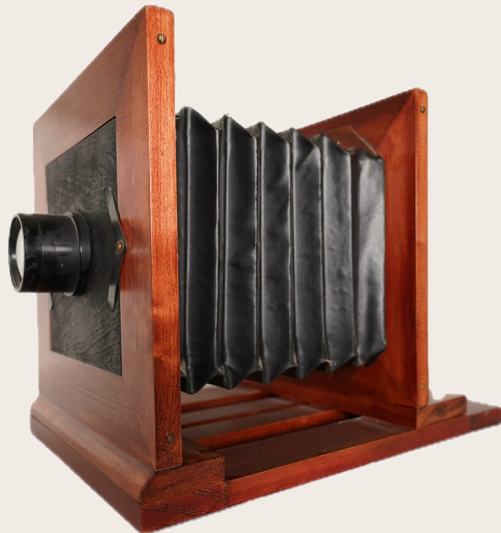


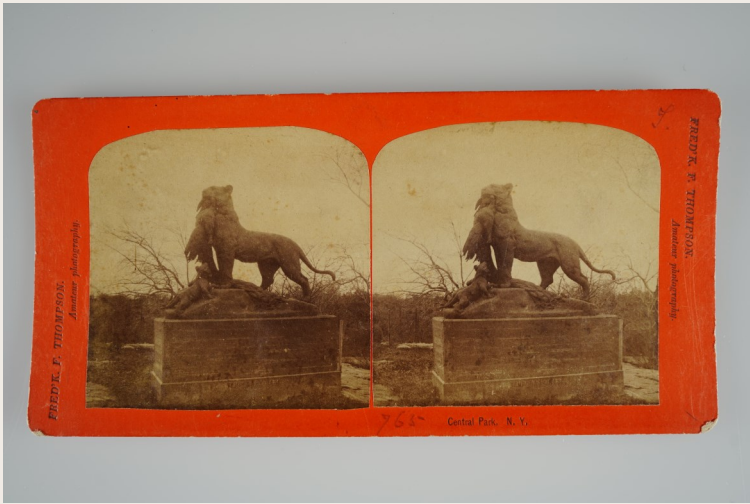
~~ Thompson Photography ~~

Can you imagine life before photography? When Frederick Thompson was born into this world in 1836, the only way to represent people, scenes, or objects was for an artist to take the time and effort to make a painting, which was not always an accurate representation of the subject.



Cameras circa 1895

Photography was first invented in Europe in 1839 – Louis Daguerre was the first to make photographs, and they were a wonder – they seemed like magic when people first saw them. However, those early photographs used a method that was extremely costly, impractical, and hazardous (for example, the process required applying and polishing a silver film onto a copper plate, oxidizing that surface with an acidic halogen; then after a lengthy exposure, treating with mercury vapor [a potent neurotoxin] in order to accomplish the film development).



FFR Stereograph Images

Photography was first introduced to the US in 1839, when Frederick was 3 years old. In a sense, Frederick Thompson and photography grew up together. The way that photographic art and science made progress in its infancy was primarily through the efforts of amateur photographers – those who had the means, free time and experimental aptitude to pursue it. Foremost among the amateurs was Frederick Thompson, who had been described as the best dry-plate photographer in America.

Although all photography has been “dry” for the past 100+ years, in its infancy wet photographic plates were used. Frederick Thompson did experiments improving upon the performance of dry photographic plates, they were an improvement because dry plates could be prepared well in advance, while wet plates needed to be used in a few hours. In April 1862 he participated in a much heralded “Great Photographic Duel” against an advocate for the wet process. Frederick Thompson demonstrated the superiority of dry plates at that time.



Glass Plate taken by Frederick Ferris Thompson ~ The Great Hall



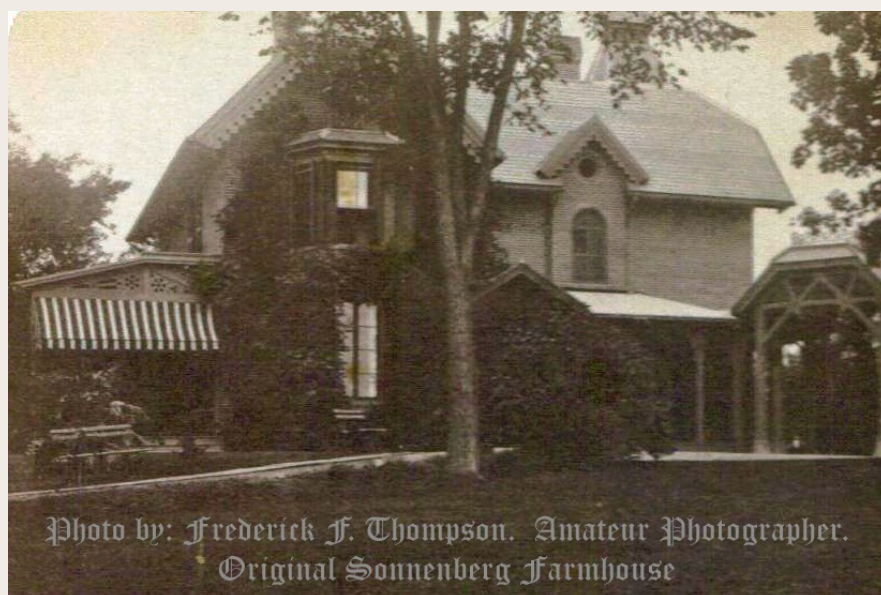
**Glass Plate taken by Frederick Ferris Thompson
~ upper South Lawn View of Mansion
~ lower Japanese Garden**



Amateurs like Frederick Thompson would experiment with modifications to previously known photographic methods to make them less costly, less dangerous, less time-consuming, more portable, etc. The way their improvements were transmitted and documented was through letters sent to the newly started photographic journals which were published. Frederick Thompson was an excellent and prolific writer, as well as an experimentalist, and was eager to share his findings. His writings reflected a high degree of wit, humor, and self-deprecation; he would characterize his apparatus of a binocular camera on a tripod as “Daddy Long-Legs”, and himself as the “Struggling Amateur”. In those days, there were no commercial cameras, film, or developing solutions. At that time there was no commercial incentive to make these improvements, only interested amateurs who would undertake the steps necessary to make their own film and developing solutions. Frederick Thompson started his own brief publication about photography and was secretary to two of the early photographic clubs which encouraged such efforts and developments.

One of the early photographic techniques found particularly useful for landscape photos was stereoscopic photography - this technique used two simultaneous pictures taken with lenses a short distance apart. Then two similar photos of the same scene were printed and viewed side-by-side in a viewer - this provided the sense of three-dimensions to the photos when each eye was viewing a slightly different aspect. Frederick Thompson was a frequent user of this technique. Sonnenberg Gardens and Mansion, his summer home from 1863 until his passing in 1899, has a large collection of these old photos. Frederick Thompson took many other stereoscopic photos during his travels through scenic upstate New York and further afield.

Today we almost take photography for granted - just an app on your phone! But, recent improvements in photography stand on the shoulders of techniques pioneered by amateur photographers some 160+ years ago, before photography became a commercial success. Prominent among those amateurs was Frederick Ferris Thompson.



Glass Plate taken by Frederick Ferris Thompson ~ Original Sonnenberg Farmhouse