

19th Century Paper Photographs

A Genealogist's Guide to Cartes de visite and Cabinet Cards

A New Book from PhotoTree.com – Released May 10, 2011

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studio print choice and was used well into the 1950s.




Figure 3-17. The c. 1878 sepia photograph on left shows extensive fading and yellowing from the albumen binder while the elegant center collodion or gelatin print from 1894 maintains rich warm hues. 1896 matte collodion print on right exhibits rich dark tones and fine detail. (Double-tap the image in landscape mode for high resolution viewing).

For reference in this book, both gelatin and collodion prints will be treated the same. They are almost indistinguishable from each other, and only an expert with a high powered microscope can tell them apart. It is important to note that both of these types of prints generally had glossy surfaces.

Warm, reddish-purple-brown prints are mostly from the 1890s, rich blacks after 1895

Photographic Papers		
Type	Characteristic	Date Used
Albumen	Sepia tone	1860 - 1898
Collodion	Reddish/brown/purple	1885 - 1920
Gelatin	Reddish/brown/purple	1885 - 1920
Matte Collodion	Near-Neutral Black	1894 - 1920

Table 3-6. Most commonly used photographic papers.

The vast majority of cabinet cards under research by the genealogist are made with one of the papers from the above table, and the 'Date Used' is the time frame when the most commonly found photographs are from. Many other paper

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Important tips are highlighted for easy reference and summary tables help the researcher quickly find and remember the valuable information.

Beautiful high resolution images, clues, and guidelines help you find the answers you need while researching old photos.

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a few can be found with revenue tax stamps that were required from 1864 to 1866.

Oval Frame - Definitely 1870s
 One of the simpler clues that is highly accurate is the oval-masked picture. This printing style was used almost exclusively during the 1870s, and quite often. During the printing process, a mask such as a piece of cardboard with an oval cut out, was placed over the photograph. The only portion of the sensitized photograph paper that would be exposed and developed into a picture was that center oval section.




Figure 2-5. A fashionable lady graces this 1872 oval-masked carte de visite with rounded corners

This look had its roots in the oval frames from daguerreotype days, many of the tin-type sleeves, and the cartouche artwork from the 1860s. This oval masking had a production value as well as purely artistic. Any stray and unwanted portion of the picture edge would be conveniently eliminated.

Clue #3 - Card Corners, Edges and Color

Thickness Corners Size Clothes
 Clues ———— Borders Imprint Stamps Studio

The manufacturers of card stock were always tinkering with the product, probably to generate new interest. But the changes were generally small, until about 1870.

Around this time, many mounting card characteristics changed at one once. For the researcher this is good, as there is a definite before and after 1870-look to CDVs.

Corners
 Early carte de visits had square cut corners. With frequent handling, they

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