Amateur Experiences:  
Julius Sachse and Photography  
Marcy Silver Flynn

Julius Friedrich Sachse was an amateur photographer who documented Philadelphia by writing about the history of photography in that city as well as through his images of historic areas in the Delaware Valley. He also served as the editor for the periodical *American Journal of Photography*, published in Philadelphia. His contributions to late nineteenth century photography offer an insider’s view into the amateur clubs that emerged, and are an important aspect of the history of photography in Pennsylvania.

In the late nineteenth century, the term amateur photographer implied an artistic, non-commercial photographer as opposed to a studio, or commercial, photographer who focused the camera on standard subjects, like portraits of children and wedding parties. During this period, the controversy over whether photography was an art form was first discussed by prominent photographers of the day. This culminated in the Photo-Secession of 1901, a split between the old school of thought (the Rational School), and the new one.

Active prior to the formation of the Photo-Secession, Sachse represents a bridge between the past and the future. His interest in documenting the history of photography during its first fifty years (1839-1889) combined with his belief that photographs could be created as art span the gap between the two divergent schools.

Julius Sachse was born in Philadelphia on November 22, 1842, and remained in the area throughout his life. He died at his home at 4428 Pine Street on November 15, 1919. Educated at the Lutheran Academy of Philadelphia, he later received an honorary doctor of letters degree from Muhlenberg College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. In 1857, Sachse worked for a coffee and tea merchant; later he began to assist his mother, Julianna D.W Buehler Sachse, at her shirt factory, F. Sachse & Son. In 1861, he joined the Union Army, serving with the Mannenchor Rifle Co., organized to defend Philadelphia. Following his discharge in 1864, Julius Sachse married Emma Caroline Lange (1842-1922) of Philadelphia on May 15. They had six children, five of whom survived childhood. During these years, Sachse was in charge of the operation of the family shirt manufacturing business, F. Sachse & Son, at the corner of Eighth and Vine Streets. In 1869, Julius Sachse purchased “The Leopard,” an historic home in Chester County. He summered at this Victorian location until he erected “Sachsenstein” in the late 1870s in Easttown Township. He made Sachsenstein his residence through 1902, and continued to maintain a home in Philadelphia. By the late 1880s, Sachse retired due to his success in the family business as well as strong financial investments. He then began to
Figure 1: Portrait of Julius Sachse after receiving honorary degree from Muhlenberg College, between 1900 and 1919.
devote time to his favorite hobbies and interests, specifically to photography and its history as well as other histories, including that of the Seventh Day Baptist German pietists and of American Freemasons.3

Sachse, conscious of the expression “amateur photographer,” divided members of the group into two classes. The first he called the “know-it-all” amateur, one who works with ready-made dry plates and ready-mixed solutions, exposes many plates, and now and then gets a quality photograph after printing by a professional. The second, he named the _amateur photographica_, a busy, conscientious worker who “in a quiet way often produces not only excellent artistic work, but results of scientific and historic value.”4 Clearly, Sachse placed himself among this second class.

In addition to his work documenting historic sites and structures in and around Philadelphia, Sachse was a skilled copy photographer. His reputation for creating excellent copies led to his hiring by many members of Philadelphia’s elite to reproduce art work for publication and other documentary purposes. He also was personally involved in the publication of reproductions for numerous illustrated histories. He did work for hire for _Ladies Home Journal_. As stated in a biographical sketch in _The Sabbath Recorder_, he “... made illustrative reproduction a special study. His proficiency in this field soon brought his services into demand among publishers issuing high grade art books ...”

Figure 2: Brothers’ House, Ephrata, Pa., ca. 1890. This photograph is indicative of Sachse’s prolific work documenting historic architecture throughout Pennsylvania. MG-351, Sachse Collection.
Sachse’s work is held by several repositories in Pennsylvania. His camera is in the collection of the Lancaster County Historical Society, manuscripts and other printed materials are at the Chester County Historical Society, negatives in the Germantown Historical Society, negatives and photographic prints in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and manuscripts and photographic prints are in the Pennsylvania State Archives. Additional negatives are in the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Several of Sachse’s descendants in the Philadelphia area still own some of his work.

Sachse’s father, John Henry Frederick Sachse (1803-1886) was a designer and artist who worked in bronze and other metals at the shop of (Robert) Cornelius & Baker. Robert Cornelius experimented in daguerreotyping, and opened the first photography studio in Philadelphia in 1840. In February of that year, Cornelius took John Henry Frederick Sachse’s portrait, a sitting which has been speculated to have been a trial run for Cornelius before he opened his gallery to the public. All of the photographic equipment was crafted by Cornelius, with the exception of the lenses, purchased from Philadelphia photography dealer John B. McAllister, and the chemicals, obtained from Dr. Paul Beck Goddard. Doubtless, the young Julius Sachse knew many of the predominant members of the photographic world while he was growing up in Philadelphia.

Sachse is among the earliest historians of American photography. This may be a result of his family’s association with Cornelius and other founding leaders in Philadelphia photography. His published contributions (including those in the American Journal of Photography) include such titles as “The Dawn of Photography,” “Philadelphia’s Share in the Development of Photography,” “The First Photo-Mechanical Reproduction,” and “Early Daguerreotype Days.”

In 1876, the year of the International Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia, Sachse’s interest in the history of the photographic medium was apparent. He acquired all of the photographs displayed at the photographic exhibition held as part of the Centennial at Fairmount Park from its organizer. By that time, he was acquainted with many founding members of the Photographic Society of Philadelphia, a group begun in 1862 with an initial membership of thirty-three. The details of this acquisition or the time are not known. The photographs stayed in Sachse’s family until recently as part of the collection of his granddaughter, Mrs. Marian Carson. In the autumn of 1996, the Library of Congress acquired Marian Carson’s collection.

It is also not known exactly when Sachse first tried his hand at photography; by the 1880s he had experimented with the possibilities of the medium, and it seems likely that he began to concentrate on photographic work sometime after the 1876 Centennial Exposition. In 1879, Sachse registered British patents for textile printing, undoubtedly the result of his work in the family’s shirt manufacturing company. By 1880, he received a British patent for a
photomechanical printing process that used cylinders coated with etched bichromated gelatin to print images. These experiments indicate his commitment to photographic discovery.

By 1887, Sachse was showing stereoviews and lantern slides of his photographic work at events held in both Chester County and Philadelphia. These images documented historic sites and buildings that Sachse believed might be lost over time. To Sachse, illustration was an important part of documenting the history of the area around him. This vital interest in history naturally led him to participate actively in several museums and libraries in the Philadelphia metropolitan area. In 1888, he co-founded the Chester County Historical Society with an eye to preserving collections related to the history of the area. In 1890 the Historical Society of Pennsylvania exhibited fifty of Sachse's photographic views of Ephrata Cloister, an eighteenth century Pennsylvania religious community known for its work in the arts. The Cloister began to decline in the late eighteenth century, but buildings and other documents survived, and Sachse documented the site before its history was lost. His work with Ephrata Cloister assisted in making it a historic site. In addition to showing documentary and historic photographs, he exhibited platinum prints of insect mimicry at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia in 1891, revealing his interest in using photography for scientific study. By the end of the following year, Sachse accepted the newly created position of photographer at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, making copy prints of its collections. In all of these activities, Sachse merged his interest in history with his fascination with the photographic medium.

Sachse's memberships and participation in historical and scholarly societies was prolific, as it was for many affluent Philadelphians during this period. By 1894, he was elected a member of the American Philosophical Society. He also regularly participated in meetings of the Photographic Society of Philadelphia, presenting papers before the group on numerous occasions. He became a member of the Photographic Society of Philadelphia in September 1890, and resigned from that society in November 1894. By 1905 he helped to organize the Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies in Harrisburg. He also served as a historical specialist on the editorial staff of the Philadelphia Public Ledger and was the librarian/curator at the Grand Masonic Lodge of Pennsylvania.

One of the most interesting aspects of Sachse's life was his work as the editor of the American Journal of Photography. Published monthly by Philadelphia photography supply company owner and original member of the Photographic Society of Philadelphia, Thomas McCollin, the journal, begun in 1879, continued until 1912. It was a small publication with uncertain circulation that has not received as much attention by photography historians as its contemporaries, American Amateur Photographer, Philadelphia Photographer,
and Photographic Times. The influence of contributors to these periodicals cannot be underestimated. According to scholar Mary Panzer, “the editors of these journals became important and powerful voices of opinion.”

Sachse served as editor for eight years, between 1890 and 1897, and his editorials and other articles were full of fascinating stories about the life of the amateur photographer in the late nineteenth century.

Before becoming editor of the publication, an early contribution to the journal was “The Evolution of the Cereus” (copyrighted by Sachse in 1888). The frontispiece of the November issue depicted a cactus plant and the accompanying article by Sachse described his experiment to use photography to record the growth of its blossom. Inspired by Eadweard Muybridge’s work documenting animal locomotion, Sachse made an exposure of the plant at fifteen minute intervals once the budding process began. Sachse distinguished this work from his other amateur work: “in these exposures no special care was taken for the purpose of making an artistic picture; the only object in view being to obtain a set of progressive plates of the gradual evolution of the bud into a flower.” For this experiment he printed and mounted photographs; he also made a series of lantern slides.
“Amateur Experiences,” was published in thirteen parts between 1890 and 1891. Sachse wrote this series using the pseudonym “J. Focus Snappschotte” and described the trials and tribulations of being an amateur photographer. This was not his only facetious work. Other articles appearing in the magazine with his pseudonym include such titles as “The Rise and Fall of the Turkeytown Camera and Tripod Club,” “The Trials of a Photographer,” and “The Spring Meeting of the Leopardville Camera Club.” These tongue-in-cheek sketches of amateur photographers provide a unique view of their social customs. In these articles, Sachse describes fictitious clubs (like the Turkeytown Hypo Club and the Leopardville Camera Club) and memberships that mirror the activities and personalities found in actual photographic societies. For Sachse, the editorials provided humor: “... a few pages in a lighter vein, calculated to drive away the blues at times when plates would fog, or prints come out muddy or blister, notwithstanding every caution of the operator.” Although the written record of Sachse’s personal life is sparse, his photographic record and his publications survive to illuminate his perceptions of the world around him. The articles written by “Snappschotte” provide an insider’s view to the personal interactions of amateur photographers and photographic societies.

In one of Snappschotte’s early letters to the editor in the “Amateur Experiences” series, he describes a photography excursion where he is accused of trespassing, tried, proclaimed guilty of the charge, and fined. He suggests, Would it not be well for the various camera clubs to form a league and have special laws enacted for the encouragement and protection of their individual members when in pursuit of knowledge and beauty? We pause for a reply, and will be pleased to have an expression from members of other clubs upon this subject of consideration. Communications sent in care of the AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PHOTOGRAPHY will be thankfully received by your suffering fellow-amateur.

By the following month, Sachse is listed as the Associate Editor of the magazine, with Thomas McCollin remaining in place as the Managing Editor. In 1891, Sachse became the editor of the American Journal of Photography, with McCollin as the Managing Editor.

The brunt of Snappschotte’s editorial criticism (as opposed to the writings credited to Sachse) falls on members of photographic societies, particularly regarding three areas: the emphasis on the wealth and class of the amateur photographer within the society; the societies’ standards for judging and awarding medals at exhibitions; and the lack of continuing participation of societies with photographic journals. These editorials use imaginative, ficti-
tious names to describe both the societies, and the antics of their members.

One meeting of the Leopardville Camera Club to select new members portrayed society members with names like Rev. W.A. Lense, Carrie Kase, and Dense Fog, and criticized the practice of giving priority to the wealthy class over the middle class mercantile person. Sachse also lampooned photographers' manners, describing the fictitious "Quaker City Camera Club":

There is a class of persons, largely represented among the guild of amateur photographers, who presume entirely too much on their wealth or social standing, and who at home pride themselves on their good breeding and polite manners, claiming to be within the so-called exclusive social circles or sets; yet they no sooner get away from the restraint of their immediate surroundings, such as a photographic outing affords, than they seem to forget that at least a little courtesy is due the strangers on whose premises they trespass.17

Sachse routinely chastised snobbishness of amateur photography clubs, making fun of their leaders in particular. In another editorial written as Snappschotte, Sachse categorized the various photographers found in such clubs as falling into eight groups: the pot hunter, a good worker with a high opinion of his own self importance; the investigator who dabbles with inventions; the faddist who is particular and methodical; the everlasting interrogator, a nuisance; the base imitator; the general grumbler; the punster; and the ordinary individual.18 As editor, Sachse seemed to be a crusader in support of the ordinary individual interested in amateur photography.

Another piece, "A Case Photographic," excoriated an amateur photographer with some standing. This man, a "theorist" and an officer of the Keystone Camera Club, is reported to have exposed more plates than anyone, and then sent them out to a professional to be developed. Snappschotte criticizes the standard that places importance in having the wealth to have an expensive outfit and to afford multiple exposures, without the talent or interest in becoming better at the art.

Poking fun at scientific photography, "Amphibian Photography" describes "scientific" images of a turtle which are really views of a raisin with clove feet. The photography club membership is frustrated by the practical joke and appoints a committee to find its perpetrator so he or she can be expelled.19 The following installment continues the story with Snappschotte forced to resign for the practical joke. He laments, "No more will I be able to attend the monthly meetings of our aristocratic local camera club; neither will my blue prints be handed round and admired; and, worse than all, I cannot borrow chemicals or parts of an outfit as heretofore."20 He continues, "If there is no
objection I shall continue to write you an occasional letter; it may not always
be a photographic one, but if I can catch any of my late compeers away from
home, with the ridiculous side up, I will let you know it.”21 How closely this
1890 story of Snappschotte’s resignation from the Leopardville Camera Club
mirrors his 1894 resignation from the Photographic Society of Philadelphia is
unknown.

Sachse’s criticism of the practice of judging photography exhibitions and
awarding prizes is demonstrated with the example of the Sixth Annual Joint
Exhibition. The Annual Joint Exhibitions began after 1886, when the Photog-
graphic Society of Philadelphia sponsored an International Exhibition of Pho-
tography at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. It was so successful that
they joined with the Boston Camera Club and the Society of Amateur Pho-
tographers of New York to sponsor an annual rotating exhibition (the first was
held in March 1887 in New York). These exhibitions guaranteed that all
submitted works would be included, but medals and awards were only to be
given to the best work within specified categories. “The Joint Exhibitions
offered the first national photographic forum, providing amateur and profes-
sional alike an opportunity to exhibit and study the best work produced by
the camera at home and abroad.”22 A new style was introduced five years later
at the Vienna Salon of 1891, where photographs were selected by a jury and
the only award or prize was for appearing in the exhibition, the way that
paintings were similarly chosen.

In July 1892, Snappschotte detailed the incidents related to the ficti-
tious Leopardville Camera Club’s agreement to participate in joint exhibitions
and began his set of articles critical of the process of award distribution at
amateur photographic exhibitions.23 According to the editorial, it had been
agreed to have a joint exhibition in Beanville, but the result was that Beanville
won all the medals, and Leopardville, the local club, hardly won any. At the
Leopardville meeting, society members complained about the situation:

When the meeting finally adjourned, it was quietly agreed upon
not to publish the minutes of the proceedings of the night, as it
would only put upon record the discomfiture of Leopardville’s
photographic magnates, around whom the whole club is sup-
posed to revolve.23

The following year, as plans were in progress for the Sixth Annual Joint
Exhibition to be held at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Snappschotte
conveyed the new plan of medal distribution made by the Turkeytown Hypo
Club. Three classes of medals were to be awarded as follows:

...at exhibitions of the club, where there is no outside competi-
tion, the bronze medals are to be awarded to the chosen few de-
cided upon; at exhibitions where pictures are entered from any
other city in this country, the silver medal is to be awarded to a
member of the Turkeytown Club, while at an exhibition where
there is competition from a foreign country the gold medal shall
be awarded to a member of the Turkeytown Club.
It is an implied understanding that no ordinary member of the
club is expected to enter into competition for the above prizes.25

The Sixth Annual Joint Exhibition became a landmark event in the his-
tory of photography since it was influential in popularizing the pictorialist
movement, formed in support of the concept that photography was an art.
The exhibition was juried, included high quality work, and was hailed by
Alfred Stieglitz, leader of the movement to accept photography as art in this
country and father of the Photo-Secession in 1901, as the best photograph
exhibition held in America.

It is likely that Sachse knew Alfred Stieglitz, founding father of
pictorialism in America, since Stieglitz's writing appeared in the American Jour-
nal of Photography during Sachse's editorship and he is also quoted in several
other articles. In addition, they were both aware of photographic develop-
ments in Germany at that time and corresponded with Josef Maria Eder and
other prominent photography scientists of the day. What was Sachse's opinion
about the new school of thought developing in photography? Would he have
supported the photo-secessionists or the more traditional photographic soci-
ety membership? Although the distinction between the old and new school of
amateur photographer has been documented, this grey area of transition has
not.

Sachse's review of the Sixth Annual Exhibition provides some indication
of his beliefs about the subject of art and photography. He praised the show as
"second to none ever held in this country, the great centennial exhibition in
1876 not excepted."26 He was especially pleased to note that in most cases the
photographs were entirely the work of the photographer, without retouching
or other outside contributions (like commercial printing). He comments on
the death of the "old style albumen print," stating "photography, intelligently
applied, is capable of producing works of art which from an artistic stand-
point, are second to none in monochrome, no matter how produced."27

Also mentioned in his exhibition review are a set of five plain oak frames
loaned for display containing facsimiles of early daguerreotypes taken in Phila-
delphia, all copies by Sachse from originals.

The series not alone shows the genesis of photography and the
progress of half a century, but proves the fact that to Philadelphia’s scientists and experimenters is due the perfection and development of photography, until finally the art has reached the elevated pinnacle which it now occupies as is shown by the sixth joint exhibition.28

In January 1893, the Photographic Society of Philadelphia decided to publish its own proceedings and mail them simultaneously to all of the photographic journals.29 The following month the first number appeared with Edmund Stirling serving as committee chair. By the following year, Sachse laments the society’s decision not to include its proceedings in the periodical. American Journal of Photography.

The members of such Societies who clamor for privately printed proceedings should remember that the power and influence of any of the regular established photographic periodicals is much greater and far-reaching than any individual sheet issued by a Society, which in many cases is but little known outside of its own circumscribed community.30

Disgust with society practices in February 1894 led to the following comment:

Of late there have been no reports of the doings of the Turkeytown Hypo Club, as that organization following the example of the Camera Club has ceased to furnish a copy of its own proceedings to the local paper, taking the ground that by the publication of their proceedings outsiders virtually reaped the results of the members’ labors, and stood upon an equal footing with those who pay towards the club’s support, and bear the heat and burden of the day, — a state of affairs which, according to the argument of the officers, is not only unjust, but interferes with the usefulness of the society.31

Sachse’s constant attacks on photographic societies and their members may be considered simply a sign of bad blood or sour grapes, but Sachse felt justified in presenting his views:

A little criticism in a photographic journal will occasionally be taken as personal by some amateur of the know-it-all kind, and who perhaps enjoys some prominence in his local society. He at once wants the publication of that particular periodical stopped,
Figure 4: Passengers aboard ship, 1890s. Sachse recorded all aspects of the world around him, including the infinite variety of people.
and orders his or the society's copy to be discontinued, in case that it happens either are subscribers. But it is a curious fact that the more this same amateur fumes and talks against the paper that has excited his ire, the more anxious he becomes to read it, as successive numbers are issued; the only actual difference it makes in such cases is that the individual changes from a subscriber to a borrower.32

Sachse's editorials provide a unique, uncommon look inside the nineteenth-century photographic society. The Snappschotte editorials are entertaining and light pieces, but also reveal several intriguing aspects of photographic societies in the years prior to the formation of the Photo-Secession in 1901. They show signs of discord among members of the club. Sachse had a strong appreciation for traditional photographic accomplishments as evidenced by his interest in the history of the field as well as his personal association with its early pioneers, but also was sympathetic to the more progressive concerns and goals of the new school of thought.

As a historian, Sachse had an enormous appreciation for the power of photography and its impact on the world. He prophesied that the two major hurdles in the twentieth century were to produce color photographs and to overcome gravity.33 He realized that he was fortunate to have lived during a period with remarkable technological changes, crediting his time with achieving three great feats: mastery over steam, electricity, and "heliography."34 He stated: "Time has been annihilated; records having been obtained in the hundreth part of a second; nothing has proved too fleet for the photographic objective, — the flash of lightning, the spark of electricity, the flight of the bullet, all are now measured by the use of the photographic lens."35

During the sesquicentennial of the invention of photography in 1989, the Philadelphia Museum of Art sponsored an exhibition and catalog, Legacy in Light, highlighting 129 photographic treasures from Philadelphia area collections. A photograph by Sachse was included in the exhibition, and his biographical essay was one of eleven included in the catalog. Described as a "skilled interpreter," the biographer discussed Sachse's place in photographic history.

What of Sachse's role in the history, or in the historiography of photography? Very little, since he slipped into obscurity after the 1890s. Today, Sachse is considered a hopeless antiquarian, albeit passionate and prolific.36
Figure 5: View on the Leine, Hanover, Germany, ca. 1895. Sachse documented the landscape and buildings during his European travels. This view depicts Sachse's parents' birthplace, where they lived until emigrating to the United States in 1834.
In reviewing Sachse's contribution to photography, as a historian as well as a photographer and an editor, he was more than an antiquarian. Although little known today, his writings help to complete our understanding of the world of nineteenth century photographers.

**Notes**

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3. Sachse's research on such subjects as the German Pietists and freemasons is beyond the scope of this paper. His publications on this topic are substantial and are still considered to be definitive today. These publications are generally copiously illustrated and printed on high-grade paper stock, integrating his love of the reproductive arts with his love for German pietist history. Among his relevant titles are: *The German Pietists of Provincial Pennsylvania, 1694-1708; The German Sectarians of Pennsylvania, 1708-1742; A Critical and Legendary History of the Ephrata Cloister and the Dunkers* (2 volumes); *Pennsylvania: The German Influence in its Settlement and Development; The Music of Ephrata Cloister; Benjamin Franklin as Freemason; Freemasonry in Pennsylvania, 1727-1907; Old Masonic Lodges of Pennsylvania, 1730-1800; and Quaint Old Germantown.*
11. Photographic Society of Philadelphia membership rolls. Sipley Collection, George Eastman House, Rochester, NY. Records of this collection have been recently made available and further research would add significantly to our understanding of Sachse's relationship with the Photographic Society of Philadelphia.
torical Society.