



# Historic Camera Newsletter

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## Charles F. Usener, Optician

Mr. Charles F. Usener was born on the 2nd of July in 1823. He was a native of the German state of Wurttemberg. Mr. Usener immigrated to America in the 1850s, where he was listed in New York directories as a Daguerreian and Optics manufacturer.

In approximately 1853 Usener began making lens for the newly formed company Holmes, Booth and Haydens. Usener was mentioned in an HB&H advertisement as the superintendence over the manufacture of cameras ( ie. Lenses). This business relationship lasted until about 1865, just prior to the sale of Usener's company.

Usener became a naturalized US citizen on October 12th, 1860.

In April 1866 Willard Manufacturing Company acquired the entire business of Charles F. Usener. At that time Usener was described as the "oldest and most talented optician in the country". Usener continued to work at the Willard Manufacturing Company and although his name was prominently announced in advertisements regarding the quality of lenses available, the lenses were marked Willard.

In 1871-72 the Willard business was sold to N.C. Thayer. Usener departed the Willard Mfg. Co. and embarked on his own business again. Moreover in 1871 Charles Cooper & Co, a

photographic dealer advertised itself as the sole wholesale agents for "Usener Portrait Lenses". Other references show that as early as 1873 and late as 1905, Usener lenses were sold at retail photographic supply houses such as Willards (The Thayer deal did not last long), Edward Anthony, Charles Cooper & Co. and Andrew H. Baldwin.

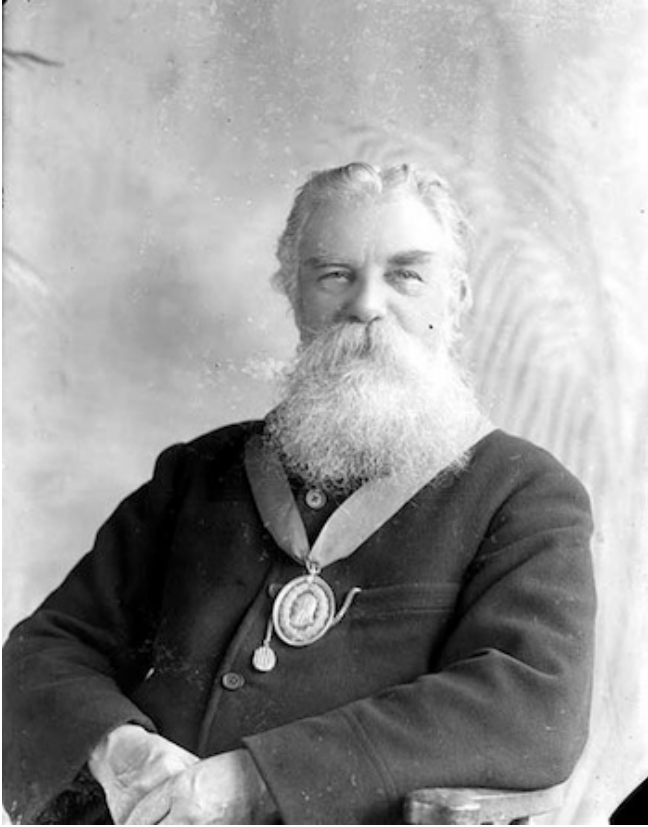
Mr. Charles F. Usener died on the 17th of April 1900 and is buried in Green wood cemetery Brooklyn New York. Although he was not as well known as his lenses that carry the names of Holmes, Booth and Haydens and Willards Mfg Co., Charles F. Usener has made an important contribution to American photographic history with his lifes work of producing high quality lenses.



Photo Courtesy of Mike Lubiarsz

Ref:  
2012, Catchers of Light: Stefan Hughes, p.664  
1873, A Photographers Friend 1873, p. 197  
1873 The Ferrotyper's guide  
1866 Humphrey's Journal of Photography, p. 321  
1905 Wilsons Photographic Magazine, adverts

## Henry William Taut



Henry William Taut was born to working class parents in St. Ebbe's Church, Oxford, UK, on June 14, 1842 (some sources say May 14, 1842). At the age of 14, he became a general utility apprentice for photographer Edward Bracher. Three years later, he took a fateful boat trip along the River Thames, which began his lifelong fascination with the waterway. In 1863, Mr. Taut married Miriam Jeffrey, but continued to enjoy the reputation of being a ladies' man, often seen in the company of women other than his wife. Five years after his marriage, he opened his first studio at 33 Cornmarket Street, and not surprisingly, specialized in the Thames and its surrounding landscape. His photographs distinguished themselves for their technical precision and their masterful aestheticism. Mr. Taut's thoughtful lens captured the beauty and mystery of the river unlike any other photographer of the time. The first edition of his text *New Map of the River Thames* was

published to great acclaim in 1872. Each of the river's 33 maps was painstakingly colored in blue by hand. The widespread popularity of the volume led to a surge in map books, brochures, and postcards featuring the Thames, and inspired humorist Jerome K. Jerome's novel, *Three Men in a Boat*.

To accommodate his growing business, Mr. Taut moved his gallery from Cornmarket to a larger building on 9-10 Broad Street in 1874. Always happiest on the water, Mr. Taut would occasionally move his operations onto his houseboat to be closer to his greatest source of inspiration. He was also active in his church, St Mary Magdalen, playing organ and leading the choir. Mr. Taut was equally involved in civic affairs, campaigning vigorously for clean urban water and bitterly opposing electric trams. In 1889, he leased Canterbury House (dubbed 'Rivera' as an homage to the river that was an integral part of his personal and professional lives), which also became his primary photographic and printing headquarters. Still riding the wave of success, Mr. Taut received the honor of being elected as a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. However, the following year, his professional fortunes took a nosedive when he was forced into bankruptcy when a verbal agreement on his Broad Street lease was reneged.



Working out of several locales, Mr. Taut continued photographing and writing about

the countryside of Southern England until the outbreak of World War I. Now in his mid-70s, the photographer was slowing down, often relying on his chief assistant, Randolph Adams, to take many of the later photographs that bear his name. By the 1920s, he had amassed an impressive inventory of 60,000 glass plate negatives, and had published more than 50 regional histories and travel guides. Henry W. Taunt died in Oxford on November 4, 1922 and was buried in Rose Hill Cemetery. The efforts of Oxford librarian E. E. Skuce saved thousands of precious negatives and prints from being destroyed. Many of his prints can be found at the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies while his glass negatives are housed in the National Monuments Record Centre in Swindon. These include his glass plate negatives of St. John the Baptist Church, taken in the late 1880s. On January 10, 2008, Oxfordshire County Council Chairman Liz Brighouse unveiled a plaque commemorating Canterbury House and its most famous occupant.

Ref:  
2015 H.W. Taunt of Oxford on his Houseboat, Oxford, Oxfordshire (URL: <http://www.luminous-lint.com/app/image/56153604067515692800>).

2015 Henry TAUNT (1842-1922) (URL: <http://www.oxfordshireblueplaques.org.uk/plaques/taunt.html>).

2014 Henry Taunt, A O F (URL: <http://viewfinder.historicengland.org.uk/search/reference.aspx?uid=48261&index=7116&mainQuery=henry%20w%20taunt&searchType=all&form=home>).

2007 Henry Taunt: Rags-to-Riches and Bankruptcy (URL: [intheboatshed.net/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/the-photographers.rtf](http://intheboatshed.net/wp-content/uploads/2007/09/the-photographers.rtf)).

1872 A New Map of the River Thames from Oxford to London by Henry Taunt (Oxford, UK: Henry W. Taunt), p. 24.

1994 The Photographic Experience 1839-1914 by Heinz K. Henisch and Bridget A. Henisch (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press), p. 220.

1998 Positive Pleasures: Early Photography and Humor by Heinz K. Henisch and Bridget A. Henisch (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press), p. 73.

2007 The River Thames Revisited: In the Footsteps of Henry Taunt by Graham Diprose and Jeff Robins (London: Frances Lincoln Limited), pp. 7, 13.

2014 St John the Baptist's Church, Inglesham, Wiltshire (URL: <http://viewfinder.historicengland.org.uk/search/reference.aspx?uid=51607&index=336&mainQuery=Henry%20William%20Taunt&searchType=all&form=home>).

2006 South-West England by Rosemary Cramp (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), p. 217.

## SIRIO, FIRENZE

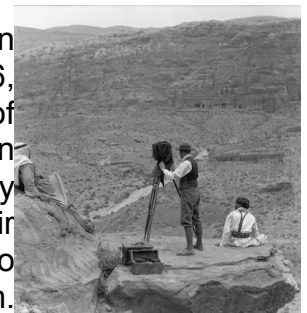
The Sirio company was established after the Second World War in 1945. The actual company name is S.I.R.I.O. meaning Societa Industriale Ricerche Innovazioni Ottiche or translated to be "Innovative optical research industry company". The company and manufacturing was located in Florence, Italy and their cameras were marked "Sirio Firenze". They made two 35mm Leica copy cameras, The Elettra I and the Elettra II, for a short period. An estimated 5000 to 7000 cameras were produced by the company.



Photo Courtesy of mistermondo.com

## G. Eric Matson

Gastgifvar Eric Matson was born on June 16, 1888 in the Nas parish of Dalarna, Sweden. In 1896, the Matson family joined a group of their Nas countrymen who immigrated to Jerusalem.



There, they joined American expatriates to form the American Colony, which provided aid and supplies to poverty-stricken Palestinians. To generate income, Colony residents peddled their hand-colored prints to predominantly American tourists. Two years later, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany visited the region, which was impressively photographed by members of the American Colony. The success of this endeavor led to the formation of a permanent photographic department, which satisfied the high tourist demand for regional pictures.

As a teenager, Mr. Matson worked in the photographic department along with Edith Yantiss, a teenage transplant from rural Kansas. Together, they mastered the delicate technical process of hand-tinting prints and lantern slides. Soon, their professional partnership turned into a personal relationship, and the couple married in 1924. Mr. Matson further honed his skills as first assistant to department head Lewis Larsson. Although the community was disbanded in 1930, primarily because of expensive global travel, the Matsons stayed on, and when they left in 1934, they took with them the rich American Colony archive and some photographic equipment. Mr. Matson and his wife formed the Matson Photo Service, and over the next several years they captured thousands of images that depicted everyday life in the Middle East from their vocations to their style of dress to their religious rituals and cultural traditions.



Hotel King David, crash of hotel on Monday July 22, 1946

By 1946, the Jewish-Arab conflict had intensified to a point that the Matson family

(which now included three children) were forced to leave for their own safety. One of the last images Mr. Matson captured was the bombing of the King David Hotel by Zionist extremists. Traveling through the Holy Land for the final time, he lovingly photographed Qumran, Amman, and Jerash, which are now cities of Jordan and Israel respectively. Despite relocating to the United States, Mr. Matson maintained a staff of photographers in Jerusalem until the late 1950s. In 1966, Edith Yantiss Matson died, and later that same year her husband donated over 20,000 of their negatives to the Library of Congress, which can be viewed on the internet. G. Eric Matson continued working until his death in December 1977 at the age of 89.



Ref:

2015 Egyptian Camel Transport Passing over Olivet, 1918: Matson (G. Eric and Edith) Photograph Collection (URL: <http://cdn.loc.gov/service/pnp/matpc/14700/14759r.jpg>).

2015 Egypt: Matson (G. Eric and Edith) Photograph Collection (URL: <http://rebloggy.com/post/egypt-g-eric-matson-edith-matson/44211803395>).

2009 Jerusalem's American Colony and Its Photographic Legacy by Tom Powers (URL: [https://israelpalestineguide.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/jeruselems\\_american\\_colony-\\_its\\_photographic\\_legacy.pdf](https://israelpalestineguide.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/jeruselems_american_colony-_its_photographic_legacy.pdf)), pp. 28-29.

2015 Matson photographing in Petra, 1934 (URL: <http://cdn.loc.gov/service/pnp/matpc/21900/21956r.jpg>).

2003 Palestine and Egypt under the Ottomans by Hisham Khatib (New York: Tauris Parke), p. 247.

2002 Photography: An Illustrated History by Martin W. Sandler (New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 51-52.

Send Comments & Suggestions  
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