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Reginald G. Trotter

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MINIATURE PHOTOGRAPHY AS AN INSTRUMENT OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH

By REGINALD G. TROTTER

After Mr. Talman's clear and comprehensive survey it remains for me to deal with the use of miniature photography by the individual scholar, not so much his use of its results obtained by the work of other hands as the advantages that he may enjoy through employing a camera in his own hands to supplement other methods of note-taking and copying.

Any who demur at the thought of departing from the general practice of amateur camera-users, pressing the button and letting somebody else do the rest, may be assured that it is by no means essential in this new use of the camera to do one's own finishing and that even if one has his films developed commercially the cost is negligible compared with that of securing other kinds of copies or facsimiles. Of course when one is not content to read the projected film and must have enlarged prints made, that does add appreciably to the cost. These enlarged prints, however, need not be full size, and if one makes his own, on photostat paper (which is cheap and fast), reducing them to one-half or one-third size, to be read, if need be, with a reading glass, the cost of material for such prints amounts to very little.

When I began to copy documents with a camera two years ago, it was with the expectation that it would be necessary to make enlarged prints in all cases, yet even so the method promised to save me in a single summer more than the cost of all the equipment involved. But after returning from a season's work at the Public Record Office with several thousand negatives, most of them covering two folio pages, a little experimenting with reading by the projection method soon showed me that in the use of much of the material, particularly when there was continuity of subject-matter through many negatives, reading by projection would be sufficiently satisfactory to obviate the necessity of adding the step of making enlarged prints. It remains desirable, however, in certain cases, for the sake of greater convenience in later use, to provide enlargements. Of these, when one is making them in quantity, several dozen can be completed in an evening, at a cost for material of two to three cents each. This is additional to the cost of film, but if that is purchased in quantity and cut into loading lengths at home, it costs considerably less than one cent a negative.

But much as I might expatiate upon the slightness of any technical difficulties to be encountered in doing one's own finishing, no doubt there are many students of history who will have little taste for facing them, even experimentally. The matter of most interest as well as importance is rather the use of the camera itself. Here there are certainly now no technical difficulties that need trouble anybody, however uninterested he may be in apparatus as such.

In equipping oneself to photograph documents in quantity the prime essentials are that the camera chosen should use small film (for economy and convenience) and be adapted to securing accurate focus at very close range. Some sort of portable stand is also needed, preferably

one that makes it possible to point the camera downwards at the table, in order that the required pages can be photographed as one comes to them without having to shift the volume or portfolio. No doubt many small cameras could be adapted to these ends with a little ingenuity, now that film has been perfected of sufficiently fine a grain. The camera that I use myself happens to be a Leica, chosen in 1932 because its makers had done more than other manufacturers to provide convenient auxiliary apparatus adapting it to amateur use in copying. It is this which I am to set up now before you in order to give an actual demonstration, in very amateur fashion, of the practicability of the amateur photography of documents.

[The speaker proceeded to unwrap his compact portable equipment, set it up on the table before him, and photograph the morning newspaper, pointing out the convenience, simplicity, and rapidity of the whole procedure. A film strip was then projected on a screen to demonstrate that method of using the results. Sample enlargements from miniature films of documents, newsprint, maps, and prints, which had been photographed under various conditions of artificial and natural light, were passed around. Concerning these the speaker remarked that although judged by professional standards the photographic excellence of such home-made reproductions might not be very high, perhaps for that reason they would demonstrate all the better the sufficiency of amateur photographic technique for the scholar's purposes.]