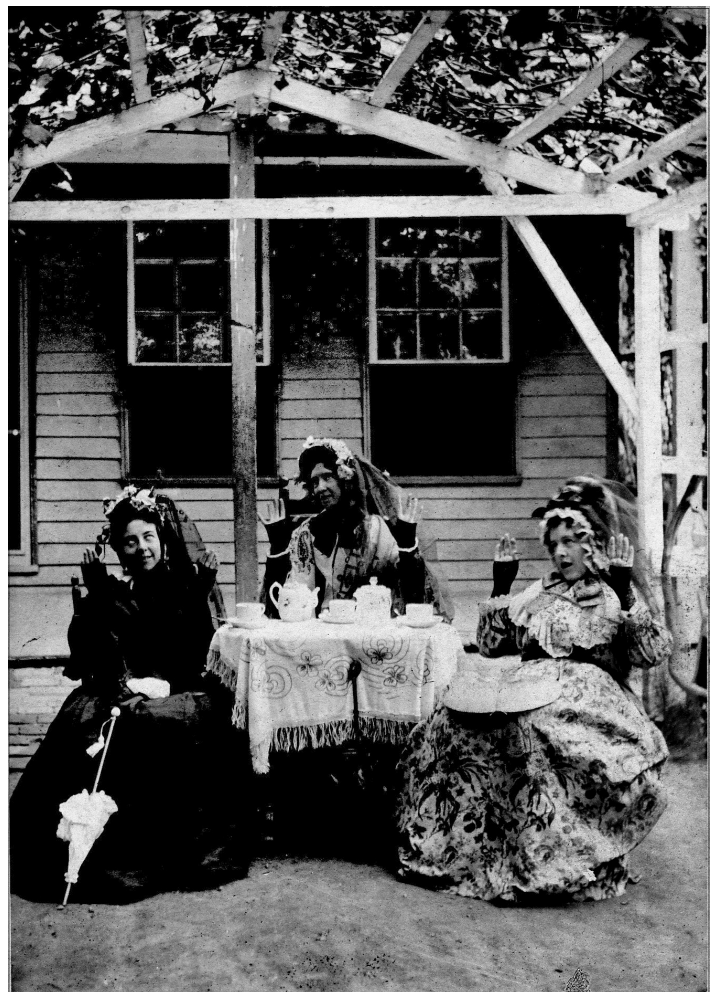
Dielman developed his own photos, not surprising for a pharmacist necessarily trained as a chemist. His photos are almost exclusively albumen prints which produce a brownish-yellow image. That's because one of the chemicals he used was derived from egg whites that helped to hold the light-sensitive silver on the paper. Over time, these albumen prints darkened to the sepia hue most often associated with archival photos.

We don't have any photos of Baltimore scenes taken by Dielman, so we assume he practiced his hobby only while a town resident and, after moving to the city, when visiting his family on weekends. In 1942 at the ripe old age of 78 he finally retired, returning to New Windsor and the then-defunct inn where he lived until his death on March 4, 1959. He spent the remainder of his 95 years working on what he





The Dielman Inn welcomed summer visitors from Baltimore, Washington, and as far away as Philadelphia who wished to escape the cities' summer heat for the cool, country breezes and healing sulphur springs of New Windsor.



Costumed ladies mugging for the camera. Dielman's father, Louis William, was a trained concert musician and he liked nothing more than to stage musicales, concerts, and skits at the inn which was regionally renowned for its cultural offerings. The ladies might have delved into the wardrobe department's closet before enjoying their afternoon tea.



Miss Lena, Dielman's sister, framed by the wisteria on the high balcony of the inn. Since the camera is almost at her level, one wonders what platform was at Dielman's disposal. Might he have climbed one of the tall trees lining the sidewalk along High Street?



George Cromwell, 17 June 1893. Little is known of Mr. Cromwell, though we find a 53-year-old by this name listed in the 1870 census and living in Westminster with the occupation of "labourer." If this is the same man, that would make him 76 years old at the time of the photo. Perhaps our Mr. Cromwell was just passing through town in pursuit of itinerant labor, or he may have been employed as staff at the inn. Regardless, he made for a wonderful subject with his crooked walking stick and the kit bag on his belt.



*Above:* A bucolic day near Slingluff Lane, outside of town. The men on horseback were preparing for a hunt, or may have just stopped to admire the farmer's coon dogs. Note the Huck Finn-like character on the left.

*Below:* Bunny and Mary, 1 May 1894. This is the second photo of the girls in a sequence of two. The first has them looking very uncomfortable, squinting into the sun. This next one shows that they have grown tired of the glare and Mr. Lou's admonishment to "Stand still." Note the little friend in the background peeking through the fence, as if wondering what all the commotion was about.







The inn's Aunt Susie cleaning a mirror—an image whose deft composition and natural lighting owe not a little to Vermeer's "Young Woman with a Water Jug." The inclusion of the pair of high buttoned shoes in the foreground is an interesting detail. (Were they hers?) This is one of a series of two photos Dielman took of Aunt Susie. The second has her standing on the chair washing the same window. The bucket is on the window sill now, the shoes are gone, and may be back on her feet. According to Julia Cairns, who knew Dielman very well, he took this photo on the second floor of the bank building on Main Street, next to his pharmacy. No doubt he liked the large window with its full light. The exercise equipment to the right suggests that the room could have served as a gym.



Two guests at the inn, Sister Mary and Dorothy June, 1893. The envelope holding this glass plate bears the stamp, "L.H. Dielman Apothecary, New Windsor, Md." and has a notation, "1 doz. cabinet cards. To be mailed." It is not known whether Dielman made the 4 1/4" X 6 1/2" portrait cards as a courtesy for these particular guests or as part of an infrequently pursued freelance photography business.



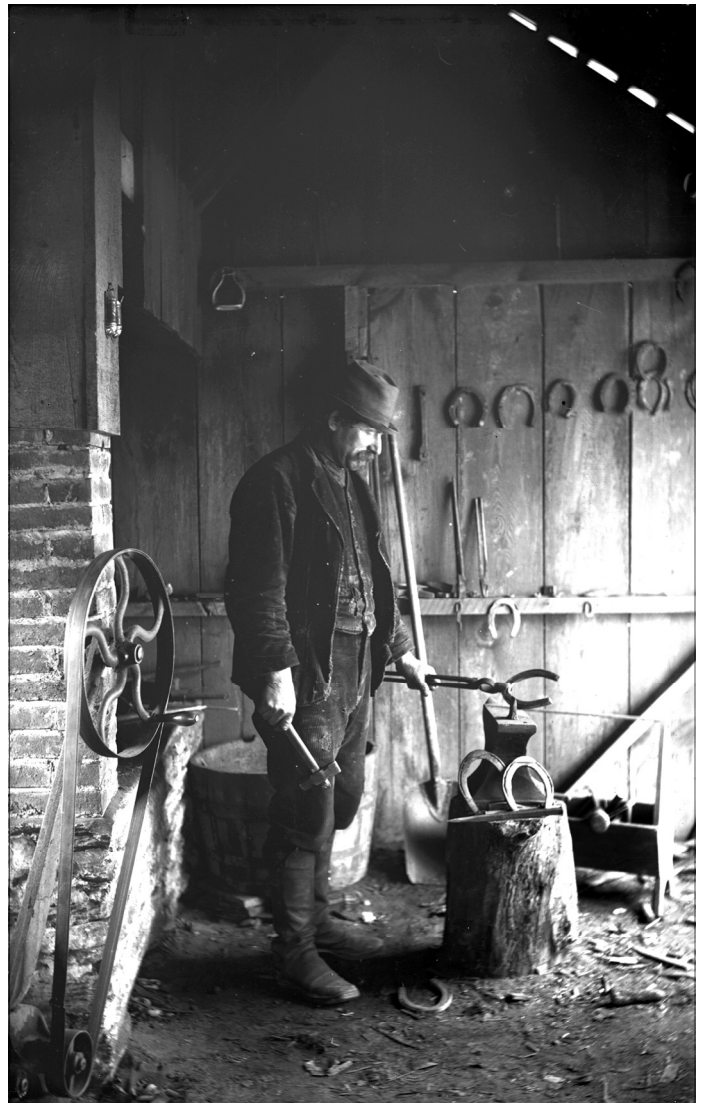
*Above:* This overly-posed photo shows the inn staff—men, women and a child—preparing chicken that would no doubt be fried “Maryland style” for the night’s dinner. The glass plate is atypical at  $4\frac{1}{4}$ ” X  $6\frac{1}{2}$ ” and may have been taken with a hand-held camera.

*Below:* The inn’s kitchen staff shucking local corn for the evening’s meal. The frame is full of interesting details, from the old pump to the two crocks. Only one of the men has an apron on, which may signal that he worked regularly in the kitchen. If so, the other two men may have been dragooned from their usual duties to help with this chore.





Winfield Scott Drach, a memorable town character, dressed in the uniform of the Grand Army of the Republic. He fought in the Union's 7th Maryland Infantry and in 1864 he was shot in the leg at the Battle of Spotsylvania and taken prisoner by the Confederates. The severity of the wound required his leg's amputation, a treatment that was all too common in 19<sup>th</sup>-century battlefield medicine.



Charles Repp, town blacksmith. He made a ladder wagon for the town fire company that is still pulled in parades today and he served as one of the company's early presidents.





*Above:* Charles and Adelaide Mine, Mt. Olivet Orchard on the outskirts of town. The trellis, kitchen garden, wash tub, scrub board, and white picket fence infuse the portrait with the details of daily life.

*Below:* Postman Ephraim Durban with his Rural Free Delivery mail cart. He delivered to houses and farms outside the town limits. Town residents had to go to the post office to pick up their mail, as they still do today.





*Above:* Farm scene with grazing cattle. One of Dielman's rare landscapes, this plate is not identified, but a similar farm scene from a different angle is labelled "Sauble Farm." George and Irene Sauble purchased *Locust Grove* at the western edge of Taneytown (off today's Route 140 at Harney Road) in 1912. Dielman was already living in Baltimore at this time, so it appears that he pursued his hobby on occasions when he returned to Carroll County.

*Below:* Unidentified man with ox cart and what appears to be a cargo of tomatoes. He was probably headed for the canning plant at the foot of Bath (now Main) and Church Streets, operated by B.F. Shriver Co. of Westminster.





*Above:* A proud grandfather with grandkids preparing to take a spin around town in his two wheeled cart known as a curricie. Seat belts anyone?

*Below:* With the Dielman Inn and a very muddy Bath (now Main) Street as a backdrop, our cast of characters includes a forlorn donkey and four denizens of the town. Note the presence of a fifth “friend,” their coveted bottle of hooch. There’s a Jack London short story lurking here.





The Dielman Inn, circa 1965. Though not taken by Dielman, this photo shows the inn as a hive of commercial activity with a barber shop, garden store, and antique store on the ground floor. At the time, Bob and Julia Cairns and family were the inn's only residents, having become the permanent guests of "Mr. Lou" in 1946. They operated the popular Boxwood Antiques and raised their family on the second floor of a brick wing behind their shop. Their son, Robin, is a freelance writer who has bittersweet memories of growing up in a mostly vacant 43-room inn. (Historical Society of Carroll County.)



*Brothers*, written by Joe Getty. The Dielman artwork was furnished by former HSCC trustee Julia Roop Cairns of New Windsor (1913-2010) who was the last resident of the Dielman Inn.

Unless otherwise credited, all images are courtesy of New Windsor Heritage.

termed his "morgue" of Maryland names and conserving materials from New Windsor's history, which today form the core of the New Windsor Heritage Committee's museum collection.

In 2011, HSCC Curator of Collections, Cathy Baty, scanned Dielman's glass plates for a documentary I was producing, *Time's Crossroads: The History of New Windsor, MD*. She also used software to change the polarity of the negatives to positive images and to sharpen them a bit. The result is a collection of unique pictures whose poignancy and power surpass anything that those proverbial thousands of words might attempt.

One last note: This is not the first time that the HSCC has honored Louis H. Dielman. In 1985 the Society sponsored an exhibit of his photographs and his brother Frederick's paintings and drawings as part of the county's celebration of the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Maryland's founding. Bob Porterfield developed the exhibit's photos, using Dielman's original plates. Some of the biographical details in this article are derived from the accompanying catalog, *Yesterday's Images: County Life through the Eyes of the Dielman*

About the author: Frank J. Batavick is a television writer, producer, and director with over 40 years of experience, including employment with Maryland Public TV and Films for the Humanities and Sciences, and operating his own company, Boxwood Productions. Frank is a trustee of the HSCC and a co-founder of the New Windsor Heritage group. He and his wife, Dori, reside in Westminster.

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