



*E. S. Dunshee*

# Last Man Standing:



E.S. Dunshee,  
Veteran Trenton Photographer

*Gary D. Saretzky*

All images courtesy of the author unless otherwise noted.



Quite a few 19th century photographers had wanderlust but Edward Sidney Dunshee, who almost concluded his career in Trenton, New Jersey, was one of the most peripatetic. He must have had a restless spirit and an ambitious drive to succeed, judging from the numerous locations where he did portraits during his long and successful life. By 1900, Dunshee, then a Philadelphia resident with a photography studio in Trenton, was one of the oldest active photographers in New Jersey, having learned how to make daguerreotypes by 1844, perhaps as early as 1843, in Vermont.<sup>1</sup>



Louis-Jacques-Mandé  
Daguerre

Sabatier-Blot, Jean Baptiste  
French (1801-1881)

[http://www.geh.org/ne/cromer/m197601680043\\_ful.html](http://www.geh.org/ne/cromer/m197601680043_ful.html)



The secret of the daguerreotype, a silver-coated sheet of copper sensitized with iodine fumes, was revealed in the summer of 1839 by Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre in Paris in exchange for a lifelong pension from the French government. Details of the process reached American shores in September, sufficient for experimenters like Seth Boyden of Newark and Robert Cornelius of Philadelphia to begin using it. Commercial portraiture was enhanced in 1840 by heightened sensitization of the daguerreotype plate with bromine fumes. The chemist Paul Beck Goddard suggested bromine fuming to Cornelius, who then opened one of the first commercial studios in May 1840 and became the first to offer portrait daguerreotypes that were not exceedingly small. Better lenses and gold toning to increase contrast significantly improved daguerreotype portraiture by 1842.<sup>2</sup>

With shorter exposures, down to a few seconds in good light, more portrait galleries appeared. Some pioneers became traveling photographers operating out of wagons or rented space in a hotel or store. They would set up in a town for a few weeks, advertise in the local paper, and then move on. Such was the case with the first daguerreotypists in New Jersey, including J. Vandeusen, in Trenton, February 1841; James Ackerman, in Somerville, June 1841, and Newark from August to December that year; and Arthur Livermore, in Flemington, June to July 1841. Customers in Burlington, Newark, and Trenton could have their visages fixed in silver by Livermore in 1842. Dunshee also began as an itinerant daguerreotypist. On August 5, 1844, he advertised in the *Northern Star* (Middlebury, Vermont) that he would be taking "Daguerreotype Miniatures" for a few days and that he could also take copies of paintings and engravings by the same process.

Many of the early photographers in the Daguerreian Era of the 1840s-1850s worked only for a few years in the profession and then moved on to other pursuits. Charlotte Prosch, the earliest known professional woman daguerreotypist in New Jersey, operated in Newark from 1847 to 1853, and later had an ice cream shop in her husband Alfred Day's bakery. Others like Victor Piard, a French immigrant, went in and out of photography,



sometimes operating his own galleries, at other times working for photographers with bigger businesses like Edward Anthony and Charles D. Fredricks, and in between working at entirely different occupations.<sup>3</sup> Some, like John Roth of Freehold, active as a photographer from about 1850 to at least 1872, combined picture making with another pursuit, in his case a jewelry and watchmaking shop.

Very few daguerreotypists who started in the 1840s were still photographers, much less alive, at the turn of the century in 1900. Mathew Brady, long retired, had died in 1896. Another famed Civil War photographer, George N. Barnard (1819–1902), who briefly had his own gallery in Newark in September of 1844, retired in 1888, although he may still have been making a few photographs for friends and family in Cedarville, near Syracuse.<sup>4</sup> "The Mathew Brady of the South," George S. Cook, who grew up in Newark and worked there as a daguerreotypist in 1845–1846, turned over the management of his studio in Richmond, Virginia, to his sons in 1892.<sup>5</sup> The venerable Josiah Hawes (1808–1901) of Boston, whose career spanned 1843 to 1901, was described in 1898 as "the oldest working

photographer."<sup>6</sup> Dunshee worked even longer, though not to the age of Hawes. With a photographic working life from no later than 1844 to 1904, Dunshee possibly was "the last man standing" among the pioneer daguerreotypists.

E.S. Dunshee, as he usually rendered his name, was born in Vermont in January 1823 to Vermont-born parents. It is likely that he began photographic portraiture either part time or as an assistant for another daguerreotypist. He opened his own gallery in Bristol, Vermont, in 1845. After a couple of years at that location, including travel in the U.S. and Canada, he wed Sarah Arnold on June 13, 1847, in New London, Connecticut, and then settled that year in Fall River, Massachusetts. In the 1850 Fall River Census, he was listed as Sidney E. Dunshee, 27, Artist, living with his spouse Sarah A., 23, born in Connecticut. They had a daughter



E. S. DUNSHEE,  
Artist,  
No. 30 Purchase Street,  
NEW BEDFORD.

Copies of the same at any time.

*Richard E. Warner*  
*Born Oct 6<sup>th</sup> 1861*  
*Picture taken July 6<sup>th</sup> 1863*

**No. 30 Purchase St.  
New Bedford, MA,  
1863**

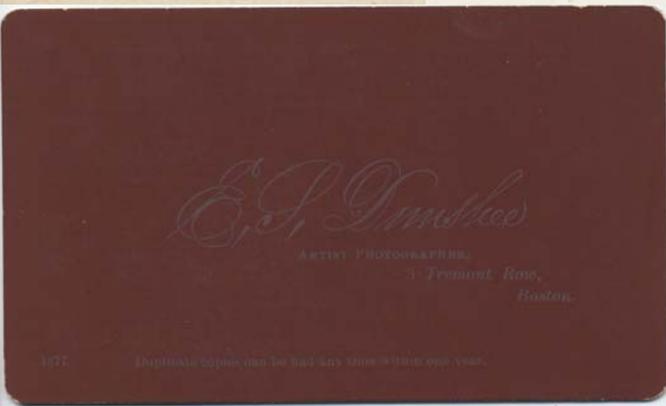




Alice L., one year old, born in Massachusetts. Also living with them was his younger brother Cornelius E., 21, profession not mentioned but who also became a photographer, and his sister, Mary H., 16, both born in Vermont. Edward's parents, Edward (c. 1795–1841) and Harriet Miranda Parmalee (c. 1801–1846) had died by this time, explaining why the three siblings were living together. From 1853 to about 1856, Cornelius worked for Edward until Edward relocated. Cornelius stayed in Fall River at least until 1861, when he set up shop in Providence, Rhode Island.

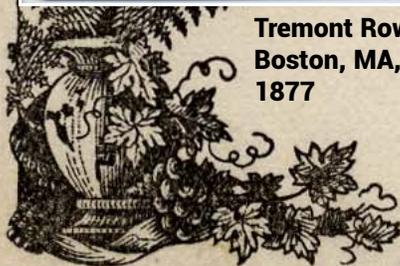


Meanwhile, by 1856, Edward had moved to the maritime port of New Bedford, Massachusetts, where he was highly successful, particularly with ambrotypes. In business directories, Dunshee marketed ambrotypes for sea travelers.<sup>7</sup> The ambrotype was popular from about 1856 to 1865. It featured an underexposed collodion negative on glass that appeared positive from the use of a black backing such as paint. The positive effect could also be achieved by using a dark colored glass, usually dark red, hence the term ruby ambrotype. Since glass was less expensive than copper, ambrotypes were cheaper than daguerreotypes to produce. They were usually presented in the same types of cases as daguerreotypes with a brass mat and cover glass.



While most ambrotypes found today do not have the photographer's identification, Dunshee was among those who had his name embossed on the brass mat used in the case. He claimed that he had the exclusive rights in New Bedford to the James Ambrose Cutting Patent Ambrotype, in which the cover glass was glued to the glass carrying the image, using balsam. On August 21, 1861, in New Bedford, Dunshee made two ambrotypes of Henry David Thoreau, discussed in Mark Sullivan, *Picturing Thoreau: Henry David Thoreau in Visual Culture* (2015).

**Tremont Row,  
Boston, MA,  
1877**

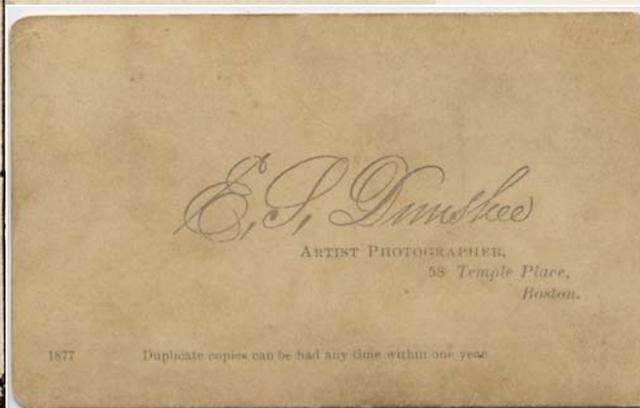




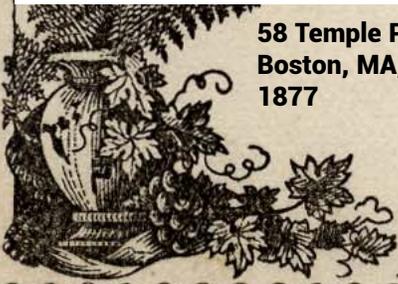
In New Bedford, Dunshee is listed in the 1860 census as Ambrotypist. The cameraman's household included his wife Sarah, daughter Alice, now 10, and son Edward Byron, known as "Eddie," 9.<sup>8</sup> In that census, Dunshee reported \$6,500 in real estate and a personal estate valued at \$500. Adjusted for inflation, he was worth more than \$200,000 in today's dollars. A further indication of his success is that the Dunshees had a live-in Irish servant, Joann Ran, 24.



In addition to ambrotypes, Dunshee also began producing photographs on paper from collodion glass negatives. By the early 1860s, the most popular format for paper photographs was the carte-de-visite, a small image on albumen paper mounted on thin cardboard, 2 3/8 x 4 inches, with the photographer's name and address displayed on the back. Like his contemporaries, Dunshee printed his negatives in the sun with the negative on top of sensitized albumen paper in a printing frame. At the E.S. Dunshee studio at 30 Purchase Street in New Bedford on July 6, 1863, a young lad named Richard E. Warner stood on a chair for a carte-de-visite portrait (see illustration, page 4).



Edward S. Dunshee kept on the move. *Industries of Philadelphia* (1881), in its biography of Dunshee, stated that he worked in Rochester, New York, early in his career.<sup>9</sup> The Rochester city directory first lists him in 1864 at 68 1/2 State Street. In 1865, his daughter Alice died on May 27 and was buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery.<sup>10</sup> That December 1<sup>st</sup>, Cornelius sold his gallery in Providence and moved to Rochester to work with Edward. The Rochester studio there became "Dunshee Brothers" in 1868. By that time, they had a second gallery at 14 State.<sup>11</sup> Early that year, Edward S. Dunshee relocated to Boston and opened a gallery on March 8 at 3 Tremont Row; it continued at that location with several changes in



**58 Temple Pl.,  
Boston, MA,  
1877**



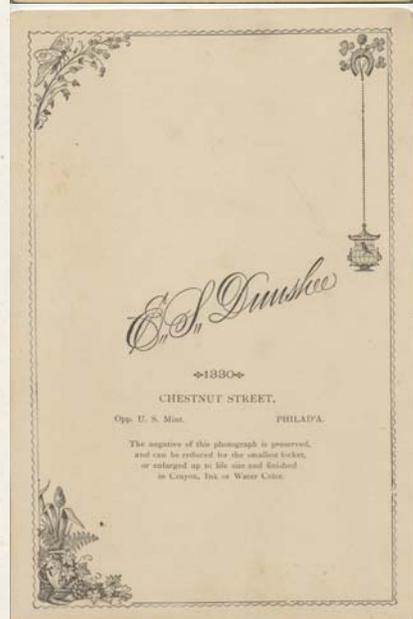
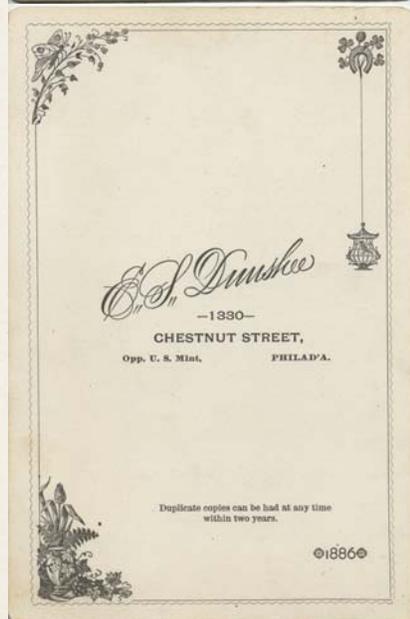
*Dunshee* { 1330 CHESTNUT STREET,  
Opp. U. S. Mint. PHILA'D.



*Dunshee* { 1330 CHESTNUT STREET,  
Opp. U. S. Mint. PHILA.



*Dunshee* { 1330 CHESTNUT STREET,  
Opp. U. S. Mint. PHILA'D.



**1330 Chestnut St.,  
Philadelphia, PA, L-R:  
undated, 1886, undated**



management until 1890. Just a block from the Courthouse in the retail district that also was home to the printing trades, it was well situated. Dunshee must have known Josiah Johnson Hawes, a photography portraitist whose business also was on Tremont Row, a short street that no longer exists.

In the 1870 Boston census, Dunshee is credited with real estate worth \$10,000 and personal estate of \$1,000. His son Eddie, 19, is listed as Dunshee's apprentice; soon Dunshee would proudly change the name of his business to Edward S. Dunshee & Son. In addition to 3 Tremont Row, Eddie worked at branches at 323 Washington, Boston,



*Dunshee* 1330 CHESTNUT STREET,  
Opp. U. S. Mint. PHILA'D.



**1330 Chestnut St.,  
Philadelphia, PA,  
undated**



1873–1874; 503 Washington, Boston, 1875; 9 Harvard Place, Charlestown in 1878; and 58 Temple Place, Boston, 1879. Edward S. Dunshee & Son also had a studio in Lynn, Massachusetts, from 1873 to 1876.<sup>12</sup>

In the 1870s and 1880s, Dunshee produced many cabinet cards, 4 1/4 x 6 1/2 inches. Cabinet cards gradually replaced the smaller cartes-de-visite as the most popular format for studio portraits. With the larger format and the more popular close-up portraits, photographers, including Dunshee, began retouching their negatives before printing. In ads, Dunshee also offered other types of photographs, including images on porcelain and photographs with applied watercolor. Although his ads in 1869 offered “every style of picture,” only one example of the cheapest form of photography—tintypes—has come to the attention of the writer, an early 1860s portrait from his New Bedford studio, now at the New Bedford Whaling Museum.

Leaving his nephew Fred F. Dunshee in charge in Boston, Dunshee moved to Philadelphia. On June 1, 1878, he opened a portrait studio at 1330 Chestnut Street. Like Broad Street in Newark, Chestnut Street was the locus for a number of upscale photo galleries in Philadelphia in the Nineteenth Century. Dunshee's studio, opposite the U.S. Mint, occupied the entire second floor, with a depth of 150 feet.<sup>13</sup> The 1880 Census found him living there without other family members. At the time the 1880 census was taken, Dunshee's wife Sarah had just died on May 8. He must have been lonely because on June 7, 1881, he married Annie Eva Oram in Camden, New Jersey. Annie, almost forty years younger than Edward, was born in Philadelphia or New Jersey (sources vary) in February 1862 to parents from Pennsylvania. She gave birth to their son Norman S. Dunshee, on July 19, 1888, in Pennsylvania.<sup>14</sup>

It was probably soon after his arrival in Philadelphia that Dunshee switched from preparing the time consuming and messy collodion negatives, which had to be sensitized in the darkroom just before use, to the gelatin dry plate. Dry plates were first produced in the United States in the late 1870s, but George Eastman in Rochester became the major manufacturer in the early 1880s. These glass negatives not only could be used right out of the box but they were more



*Dunshee Artist* 209 E. STATE STREET,  
Opposite P. O. TRENTON, N. J.



*Dunshee Artist* 209 E. STATE STREET,  
Opposite P. O. TRENTON, N. J.

**209 E. State St.,  
Trenton, NJ**

Left photo courtesy  
Richard Willinger

sensitive to light and thereby shortened exposure times, a particular advantage when capturing restless children. Dunshee continued to contact print these negatives onto albumen paper until the 1890s.

During the last decade of the Nineteenth Century, many Philadelphia residents were moving farther out from the city-center and used the new streetcar lines for trips downtown. In 1891, Dunshee established a second Philadelphia location at 4517 Frankford Avenue in Northeast Philadelphia. It was a five-minute walk to his residence at 4320 Paul Street. He retained both Philadelphia studios until 1895.<sup>15</sup>

Some Philadelphia photographers, like New Jersey native James R. Applegate, opened summer studios in Atlantic City, a popular vacation destination for his urban clientele. But instead of the Jersey Shore, Dunshee, in November 1894, established a gallery at 209 E. State Street, Trenton, and soon after closed his Philadelphia locations. He remained open in Trenton until 1901.



**209 E. State St.,  
Trenton, NJ**

Right photo courtesy  
Richard Willinger



Why did Dunshee, then in his seventies, start a new business in Trenton? New Jersey's capital city was growing rapidly with an excellent economy and employment opportunities at the Roebling works, potteries, and other industries. The population almost doubled in fifteen years from less than 30,000 in 1880 to more than 57,000 in 1895. Moreover, Dunshee found an excellent location. He was across the street from the U.S. Courthouse and Post Office and near the state and city government buildings, hotels, and theaters. Another reason may have been the competition in Philadelphia. In any case, he had a young wife and son to support. Or maybe he was just ready for another change.

Dunshee first appears in Trenton city directories as "Photo Artist." He was listed from 1894 to 1901, with the name "Dunshee & Co." in 1895 and 1898–1900. (The "& Co." suggests that another photographer was involved in the business.) The *Trenton Times*, November 27, 1895, reported that Dunshee was celebrating the first anniversary



**209 E. State St.,  
Trenton, NJ**  
Right photo courtesy  
Richard Willinger

of the opening of his gallery by reducing prices: cabinet cards, 4 for \$1, 6 for \$1.50, and 12 for \$2-\$3. On November 28, 1895, he offered a free cabinet card on Thanksgiving.

Dunshee's portraiture in Trenton was typical of studios at that time, before Pictorialist aesthetics featuring off-center compositions, soft focus, and at-home portraits, practiced by *fin-de-siècle* amateurs, began to influence professional photographers around the turn of the century.<sup>16</sup> But Dunshee remained "Old School." He used typical studio props and a variety of poses with both plain and painted backgrounds.

Photographers had several options with regard to managing multiple backgrounds. One device, patented in 1870 by Jonas Anderson, had two or more backgrounds on a long continuous looped canvas mounted on a stand with "a system of ratchets and pawls" that allowed the operator to wind the canvas vertically to a different position with very little effort. Another was Louis Moberly's 1879 invention, a large box with top and bottom grooves into which six backgrounds on frames could be slid in or out.



This technique had the advantage of protecting the backgrounds from damage but took up more floor space than Anderson's design.<sup>17</sup>

In clear focus, Dunshee generally captured adults looking off at 45 degrees in a three-quarter view that was considered more dignified than having the subject frontally address the camera. Children, however, gazed toward Dunshee standing just to the right of the lens, perhaps holding a "birdie" to get their attention. (Photographers began using mechanical birds in the 1870s.) Like Frank Dunn in New Brunswick, Dunshee usually placed infants on a large long-haired fur. It's possible that there was a hole in the pelt behind which a "hidden mother" could reach through and hold the child in place or that the hole was used for a belt that helped to immobilize the subject.

If they have not been abraded or otherwise physically mishandled, Dunshee's cabinet card portraits from Trenton are in excellent condition today because he printed with gold-toned collodion printing-out-paper (POP), which is resistant to fading and other deterioration problems. It can usually be identified by iridescence—colors seen when moving the photo back and forth under a light source. Sometimes Dunshee put the mounted cabinet card in a press which raised a central rectangular area above the border; this attractive feature made the delicate surface of the print more liable to damage from rubbing.

Dunshee's last appearance in the *Trenton Times* was on February 23, 1901. That issue reported that he was being visited by his son "Clarence Dunshee of Philadelphia." This "Clarence" was probably Norman, as Dunshee did not have a son named Clarence and there was no Clarence Dunshee listed in the 1900 Census in Philadelphia—or indeed anywhere in the United States. But this article is useful because it places Edward S. Dunshee personally at his studio in Trenton in 1901, at a time when his residence was in Philadelphia. Apparently, he was a commuter. The studio was not listed in the 1902 Trenton directory.

Dunshee's last known studio was at 1344 Ridge Avenue, Philadelphia, in 1904, when he was 81 years old. It was a short walk from his rooms at 1523 Fairmount Avenue.





Apparently, he then retired, as the 1905 city directory listed him without profession.

On May 23, 1907, at the age of 84, Dunshee died at his residence of "old age," according to his death certificate. After a funeral at home with family and friends, he was buried on May 25 in Mt. Vernon Cemetery, Philadelphia.<sup>18</sup> By then largely forgotten as a photography pioneer, his passing did not generate an obituary in either the *Trenton Times* or the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. But his excellent portraits remain a lasting testimony to the quality of his work.



- 1 *Industries of Philadelphia* (1881), which contains errors, stated that Dunshee learned the process before 1840 but that is very doubtful. In an 1853 city directory, he claimed in an ad that he had eight years practical experience, which would indicate 1845 as a start date; that date must refer to when he opened his own gallery. In the *Rochester Daily Union & Advertiser*, January 12, 1865, he stated that he had 23 years experience, implying he began in 1842. In 1888, Dunshee's ad for his Philadelphia studio in the *Bridgeton (NJ) Evening News* mentioned that he had 45 years experience and in 1894, the *Trenton Evening Times* stated that he had more than 50 years experience. Both these later references imply that he began by 1843.
- 2 The earliest known commercial studio was that of A. S. Wolcott and John Johnson in New York; they offered "Sun Drawn Miniatures" in March 1840 using system of mirrors and a camera without a lens. *New York Sun*, March 4, 1840, quoted in Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene A Social History, 1839-1889* (1938, Dover reprint 1964, p. 34). See also William F. Stapp, *Robert Cornelius: Portraits from the Dawn of Photography* (Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984) and Dennis A. Waters, *Dating American Daguerreotypes*, <http://www.finedags.com/dating/datingdags2.shtml>
- 3 In 1843, early in his career, Piard photographed Congressmen in Washington, D.C. for Anthony, Edwards & Co. During the 1840s and 1850s, he briefly tried his hand at dentistry and the grocery business, and partnered in a daguerreotype gallery with Alexander Beckers in New York. Piard then ran his own photography gallery in Jersey City, 1859 to 1867, but then gave it up for fishing and boat building in Oceanport.
- 4 Keith F. Davis, *George N. Barnard: Photographer of Sherman's Campaign*. Kansas City: Hallmark Cards, 1990.
- 5 Jack C. Ramsay, Jr. *Photographer . . . Under Fire: The Story of George S. Cook, 1819-1902*. Green Bay: Historical Resources Press, 1994.
- 6 Grant Romer and Brian Wallis, eds., *Young America: The Daguerreotypes of Southworth and Hawes*. Steidl & International Center of Photography, 2005. At different times, Hawes had studios in at least two locations on Tremont Row.
- 7 John S. Craig, *Craig's Daguerreian Registry*, Volume 2, Torrington, CT: Craig, 1996, p. 168.
- 8 The 1860 Census erroneously lists Eddie's birthplace as Vermont. He was born in Fall River. Massachusetts Vital Records, 1841-1910, Volume 42, p. 77.
- 9 *The Industries of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Richard Edwards, 1881.
- 10 <http://www.thedunshees.com/DunsheeFamilyHistory/p137.htm#i2222>
- 11 Another brother, Horace S. Dunshee (1825-1881), also a photographer, moved from Rockford, Illinois, to Rochester in 1870. He worked at the Dunshee Brothers at 68 1/2 State Street, then had his own studio at 70 State Street. In about 1873, Horace's son Fred F. Dunshee, who was working as a cashier, moved from Rochester to Boston to work for Edward S. Dunshee at 3 Tremont Row, initially as a clerk. By 1888, after the





departure of Edward's son, Edward Byron Dunshee, for Jacksonville, Florida, Fred Dunshee managed the Dunshee & Co. studio at 3 Tremont Row. Late in 1889, he and Frank Maxfield, who also worked for Dunshee & Co., opened a new location at 22 Winter Street and beginning on January 1, 1890, operated from there exclusively.

12 Cornelius stayed there when Edward moved on to Boston in 1868. <http://www.thedunshees.com/DunsheeFamilyHistory/p156.htm> Ron Polito, ed. *A Directory of Massachusetts Photographers, 1839-1900*. Camden, Maine: Picton Press, 1993.

13 *Industries of Philadelphia*, 1881.

14 The 1900 Census records the Dunshees renting at 1523 Fairmount Avenue, Philadelphia, with six boarders and two black female servants, Martha Dixon, 23, and Ella Brooks, 25. The death certificate for Norman Dunshee, who died in Philadelphia on May 7, 1938, gives an alternate spelling of his mother's maiden name as Harroun.

15 In this regard, Dunshee was similar to the dean of Philadelphia portrait photographers, Frederick Gutekunst, who branched out from his downtown location at 712 Arch Street in the 1890s and opened an ancillary studio at 1700 N. Broad, near the new Temple University.

16 For a discussion of Pictorialist aesthetics in portrait photography of the early 1900s, see Gary D. Saretzky, "Elias Goldensky: Wizard of Photography," *Pennsylvania History* 64:2 (Spring 1997), available at <http://journals.psu.edu/phj>

17 Janice G. Schimmelman, *American Photographic Patents: The Daguerreotype & Wet Plate Era, 1840-1880* (Nevada City, CA: Carl Mautz, 2002).

18 Mortuary Notice, Philadelphia Inquirer, May 24, 1907, p. 7. Death certificate, Ancestry.com.

The author acknowledges with gratitude research assistance provided by Bette Epstein, Evan Lindner, and Ron Polito, who provided me with copies of documents pertaining to the Dunshees.

