

History conferences: in Rochester

PhotoHistory III, a symposium on the history of photography, was held at the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House during the weekend of Oct. 8-10. The event was hosted by IMP/GEH and sponsored by the Photographic Historical Society, a Rochester, N.Y., organization composed mainly of collectors of "photographica."

The conference participants—like the members of the sponsoring group and its umbrella, the Photographic Historical Society of America, which conducted its annual business meeting during the weekend—were a strange mix of collectors of photographic hardware (cameras, miniature cases, technical books, even chemicals) and people interested in the end product of the manipulations: the image.

Presentations reflected the diversity of the audience, with talks ranging from a chronological listing of Japanese 35mm SLR cameras (postwar) and a travelogue-type slide tour of W.H.F. Talbot's hometown, Lacock, by the curator of the Fox Talbot Museum, to scholarly lectures on early uses of the medium.

Included in the days' sessions were "Japan's Photography in its Early Stages," presented by Norihiko Matsumoto, and Jerome O'Neill's entertaining talk on racetrack "photofinish" photographs.

Heinz Henisch, editor of **History of Photography**, a new journal which begins publication in January, provided some challenges to accepted assumptions about photographic history by pointing out events in Eastern Europe which occurred at the same time as more famous Western counterparts. For instance, Henisch reported that the Russian Bestuzhev-Ryumin discovered the light

sensitivity of silver salts in 1725—the same year that Johann Schulze is said to have made his discovery.

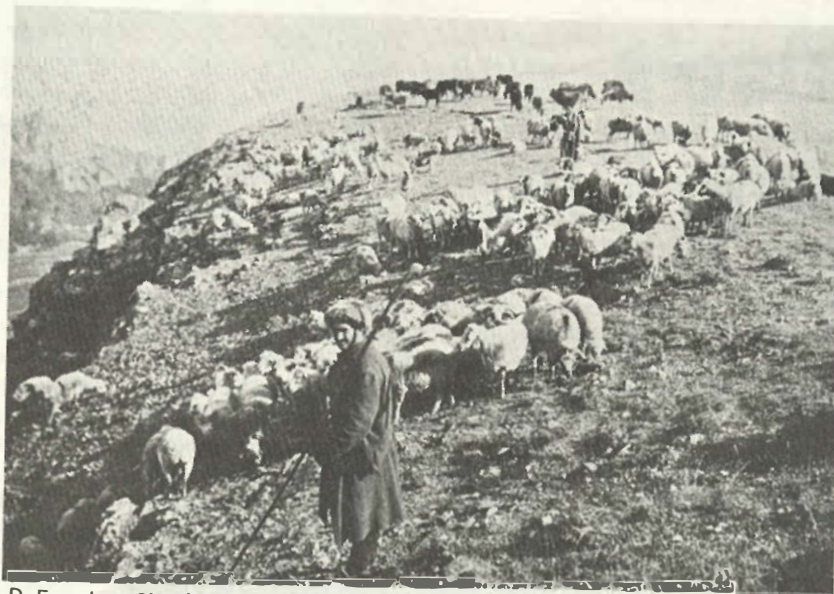
Lithographs after daguerreotypes were published in Eastern Europe at about the same time as the well-known series **Excursions Daguerriennes** appeared, Henisch noted. Count Szathmari, according to Henisch, preceded Fenton in photographing the Crimean War.

Henisch did not, however, emphasize "firsts," but tried to provide information on what was happening in what we often think of as "underdeveloped" countries during the early years of photography.

Perhaps the best-received presentation was Estelle Jussim's "An Immigrant Photographer of the 1920s: Apprenticeship, Aesthetic Milieu, and Business Adventures." Jussim, author of **Visual Communication and the Graphic Arts**, traced

the career of a studio portraitist ("a photographer of modest aspirations and small renown") from apprenticeship in Russia as a retoucher through a succession of studios catering to New York City's immigrant community, participation (with 25 other photographers) in a doomed Ontario gold mining venture, and the eventual decline of his business.

She also showed post-studio snapshots he made with a hand camera (which camera the old photographer blamed for the demise of his business) in juxtaposition with his canvas-backed formal portraits. The point—vividly illustrated—was that he never was able to adapt his stand camera technique to a system which required more spontaneous responses. His snapshots stayed every bit as technically poor as the grossest amateur's.



D. Ermakov, **Shepherds**, c. 1890, from an album of "Georgian Types." Collection of Heinz Henisch, courtesy The Photographic Historical Society.

Prompted by the symposium moderator, Jussim revealed why she was privy to the many intimate details with which she spiced the story of her subject's life and career. The photographer, she admitted, was her father.

"There were a number of different special interest groups attending," said Jerome O'Neill, publicity chairman for the event, when asked about the varied interests of participants. "I think the equipment people found less of interest," he continued. "In fact, some New York City equipment collectors stayed away specifically because the program appeared to emphasize images."

Asked whether he thought the groups might be mutually exclusive, O'Neill said, "There's been some talk about parallel sessions, but with a local membership of 40 to 50 and with the conference being organized entirely by volunteers, things would get that much harder. I'm not sure we could do it."

Even with the volunteer labor and the fact that the society paid no honoraria or travel expenses, it looked, for a while, as though the organization might not sell enough tickets at \$20.00 to break even. "We cut it a little closer than we would have been comfortable with," said O'Neill, "but it ended up as a success." The final enrollment was announced at the conference as "about 200."

The organizers plan to publish the proceedings of the symposium, and hope to mail them in considerably less time than the two years it took to produce the collected abstracts of Photo History II. Prepaid orders (\$6.00 each) may be submitted to the Photographic Historical Society, P.O. Box 9563, Rochester, N.Y. 14604.

—Charles Desmarais