

What Happened to the E Lab Notebooks?

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August 31, 2004

In the middle 1970's I was approached by Leon Jacobson, an engineer in HMED Quality Assurance at Farrell Road. He asked if I would be interested in doing a "volunteer" job on the SEM (Scanning Electron Microscope). He wanted to analyze surface contamination on historical Daguerreotype photographs, dating to the 1860's, for the International Museum of Photography at George Eastman House in Rochester.

In due time, after getting verbal permission from my manager, I spent a weekend on the SEM analysis and got some interesting results. Within a few months Leon and I published a little paper in an obscure privately-printed periodical that went out of business several years later (not our fault!) Before we published the article, Leon and I obtained written clearance from E Lab management through the usual procedures.

This was apparently the first such analysis that had been reported in the literature, and the article was reprinted in several sources and even cited in a doctoral dissertation, among other places. So we got some gratis satisfaction from a gratis job.

Now fast forward to my retirement in Arizona where I became a volunteer in the archives of a prominent museum. I had access to many historical photographs, and set up a state-of-the-art darkroom for printing and duplicating these photographs, using the best archival procedures. I soon became very interested in 19th century technology, and began writing a book that covered topics that I had not found in existing references. I worked on this project for more than fifteen years, which gave me an excuse to travel to major libraries and college campuses around the country and Canada (great retirement fun).

As the book took shape, I began seriously to think about publishing it. One of the topics I included was a chapter on the SEM work that I had done so long ago, including some previously unpublished photographs. But then the question of permission came up again. By this time, Lockheed Martin owned Electronics Park and the ownership of the photographs was probably moot, particularly since Daguerreotypes have never been of significant commercial interest either to GE or Lockheed. But you never know.....

So I began a little exercise in following the corporate trail, just for fun. First I called Alyce Ann who by now was Librarian in Building 6 (where the E Lab library had been relocated). I didn't know many people at the Park, but Alyce Ann was cordial and patient (bless her), and she gave me names and phone numbers. I got in touch with some very nice people in Lockheed's legal department, and asked what happened to the E Lab engineering notebooks. The para-legal that I contacted said that the notebooks had been boxed and shipped to Nashua New Hampshire to a site that was to be a Lockheed development laboratory. More names and telephone numbers. The New Hampshire laboratory had been sold to another company, and the person whom I contacted said he guessed the boxes were probably still in the basement.

The final chapter is even more bizarre. The last company had been sold to a German company, and the boxes are almost certainly long gone. Sic transit.....

I recall how we carefully logged the thousands of SEM photographs, and how I had my personal logbook witnessed and annotated so often. I have seen too much of this world to be surprised at the waste of hard-won knowledge, and I won't try to formulate a lesson. Let the next generation make their own mistakes. But no-one can say that we old timers at the E Lab didn't do our best to do the job right.

PS

My book hasn't been published yet in hardback, but the museum has it on their website for free reading or downloading (I have a talent for non-paying jobs). If you are interested, use Google to search for Sharlot Hall Museum/Archives, and follow the yellow brick road.