

Grandma Nellie's Scrapbook: Identifying & Interpreting Old Photographs

Identifying and Dating Your Photographs:

- What large features are in the photo, i.e. buildings, scenery, vehicles?



- Are there street signs or business names?
- Does the photo have a photographer's name or address listed?
- What type of material is the photo? e.g. Tin Type, Cart de Visite, Color Print...
- What style of clothing are people wearing?
- Tax stamps were used during the Civil War 1863-1865.
- Once you have narrowed down a time period & location you can begin to identify the subjects in the photo.

Themes and Trends in Photography:



- Clothing styles change by decade:
- Full skirts and button down jackets in the 1860s
- White button-down shirts and puffy sleeves in the 1910s
- Straight skirts and long strands of beads in the 1920s
- Examine hats, bonnets and jewelry

Props and Backgrounds:

- Photographer's backgrounds & props are a great way to tie photos together or to a particular time and studio.
- Look for identical items: chairs, tables, cloth, curtains

Eras:



- Tin Types 1855-1885
- Diamonds were popular @ 1895
- Carte de Visite (Cabinet Cards) 1860s-1910s
- Picture Postcards 1900-1920s
- Rectangular portraits were a popular style @ 1910-1925
- Art Deco revival cardboard enclosures @ 1940-1950s
- Polaroid 1948-1962 1963- (3 distinct eras) www.polaroid.com/history

Active Seeing:



- What type of photograph do you have?
- What is the physical condition?
- What type of photo is it? Studio portrait or candid?
- What do you see in the background?
- How many people are in the picture?

Online Resources:

- Chronicling America Newspapers <https://archive.org/details/catalogs>
- Dead Fred: www.deadfred.com
- Flickr: www.flickr.com
- Fold3 City Directory Collection <https://archive.org/details/catalogs>
- Ford & Nagel: www.fordnagle.com
- Google News Archive <https://archive.org/details/catalogs>
- Illinois Digital Archive: www.idaillinois.org
- Internet Archive Catalog Collection: <https://archive.org/details/catalogs>
- Langdon's List of 19th & Early 20th Century Photographers: www.langdonroad.com
- Library of Congress www.loc.gov
- National Archives: www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/photography.html
- Shorpy Historic Photo Archive: www.shorpy.com

Print Resources

- Eakle, Arlene H. Photograph Analysis. Family History World. Salt Lake City. 1976.
- Eastman Kodak Co. Conservation of Photographs. Eastman Kodak Co. Rochester. 1985.
- Frisch-Ripley, Karen. Unlocking the Secrets in Old Photographs. Ancestry. Salt Lake City. 2001.
- Langford, Martha. Suspended Conversations: the afterlife of memory in photographic albums. McGill-Queen's University Press. Montreal. 2008
- May-Levenick, Denise. How to Archive Family Photos. Family Tree Books. Cincinnati. 2015
- Niemetzky, Gerard. Photo Retouching with Photoshop. O'Reilly Press. 2005.
- Romer, Grant. Young America: the daguerreotypes of Southworth and Hawes. George Eastman House. Rochester. 2005
- Sturdevant, Katherine Scott. Organizing & Preserving Your Family Heirlooms. Better Way Books. Cincinnati. 2002.
- Taylor, Maureen A. Uncovering Your Ancestry Through Family Photographs. 2nd Edition. Family Tree Books. Cincinnati. 2005.
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