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Dr. Latimer or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love My Printed Photos^{*}

By Philip Borden

When first I joined the Boston Camera Club a year ago, I was mystified by the Latimer competition. Prints? Who prints their photos anymore? Isn't that for dinosaurs, a relic from the bad old days of film photography?

But now, after a year in the club, I've come to think that the Latimer competition is one of the very best aspects of the BCC. Why the change of heart?

For me, it was simple and, admittedly, a bit narcissistic: I love seeing the printed version of my photographs. No matter how good an image might look on the screen, there's no substitute for seeing your printed photos. And there's no contest when comparing printed photos to photos on a screen or even — god forbid! — on Instagram. Prints win every single time.

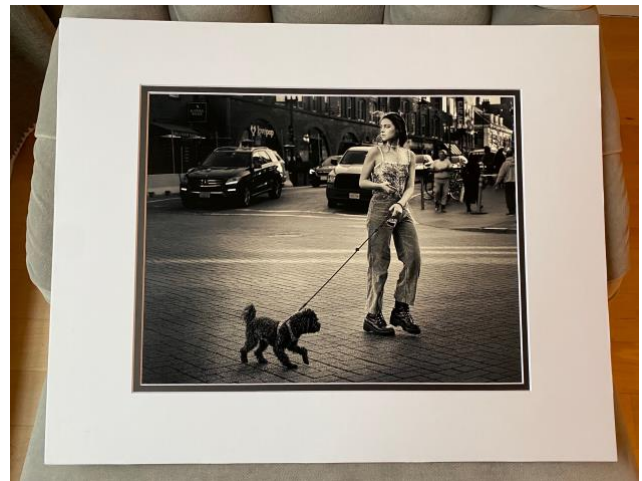
I've found printing my photos to be a revelation. It pushes me to select the photos I truly love, to slow down, to take the extra time and the additional care to show off those photos using the very best possible medium.

For me, the Latimer competition functions as a forcing mechanism to print photos that would have otherwise been trapped in my computer. I liken the Latimer to exercise: I sort of dread it beforehand, but I enjoy it once I've started, and I always feel better about myself once I'm done.

Unfortunately, the BCC has far fewer submissions to and participants in the Latimer competition compared to the typical digital image competition. While that's understandable, it is also a shame.

For newer club members like me who are not used to printing (and certainly not mounting) photos, I suspect one of the culprits for the lower Latimer participation is a general sense of "how in the hell do I do this"? Prior to my first Latimer competition in Feb. '20, I was flummoxed — I didn't even know where to start.

So, I thought I'd share a little bit of the methodology I've used to print and mount my Latimer photos. I'm not claiming this is the "right" method and or even the best one, but it is a



A printed and mounted photo for the Jan. '22 Latimer competition

^{*} With apologies to Dr. Strangelove

methodology that works well for newcomers and that generates reliable, clean results at relatively low cost. In short, this method provides great bang for the buck.

Core Principles:

There are a couple of core principles that seem to have worked for me:

- **Print Big:** If I'm going to go through the trouble of printing and matting my photos, I want to print as big as possible. To me, bigger prints are almost always better. I'm sure not all BCC members will agree with this, but my goal is to use the full allowable space, which, for the Latimer competition, is 16x20 inches, including the border.
- **Buy Pre-Cut Front Mats:** A front mat simply makes your photos look much, much better than an unmounted photo. The issue, however, is that I have no desire to cut my own mats, a task well beyond my fine motor skills. It also allows me to buy front mats that have cool double borders (and creating those would be WAY beyond my skills).

I've found the easiest path is to purchase front mats that have a standardized picture opening for my Latimer photos. After some experimenting, I've found the size that works best for me is a front mat that is 16x20 inches in total size and that has a pre-cut picture opening of 11x14 inches. I believe a front mat of those dimensions creates a pleasing balance between the area of the picture and the area of the mat. In addition, I'd estimate 75% of my photos look great when cropped to an 11x14 aspect ratio (either landscape or portrait). Again, this is just what works for me.

- **Buy a Show Kit Pack:** After exploring several options, Golden State Art (www.goldenstateart.com) has a great kit which includes most of what's needed to mount your photos. GSA's "Show Kit Pack" includes (1) a 16x20 backing board, (2) a 16x20 pre-cut front mat with a picture opening in my preferred 11x14 size, and (3) a clear plastic sleeve that protects everything once you're done (useful when you leave your prints in the box outside of Tom's house!).

A few specifics about Golden State Art's "Show Kit Pack":

- I ordered a 25-count Show Kit Pack. This 25-count kit allows me to create 25 fully mounted pictures from this one order, which is enough for more than 1 ½ years of Latimer competitions
- I prefer the double mat option for my front mat. The double mat is obviously thicker and adds solidity to a mounted photo, but it's obviously personal preference
- Golden State Art allows you to "mix and match" the colors of the 25 front mats in your Show Kit Pack. I went with a bit of variety, knowing that certain photos might look better with certain colored mats. That being said, 15 of my front mats are plain white and 5 are black.
- While I prefer the 11x14 picture opening for my front mat, Golden State Art also offers 16x20 front mats with picture openings of 12x16 inches and 12x18 inches too. If I needed a different picture opening than my standard 11x14, I just order that on a one-off basis

Methodology:

With that as background, here's my methodology for printing and mounting photos for the Latimer competition:

1. Select photos for Latimer submission
2. Crop my photos to my preferred aspect ratio (11x14 inches).
Important note: the front mount, while it says it is "11x14", it's actually "10.5x13.5". This is done to create an ¼-inch overlap on all sides to create some "wobble room". But you need to take this into account if your photo has important information at the very edge!
3. Export photos in the highest-quality JPEG format possible. For me, this creates a file of 15-30MB.
4. Upload my JPEG files to an online printing service. I use Hunt's Photos — Hunt's happens to be 100 feet from my front door in Cambridge, and I also like supporting my local camera shop. They know me by name and are always friendly and willing to help.
5. Personally, I prefer to print on "luster" paper, which strikes a good balance between "glossy" — which I find too shiny — and "matte" — which I find to be too dull. Hunt's in Cambridge prints their photos on-site and I can typically pick them up the same day that I ordered them. Each 11x14 print costs roughly \$20-\$25, but I'm selecting the highest quality options. Shutterfly and Snapfish offer 11x14 prints at roughly \$6-\$12 per print.
6. Purchase a pack of 25 "Show Kit Packs" from Golden State Art with the 16x20 backing, a front double mat with an 11x14 picture opening, and a sleeve. The total cost for this 25-count pack is \$85.99, which equates to less than \$3.50 per photo. My order took roughly 10 days to arrive, so buy early.
7. To assemble the Show Kit Packs and mount my photos requires two different types of specialized tape, both of which are sold by Golden State Art: (1) acid-free ATG double-sided tape (½-inch x 33 yards) and (2) Lineco self-adhesive white linen hanging tape (1.25-inch x 35 ft.). Total cost for these two tapes is ~\$20 from Golden State Art. You also need scissors.



Printed and mounted photo for the Latimer competition, using a 16x20 front mat with a 11x14 picture opening and double front mat

Final Assembly:

- I use the so-called "hinging" method for mounting my prints. Honestly, it's too difficult to write a description of how to mount your photos using this method— if a picture is worth 1,000 words, a "how to" video might be worth 10,000 words. I'll save the trees and simply

say “watch this video and follow this exactly”:
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkQtKR4ZKGE>). Suffice it to say, if I can make this work, anyone can do it.

- After a bit of practice, it now takes me 15 minutes to assemble and mount each photo. Roughly ½ of the total time is consumed by me fumbling around trying to separate the tape from the backing — those with better fine motor skills will take even less time. But, rest assured, the hinge method is very simple if you follow the video step-by-step. I did it on my first try without issue.
- Anna Golitsyna provides an excellent tip for how to keep your photos centered while mounting: “I have a dedicated clean pebble that I place inside a dedicated thick white sock. Once the print is positioned correctly relative to the front mat, I place the sock on top of the center of the print, which prevents the print from moving relative to the backing.”
- Two other final steps: (1) Label the back of your mounting with the appropriate information (name, image title, competition category and group). I label mine in pencil. (2) Remember to submit your Latimer contest photos to the BCC website.

Printing and mounting photos requires work. But I’ve found that work to be enormously rewarding. And I’m hoping that by sharing my printing and mounting methodology, it will encourage other BCC members to stop worrying and learn to love your printed photos.