

**Preserving and Researching Family Photographs
Dating Photographs By Format and Technology**

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Positive Images:

Daguerreotype: 1839-1865. Peak years 1850s. Generally found in a case. Can be dated by mats and cases – simple designs are the earliest. (Negative)

Ambrotype: 1854-1865. Peak years 1857-59. (Because it is a wet plate collodion negative it cannot be before 1851.) Generally found in a case. (Negative)

Tintype: 1856-1930. Peaked in 1860s. (Collodion negative on japanned iron.)
brown/chocolate period 1870-1885
gem period 1863-1890
carnival/street photographer period 1875-1930

Albumen paper: 1850-1895. Characteristic purple or brownish tones. The whites are cream colored. The paper is very thin and tends to curl.

Carte-de-visite format: 1860-1900. Peak 1859-1866. (Later styles/edging fancier)
tax stamps August 1864-August 1866

Cabinet card format: 1866-1900s. (Dated by stock color, edging styles.)
other sizes: boudoir, imperial, promenade, panel.

Stereoviews: 1850s- 1930s. (Can be dated by color, edging, & curvature.)

Cyanotype: 1880-1920. Blue in color. (A popular amateur process.)

Platinotype: 1880-1920s. (Usually is from a photo studio. Sometimes the image will have transferred to the mat board or tissue paper.)

Postcard format:

“Private mailing card” -1898-Dec 24, 1901

“Postcard” –Dec. 24, 1901-1907 – message is on the front image

“Postcard” –1907 message is on the back “divided backs”

Velox – 1902; Azo 1904

Azo upward triangle 1907-1912 generally

Fiber/RC prints (after 1900):

Fiber chlorobromides (brown-black with cream base) 20s-50s

Bromides (blue-black with white base) 1950s-now

RC (plastic coated) 1960s--now

Color: Professional use began 1905. Amateur use began 1935.

Negatives

Wet plate: 1850-1890s

Dry plate: 1871-1930s. Common manufacturers names on boxes: Seed, Cramer, Sears, Hammer

Nitrate: 1888-1951. (Very thin curling negatives before 1900.)

Kodak circular prints: Kodak #1 1888 (2")

Kodak #2 1889 (3")

Cellulose Acetate "safety" film: 1937-1960s. Says "safety" on it.

Polyester film: 1950s. Thicker base

Guidelines for Handling Photographs

- Do not allow ink pens, food, drink, or tobacco near photographic materials.
- Use pencil when working with photographic materials.
- Wash hands and wear cotton gloves (plastic disposable gloves are acceptable) for handling photographic materials.
- Lay photographic materials on a flat surface for viewing. Do not hold to view (use light box for viewing negatives and transparencies).
- Handle materials by edges and support with both hands (brittle materials will break or crack when handled by one hand without support).
- Brittle items should be supported by acid-free, lignin-free board when handled.
- Very thin prints (such as unmounted albumen prints) can be easily torn by handling. Place them in mylar sleeves (with an acid-free, lignin-free board as backing if possible) in acid-free, lignin-free folders.
- Don't open cased images (such as daguerrotypes) all the way--the bindings are delicate. Open only enough to view image, support in hands (or book cradle type support) to protect binding from strain.
- Handling albums: Use book cradle type support to protect album binding unless it can be laid open without strain. Be careful when turning pages and watch for loose pages or loose photographs. If photographs need to be put back in album use acid free mounting corners. (If an album is deteriorating--pages & photos falling out, torn bindings, etc., it might be better to take the album apart and folder the photographs individually in the order they appear in the album).
- Handling negatives: Support the negative with two hands, hold by edges, and do not touch emulsion side of negative. Remove negatives from enclosures slowly and carefully to prevent tearing the emulsion. (Negative emulsion flaking often occurs at edges of the negative).
- Don't use original prints in exhibits, use copy prints or photocopies instead.
- In order to preserve slides, don't allow them to be projected. Slides can deteriorate rapidly from the strong light and heat of projectors.

Typical materials that cause deterioration in photographs:

- Sulfur-based chemicals and materials including”
 - Rubber cement
 - Rubber bands
 - Sulfite and kraft papers
 - Industrial pollutants

- Chlorine-based chemicals and materials including
 - Polyvinyl chloride plastics
 - Cleaners and commercial cleaning solutions
 - Sweat and perspiration salts transferred through finger oils

- Oxidizing gases and chemicals including
 - Ozone from xerox machines
 - Industrial pollutants
 - Ammonia (from household cleaners, etc.)
 - Cellulose nitrate photographs
 - Oil based paints
 - Floor varnishes
 - Wood and other materials with lignin

- Organic acids and basic chemicals and materials including
 - Wood and other materials with lignin
 - Sulfite and kraft papers
 - Glassine
 - Cardboard and unprocessed paper products
 - Pressure sensitive tapes

- Iron based metal products including
 - Paper clips