

The Evolution and Demise of the Larger Format Press Camera

by Reg Holloway

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Through his own experiences as a reporter/photographer in England, PHSC member Reginald Holloway has produced a book dedicated to the cameras that he worked with or were the prevalent equipment used during the large-format camera days.

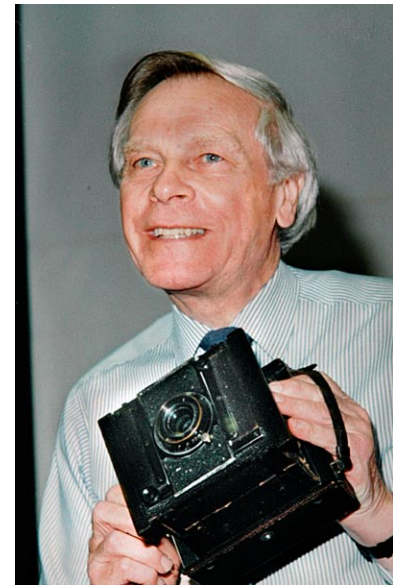
Today's automatic light weight digital equipment is a far cry from those heavy, single-shot, glass-plate cameras used by early press photographers. Cameras made of wood, brass and leather could weigh up to five pounds while the plates and holders for perhaps a dozen exposures could add as much again. The earliest photographers had no range-finder, exposure meter or flash equipment so it was experience that guided them to a proper exposure which could only be verified when the plate was developed.

The book presents some history to early press photography with cameramen being assigned to give coverage of the Crimea War in 1855 and the American Civil War from 1861. The 8x10 field camera on tripod was most common with the wet plate process requiring coating and processing of the plates right in the field. The results were converted into woodcut engravings for reproduction in the popular press. Otherwise actual photographic prints were inserted into magazines or displayed as

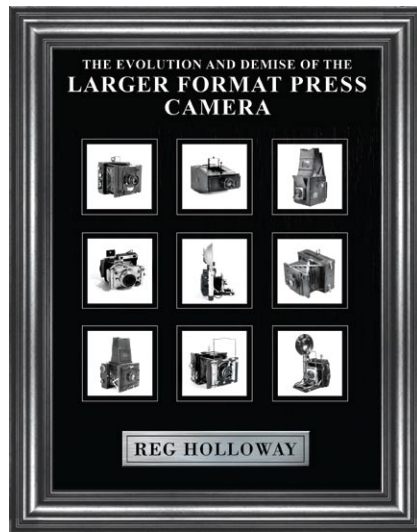
exhibitions. It wasn't until the 1880s that the halftone engraving with its dot matrix, that photographs could actually be printed directly to a page along with type. It can be proudly claimed that the first halftone image appeared on the front of The Canadian Illustrated News in Montreal in 1869.

Holloway traces out the changes in processes and equipment over the years with commercially dry plates offering greater emulsion speed resulting in shorter exposures and smaller hand-held cameras.

"During a period of sixty years (and for



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some a little longer), press photographers wielded large and rugged, often handsome, equipment and they created a romantic image of themselves – an image that remains synonymous with the craft they established," says Holloway.

The book is well illustrated and contains detailed descriptions of more than twenty classic press cameras. All cameras shown are in the author's collection which he assembled from many parts of the world during 30 years in the British foreign service following his career as a reporter. His last three positions were as Consul General in Toronto, Senior British Trade Commissioner in Hong Kong and Consul General in Los Angeles.

Mr. Holloway believes the book will be of interest to anybody who is or was involved in photography or is fascinated by old cameras.