



## Identify Photographs

### Identifying Historical Photographs

Historical photographs are paramount in the search for historical facts. They provide images of a past before our lifetime as well as a record of people and places we may not remember. They capture, forever, a moment in time.

### Dating the Photograph

Knowing when a particular type of photo was common will help you date the photographs in your collection. Use these clues and the following chart to help you approximate the date of a photograph:

- ◆ Size of the original photo
- ◆ Material the photo is composed of or attached to
- ◆ Subject matter
- ◆ Clothing styles
- ◆ Hair styles
- ◆ Shoe styles
- ◆ Accessories such as glasses, handbags, etc.
- ◆ Style of house
- ◆ Technology in the picture; train, car, delivery wagon
- ◆ Business name; check city directory or map for approximate years of operation
- ◆ Infrastructure; dirt vs. paved road, year bridge built, telephone pole style, electric lighting
- ◆ Furniture styles
- ◆ Age of known person in photograph vs. another person (census records help).
- ◆ Activity going on in the photo; marriage, christening, death, etc.

There are a number of online sites that describe and show images of clothing during different periods of time. Here are three helpful websites:

- ◆ <http://www.olivetreegenealogy.com/photos/fashions-photos.shtml>
- ◆ <https://www.cyndislist.com/photos/dating/>
- ◆ <https://www.pinterest.com/geneaalacarte/datingpreserving-old-photos/>

## Identify Photographs

A brief chart of the evolution of photography; photo types, processes, and cameras.

Type and Size	Years of Use	Notes
<b>Daguerreotype</b> 2 x 2.5" to larger than 6.5 x 8.5"	1839-1860	Is a sheet of polished metal covered in light sensitive chemicals. Has a shiny, reflective surface that must be held at an angle to see the image. May be colored or tinted. Image reversed. Do not clean.
<b>Kaleidoscope</b>	1849	
<b>Albumen Prints</b>	1850	
<b>Ambrotypes</b>	1854-1865	A piece of glass coated with the photo chemical collodion, a mixture of gun cotton and ether. The emulsion may lift off. Image not reversed.
<b>Carte-de-visite</b> 4.25 x 2.5"	1859-1889	"Visiting cards." A form of introduction. Print adhered to a cardboard backing.
<b>Tintypes</b> 1 x 1" to 6.5 x 8.5"	1856-1878	Image on iron sheets. Also called ferrotypes, they were the first photographic process invented in the U.S. Image reversed. Very fast, only a minute to make. Used heavily during Civil War.
<b>Stereograph</b> 3 x 7 or 4 x 7	Small Size 1859 Large size 1870	
<b>Cabinet Card</b> 4.25 x 6.5	1866 - 1903	A thin photographic print glued to a cardboard backing.
<b>Kodak Box Camera</b>	1888	
<b>First Panoramic Photograph</b>	1898	
<b>Kodak Brownie Camera - \$1.00</b>	1900	
<b>Aerial Photography</b>	1903	Gated by invention of airplane.
<b>Autochrome Color Process</b>	1907	Introduced by France.
<b>35 mm Camera</b>	1925	
<b>Kodachrome color transparency</b>	1935	
<b>Polaroid Land Camera</b>	1948	
<b>Kodak Instamatic</b>	1963	
<b>First Digital Camera</b>	1975	
<b>Camera Phone Introduced</b>	2000	
<b>Kodak Stops Making Film Cameras</b>	2004	

**Note:** See <http://www.phototree.com/history.htm> for additional information.

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### Negatives

The following chart provides a brief summary of the common types of historical negatives you may have in your collection.

Type of Negative	Years Used	Notes
<b>Glass Plate</b> Sizes 2×3, 4×5, and 5×7	c.1850s-1930s	Made with wet or dry process. Very delicate. Emulsion lifts and curls.
<b>Nitrate Film</b>	1889–Early 1950s	Very flammable.
<b>Acetate or “Safety” Film</b>	1920s	Had stability issues.
<b>35 mm</b>	1930s through Present	35 mm transparency mounted in a cardboard or plastic holder. Viewed through a slide projector. Came in several sizes.
<b>110, 126, and Disc</b>	1970s and 1980s	Film sizes, no longer available. Disc was 15 tiny negatives mounted on a disc.

**Note:** Two useful websites for understanding the characteristics of negatives, their care, and preservation are:

- ◆ <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/5.-photographs/5.1-a-short-guide-to-film-base-photographic-materials-identification,-care,-and-duplication>
- ◆ [http://www.webjunction.org/documents/webjunction/The\\_Preservation\\_of\\_Glass\\_Plate\\_Negatives.html](http://www.webjunction.org/documents/webjunction/The_Preservation_of_Glass_Plate_Negatives.html)

**Professional Photographer’s Recommendation:** Photographs continue to fade, discolor, and deteriorate. They’re never as good as they are today! To preserve the current quality, take them to a professional photographic laboratory and have a 35mm negative made of the print. Store the print properly and use only the 35mm to make future prints.

The same recommendation is made for glass plate negatives. If the emulsion is curling or lifting, a professional lab can use another piece of glass to flatten the emulsion before making the 35mm negative.

## Photographs—4

### Clothing, Hair, and Accessory Examples



#### Women 1850s:

**Clothing:** Bosom-flattening corsets, hoop skirt, close fitting bonnets, capes and fur capes. Wide collars of lace, crochet, or tatting, Woven gingham, calicos, checks, and plaid fabrics.

**Hairstyle:** Padded wing hairstyle

**Accessories:** Drop pendant earrings, hanging watches, neck ribbons.



#### Men 1850s:

**Clothing:** Long jackets with narrow sleeves, shirt, vest, tie. Farmers and laborers wore smocks during the day. Sleeves widened by 1860 with wide, flat lapels, tubular trousers.

**Hairstyle:** Parted, slicked back, combed into a high wave at the center of the forehead. Wave gone later, hair drapes over ears. Early 50's clean shaven, later facial hair.

**Accessories:** Two inch wide ties, later narrower. Top hats, straw hats, bowler hats, and railroad caps were common.

The above images are from this website:

- ◆ <http://www.sheknows.com/living/articles/814584/genealogy-research-dating-vintage-photographs-by-clothing-and-hairstyles-1>

You can research styles for each decade online or in books recommended by the Fashion Institute of Technology Gladys Marcus Library.

- ◆ <http://fitnyc.libguides.com/c.php?g=66301&p=428112>