

Dating Photographs

Finding Family History Clues
through Old Pictures



- | *The earliest known photograph taken in North America was taken in October or November 1839.*

Historical Time Line

- | No photos prior to 1839
- | Daguerreotype 1839 -1860
- | Ambrotype 1854 – 1860
- | Tin Type 1855 -1930's
- | Carte de Vistas 1859 -1890's
- | Cabinet Cards 1866 – 1920's

Daguerreotypes

1839-1860

- | The Daguerreotype uses a polished, silver plated sheet of metal, and once seen is easily recognized by its mirror-like surface.
- | The plate has to be held at the correct angle to the light for the image to be visible. That image is extremely sharp and detailed.
- | The Daguerreotype fell out of favor after 1860 as less expensive techniques supplanted it.

- | Usually found in cases — either the leather or paper covered wood-frame case, or black molded plastic
- | Within that case, the photograph is covered with a brass matte, sometimes encased in a brass “preserver” and placed under glass.
 - | If there is no preserver, the Daguerreotype probably dates from the 1840s.
 - | If the matte and preserver are both plain, then it dates from 1850-55.
 - | If there are incised or pressed patterns and decorations on the matte or preserver, then it was probably produced after 1855.



Ambrotypes

1854-1860s

- | The Ambrotype is essentially a glass negative with a black background that makes the image appear positive.
- | More clarity than a daguerreotype.
- | It is a cased photo.
- | Invented about 1854, the form lost popularity in the early 1860s when tintypes and card mounted paper prints replaced it.



Tin Type

1855 – 1930's

- | The Tintype is relatively easy to identify.
- | Because the Tintype image is made on an iron plate, it will attract a magnet.
- | Tintype images began life as an inexpensive alternative to the daguerreotype.
- | The tintype was patented in 1854 and later sold to Neff in 1856.

- | The main advantages of the tintype were threefold:
 - | Created an unbreakable, durable, photographic image supported on an iron plate, which could be carried into hazardous conditions such as battle without breaking like the fragile daguerreotype;
 - | The first truly instant photograph, ready for the sitter in a few minutes;
 - | It was inexpensive, its lowered cost of production meant working class could own photographs.

Tin Type Time Line



Circa 1891

- | *Introduced.* Patented in 1854
- | *Peak.* Popularity varied through the life of the tintype. Commonplace in American homes for decades. The civil war years (1861-1865) saw great popularity among the soldiers. Then in the 1890s they were popular as quick and inexpensive image.
- | *Waned.* 1900.
- | *Last Used.* 1930s. For a long time from the late 19th century to as late as the 1930s itinerant tintype operators worked the back roads and county fairs. The tintype held on for so long because it was the only type of "instant photography"

Carte-de-Visite

1859-1890s

- | Carte-de-Visites, or CDVs, are a type of card mounted photograph introduced about 1854 and tremendously popular, especially in America and Europe, from 1860 until almost the turn of the century.
- | The CDV is easily distinguished from other card-mounted photos by its size, typically 2.5 x 4 inches or slightly less.
- | The various characteristics of card mount, image and photographer's imprint often allows these images to be correctly dated to within a few years of their origin.

- | The carte de visite today is not a rare item, being produced by the millions in the nineteenth century.
- | By 1862, the fashion of "having one's likeness photographed upon his visiting card," had been modified into the custom of distributing dozens of small portraits among friends.
- | Cartes de visite were often autographed with a signature at the bottom of the card just below the image for handing out to guests
- | Due its small size the carte de visite proved easy to handle and view without the use of an optical instrument or a special viewing angle,
- | The small images were ubiquitous and collected by nearly everyone (Queen Victoria was passionate about collecting photographs).



- | *Introduced.* In 1854, the French photographer introduced a method for producing multiple images on a single glass plate, a format for mounting the resulting images on card stock and the name "carte de visite" to describe the product.
- | *Peak.* The height of the "carte craze" was the period 1860-1866, which included the photography boom that occurred during the American civil war. The early 1860s period saw the first commercial photographic albums, which began to grace ordinary middle class parlors. By 1864, a family would have to be poor indeed to not own a carte de visite album.
- | *Waned.* Starting in 1866, the cabinet card began to erode the position held by the carte de visite. Carte production waned from 1870 to the late 1880s when they all but disappeared from the scene.
- | *Last Used.* Cartes were, however, produced after 1900, perhaps to 1906 or perhaps in limited numbers to 1920

Cabinet Card

1866-1920's

- | Cabinet Cards, card mounted photographs introduced in 1866, and tremendously popular, especially in the US, from their introduction until just after the turn of the century.
- | The Cabinet Card is easily distinguished from other card-mounted photos by its size, typically 4.25 x 6.5 inches

- | The Cabinet Card has the appearance of a larger version of the carte de visite, retaining the photographer's imprint and exhibiting similar styles of decorative artwork on the card face or back.
- | The majority of cabinet cards were printed on albumen, but toward the end of the nineteenth-century other types of photographic paper began to replace albumen papers.
 - | The albumen images are yellow-brown or purple-blue in tone, a result of the common practice of gold toning ("sepia" tone includes the effects of yellowing and albumen fading in addition to the original tone).
 - | You may see cabinet card images from 1890s that have the appearance of a black and white photograph. These photographs exhibit what is called by photographic experts a *neutral image tone* and were likely produced on a matte collodion, gelatin or gelatin bromide paper.



I Cabinet Card Colors

- I 1866 - 1880 White card stock of a light weight
- I 1880 - 1890 Different colors for face and back of mounts
- I 1882 - 1888 Face of buff, matte-finished, with a back of creamy-yellow, glossy. Borders
- I 1866 - 1880 Red or gold rules, single and double lines
- I 1884 - 1885 Wide gold borders
- I 1885 - 1892 Gold beveled edges
- I 1889 - 1896 Rounded corner rule of single line
- I 1890 - 1892 Metallic green or gold impressed border
- I 1896 Impressed outer border, without color. Corners
- I 1866 - 1880 Square, lightweight mount
- I 1880 - 1890 Square, heavy board with scalloped sides.

(from Willis, *Photography as A Tool in Genealogy*)

- | *Introduced.* In 1866, the Cabinet format was adapted for portraits. The format had already been in use for some years for views.
- | *Peak.* Although not uncommon in the 1870s, the cabinet card, however, did not displace the carte de visite completely until the 1880s.
- | *Waned.* The 1890s witnessed the decline of the cabinet card and the card photograph album, replaced by the snapshot (an unmounted paper print) and the scrapbook album.
- | *Last Used.* The cabinet card was popular and continued to be produced until the early 1900s and quite a bit longer in Europe. The last cabinet cards were produced in the twenties, perhaps as late as 1924.

Women's Fashions 1820 - 1870



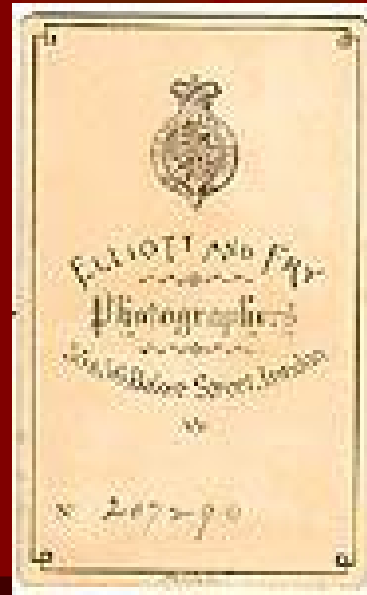
1860s



- | you can see both head and feet with a carpet
- | some old furniture and studio props such as a curtain
- | the man may have a jacket buttoned only at the top
- | the woman has a down to the ground wide dress – bell shaped
- | Severe women's hairstyles – parted in the middle, rarely a curl, no bangs, very smooth
- | the back of the card has a simple print for the photographers name and the cardboard feels a bit thin

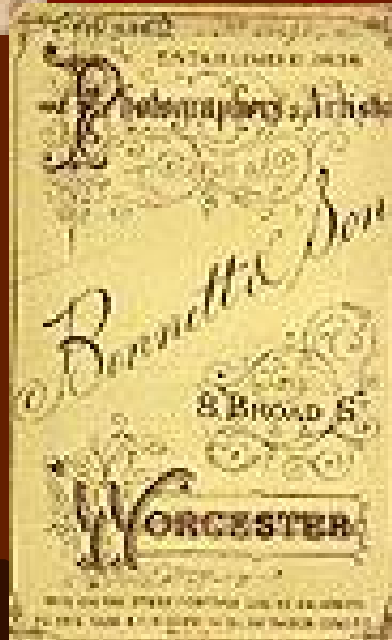


1870s



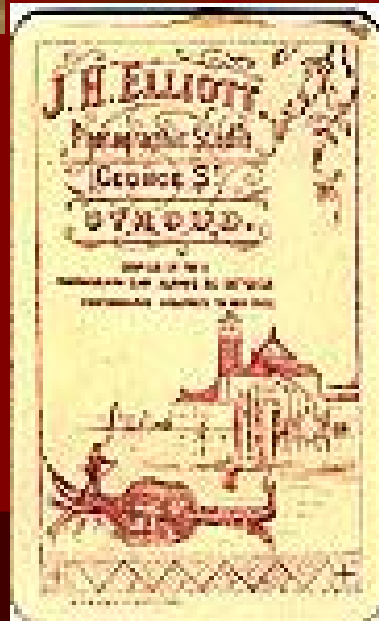
- | If the portrait is a half or three-quarter (no feet)
- | the ladies hair is less severe, with perhaps a curl
- | much jewelry and perhaps sitting down in a more casual way,
- | clothes trimmed with lace or tassels.
- | Men wore lounge suits with matching waistcoats by the middle of the decade.
- | The ladies look like they are wearing heavy furnishing rather than dresses.
- | The cardboard is thicker and stronger (less flexible than a playing card)
- | the printing on the back is typeset with fonts but usually one large word, and perhaps a border, and the rest small
- | colored inks may be used and a logo may appear.
- | The card may have rounded corners - (mid to late 1870s).

1880s



- ! The ladies dress may be severe and close fitting or it has a bustle (1881-1886 ish), skirts had pleated edges
- ! Ladies wore tight fitting jackets, high white collars or ruffs, a brooch at the neck, lots of buttons in rows, tight fitting sleeves, odd little hats, hair plain or curls usually pulled back.
- ! Boys wore sailor suits and velvet suits,
- ! Men did not wear frock coats and wore a morning-coat suit or a lounge suit, top hat, bowler or straw hat.
- ! Norfolk jackets were popular as were more casual clothes.
- ! The back of the card is quite filled with print, with medals, famous customers, branches, and could be artistic.
- ! Studio furniture and chairs look as if from a fine country house.

1890s



- | Women wore tailor-made suits and plain with little ornamentation (brooch at the neck), hair in a bun with no fringes.
- | Sleeves became wider until by 1895 the 'leg of mutton' shape with sort of upstanding 'wings' on the shoulders.
- | Collars were high and with a ruffle or lace under the stiff outer.
- | Sleeves became tighter by 1897 and frilled bodices came into fashion.
- | Most cartes were head and shoulders only
- | The back of cards were very elaborate and artistic, colored backs and gold print common.
- | Plain backs with the photographer's name on the lower front, some like this occur from about 1889.
- | Many cabinet card seem to date from the 1880s and 1890s

1900

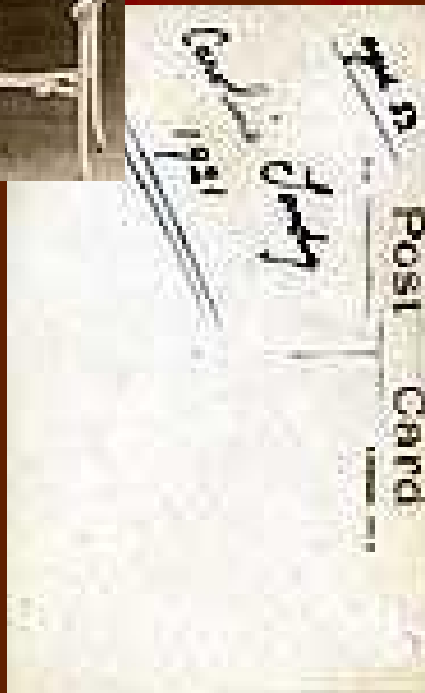


- | Wide sleeved blouses were still worn for a few years, but for many this was the era of the blouse and simple skirt and straw boater hat, and wide hats for special occasions.
- | Those enormously wide brimmed hats date from June 1911 onward and were often worn with a short slit in the skirt.
- | 1898 Postcards replaced cabinet cards and CDVs as the main type of cheap studio portrait and peaking during the First World War.
- | the later cabinet card looked a little different, simple logo and studio on the bottom front and often with embossed patterns or channels and saw-cut edges or pinking and rarely any writing on the back.

1910



1920s

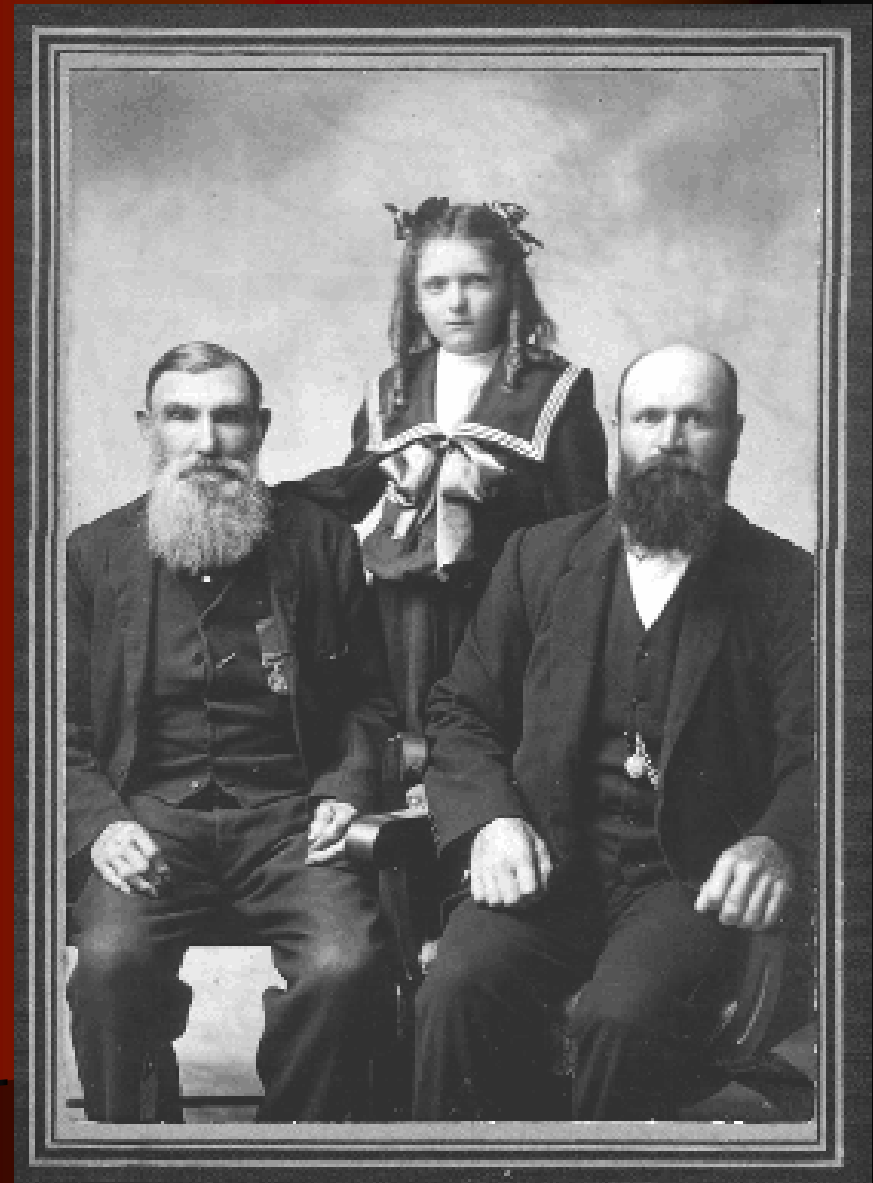


- In the 1920s hair was cut short (for some) and the hemline rose for the first time ever.

Date this picture

- | Ringlets of this type were fashionable in the late 1870s and again around 1900 but only during the earlier period was the hair parted in the middle.
- | The heavy bow on the girl's dress was a feature throughout the 1870s. The "sailor" top to the dress is unusual on girls though boys were often photographed in sailor outfits.
- | The untidy beards, especially on the man on the left, indicate a period before 1880.
- | Type of Photo: Cabinet Card

So the girl's hairstyle is the major indicator, confirmed by the bow on the dress and the men's hairstyles: this picture was taken between 1875 and 1880.



- Square Toe shoes on the man (could date 1860-1890)
- Old furniture or drape in the picture
- Severe hair style – parted in the middle
- Bell Shaped Dress
- Can see head and feet
- Type of photo: Carte de Visite

The dress and hair style are classic 1860's. Also that you can see the head and feet. This photo dates to the 1860's



- Upper body shot only
- Older woman – harder to date since they wear older styles (out of fashion)
- Can't see her clothes – makes it even harder
- Type of photo: Carte de Visite with simple border
- Black neck scarf indicates she is in mourning
- Severe hairstyle – older women kept older styles longer

Best guess 1860's – 1870's



- Type of Photo: Tin Type
- Severe hairstyle – no curls
- Watch chain

This photo dates to the 1850s or maybe early 1860s





- | Small table – no old furniture or drape
- | Hair parted in the middle
- | Curls in the hair
- | Can't see feet
- | Type of photo: CDV

Based on hair style,
clothing and no
furniture, 1870's

- | Light colored dresses
- | Neck tie – not cravat or bow tie
- | Poofie hair
- | Casual setting
- | Type of photo – CDV or Cabinet Card

Definitely 1870s – due to the men's ties and the women's hair



- | Skirts are ankle length
- | Bicycles
- | Leg of mutton sleeves
- | Type of photo Cabinet card
- | 1890s











