tremendous change as technologies develop and the public demands more access to manuscript material and rare books, profiles of institutions such as the ones presented in this report offer an important starting point from which staff can evaluate their own practices and policies. ~ Lori Birrell, Manuscript Librarian, University of Rochester


Rediscovering William Henry Fox Talbot’s *The Pencil of Nature*, the first commercially produced photography book, led my mind back more than 20 years to when, as a young photographer, I studiously devoured the lessons wrought from the photographers Eugène Atget, Man Ray, and August Sander. One day as I sat in a verdant backyard absorbing books filled with images by these three photographers, my father plopped *The Pencil of Nature* by my side. In his quiet but immutable manner he said, “He [Talbot] did it first.” Atget, a late nineteenth-century/early twentieth-century photographer, took more than 5,000 pictures of Paris and its people. His most haunting images are of isolated buildings, empty street scenes, and barren garden stairways. The early twentieth-century surrealist Man Ray took photograms that harkened a new era for the art of photography. Photograms are photographic images taken without a camera. The artist puts an object directly on light-sensitive paper to produce a stark “surreal” image. Starting in 1911, August Sander’s earthy, grounded portraits of German people in their professional garb brought a stark but warm “realness” to photography. Taken 60 years before, Talbot’s photos can seem stilted in comparison, but sit and peruse *The Pencil of Nature*, and the composed stark scientific sheen of Talbot’s images hover in a strange hyper-reality of an era long past. It is startling to think that these are some of the first photographic images ever produced. It is even more startling to realize that *The Pencil of Nature* was the first photography book ever created. And, most startling of all is to realize that all three photographers—Atget, Man Ray, and Sander—major figures in the history of art, used processes or concepts originally developed by Talbot.

As I relished images in this edition of *The Pencil of Nature*, my initial reaction to the edition was to find it a poor cousin to the 1969 printing by De Capo Press. The paper, printing, and image presentation of KWS Publishers’ facsimile bears no comparison to the rich paper, fine printing, and photographic presentation of the De Capo Press edition. This is a sign of the times, I fear; as publishing costs continue to rise, the quality of book manufacturing continues to decline.

At the same time, KWS Publishers provided other elements in their printing of *The Pencil of Nature* that makes this edition important to any art or history of technology collection. This is the first contemporary edition (within the last hundred
years) to use prints from the original plates. The plates reside at the National Media Museum in Bradford, West Yorkshire, England. Talbot is considered one of the fathers of photography. He invented the calotype process, which required less exposure time than the daguerreotype. The daguerreotype, developed at about the same time as Talbot’s process, used a direct positive process using silver-plated copper. The calotype process used paper and generated a negative. The negative made reproducing images much easier than the more detailed and exquisitely fine daguerreotype. The relative ease of reproducing images with the calotype form enabled Talbot to envision the first photo book.

The story behind the printing of *The Pencil of Nature* and the personality of Talbot come alive in the introductory essay by Colin Harding. Unlike the short essay by Beaumont Newhall for the De Capo edition, Harding is given space to describe Talbot the man and the events surrounding the development of photography. Harding details the confluence of events and the relationships within the small photography world of the 1840s. He tells us that Nicolaas Henneman, who produced the original *The Pencil of Nature*, was originally Talbot’s valet. Eventually, Henneman became Talbot’s photographic apprentice. With his expertise in the calotype process, Henneman left Talbot and moved to Reading, England, where he set up the Reading Establishment, the first photography business in the world.

Harding elaborates that Talbot was a man of many interests. He put his photography work on hold to follow other pursuits; but, in 1839, when the Frenchman Louis Daguerre announced his invention of the daguerreotype, Talbot refocused his efforts on photography. Talbot was driven by a desire to receive credit for discovering the photographic process and defining photography. Soon, Talbot envisioned *The Pencil of Nature*, a photographic book that would illustrate photography’s potential. Henneman was to produce ten to twelve serial folios, which in total would comprise *The Pencil of Nature*. Each folio focused on different aspects of photography from portraits to photographic reproductions of etchings and other arts. The encyclopedic nature of this undertaking makes *The Pencil of Nature* one of the most ambitious photography projects conceived to this day.

Harding provides additional details of Talbot’s book that are not well known. Sales were not great, but critical response was, for the most part, positive. Despite the grandeur of the *Pencil of Nature* endeavor, Talbot insisted that Henneman put it aside temporarily while he reproduced photos for another book project, *Sun Pictures in Scotland*, based on Sir Walter Scott’s work, as well as 7,000 images for the cover of the journal *Art-Union*. Needless to say, the new projects hindered the production and the quality of the later sections of *The Pencil of Nature*. In all, only six folios were produced.
Harding details for the reader the poor quality of many of the prints, proving himself a learned guide through Talbot’s work. The rapid production of the prints and the rush through the stabilization process caused many of the resultant images to fade rapidly and fall short of Talbot’s vision. Interestingly, in this edition, Harding juxtaposes well-preserved prints next to poor ones, thus highlighting the delicacy of the photographic process, the need for patience, and the triumph of a good print. Photos of the Reading Establishment, of Henneman, of a note from Talbot’s journal, and other images provide a level of intimacy and a window into Talbot’s world.

Following the introductory piece, the reader must read Talbot’s own introduction that describes the potential of photography. Next you can view the twenty-four images in this edition. Talbot’s best photos are works of art, but he also included mundane images of lace, sculpture, and art reproductions. These photographs were not meant to illustrate the artistic aspect of photography but the idea of reproducibility. Talbot understood, at least intuitively, that photography’s ability to reproduce “reality” could shift the course of the other fine arts.

My favorite photos are “The Articles of Glass,” “The Open Door,” “The Haystack,” “The Ladder,” and “The Gate of Christchurch.” Each is composed with an eye to show the object or setting in its full dimension. The quality of each picture forces the viewer to float back more than 100 years to imagine Talbot’s world. Like all great works of art, each of these images resonates with our own times. The glorification of objects in the “The Articles of Glass” image suggests our current covetous consumer culture. The stillness and feeling that a story is occurring beyond the frame of “The Open Door” plays right into contemporary art theory. “The Haystack,” “The Ladder,” and “The Gate of Christchurch” illustrate the weight of place, the weight of time, and the weight of stillness. All the photographs in The Pencil of Nature have accompanying text by Talbot. At times, Talbot merely describes the location where the photograph was taken while at other times he discusses light, angle, and composition. Overall, the images and the accompanying text offer a compendium of photography’s potential. His work foreshadows the art of Atget, Man Ray, and Sander, a fact that can be well understood from this volume.

The weakness in this edition resides in the presentation of the images. The images are reproduced directly on the paper, rather than on photographic plates as in the original edition. In these harsh economic times, it is understandable that the publisher might produce the images directly on the paper to save on production costs, but an explanation for the reader would have been welcome.
Overall, I commend KWS Publishers and Colin Harding. Artists and historians will find this book useful and enlightening. Harding’s essay breathes life into an important period in the history of photography. This wonderful introduction, splendid with details and anecdotes, includes the history behind the inspiration for the title *The Pencil of Nature*. The introduction proves that an erudite and well-written preface can offer an edifying framework for a sound, informative, and pleasing book. — Sarah Passonneau, Assistant to the Dean of the Library/Assessment Librarian, Iowa State University Library


*Processing the Past* is an examination of the evolution of professional archival management and its relationship to the study of history. As the title states, much of this book deals with the concept of authority, from both an archival and an intellectual perspective, and seeks to build understanding in the increasingly separate worlds of the historian and archival professional. Blouin and Rosenberg, an archivist and historian, have labeled this disparity the “archival divide” and, in the course of *Processing the Past*, trace its beginnings, meanings, and consequences for archivists, historians, and the creation of archives past and present.

The book begins with a detailed history of public archives and their use in the creation of “authoritative history.” Archivists and historians in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries shared a view of archives as objective sources of truth. The authority of the archive was largely derived from its relationship to the state, and much of the historian’s practice was spent in researching and writing the history of nations and their leaders. Chapters 2 and 3 describe the first turns toward a separate archival authority as archivists and records managers took on a custodial role. The authors cite foundation archival texts by Hilary Jenkinson as influential during this transition from the role of the archivist in establishing “historical authority” to the role of the archivist in a passive, neutral position. By the 1970s and 1980s, both the volume of records being produced and the new technologies being used to describe them further widened the archival divide as archivists became fully consumed by the practical aspects of archival management.

Chapter 4 explains the changes that led historians away from archival authorities. As the methods of social historians moved past the paradigm of state-centric history, historians also moved away from using government archives. By the 1970s, the authors argue, historians were unable to find the sources they needed in government or historical repositories, because the archives had not collected relevant cultural material or because methods of description obscured topics like