



Identifying Family Photos

Ask Questions and Find Answers

Start at home and network with relatives.

- Why is this picture in your collection?
- Who do you think the people are?
- Are there stories associated with the image?
- How did it end up in your collection?

Photographic Method

Major Characteristics used in Photographic Methods

DAGUERREOTYPES

- Mirror-like surface
- Must be held at an angle to be seen
- Usually cased
- Image is reversed* 1839

AMBROTYPES

- Negative on glass; appears as a positive image
- Backed with a dark background Usually cased
- Not reversed
- 1854

TINTYPES

- Negative on iron; appears as a positive image
- Fixed on a black metal background
- Paper mat or case image is reversed* 1856

* Reversal lens were available but not all photographers used them



CARTE DES VISITES

- Albumen or carbon prints—photo chemicals on paper
- Mounted on thin card stock
- Occasionally found in a case
Not reversed
- Process introduced to United States in 1859

DIGITAL IMAGING

The first commercially successful digital cameras debuted in 1990.

HOME MOVIE FILM

Color film for 16mm cameras was available as early as 1928.

PAPER PRINTS

Kodak introduced its black-and-white roll film 1012 in 1895 and didn't discontinue it until 1956. Color negative film was introduced in 1941.

POSTCARDS

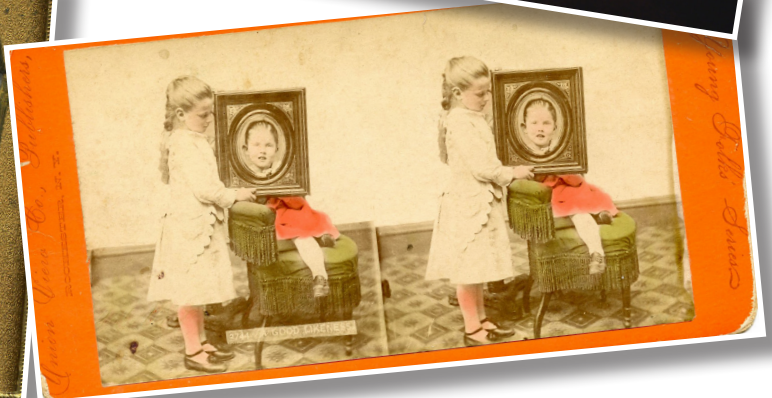
"Real photo" postcards produced from film or glass plate negatives with postcard-style backs, appeared around 1900 and remained available for decades.

STEREOGRAPHS

From 1854 to 1938, a few commercial companies produced "stereos" of travel, war, religious and other scenes—rarely do they depict people up close.

SLIDES

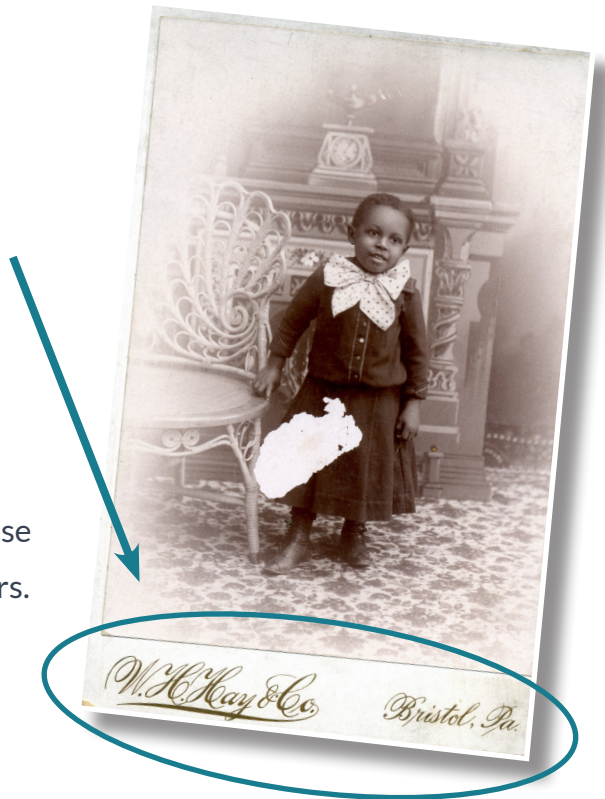
Glass slides appeared in the late 19th century. Auguste and Louis Lumiere introduced the autochrome, the first commercially successful color photography process, in 1904. Kodak offered the first amateur color slide film in 1936.



Photographer's Imprint

Photographers placed imprints in different places, depending on the type of image. Since the majority of photographs are paper prints, look on the front of the cardboard mount, the back of the image or their name embossed in the lower right corner of some images. Imprints include the photographer's surname and sometimes where they operated their business. Try these resources for additional help researching photographers.

- Use an internet search engine such as Google.com
- Use city directories to establish work dates.



Clothing Clues

Hairstyles come in and out of style. This twisted topknot is c. 1900.



Watch for facial hair. This waxed mustache is c.1900.

Sleeves, collars, lapels, and ties can all help date a picture. This woman's puffy upper sleeves date from the late 1890s-circa 1900.



MILITARY UNIFORMS

Pay attention to the prominent features of the uniform such as hats, braiding, patches, shape and style of pants and jackets and any props then consult one of the many encyclopedias for military dress.

WORK OR TRADE DRESS

Some tradesmen wore distinctive clothing that identifies their occupation. Some individuals even posed for portraits with the tools of their trade.

ETHNIC OR REGIONAL VARIATIONS

Ethnic and regional dress depended on local culture, not necessarily political boundaries. Pay attention to any details in a person's dress that does not reflect contemporary fashion.

FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

Photographic evidence of ancestral membership in a benevolent, fraternal or secret organization can be found in images of your relatives posed singly or in a group. Visual clues—medals, buttons, ribbons, badges, sashes, and jewelry (watches, fobs, pins, rings)—contained symbols and slogans of the organization to which the wearer belonged.

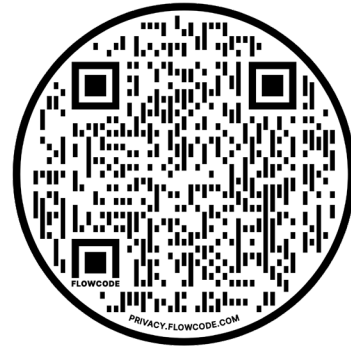
MOURNING ATTIRE

Pins and other types of jewelry included hair as a memorial to the deceased. Men wore arm bands and women in full mourning wore dark colors from head to toe.





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