

Nineteenth Century Photography:

Hints, Tips and Tricks for Identifying Early Photographs

Recommended Books

Collector's Guide to Early Photographs

O. Henry Mace

Cased Images and Tintypes

Gary W. Clark

The Daguerreotype in America

Beaumont Newhall

The Last Muster: Images of the

Revolutionary War Generation, Vols. 1 & 2

Maureen Taylor

Collection, Use, and Care of Historical

Photographs

Robert A. Weinstein and Larry Booth

Photography: The Early Years

George Gilbert

Collector's Guide to Nineteenth Century

Photographs

William Welling

Suggestions for Storing Antique Photographs

- Maintaining moderate temperatures and humidity is very important. Moisture can cause images to stick together, surfaces to flake off or metal plates to rust or tarnish. Ideal temperature is 65° and ideal humidity is 30 – 50%. Avoid storing in attics or basements.
- Prevent friction against the face of the image. This is especially important for daguerreotypes which can be completely erased by touch. Keep images from bumping into each other with individual sleeves or small folders. Acid free is ideal.
- Keep images out of direct light to prevent fading.
- Keep notes about the photograph and its provenance with the images to ensure future generations are aware of its significance.
- If writing directly on the back of an image, write lightly with a pencil, no pens to avoid ink rubbing off on other images or seeping through image.

Common Early Photographic Processes

Daguerreotype

Most Common: 1839-1860

- Image on a silver coated copper plate
- Viewing the image from different angles causes the image to appear or disappear and show a more mirror-like appearance
- Usually cased, sometimes tinted

Ambrotype

Most Common: 1855-1865

- Image on glass plate
- Image does not change appearance based on viewer's angle
- Usually cased, sometimes tinted
- Common format for Civil War era images

Ferrotypes or "Tintype"

Most Common: 1858-1880

- Image on very thin iron plate
- Image does not change appearance based on viewer's angle
- Early ferrotypes are often cased and easily confused with ambrotypes
- Later ferrotypes are frequently seen uncased- just a rectangular piece of metal
- Very common format for Civil War era images
- Continued in use as carnival souvenirs through 1940s

Carte de Visite

Most Common: 1858-1870

- Photographic print attached to heavy cardstock or paperboard
- Usually purchased in bulk and handed out or mailed to friends, much like a modern high-school senior picture or family photo holiday card
- Very common format for Civil War era images
- Photographer's name and location sometimes printed on bottom front or back.
- Produced with albumen process

Stereoview or Stereograph

Most Common: 1858-1920

- Dual images mounted on heavy paperboard, though stereo-daguerreotypes were also produced
- Image captured by a camera with two lenses about 2-3 inches apart to mimic distance between human eyes
- Used with a stereo-viewer device

Cabinet Card

Most Common: 1865-1905

- Photographic print attached to heavy paperboard
- Produced with albumen process
- Photographer's name and location usually printed on bottom front or back

Helpful Links

Museums

Brookside Museum

J.S. Wooley Photograph Collection
Ballston Spa
Brooksidemuseum.org
Brookside.pastperfectonline.org

Chapman Museum

Seneca Ray Stoddard Photograph Collection
Glens Falls, NY
ChapmanMuseum.org

Saratoga Springs History Museum

The Bolster Collection
Saratoga Springs, NY
SaratogaSpringsHistory.org

George Eastman House

Extensive Photographic History Collection
Rochester, NY
Eastman.org

Websites

Luminous Lint

Alan Griffiths Photo History Website
Luminous-Lint.com

Photo Tree

Photo history website with galleries,
preservation information and case info.
Phototree.com

History of Photography Podcast

Free Photo History Lectures from Professor
Jeff Curto
photohistory.jeffcurto.com/

Fine Daguerreotypes and Photography

Dealers in and restorers of historic photographs.
Excellent archive of notable and unusual images.
finedags.com

Storage Supplies

Products for safely storing and displaying early
photography.

Gaylord Archival Supplies

*www.gaylord.com/c/Photo-Print-and-Art-
Preservation*

Light Impressions Direct

www.lightimpressionsdirect.com/

Modern Tintype Photographers

Glens Falls Art

Photographer Craig Murphy offers tintype and
ambrotype portraits using collodion process
through his mobile photography studio.
Glensfallsart.com

Analyzing a Photograph

- Who
 - Sitter's Identity: Are there any written notes on the back of the image or on a note within the case?
 - Photographer's Identity: Is there a back mark? A plate mark?
- What
 - What is the subject of the image?
 - What method was used to capture the image?
- Where
 - Is there a photographer's back mark?
 - Any family history or provenance that would indicate the location?
 - Was the image taken in a studio? Outdoors? In a home? A tent?
- When
 - What method was used to capture the image?
 - If an image of an individual, what is the sitter wearing? Any props? Accessories?
- Why
 - Is a particular scenario depicted? A wedding portrait? An image of a house or business? A pet? A soldier?

Image Sizes & Plate Measurements

These are the most common dimensions, though there are some variations. Measurements are given in inches.

Daguerreotypes, Ambrotypes, & Ferrotypes:

Whole Plate: 6.5 x 8.5

Half Plate: 4.5 x 5.5

Quarter Plate: 3.25 x 4.25

Sixth Plate: 2.75 x 3.25

Ninth Plate: 2 x 2.5

Sixteenth Plate: 1.375 x 1.625

Gem: .75 x 1 and smaller

Cartes De Visite:

Image Measures 2.5 x 3.5

Mounted on a 2.5 x 4 card

Cabinet Card:

Image Measures 4 x 5.5

Mounted on a 4.5 x 6.5 card

Stereograph (Size Varies):

Each image (2): 3 x 3.25

Mounted on a 7 x 3.5 card

To Reach the Presenter

Anne Clothier

aclothier@brooksidemuseum.org / anne.clothier@gmail.com