

# Occupational tintype photography making comeback on Grand Manan

By Heather Knight

GRAND MANAN – John DiMartino Jr. is reacquainting the people of Grand Manan with a more than 150-year-old photographic technique.

In 1856, the invention of tintype photographs broadened photography's reach in an entirely new way. The photographic practice was known for "democratizing photography" due to its affordability for most everyday people.

In just a handful of minutes, those who previously couldn't afford to have an image of themselves taken had a tangible depiction of themselves at a given point in time, without emptying their pockets.

DiMartino, an artist from New York, shifted his focus to his art passions after leaving a 20-year career with the Environmental Protection Agency. The pandemic forced him to take a step back, recognizing he was unfulfilled in that role.

Since leaving his previous career, DiMartino apprenticed with John Coffey at the world's leading teaching centre for wet plate practices, Camp Tintype.

He embraces the authentic process entirely – making his own chemicals, varnishing thin pieces of metal with black varnish, and using only natural light to create historically accurate tintypes, also known as ferrotypes.

"Literally getting your hands dirty," said DiMartino. "I've never worked so hard in my life."

Occupational tintype photographs forged a connection between everyday working people and the communities surrounding them. DiMartino is bringing that connection back, capturing images of everyday workers and their tools in the age of all things digital.

While occupational tintypes primarily featured men rather than women between 1850 and 1880, photographers bringing the art form back today have broadened the scope of inclusion.

Lifting up the working people is important to DiMartino, and exactly what he's been doing on Grand Manan this past summer.

"The people here hustle, they work hard," he said. "Nothing would make me happier than if I got shots of a plumber."



John DiMartino Jr. photo  
Retired weir, lobster and scallop fisherman Bradley Small mending his nets in Woodward's Cover, Grand Manan. The image was shot to replicate a black and white image of Small's father in the same pose doing the same thing.

"I think it says something," he added. "I've always been interested in people who make something because I do that too. I like photographs that tell a story."

The inspiration for this project hit DiMartino after discovering a book of tintype images.

"It resonated with me," he said. "Opting to shoot tintypes is not an easy undertaking. Unlike film, which can be processed at your leisure, DiMartino's tintype photographs have a 15-minute window in which they must be processed. Because the subject matter of his images revolves around people at work, it requires him to travel from subject to subject."

He completes all the image processing in the back of his truck. The window of time he has to complete his images relies entirely on available natural light. Each photograph requires focus and dedication. He doesn't have unlimited attempts in a single day, and if he fails to get his shot, he must wait until the light is optimal again.

What started as a hobby turned into a passion, bringing DiMartino the purpose he was missing in his life. Creating

tintype photographs involves constant tinkering, which was a big draw for him.

His work involves no digital manipulation. The only trace of modern technology in his process is the scanner he uses to keep a digital copy of his images.

"If you let me take your image, I give you one as a thank you."

This past summer he spoke about his work and held a demonstration at the Grand Manan Museum, which had been in the works for a few years.

He's been selling work as he goes, but most of his work is created out of pure passion for the medium. Eventually, he might show his work in an exhibit or a book, but right now he's focused on creating a body of work he's proud of, just as the subjects he's photographing are proud of their work.

DiMartino will continue his occupational tintype work in Grand Manan and Maine in summer 2023.

For more information on DiMartino and his work, visit [johndimartinojr.com](http://johndimartinojr.com) or follow him on Instagram (@john\_dimartino\_jr).

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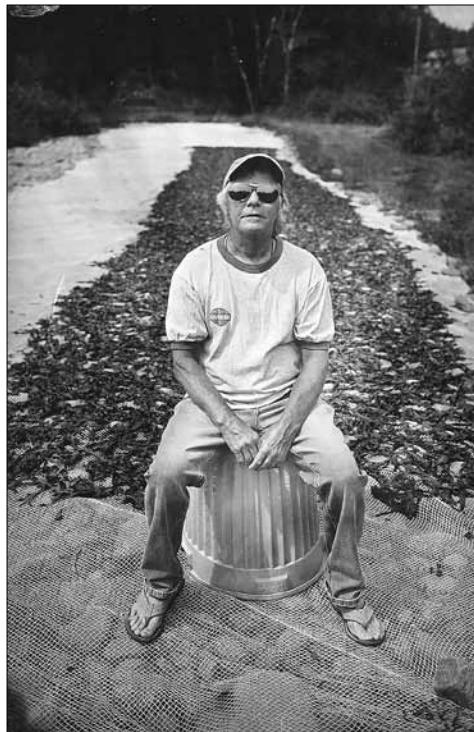
John DiMartino Jr. photo  
Taken while working on his occupational tintype work in Newfoundland, DiMartino photographed Darrin Hookey, a cooper at the Trinity Historical Society, where they have a working cooperage. Hookey is making a small pail used to bail water from a dory or skiff.



John DiMartino Jr. photo  
Grand Manan's Carly Maicher is a landscaper, fibre artist, songwriter, singer and musician in Seal Cove. Here she is pictured on an overcast day in front of the treehouse she made in her woods. Her dog, Ruby, can be seen in the bottom left corner.



John DiMartino Jr. photo  
Swallowtail lighthouse keeper Ken Ingersall. Due to changing sun and winds, this shot took DiMartino four days to achieve.



John DiMartino Jr. photo  
Grand Manan's Elton Greene pictured sitting on a dulsing barrel in front of his dulsing spread field in Castalia. He's been dulsing for more than 50 years.



John DiMartino Jr. photo  
Lobster fisherwoman Jordan Ellingwood from Seal Cove, Grand Manan, pictured in front of lobster traps.



John DiMartino Jr. photo  
Davey Jones in Port Aux Choix, Newfoundland. Jones is holding the poker he uses to tend to the fire in the French bread oven.