

CHAPTER 3 ~ CASE CHARACTERISTICS

Early photographs are found in attractive, though usually worn cases of wood and leather. Dating 19th century photographs from the characteristics of the case is usually difficult for the genealogist or collector, as many cases appear similar, yet they are not. Cases evolved from simple boxes to highly prized works of art. The new ways of creating artwork, different case materials, and manufacturing methods are all datable.

and family historians have few cased images, this book will not delve into the details of case artwork and collecting, that is a separate study as complex as photographs themselves. Many price guides and books on case collecting are available.

Still, there are a few easily recognized case characteristics that can help you with the dating process.



Figure 3-1. A variety of cases spanning 20 years. Front row L to R: Octagon thermoplastic case, 1/16th leather/wood daguerreotype case, small tintype pendant. Back row L to R: 1/16th daguerreotype case, 1/4th ambrotype leather/wood case, 1/9th ambrotype thermoplastic case.

Cases were made by local artisans usually one at a time, and by a few major suppliers using mass production techniques. The variations are endless, and the opportunity for a unique one-of-a-kind case is possible.

Case collecting has also become a big business, regardless of the image inside. Collectors focus on the artistry and rarity of cases. However, since most genealogists

Miniature Portrait Cases

Before photographs were available, painted miniature portraits were popular. These were small paintings, that the owner could carry with them and show off family likenesses. The careless handling of a small, original painting would soon result in irreparable damage, so the case was born.

Cased Daguerreotypes

The miniature paintings were housed in small wood cases made by local craftsmen. Reportedly, the first daguerreotypes displayed in America in 1839 were housed in “a morocco case that resembled those used for miniature portraits.”¹

All daguerreotypes would have been delivered to customers in a case to insure image protection.



Figure 3-2. c. 1852 wood and leather daguerreotype case.



Figure 3-3. The daguerreotype plate from Figure 3-2 case.

Cased Ambrotypes

Ambrotypes also were placed in cases. This not only protected the photographic image on the glass surface from scratches, but the encasement also prevented the glass from breaking if dropped. Ambrotypes were in vogue at the same time as daguerreotypes and shared many of the same case models. If an ambrotype is found without a case, that is because it was removed from the case at some time.



Figure 3-4. A striking c. 1859 Union case in black.

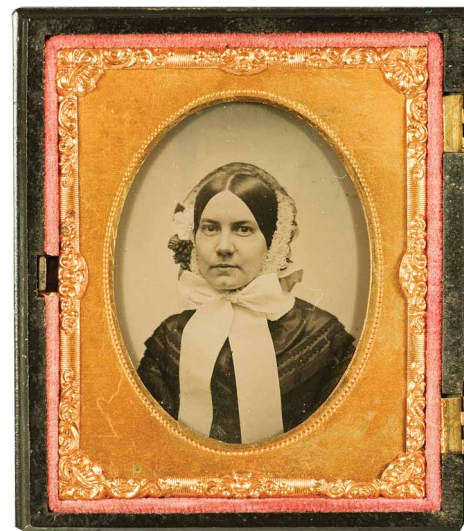


Figure 3-5. c. 1859 ambrotype inside Figure 3-4 Union case.