"The Sight of a Place Affords So Much More Pleasure:"

Robert Vance, the Illustrated Press, and Images of the San Francisco Vigilance Committee of 1856

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On November 17, 1855, at around six in the evening, the sun set over the young city of San Francisco. At this late hour, daguerreotypist and entrepreneur Robert Vance would not be able to take any more pictures for the rest of the night. By all accounts a workaholic, and without a wife or children to go home to, Vance likely would have continued to work after nightfall, sweeping the floors in his busy studio on the corner of Sacramento and Montgomery Street or perhaps preparing his special cocktail of chemical baths and treatments for the next day's business.[1] It is not known whether he stayed or left after the last rays of sunshine moved beneath the horizon. If he had stayed until 7pm, however, he may have heard the sound of a gunshot a few hundred feet away. Two blocks down the street, at the corner of Montgomery and Clay, Charles Cora gunned General William Richardson down in the middle of the road. After hearing the shot, or the cries of passerby, Vance might have walked downstairs from his second floor office, down into the street, and may then have joined the thousands of people beginning to gather a short distance away. The air was electric, and excited residents exchanged rumors about a lynching. No mob assembled to apprehend Cora, however, and for the time being the assailant was placed in police custody. Vance may or may not have witnessed or participated in the drama, but he doubtlessly heard about it that night or the next morning. Either way, the shooting hit close to home.

Robert H. Vance's career as a daguerreotype artist, entrepreneur, publicist, and pioneer in early San Francisco has attracted considerable attention from art historians and other students of

[1] Keith F. Davis gives an excellent description of the day-to-day life of a daguerreotypist in *The Origins of American Photography: From Daguerreotype to Dry Plate* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007), 66 – 69. Of course, it should be read as a rough guide, and not a definitive schedule.

early photography.[2] His contributions to portraiture, landscape photography, advertising, and even forensics invite, and deserve, careful study and serious scholarship.[3] However, one aspect of Vance's life and career has largely escaped attention. During the summer and fall of 1856, in response to Richardson's murder and James King of William's assassination the following May, the San Francisco Vigilance Committee mobilized thousands of local men to combat crime in the city and to implement civil and criminal reform. Although Vance did not seem to play a prominent role in the proceedings, representations of his daguerreotypes of the event appeared in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, a periodical based tens of thousands of travel miles away in New York. Moreover, Vance made at least a few daguerreotypes of the event, which can be found in an assortment of photo collections, historical ephemera, newspapers, and other documents. His photographic coverage of the event is not altogether clear today, and it requires a bit of detective work on our part to uncover, but Vance's artistic, cultural, and social visibility in 1856 San Francisco, coupled with the fast growing circulation of the *Illustrated Newspaper* and other print media, demonstrate that his role in popularizing and legitimizing the event may have been greater than previously thought. This role, in turn, has implications on both the

[2] Peter Palmquist was the foremost authority and most prolific student of Robert Vance. Although he wrote extensively on Vance in a variety of forums, I rely primarily on three articles in particular: Peter E. Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: Pioneer Photographer," *The Argonaut* 8 (1997): 3 – 35; Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: The Maine and Boston Years," *The Daguerrean Annual* (Lake Charles, LA.: Daguerreian Society, 1991): 199 – 214; and Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance," in Palmquist and Thomas A. Kailbourn, ed., *Pioneer Photographers of the Far West: A Biographical Dictionary, 1840 – 1865* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2000), 559 – 565. See also Martha Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2002), 81 – 84; and Davis, 27, 58, 75, 109, 217-18.

[3] Vance's contribution to forensics, for example, stems from his role in the Limantour Case in 1858. José Yvez Limantour claimed that a land grant from the Mexican governor in 1843 entitled him to a large portion of the city of San Francisco. In a District Court case between Limantour and several residents who anxiously bought land titles from him, Vance presented ambrotypes of the fraudulent documents in court, which were then proven to be false. This was perhaps the first time ambrotypes were used to copy records to be used as evidence. Vance made over $4,300 for services rendered. See Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: Pioneer Photographer," 31.

historical development of photojournalism and the cultural logics of lynching, which are fully manifest within the print culture of the late-nineteenth century.[4]

In addition to discussing Vance's work, we must also discuss Vance himself. Scholars have frequently commented on his artistic vision, entrepreneurial success, and business acumen. Yet these characteristics seem to be incidental within the historiography – Vance's personality and biography, however well-chronicled, serve mainly as narrative devices to explain his photographic accomplishments. Perhaps we can assign greater significance to Vance's success in San Francisco, as well as his own historical personage, by focusing on his penchant for creating images for a bourgeoning print-based mass media and his ability to market his work in a variety of different venues and forums. Vance may not have been a major mover and shaker in his time and place, and he may not have even been an especially outstanding figure outside of his artistic work, but he foreshadowed the ways in which the public would consume topical art and photography. Vance anticipated the demand that his photos would create for additional images of the events taking place in San Francisco, and he was prescient enough to capitalize upon it. If Vance was not the first photojournalist in name, he was one of the profession's pioneers in both spirit and practice.[5]

To understand how Vance approached his art, profession, and business, we first need to investigate his childhood and early adult years. Vance was born in Baring, Maine, to William and Charlotte Vance in 1825. William Vance (1759 – 1841), also known as "Squire Vance," was a sawmill owner, as well as a state legislator from the time Robert was born until 1837. The elder Vance owned a large, three story house on a hill above the St. Croix River, which separates

[4] See Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[5] Other historians have explored the origins of photojournalism. For example, Beaumont Newhall places the beginning of photojournalism in the late nineteenth century, with the invention of the halftone printing plate. See Newhall, *The History of Photography* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999), 130.

Maine from Canada. Known as "Mount Defiance," Squire Vance mounted cannon on the roof of the house during the War of 1812 in order to repel any potential invasion, and he was thereafter known for his antagonism towards the British. Vance also had a reputation as a philanderer – women and local rivals accused him of committing adultery, holding orgies, and initiating lawsuits against his many ex-wives. Charlotte, Vance's fourth wife, separated from Vance when Robert was a young boy, and Squire soon married another woman. As a result of these frequent marriages and sexual escapades, Robert had a large immediate family: of Squire's many children, Robert was the third youngest, but his oldest half brother was as much as fifty years older. Little is known about his relationships with his siblings, although he lived with at least two, sister Charlotte and brother George, and another brother, William, followed him to San Francisco at some point to practice photography. While it seemed as though Squire had little time to devote to Robert, he left his son six thousand dollars upon his death, which Robert reportedly used later to go into business as a daguerreotypist.[6]

As a result of his father's volatile, restless household, Vance spent his childhood moving from place to place, a theme that would repeat itself throughout his life. When Vance was six, he moved to a farm in Readfield, over 170 miles away from Baring, as a boarder with another relative. Later, he must have spent a lot of time with his sister, Charlotte, because by 1840, Robert's future brother-in-law, Lot M. Morrill, gained custody of Robert before Squire's death the following year. Morrill studied law in Waterville until 1839, when he established a practice in Readfield. Morrill then moved to Augusta in 1841, while Vance apparently stayed in

[6] Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: Pioneer Photographer," 10; "Robert H. Vance: the Maine and Boston Years," 204.

Readfield until after his eighteenth birthday. By that time, Vance had moved on several occasions, and had lived with other family members well before his father's death.[7]

According to Peter E. Palmquist, Vance's childhood formed the businessman that he was later become. "Squire Vance's life serves . . . as a reflecting mirror for Robert's later business techniques," Palmquist wrote, alluding to Squire's own litigious, double-dealing nature as a sawmill owner and politician.[8] Palmquist further theorizes that the complications that arose from the process of settling Squire's estate, which took years for his many children and other relatives to sort out, were "unsettling" for Robert.[9] Vance's "unsettled" youth and his father's flawed business ethics likely made an impression on him as he grew up, but within the saturated field of daguerreotype portrait photography his personality and past experience apparently served him well. Historian Keith Davis once claimed that "the most successful city daguerreotypists were almost invariably the ones with the best overall combination of technical knowledge, business acumen, and interpersonal skills."[10] Davis also notes that, during the mid-1840s, many young men entered the daguerreotype profession in hopes of starting a new career or making some money on the side, but very few lasted more than a couple of years.[11] Within this calculus of professional success, then, Vance must have developed his sharp business instinct early on, before entering the profession.

By 1845, at the age of 20, Vance had decided to become a daguerreotype artist.[12] At this point in time, the industry was only a few years old. Louis Daguerre invented the daguerreotype process in 1838, and he announced the results of his experiments to the French Academy of

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[7] *Ibid*., 10.
[8] *Ibid*., 8.
[9] Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: The Maine and Boston Years, 1825 – 1850," 204.
[10] Davis, 29
[11] *Ibid*., 23.
[12] Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: Pioneer Photographer," 11.

Sciences on January 7, 1839. Within a few months, Americans were experimenting with the process at several colleges across the country, and by September residents of the major cities had enough information about the technique to experiment on their own. In 1840, entrepreneurs began to offer the public daguerreotype services, which were centered in New York, Philadephia, and Boston. Meanwhile, Francois Gouraud toured the eastern United States with a travelling daguerreotype exhibition, which raised public interest in the process and demonstrated its potential as both an artistic medium and as a consumer product. Samuel Morse, inventor of the telegraph and an artist in his own right, learned about the process from Daguerre himself, and popularized it in the states with a series of lectures and experiments. Daguerreotypy was initially hindered by long exposure times and the command of chemistry that it required, and few people could sit still long enough for the image to take hold on the plate. But by the mid-1840s newly invented lenses, plates, and lights made the process cheaper and easier for subjects, especially children, to undergo.[13] Vance had many opportunities to see daguerreotypists at work during the early 1840s, given the rapid proliferation of the process throughout the United States. As early as 1841, Vance could have visited a daguerreotype studio with his family in nearby Augusta.[14]

We don't know where Vance trained to become a daguerreotypist, but once he was ready to open his own shop he decided to do so in Boston. In retrospect, it seems like a very wise choice. In a city like Boston, the demand for daguerreotype portraits was quite high, and the portraiture business was an artist's primary source of income. Families who could not afford a portrait artist could now afford to have their pictures taken, and small children could be cheaply

[13] Davis, 15 – 22. See also Beaumont Newhall, *The History of Photography, from 1839 to the Present* (New York : Museum of Modern Art : Distributed by the New York Graphic Society Books, 1988), which remains the definitive work on the subject. For more information on Samuel Morse and the historical development of photography in America, refer to Carleton Mabee, *The American Leonardo: A Life of Samuel F. B. Morse*, Revised Edition (Fleishmans, New York: Purple Mountain Press, 2000), 226 – 244.

[14] Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: Pioneer Photographer," 11.

and easily photographed. Since daguerreotypes were not large enough to fill a lot of wall space, and given that most peoples' aesthetic tastes opted for painted art over photographs, studios made most of their money by producing daguerreotypes for patrons' parents, relatives, friends, and themselves. Cities were thus better able to support studios than smaller communities elsewhere. The demand for daguerreotypes in Boston was particularly high given the size of the city's population, which grew from 93,400 people in 1840 to nearly 137,000 in 1850. As daguerreotypes became increasingly cheaper and the population rose, the market for potential daguerreotype consumers exploded. Perhaps most importantly, however, Boston had a higher per-capita wealth than any other city in America, including New York and Philadelphia. As a result, the number of galleries in the city rose from four in 1841 to forty-three in 1850.[15] Vance had every opportunity to carve out a market niche in this growing, wealthy city.

At some point while in Boston, Vance's interests expanded beyond portraiture, which was by far the most profitable route within the profession, and into the growing field of landscape photography. As we will see, Boston afforded photographers with many cultural and professional opportunities to begin conceptualizing their work as art or even journalism. However, even daguerreotypists with artistic vision were limited by the technological constraints of copying and showcasing their work. As Vance practiced and refined his craft in Boston, daguerreotypists in Mexico attempted to chronicle the Mexican American War from behind the camera lens. However, they were beset by several problems – they could not capture action with the long exposure times needed during that time, it was difficult to order and move their equipment across long distances, and few people were willing or available to purchase their work. Daguerreotypes usually served as topographical references for painters and other artists who later depicted important events, such as the capture of Mexico City. The public's demand

[15] Davis, 29.

for prints, sketches, and paintings of the war soared, but they mostly wanted grand pictures of symbolic, patriotic events. Even if consumers wanted to purchase these daguerreotypes, they would have to rely on copies or sketches of the original, which were thus imperfect copies of perfect representations. The war showcased the possibilities of photography, as the three dozen or so existing daguerreotypes of the war demonstrate, but it also exposed the medium's limitations during that time: daguerreotypes of the war were too small to be colorful, too unique to be consumed by a mass audience, and too real to be meaningful to the American public.[16]

However, Vance had ample opportunities to see how other artists overcame these shortcomings. For one, he was at least familiar with Southworth and Hawes, who were two of Boston's finest photographers. Southworth and Hawes's clientele included some of New England's most notable individuals, including Charles Sumner, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Bronson Alcott. In late October, 1845, Vance wrote Southworth about purchasing a camera, and it's possible that he took lessons with him as well, since they offered daguerreotype instruction to interested students for $25.[17] Later on, in the early 1850s, Southworth and Hawes created a series of stunningly original prints, including images of frost on glass and a roomful of girls in a classroom. This series indicates a more modern, artistic approach to photography that the firm highlighted in their galleries, which gave the public the opportunity to view their works.[18]

Vance also had the opportunity to see several major exhibitions that made their way to Boston. For example, John Bouvard presented an enormous moving panorama of the

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[16] Sandweiss, "Daguerreotypes of the Mexican War," in Sandweiss, Martha, Rick Stewart, Ben W. Huseman, *Eyewitnesses to War: Prints and Daguerreotypes of the Mexican American War, 1846 – 1848* (Fort Worth, Tex.: Amon Carter Museum, 1989), 62 – 63. For a good discussion of the relationship between print culture and American nationalism, consult David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: the Making of American Nationalism, 1776 – 1820* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[17] Charles LeRoy Moore, "Two Partners in Boston: The Careers and Daguerreian Artistry of Albert Southworth and Josiah Hawes," (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1975), 69, 98n52. Southworth and Hawes' records at the George Eastman House are perhaps the largest collection of documents in the history of early daguerreotypy, and provide a rare glimpse into the day to day operation of a daguerreotype studio in the 1840s.

[18] Davis, 26, 29 – 32.

Mississippi in 1846, based on sketches and daguerreotypes of the river taken from a boat. Imitators quickly followed with their own panoramas of the river, and the public's appetite for images and paintings of the West was more than large enough to accommodate them.[19] Vance certainly learned how profitable the West was for artists who were able to satisfy Americans' curiosity on the East coast, but he also began to invent ways to apply his photographic skills to this consumer demand for images of the West. As we will see, he began to do so by capitalizing on the public's seemingly incompatible desire for both accurate images of westward expansion and colorful, narrative, and symbolic representations of the nation's manifest destiny.

The possibilities opened up by daguerreotypy, as well as the opening up of the west, stirred Vance's imagination enough for him to sell his business in 1847 and embark on an expedition to South America. He might have also been bored and ready for a new challenge after spending two years in the studio.[20] During the course of the next few years, Vance established a series of galleries in Chile and elsewhere, honing his portraiture business in Santiago while earning enough money to take pictures of the interior of the country. His studio in Santiago, in particular, helped prime Vance for his later work in California. After conducting an intensive advertising campaign, Vance and a partner managed to drum up considerable business among Santiago's high society. This sort of experience helped him develop his marketing skills, which were necessary in California's increasingly crowded population of resident daguerreotypists. In Chile, meanwhile, Vance was among the first ten photographers to set up shop in the country.[21]

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[19] Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 48, 52.

[20] For more information on Vance's residence in Chile, see Abel Alexander, "Robert H. Vance: Pioneer of the Daguerreotype in Chile," *The Daguerrean Annual* (Lake Charles, LA.: Daguerreian Society, 1993): 11 – 30.

[21] Alexander, 15.

The discovery of gold in California stirred the imaginations of thousands of men in America and elsewhere who, dreaming of striking it rich, migrated en masse to California in 1849. Not everyone who left, however, set out to mine gold. Vance sensed that the gold rush was going to be a massive demographic shift, bringing people and money who would want daguerreotype portraits to a territory across the continent.[22] He set sail for California in August 1850, with several stops along the Peruvian, Panamanian, Mexican coasts. While in Peru, Vance visited Cuzco. He took several images of the city, including one of the Plaza de Armas that would later appear in his New York exhibition. He continued to take pictures along the rest of the journey. By the time Vance arrived in San Francisco, he was a seasoned traveler and photographer who had already photographed portions of two continents.[23]

Vance's experience and career education up until this point – learning business ethics and opportunism from his father, building a clientele in Boston, and refining his artistry in South America – prepared him well for his businesses in San Francisco. The city resembled the Boston of 1845 in many ways: a rapidly expanding population, a changing cityscape, and few established practitioners available to provide daguerreotype services. The dynamic was different, however, in that daguerreotypes made in the city were exportable. The city's population was primarily male and transient, and most had families back East or elsewhere in the world who wanted up to date photos of their westbound relatives. San Francisco and California itself was also a subject of interest to people in the eastern cities, many of whom had seen the panoramas of the Mississippi and westward exploration and wanted to learn and experience more of the exotic and distant western territories. So in addition to the portrait business that San

[22] Davis, 56.
[23] Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: Pioneer Photographer," 15.

Francisco's rising population could provide, San Francisco offered additional opportunities for enterprising daguerreotypists. Vance was poised to take advantage of it.

Vance's vision quickly grew. Shortly after arriving in California, Vance set out to record the Gold Rush as it was happening. He went to the mining camps with his camera, took images of Sutter's Mill, created panoramas of Placerville and Coloma, and made dozens of daguerreotypes of the villages and camps in the region.[24] Many daguerreotypists plied the state for subjects, offering portrait services from the back of wagons in remote mining camps. Unlike many of his competitors, however, Vance seemed to take a long term view with his photography. Vance banked most of these photographs, saving them for a future opportunity to display and sell them. He might have even made these journeys into the gold fields secretly, in hopes of amassing enough to unveil them all at the right time.[25] In any case, he spent a considerable sum of money to obtain these pictures, which endeavored to tell the story of the California gold rush and the sea route that gold-seeking Argonauts took to get there.

The opportunity to present his collection of over three hundred daguerreotypes from South America, Panama, and California came when he planned to exhibit his works in New York. His "Views of California" exhibition promised New Yorkers a glimpse of what the West was really like, as opposed to how panoramas and artists generally portrayed it. The exhibition's catalogue expressed Vance's mission: "Within a few years attention has been particularly directed to California . . . to such a pitch has public curiosity been excited, that the smallest item of news in regard to this newly discovered El Dorado, is eagerly seized upon." After noting, "much valuable information has been given in regard to the country . . . by several excellent works," he claims, "inasmuch as the sight of a place affords so much more pleasure, and gives so

[24] Robert H. Vance, *Catalogue of Daguerreotype Panoramic Views in California* (New York: Baker, Godwin & Company, 1851) 5 – 7.

[25] Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: The Maine and Boston Years," 201.

much better knowledge . . . the accompanying Views will afford the information so much sought after." Vance gambled on the belief that his whole plate daguerreotypes, which on average were no larger than 6.5 by 8.5 inches, would both inspire his audiences to imagine the west in a more realistic way and also purchase his work. Vance extolled the pictures' realism in the catalogue: "These Views are no exaggerated and high-colored sketches, got up to produce effect, but are as every daguerreotype must be, the stereotyped impression of the real thing itself."[26]

As Martha Sandweiss points out, these attempts to promote the accuracy of these images illustrate Vance's desire to elevate the daguerreotype's realism over the hyperbole and bombast of traditional panoramas and other artistic renditions of the West. Vance believed that the information was important in and of itself.[27] However, it is also apparent that Vance was selling the information as a product, rather than as an attribute of the photos themselves. He believed that his daguerreotypes had journalistic content, and could tell the story of the Gold Rush to interested patrons. Ultimately, he hoped that customers would buy these images to keep both as souvenirs and as pieces of a pictorial, narrative series on the events unfolding in California. It might not have been photojournalism for a mass audience, but it was photojournalism nevertheless. Vance had witnessed the history himself, and so he delivered it to the people back East as an illustrated product containing information on a topical event.

For all its promise, however, the exhibition was a commercial failure. The New York press took virtually no notice in the exhibition, and although it seems as though it was well attended, few of the patrons were interested in purchasing his art. H. H. Snelling, who founded and published a journal for the daguerreotype industry, raved about the show. But Vance took a major financial hit: besides leaving San Francisco for up to six months to put on the show and

[26] *Ibid.*, 2.
[27] Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 81 – 84.

therefore leaving his studio behind, Vance reportedly paid over three thousand dollars to take the pictures, and another seven hundred to purchase frames. After two years of moving between different halls, Vance finally sold the collection for $1,500. Although Vance had the benefit of an inheritance and a sound financial mind, he must have been very disappointed by the result.[28]

Vance's experience in New York demonstrated both the advantages and the disadvantages of daguerreotypes as an item for public consumption. On an intellectual level, viewers knew that they were looking at real images of the west. On a cultural, artistic, political, and perhaps even psychological level, however, these images lacked the drama, grandeur, and symbolism of the painted panoramas. Viewers were interested in checking out his daguerreotypes, but they were not desired for repeat viewing. In this sense, the exhibition was a failure, and in an effort to recoup some of the cost Vance had to sell his collection to a daguerreotypist in St. Louis, who then displayed the collection in his own gallery before the photos mysteriously disappeared. Beyond that, the experience must have been a watershed moment for Vance, who realized that people were still mostly interested in buying portraits, but that interesting exhibitions would bring curious customers in who might then want their pictures to be taken.

During the next few years, Vance became an expert at selling, disseminating, and marketing his work to people in San Francisco, California, and across the country. By 1856, his work, like that of other prominent daguerreotypists, was a marketable brand product. One method was through the construction of galleries throughout California. An attractive, stimulating gallery could attract potential customers in droves: people would visit the gallery, usually for free, admire the craftsmanship of the photographer's work and see examples of his

[28] See William Welling, Photography in America: The Formative Years, 1839 – 1900 (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1978), 74; Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*, 81 – 84; and Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: Pioneer Photographer," 27 – 28.

portraits, and learn about the services available there. Therefore, Vance used his financial resources to construct perhaps the finest gallery in the city. His San Francisco studio and galleries occupied a very large, prominent building downtown, and reportedly featured at least eight reception rooms, twelve operating rooms (where the pictures were taken), and three separate galleries within the main show room. He spared no expense on furnishings, either, and outfitted his main studio with chandeliers, oriental carpets, and lace curtains.[29] Vance claimed to have the world's best of many things, including "the largest light in the world;"[30] "One of the Best Photographers in the World," Ira B. French;[31] and overall the best stereoscopic daguerreotypes in the world: "Mr. V. challenges the world to produce more perfect ones that he is now executing."[32] In addition to his studio and galleries in San Francisco, he built branch galleries in Sacramento and Marysville. By the end of the decade, he featured his work at galleries in Nevada and as far away as Hong Kong. These operations were apparently successful, even after fire destroyed several of his galleries over the course of the decade. The 1860 census reports that Vance's net worth was about $40,000.[33]

Vance continued to produce excellent work in San Francisco and elsewhere. In addition to continuing to produce numerous street views and other landscape plates – he advertised his ability to "go to any part of the City or State to execute views of Buildings, Landscapes, Machinery, Mining Claims, or anything of the kind . . . at the shortest notice"[34] – Vance's portrait work shows a subtle sensitivity to his subject matter and a fine attention to technique. A daguerreotype of a woman and her child in mourning, taken in 1855, is an exquisite example of

[29] Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: Pioneer Photographer," 4 – 5.
[30] John P. Bogartus, *The Illustrated California Almanac, For the Year 1855* (San Francisco, Cal.: Robert H. Vance, 1854), 19.
[31] "Miscellaneous," *Daily Evening Bulletin*, 12 May 1856, 1.
[32] Bogartus, 42.
[33] California Section, California State Library, "Vance, Robert H. Census Record," *California Information File* (Bellevue, Wa.: Commercial Microfilm Service, 1986).
[34] From an advertisement featured in *Hutching's Illustrated Magazine* 16 (1857), 194.

the quality of his services (see figure 1).[35] Since portraits remained the mainstay of any portrait artist's business, he must have made enough money conducting these bread and butter portraiture services to fund his gallery expansions and other artistic endeavors. He also spent considerable sums of money on researching, developing, and experimenting with new techniques. Vance was not the first daguerreotype artist in San Francisco to produce ambrotypes, but once he purchased Cutting's patent on the process and refined it to his own specifications, he claimed a monopoly on the technique. "I hereby denounce all Pictures taken on glass, in this City or State, and called Ambrotypes, as 'bogus,'" Vance proclaimed in an ad, "and a fraud upon the public." "Beware of 'bogus,' or, as some call them, 'Improved Ambrotypes,'" he warned in another ad, "they are not sealed and will not resist dampness, and will fade from exposure." Indeed, Vance was likely the best equipped and most highly skilled daguerreotypist in San Francisco, if not California.[36]

Critics usually agreed. A report in the *Sacramento Daily Union* urged its readers to visit San Francisco and see Vance's specimens on display in the gallery: "it contains a collection of pictures which is well worth an examination, and a study of which will give an insight into the mysteries of this art . . . the whole arrangement is probably as complete as that of any similar establishment in the United States."[37] A *Daily Union* correspondent at the 1856 California State Fair in San Jose, where Vance's submissions won First Premium again for the third time in a row, raved that, "Vance's ambrotypes are universally admired. Their immense size, and the faultless manner of their execution, entitles them to all the encomiums which they have lavishly received."[38] Vance cites several newspaper reports in his *Illustrated California Almanac*,

[35] Davis, 58.

[36] *Daily Alta California*, 17 July 1856, 30 January 1857; Davis claimed that "he was the most accomplished and enterprising daguerreotypist in the region," (58).

[37] *Sacramento Daily Union*, 12 June 1856.

[38] *Ibid.*, 10 October 1856.

including articles from *Time and Transcript* and *Wide West*, which all praised on his work.[39] This praise was not limited to the press. Vance also won several awards for his work, including the First Premium award for his submissions to the California State Fair in 1856, which gave credence to the name of his studio, "R. H. Vance's Premium Daguerreotypes." Overall, historians and contemporaries alike have raved about the quality and delicacy of Vance's daguerreotypes.

If Vance treated his craft with delicacy, he did not reserve the same for his rivals. Even within the hyper-competitive world of mid-nineteenth century portrait photography, Vance seems to have had few scruples in his business dealings. In a note sent to the *Daily Evening Bulletin* in early June, 1856, a dozen local daguerreotypists, including Vance and his brother, informed their customers that they would close their shops on Sunday, "as we consider it will be in our best interests to do so." A little over a month later, however, on July 24th, another note appeared in the Bulletin:

> "The undersigned Daguerrean Artists desire to inform their friends that, Whereas, having subscribed their names to an agreement to close their Galleries on Sunday; and Whereas, That agreement having been broken by one of their subscribing parties – R.H. Vance, corner of Sacramento and Montgomery streets; no cause or reason being assigned for doing so, therefore, Hereafter they will act and conduct their business as may seem to do them best, without regard to said agreement, or the course the said Vance may seem fit to pursue."

[39] Bogartus, 19.

The note, signed by six local daguerreotypists, seemed to go out of their way to exclude William Vance. However, their scorn for Robert likely transcended his breach of the Sabbath.[40]

Vance did not just make light of the Fourth Commandment. One of his recurring advertisements in the Alta Californian read, "MURDER! MURDER! A noted Coroner was called in at one of the 'bogus' Ambrotype Rooms the other day, to view the remains of a large quantity of murdered ambrotypes, that were found in the street, badly mangled and broken up." The coroner did not hold an inquest, however, "as they were so disfigured that their friends could not recognize him." These items were placed beneath the column normally reserved for crime stories, and away from the area usually set aside for advertisements.[41] Vance's use of graphic imagery to promote his craft is telling, as it demonstrates the lengths to which Vance would go to in order to attract customers. It was also successful, given the long life of Vance's business in a city with a largely transient, ethnically diverse, and disproportionately young, male population.

It also shows how creative Vance's advertising could be. All successful daguerreotypists had to master advertising to some degree, but Vance's efforts went beyond typical newspaper and other printed advertising. Perhaps the best example of Vance's advertising acumen can be seen in his *Illustrated California Almanac*, a compendium of sketches, rhymes, civic information, and astronomical tables that Vance published in 1854. Financed in part by the dozens of firms that advertised within the book, Vance predictably used parts of it to promote his own business. Two whole-page advertisements direct the reader's attention to his galleries, one of which includes what we might now refer to as a "jingle:"

[40] San Francisco *Daily Evening Bulletin*, 11 June 1856, 24 July 1856, quoted by typewritten notes within the Robert Vance Research File, Beaumont and Nancy Newhall Papers, Institutional Archives at the Getty, Los Angeles, California.

[41] *Daily Alta Californian*, 24 August 1856.

Here Art, triumphant, our attention claims;
Here, life seems speaking from a hundred frames,
Men, women, children throng the pictured walls,
Each face, each form, its living type recalls,
Features, complexion, attitude, attire,
Beauty's soft smile, and manhood's glance of fire,
Truly reflected from the burnished plate,
Astonish life with its own duplicate,
Think not these portraits, by the sunlight made,
Shades though they are, will like a shadow fade,
And death's grey film o'erspread the beaming eye,
Then VANCE'S pictures, mocking at decay,
Will still be as fresh and vivid as today.[42]

This advertising strategy helped contribute to Vance's rising reputation in San Francisco, Sacramento, and elsewhere, and elevated his work into a recognizable, branded product. But soon, the brand began to transcend the art – advertisements, publications, and even lithographs could carry the Vance brand to consumers throughout California, and perhaps even beyond. In other words, if a person in San Francisco or New York could associate Vance's daguerreotypes with unsurpassed accuracy and literacy, then consumers could make similar associations with lithographs or sketches based on Vance's original work.

By 1856, Vance was in an optimal position to report on the Committee of Vigilance. Although he was slow to adopt the ambrotype in his studios, Vance's business acumen, aesthetic

[42] Bogartus, 19

gifts, and growing reputation in California and beyond gave him the tools that he needed to document the Committee's activities and the knowledge and ability to profit off of them. His gallery was unsurpassed in the region, and residents of the city could visit it for free. Once there, they could look upon his critically acclaimed, whole plate pictures of local buildings, mining camps, and other sights of interest. Some of these visitors might have then purchased portraits for themselves or their family and friends. In the meantime, all of the visitors could be assured that they were seeing the subjects of the daguerreotypes as they really were. Since the invention of the daguerreotype, the word had been synonymous with "accuracy," but few photographers were able to portray the truth-telling qualities of the daguerreotype as being superior to the colorful, symbolic, or narrative powers of paintings, sketches, and other forms of visual media.[43] Vance seems to have had some measure of success in doing just that: if daguerreotypes embodied accuracy, then Vance's daguerreotypes were the embodiment of the form. They also managed to convey the emotional weight of the events, and provided a visual narrative of them as they occurred. As we will see, this calculus served to legitimize many of the lithographs of the Committee's activities, and likely attracted new customers to Vance's galleries to see his latest photos of the action.

After Vance's brush (or near brush) with the crowd surrounding General Richardson's crime scene, more action was soon to follow. Only five years after the 1851 Vigilance Committee disbanded, San Francisco seemed ready for a new outbreak of violence. By 1856, the city's population rose to over fifty thousand residents, and the gender balance had started to even out somewhat. A police force patrolled the city, and a working system of courts prosecuted

[43] See Martha Sandweiss, "Introduction," in *Eyewitnesses to War*, 2; *Print the Legend*, 54 – 55. Sandweiss argues that photographers had already started to look for ways to reconcile the limitations of their medium with the public's aesthetic and cultural preferences in visual media. She argues that they were not successful in the mid-1850s, although the process was already underway. Vance's contributions to the coverage of the Committee, however, proves otherwise.

criminals. However, although the city had already started to develop modern civil institutions, the residents believed that the city's political, social, and economic problems threatened both the possibility of personal harm and the danger of eastern cities withholding investments and business from a city that they perceived to be crime-ridden. Corruption was probably the biggest concern for many San Franciscans – Senator David C. Broderick imported a Tammany-style politics into the city, and with the help of Irish immigrants who stuffed ballot boxes and mobilized the city wards he controlled the city. The city budget was two and a half million dollars in 1856, due mainly to inflated salaries and bribe payments.[44] Even Stephen Palfrey Webb, mayor of San Francisco from 1854 – 1855, admitted as such in his history of the Committee. "The offices were filled by rapacious and unscrupulous men," he recalled, and "the agents who had helped elect them . . . were supported and protected in their villanies."[45]

When combined with the other day to day problems of city life, particularly those of a growing, cosmopolitan, and predominately young and male city – violent crime, prostitution, larceny, etc. – the city's widespread corruption and the prevailing sentiment that few people were willing to do anything about it created a powder keg of bitterness and anger within the population. It took one man to light the fuse: James King of William, editor of the *Daily Evening Bulletin* and the city's self-appointed leader of a newfound reform movement. Established in October 1855, the *Daily Evening Bulletin* immediately went to work attacking Broderick, his cronies, and a long list of other officials in the city. Its refusal to run graphic medical notices and its invitation to women and children to participate in the paper set a new tone both for journalism in the city and for reformers, who now sought to include women in their

[44] Richard Maxwell Brown, *Strain of Violence: Historical Studies of American Violence and Vigilantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 134 – 141.

[45] Stephen Palfrey Webb, *A Sketch of the Causes, Operations, and Results of the San Francisco Vigilance Committee in 1856* (1874; Project Gutenberg, 2004), http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/5802.

efforts to curb vice and crime. According to Richard Maxwell Brown, King riled the population up to a "white heat," and soon the air was thick with tension.[46] That May, one of King's targets, a city supervisor named James P. Casey, decided to confront King over accusations that he was an ex-con from Sing Sing in New York. "A thief is a thief," King wrote in an editorial, "whether he steals 'two bed steads of the value of eight dollars each, as Casey the assassin did." Incensed over the charge, on May 17th Casey encountered King on the street and shot him in the leg, mortally wounding King. The city's residents were shocked by the attack, and many threw banners up over their buildings to express their sympathy. This event effectively sparked the powder keg, and by the end of the day the 1851 Vigilance Committee had been reconstituted by former members.

Within a few days, the movement was in full force. The Committee secretly recruited members over the next 48 hours, and armed hundreds of them. The city's merchants flocked to the Vigilantes' banner, and over the course of the summer nearly six thousand men, the majority of the city's voters, enrolled in the organization. The Committee established their headquarters in a large building on Sacramento Street, not far from Vance's gallery. The day after Casey shot King, the Committee broke into the city jail and took Casey into custody. Cora, whose earlier trial over Richardson's death resulted in a hung jury, was taken as well. Both were immediately tried by a Committee tribunal and sentenced to death. In an odd twist of fate, King's son, Joseph, later recalled a family friend quickly drawing down the blinds of his family's carriage as his father's funeral procession rolled across Sacramento Street. "After the funeral," he wrote, "I learned the reason for the action. Those looking down Sacramento Street could see . . . Casey

[46] Michelle Jolly, "The Price of Vigilance: Gender, Politics, and the Press in Early San Francisco," *Pacific Historical Review* 73 (2004), 549; Brown, 136.

and Cora, hanging by their necks in front of the rooms of the vigilance committee."[47] The vigilantes executed both suspects on May 22nd, the day of King's funeral. By August, the Committee executed two more people, banished dozens of others from the city, pressured several city officials to leave office, and imprisoned a state Supreme Court judge for seven weeks.[48]

Historians place the Committee in a variety of contexts. For a long time, historians were sympathetic towards the vigilantes. Preeminent California historian Hubert Howe Bancroft wrote in his History of California that, "This formal vigilance committee was not to be confused with the rash, vindictive, mob-like risings which had so often disgraced the mining region . . . the benefits were incalculable, in many respects permanent." As evidence, Bancroft pointed out that that city expenditures went down from over $2.6 million in 1856 to just over $353,000 two years later.[49] More recently, historians have taken a more nuanced approach. Richard Maxwell Brown referred to the movement as the first outbreak of "neovigilante" violence, which reflected residents' discomfort with the process of urbanization and the growing tensions between the city's various ethnic communities. Michelle Jolly claimed that the Committee was a part of a year-long movement to reform San Francisco politics, culminating in the creation of the People's Party later that year. Jolly also emphasized the gender aspects of the movement, which often revolved around participants' belief that their masculinity was under siege. Meanwhile, Ken Gonzales-Day has bemoaned historians' attention to the Committee, whose historical reputation as a legitimized response to frontier crime has obfuscated our understanding of racially motivated lynchings throughout California.[50]

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[47] Joseph L. King, "The Vigilance Committee of '56," *Overland Monthly* 68 (1916), 509.
[48] Jolly, 544.
[49] Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California*, Vol. VI, in *The Works of Hubert Howe Bancroft*, Vol. XXIII (San Francisco: The History Company, 1888 [microfiche]), http://www.archive.org/details/cihm_14174 (accessed 10 December 2009).
[50] Brown, 134 – 141; Jolly, 548; Gonzales-Day, 1 – 22.

For our purposes, we must place Vance within the context of the Committee. It seems as though he sympathized with the committee, at least to an extent. For one, he regularly placed ads in the *Daily Evening Bulletin*, both before and after the Committee was founded.[51] He knew King, or at least did business with him – he took a daguerreotype portrait of King sometime in 1855 (figure 2). Moreover, according to an article in the *Alta California* that ran the day after King's death, Vance joined other shopkeepers in the area by hanging a large banner or transparency outside of the building. "Vance's Daguerrean Gallery Building," it noted, "was also conspicuous in its mourning emblems." Like other businesses in the area, Vance probably closed it the afternoon when word came of King's death.[52] At the very least, Vance fits the profile of a prototypical Committee member: he was young, male, white, and a merchant.

Given his sympathies with the committee, Vance's coverage of the event was not completely unbiased. However, an examination of Vance's daguerreotypes of the event, as well as the published lithographs based on his photos, demonstrates that Vance at least approached the subject with a journalist's eye – he tried to show the events as they happened, without the dramatic or artistic flourishes that typically define sketches and paintings of uprisings and mob scenes, but with an understanding of the image's narrative importance. An example of this can be seen in a full plate daguerreotype by Vance in front of the Smiley, Yerkes and Company Building, where the occupants hung a banner displaying the text, "THE GREAT MAN has

[51] See his ads in the *Daily Evening Bulletin*, which ran the week before and the week following King's assassination (10 May 1856 – 24 May 1856). The *Evening Bulletin* was one of the Committee's most vociferous supporters after the Committee was founded. Meanwhile, most advertisers pulled their ads from the *Herald* after it came out against the Committee on May 19th, so advertisers were both aware of and willing to react to the newspapers' political platforms. Vance's continued business with the *Evening Bulletin* after the Committee's formation indicates at least a passive acceptance or extreme antipathy to its support.

[52] "Events of Yesterday," *Alta California*, 21 May 1856. The article mentions that there was "a general suspension of business affairs" that afternoon, "and shops of all kinds are closed up."

FALLEN, WE MOURN HIS LOSS" (figure 3). The banner, the streamers, and the building itself dwarf the men standing near the bottom.[53]

While this could have been a commissioned work, it appears as though the men in the picture were standing for an impromptu picture. The man pulling the cart in the street is perfectly still, and is cooperating with the cameraman, while a couple of semi-dissolved figures can be seen, indicating that they were unwilling to stop long enough for the exposure to take hold. In the upper right corner, a flag is visible above one of the buildings. Its understated presence suggests that its inclusion was intentional, and that it could have been omitted in order to make the foreground seem bigger. The daguerreotype, which is encased in a custom frame and still bears the studio's seal, was probably showcased in his gallery. Artists seldom used whole plate daguerreotypes for anything besides major exhibition pieces, and these were generally representative of the daguerreotypist's own artistic vision. Vance's advertisements allude to his efforts to place new works on display. On August 3, he claimed that he had recently "made great and extensive additions to [the] gallery."[54] Therefore, Vance probably intended to display this piece prominently within his gallery, both as an illustration of his photography skills and as a piece of information itself.

Of course, although a work exhibited at a gallery can gather a lot of attention, viewers must go to it in order to see it. Lettersheets provided lithographers, artists, and illustrators with a mass media outlet for their works. During the Committee's activities, printers issued lettersheets to express their views in an ongoing debate over current events, and to apprise their relatives back east of what was going on in San Francisco. Many contained political cartoons, while

[53] Other historians have commented on this plate as well. Keith Davis wrote that it "commemorates the loss of an important civic figure and, by implication, the power of frontier justice." (58).

[54] Davis, 28; *Daily Alta California*, 3 August 1856.

others simply sketched out prominent figures and important events.[55] Although there was no direct way to convert a daguerreotype into print, lithographers based some of their illustrations on Vance's works. Perhaps more importantly, they indicated as such to their audiences. One example of this can be seen in a lettersheet printed by the Noisy Carrier Printing Company, which published two daguerreotype views taken by Vance: one of a mass meeting of the Committee, and another of the exterior of Fort Vigilance (figure 4). Like figure 3, these two sketches vividly express the drama of the situation – cannons placed along the roof of Fort Vigilance shows that the Committee was well prepared and well armed, while the large American flags waving above the crowd at the mass meeting associate the Committee's activities with patriotism. The whereabouts of the original plates are unknown, but the publishers remembered to place Vance's name in the lower left corner. This is rather remarkable, considering that very few lithographic representations were similarly labeled at this time.[56]

If lettersheets proved to be an effective means of communicating pictures to a mass audience, newspapers were quickly becoming a more pervasive, legitimate, and widely circulated tool for conveying the printed word and image. Few newspapers had the financial or economic resources to regularly print lithographs in their papers, and most did not even have the equipment to do so. During the late 1840s through early 1850s, however, the number of illustrated newspapers and newspapers with occasional illustrations in them increased rapidly. Not surprisingly, perhaps the best known and most widely viewed images of the Committee can be found in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. Although historically significant for its role in

[55] Jolly, 547, 564.

[56] Palmquist notes in his serial biography of Carleton Watkins that Vance not only made photographs of Casey and Cora's execution, but that they were made into woodcuts, "which made them available to a large number of viewers." Palmquist does not cite this information, however, so the author is unable to confirm its accuracy. See Palmquist, "From Babies to Landscapes, 1856 – 1858," *The Daguerrean Annual* (Lake Charles, LA.: Daguerreian Society, 1991): 234.

publishing lithographs of the Civil war, the paper itself started in 1855 with much fanfare, and boasted having a circulation as high as forty thousand in December of that year.[57]

Frank Leslie, an English immigrant who had previously worked for the *London Illustrated News* and P.T Barnum's short-lived *Illustrated News*, was an innovator in his own right. He transformed the process of creating lithographs from illustrations and pictures from a time-consuming, laborious process of several weeks to a month into an assembly like operation that took less than a couple of weeks. Leslie divided each illustration into small squares, which he then distributed among several different lithographic artists. Since New York had a large population of these, Leslie's operation there was more than capable of taking a contributor's sketch and then reproducing it in a timely manner. Vance was well aware of the difficulties that otherwise prevented rapid lithographic production – his *Illustrated California Almanac* had very rudimentary lithographs, and he continued to use the same lithograph of his building's façade by W. C. Butler in most of his illustrated advertisements. In some ways, it is ironic that Vance, the peddler of pictorial truth, would find a market and an audience for his pictures in the same periodical that some historians consider to be a pioneering work in sensational journalism.[58]

Leslie's Illustrated brought sensational, illustrated coverage of the Committee and its activities to readers back east. Outside of Leslie's frequent editorials on the manner, in which he unequivocally advocated for the Committee and called on New Yorkers to pursue a similar course with regards to Tammany Hall,[59] this coverage came from three main sources: San Francisco newspaper reports, an unnamed artist-correspondent who filed sketches and dispatches

[57] *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 22 December 1855.

[58] Few historians have talked at length about Leslie or his publishing enterprises before the Civil War. For short introductions to Frank Leslie and *Leslie's Illustrated*, refer to Stuart A. P. Murray, *Witness to the Civil War: First Hand Accounts from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* (Irvington, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2006): viii – ix; and Lynne Vincent Cheney, "Mrs. Frank Leslie's Illustrated News," *American Heritage* 26 (1975): http://www.americanheritage.com/articles/magazine/ah/1975/6/1975_6_42.shtml. For a good example of how hard and expensive good lithographs were to make, see the example on page 15 of the *Illustrated California Almanac*.

[59] *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 28 June 1856.

of the events in California, and Robert Vance's daguerreotypes. Reports and materials from all three arrived regularly in New York via steamship, and the paper's weekly news cycle allowed it to regularly and effectively piece all of these materials together in a timely, well organized fashion. The newspaper sources, which came from the *Herald* and the *Daily Alta California* in particular, added breadth and a wider reporting lens to the coverage. Meanwhile, the artist-correspondent, probably a paid agent of Leslie's and possibly someone who knew Vance, submitted lengthy dispatches to the paper, as well as a variety of sketches of the event. The artist's sketches appeared along with the dispatches within the paper, and were often adjacent to reproductions of Vance's own work.

We don't know how many daguerreotypes Vance sent to Leslie. Since the newspaper's lithographic production facilities were on-site and were faster, better skilled, and more faithful to the originals than those available in San Francisco, we can assume that Vance shipped unreversed daguerreotypes to Leslie, either directly or by way of his correspondent.[60] Either possibility required effort and expense on Vance's part: he had to purchase the plates, generally whole, which were the most expensive kind; pre-treat the plate; send an operator to take the picture or go by himself, which involved moving and setting up a lot of heavy equipment; and then take as many daguerreotypes as necessary to get the lighting right. In any case, we know that Vance actively sought and solicited newspapers that could produce lithographs from his work, as evidenced by his successful partnership with the *Sacramento Union* during the late-1850s.[61] Other artists mirrored this practice, and some even sent their work to non-illustrated newspapers as a means of both providing information and advertising their work, as we shall

[60] Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: Pioneer Photographer," 16 – 17.
[61] Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance," 561.

soon see with James M. Ford's submissions of Committee-related daguerreotypes to local newspapers.

Between June and September, 1856, three of Vance's daguerreotypes made the final cut and appeared in *Leslie's Illustrated*. On June 28, an illustration whose caption reads, "View down Sacramento St., San Francisco, Showing the Excitement in the Street," was credited as being "From a daguerreotype by R. H. Vance" (figure 5). As Palmquist seems to indicate, this sketch could be derived from a more generic rooftop daguerreotype that Vance took of Sacramento Street earlier in the year (see figure 6), but since the gallery's building abuts Sacramento, it is possible that Vance or an operator took this shot from his roof or that of an adjacent building. Moreover, this daguerreotype is housed in the Bancroft photo collection, while none of Vance's other *Leslie's Illustrated* sketches appear there, so it is likely that Vance made another print, which he sent to New York and which then met the same fate as the rest of his originals. These were usually disposed of after the lithographs had been made.[62]

We know even less about the other two lithographs, but they show even more action. Both were published on September 13, and each portrays the "grand parade" of the Vigilance committee that concluded the organization's activities with a revue through the city. They are remarkable for what they show: the first (figure 7) has women and men milling about, in a social atmosphere. Many are sitting on rooftops, waiting for the parade to come through, and several took their carriages into the city to see the event. A huge American flag waves prominently from a nearby store as the crowd waits for the parade to arrive. The second (figure 8) also features

[62] This image could very well have been based on an ambrotype, which would have produced additional copies from a negative. However, Vance reportedly preferred to use daguerreotypes when making showpieces and other exhibition items (see Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance," 562, who also claims that Vance made original daguerreotypes of Fort Vigilance), and Leslie would have been sensible enough to not make the mistake of labeling an "ambrotype" as a "daguerreotype," which was a common sense designation in 1856. Vance might have made a daguerreotype copy of the original to send, but that might have been a lot less productive than moving the camera to the roof and filming the real thing in progress. In any case, we won't know for sure until we know where Leslie's originals ended up.

two prominent American flags, as well as tightly ordered regiment of troops lined up along the street. The presiding officers are wearing full regalia, and a marching band on the far left is playing for the troops and the crowd. It resembles a scene that would play out five years later in towns across America: troops marching off to war as the crowd wishes them well.

The accuracy of these lithographs relative to the originals is unknown, but we do know that they contradict other published accounts of the event. For example, the lithograph contradicts the *Daily Evening Bulletin's* claim that no women were present at the Committee's final parade by showing several women standing around and watching the action.[63] It is possible that Leslie manipulated or changed the sketches that he made based on the daguerreotypes that Vance sent, but this was a problem that would continue to jeopardize the authenticity of these representations until the technology improved enough to allow the direct printing of photographs onto newspaper. In any case, these daguerreotypes blend elements of patriotism, civility, and formality, while implying that both men and women had come from all over to express their approval of the activities.

Vance was not alone in his efforts to document the proceedings. James Ford, one of Vance's chief rivals and an early adopter of the ambrotype, submitted views of Fort Vigilance to the *Daily Evening Bulletin* and the *Daily Herald* on June 17. Ford included one of his ambrotypes of Fort Vigilance, also known as Fort Gunny Bags, in his *San Francisco Album*. One of the publishers of his album was a member of the Committee, and the proximity of Ford's gallery to many of the Committee's meetings and trials gave him and his staff ample opportunities to photograph them.[64] It is possible that Vance and Ford's rivalry spurred both to

[63] Michelle Jolly, "The Price of Vigilance: Gender, Politics, and the Press in Early San Francisco," *Pacific Historical Review* 73 (2004), 543.

[64] Peter E Palmquist, "George Robinson Fardon," in George Robinson Fardon, *San Francisco Album: Photographs 1854 – 1856* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999), 22 – 23.

produce pictures of the events. However, Vance was more successful in bringing his images to the public eye. Ford's plates might have resulted in the publication of a few lettersheets, but there is little evidence that this occurred.

Taken together, Vance's depictions of the Committee's activities were seen in several ways, likely by tens of thousands of people. Residents and visitors to San Francisco would have made their way to his galleries, whose luxury and art could be enjoyed for free, and would have seen these images in person. Many might have even visited in hopes of seeing fresh images of the Committee's activities, particularly if Vance and Ford were competing for the best daguerreotype of the event. Meanwhile, people picked up and read lettersheets with artwork based on his daguerreotypes, and might then have associated the sheet's accuracy with what they knew of Vance's own reputation as a meticulous professional. Readers of *Leslie's Illustrated* in New York and elsewhere might have made similar assumptions based on what they knew of the daguerreotype's accuracy, and a few might have even remembered Vance's original exhibition on Broadway, where he pitted his "stereotyped impression[s] of the real thing itself" against the more colorful, more popular panoramas and paintings that brought the exotic lands west of the Mississippi to urbanites on the Atlantic seaboard. Vance had nothing to lose from this exposure – whenever gallery viewers, lettersheet readers, or *Leslie's Illustrated* subscribers saw these images, they knew that they were looking at one of "Mr. V's" impressions, which were almost as real as the real thing itself. And if any of the latter were ever in San Francisco, which many people believed would become the New York of the Pacific coast, then they could acquire a very real likeness of themselves at Vance's studio.

Whatever ulterior motive Vance might have had in bringing accurate, unblemished visual information to gallery viewers and patrons of the illustrated press, it is clear that Vance opened

up new ways of thinking about both journalism and the phenomenon of lynching. On the one hand, Vance successfully bridged the production gap between daguerreotypes for private display and daguerreotypes in journalism. Vance's work corresponded with rise of the illustrated press, the steamship, and the lithographic industry – all three concomitants made photojournalism possible, at least in this nascent form. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* gave Vance a potentially national forum for his daguerreotype-turned-lithographs, and the paper in turn took advantage of Vance's previous exposure in the New York community and the popular reputation of the daguerreotype to sell the accuracy of its pictures. Even if Vance's journalism was intended to bring people into his galleries and encourage them to look favorably upon his work, possibly in the interest of selling his more artistic and general subject works in the future, Vance was acting with no less self-interest than any photojournalist with a paycheck at stake today would have. In the end, it provided the information consumer of the antebellum period with a means of obtaining perhaps the most accurate view and understanding of a topic than had been previously conceivable, and this understanding helped Frank Leslie capitalize on the illustrations he published during the Civil War a few years later.

On the other hand, Vance's daguerreotypes may have also helped to legitimize lynching in the eyes of urban Americans in the Northeast. After the Civil War and Reconstruction, lynching emerged as a means of social control in the South. Southerners employed it, seemingly at random, to reconstruct and reinvent racial hierarchies that changed dramatically after the end of slavery and the duration of Radical Reconstruction. Press reports, human remains, and photos of the lynchings and of the crowd during the event formed a major element of the ritual, by reinforcing the moral and social lessons of the day while also serving to desensitize and convince Northerners of the processes' legitimacy. Although we can hardly blame Vance, who did not

live past the end of Reconstruction, for promoting and proliferating lynching ephemera and photographic mementos, his coverage of the Committee and its illustrations could have only further legitimized the acts in the public eye. During this time, mob violence was already questioned as a viable alternative to a professional police force, and "frontier justice" was losing currency as a legitimate tool for redressing crime and social ills. However, as Richard Maxwell Brown points out, the Committee of 1856 serves as a watershed moment in the history of vigilantism, marking the beginnings of a national trend that generally identified the victims of vigilantism by their race or ethnic origin, rather than by their moral flaws.[65] Once *Leslie's Illustrated* readers in New York began making conceptual links between the efficacy of vigilantism in confronting social and political problems and their own issues with Tammany Hall, and later with the perceived moral faults of Northern and African American officials in the reconstructed South, Northerners and other Americans began to lay the intellectual, moral, and psychological foundations of a century of segregation, lynchings, and Jim Crow.[66]

The future of the nation notwithstanding, Vance continued to prosper for several years after the Committee ceased its operations late in 1856, but by the end of the decade most of his best work was behind him. After the Civil War started, Vance stayed in California and produced a number of sweeping landscapes in Northern California, many of which can be seen in a compilation of Vance's work, *A Camera in the Gold Rush*, which the Book Club of California published in 1946.[67] Vance's skills as a photographer could not save him from his own bad luck as a land speculator, however. In 1857, squatters kidnapped Vance after he attempted to evict

[65] Brown, 134 – 141.

[66] There is a growing and vibrant literature on the subject of lynching, particularly in the South. For a good overview of the subject, consult Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: the Lynching of Black America* (New York: Modern Library, 2003); Michael Pfiefer, *Rough Justice: Lynching and American Society, 1874 – 1947* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 2004) or Goldsby. Of course, Eric Foner's magisterial *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution* (New York: Perennial Classics, 2002) is the classic work of the Reconstruction period.

[67] Book Club of California, *A Camera in the Gold Rush* (San Francisco, Cal: Taylor & Taylor, 1946).

them from land that he owned in northern California. Authorities found him the next morning completely naked and shivering. By 1860, his mining investments in the Comstock Lode region went bust, and he had to sell off some of his galleries to pay off his debts. He continued in Nevada for awhile before selling his remaining galleries in 1865 and moving to New York City, where he became a real estate investments broker. Although Vance tried to set up a small exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876, he died before he was able to attend. Strangely, Vance died on July 4th, the nation's centennial. He left no wife or children, and his brother in law, Lot M. Morrill, was his next of kin.[68]

Perhaps we should not read too much into the last two decades of Vance's life, though. Historians tend to sum up their narratives of Vance's life with a note about the legacy of his *Views on California* exhibit in New York. Palmquist concludes his article on Vance in the *Daguerreian Annual*, for example, with the sentence, "How sad that those 300 daguerreotypes are missing, for they were the crowning jewels of Robert H. Vance's legacy to the world."[69] Sandweiss almost ends on a note of futility, arguing that at least other daguerreotypists could have appreciated Vance's valiant but unrewarded efforts to show accurate likeness of the West. In light of Vance's desire to provide accurate information through the photographic medium, however, it's ironic that historians have fixated so much on the information that he *failed* to convey, be it through the exhibition's failure or the loss of the plates. Vance's coverage of the San Francisco Committee of Vigilance requires much more research and consideration, but the evidence that we have at the moment already suggests that a positive legacy is possible.[70] Extant

[68] Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: Pioneer Photographer," 33 – 35.
[69] Palmquist, "Robert H. Vance: The Maine and Boston Years," 213.
[70] Specifically, the next step is two-fold: a more thorough mining of the Daily Evening Bulletin, the Chronicle, and other papers that Vance advertised in and which might yield clues to his output during the Committee's activities, and a search for woodcuts and ephemera of the Committee which might be based on Vance's work, as well as an investigation into the Noisy Carrier's Publishing Company and other firms that made and sold lithographs based on Vance's pictures.

daguerreotypes and a catalogue of his exhibition can give us an idea of what Vance did and how good he was at his job, but historians can learn a great deal about the Committee, San Francisco, and the phenomenon of vigilante justice by evaluating what Vance had to say about it. With a ruthless business acumen, a fine eye for detail and precision, and an adroit use of gallery space, lettersheet printers and newspapers, Vance told his story with a camera. We should revisit his own words from his exhibition catalogue, that "the sight of a place affords so much more pleasure," and remember that only a true believer in the art and intellectual promise of daguerreotypy could have taken those 300 views in the first place. Thus, we should focus less on the ways in which Vance failed as an artist, and instead consider how he managed to succeed as a photojournalist.

Appendix: Illustrations

Figure 1 – Woman and Child in Mourning, ca. 1855. Taken from Davis, 58.

Figure 2 – James King of William (1822-1856), by Robert H. Vance (c. 1855).

Cased photographs, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley

Figure 3 – Robert H. Vance, "The Great Man Has Fallen," Whole-plate daguerreotype. Currently on display at the Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City, Missouri.

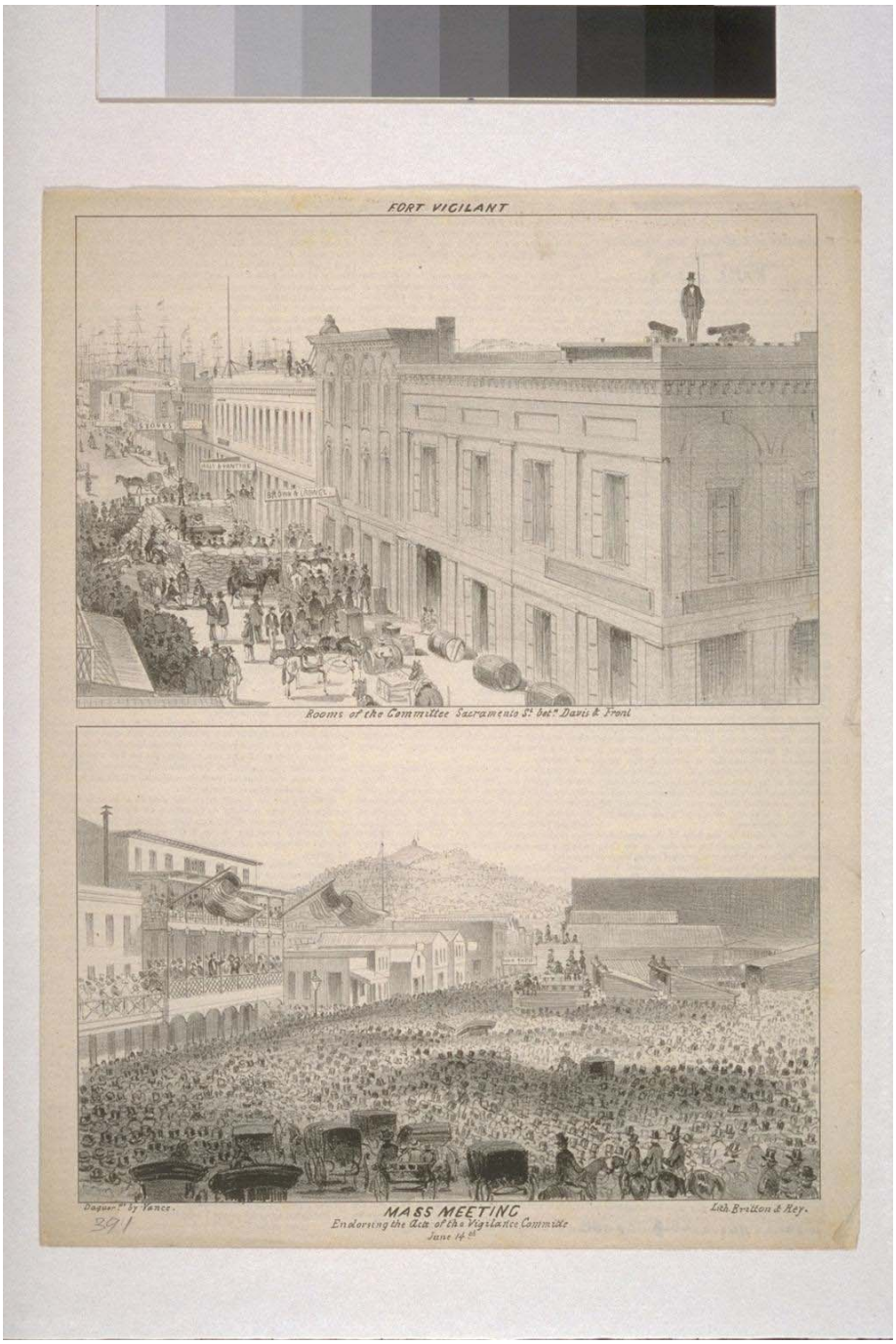

Figure 4 – Fort Vigilant: Rooms of the Committee Sacramento St. bet. Davis and Front / Mass Meeting : Endorsing the Acts of the Vigilance Committee June 14th. -- [San Francisco]: Britton & Rey -- 2 Lithographs; 12 x 19 cm. each -- Daguerreotype by Vance .

California Lettersheets from the Robert B. Honeyman, Jr. Collection of Early Californian and Western American Pictorial Material, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley

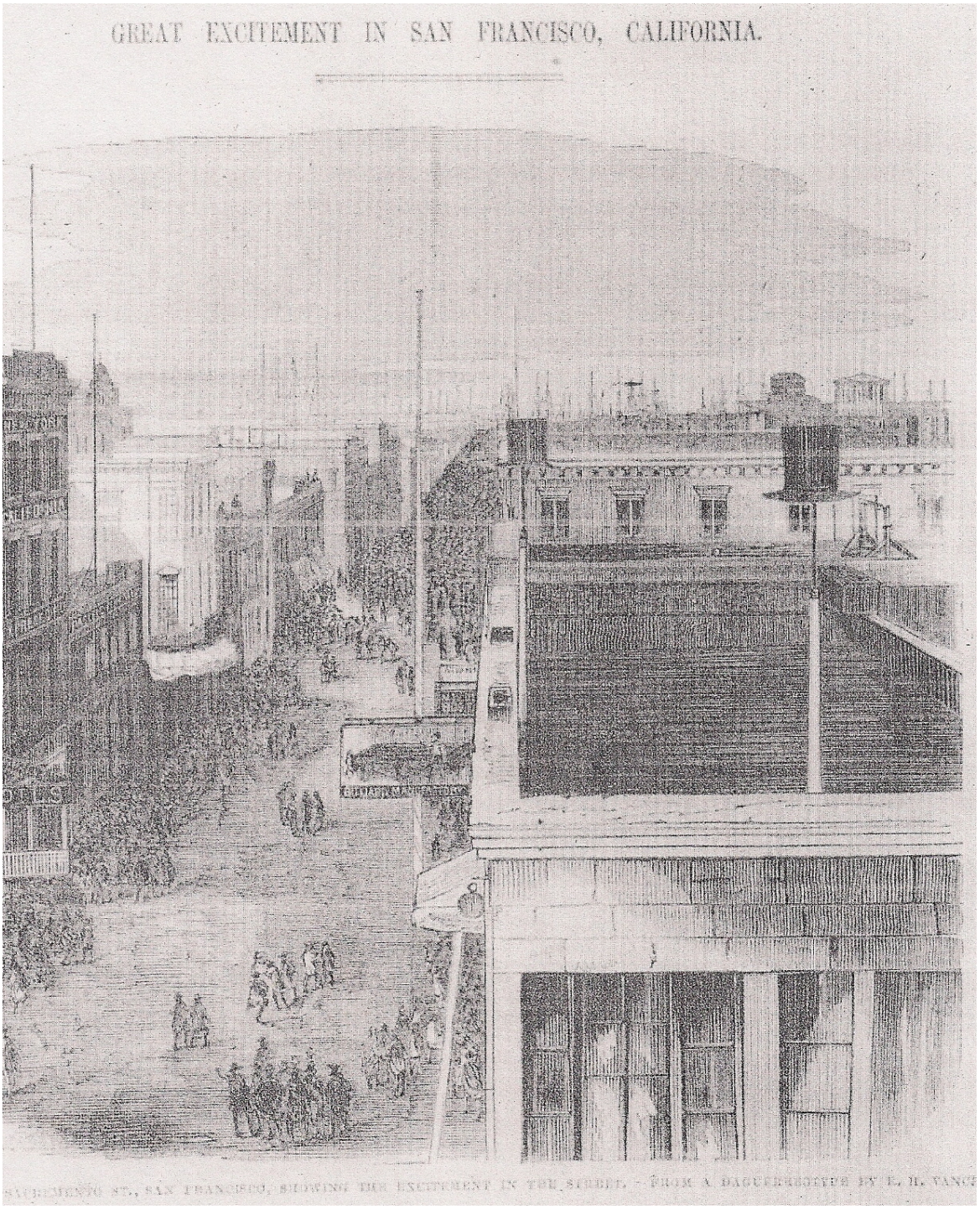

Figure 5 – "View Down Sacramento St, San Francisco, Showing the Excitement in the Street. From a Daguerreotype by R. H. Vance," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 28 June 1856

Figure 6 – Sacramento Street, San Francisco, c. 1856. Unreversed original by Robert Vance.

Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley

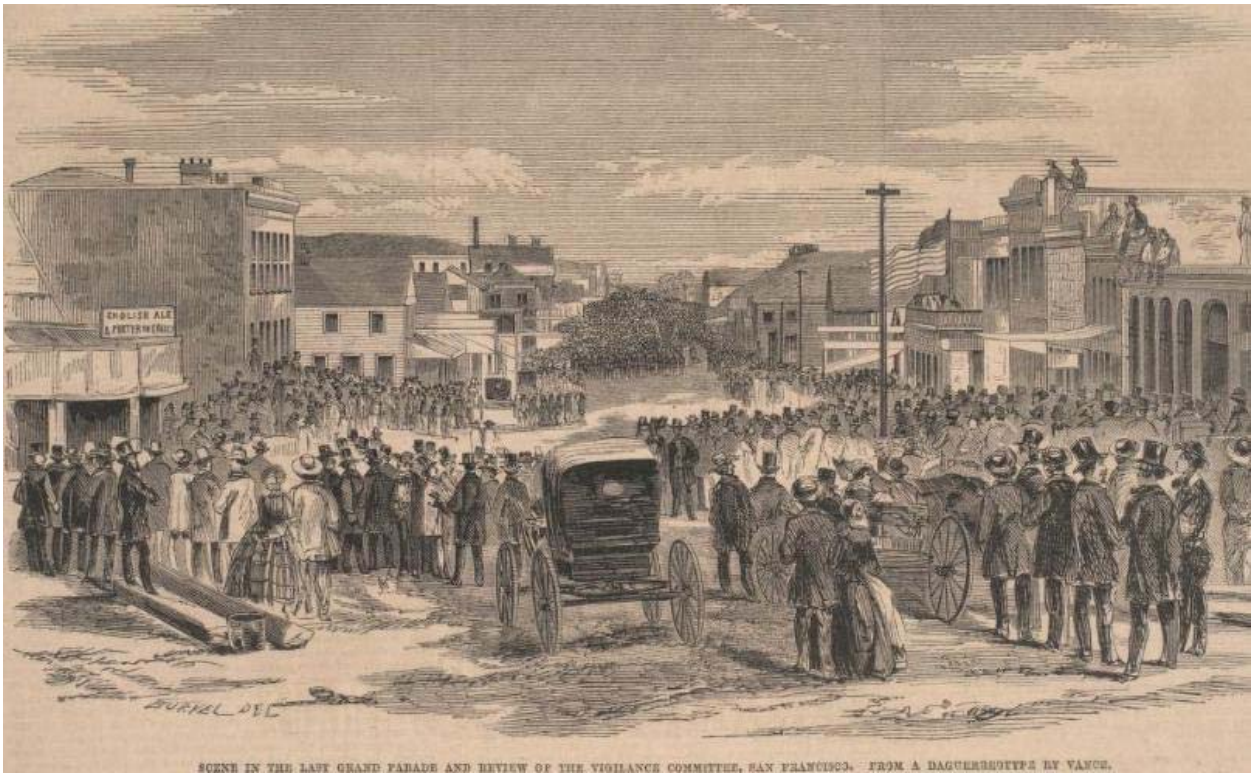

Figure 7 – "Scene in the Last Grand parade and Review of the Vigilance Committee, San Francisco. From a Daguerreotype by Vance," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 13 September 1856.

Figure 8 – "Scene in the last grand parade and review of the Vigilance Committee, San Francisco. From a Daguerreotype by Vance," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, 13 September 1856.

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