

# Grandma Nellie's Scrapbook: Identifying & Interpreting Old Photographs

Tina Beaird [tinab@tamarackgenealogy.com](mailto:tinab@tamarackgenealogy.com)



## Identifying and Dating Your Photographs:

- What large features are in the photo, e.g. 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)

## 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](http://www.deadfred.com)
- Flickr: [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)
- Fold3 City Directory Collection <https://archive.org/details/catalogs>
- Ford & Nagel: [www.fordnagle.com](http://www.fordnagle.com)
- Google News Archive <https://archive.org/details/catalogs>
- Internet Archive Catalog Collection: <https://archive.org/details/catalogs>
- Langdon's List of 19th & Early 20th Century Photographers: [www.langdonroad.com](http://www.langdonroad.com)
- Library of Congress [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov)
- Library of Virginia Digital Photo Collections [www.virginiamemory.com/collections](http://www.virginiamemory.com/collections)
- National Archives: [www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/photography.html](http://www.archives.gov/research/alic/reference/photography.html)
- Polaroid [www.polaroid.com/history](http://www.polaroid.com/history)
- Roanoke Public Library digital collections [www.virginiaroom.org/digital/collections/browse](http://www.virginiaroom.org/digital/collections/browse)
- Shorpy Historic Photo Archive: [www.shorpy.com](http://www.shorpy.com)
- Virginia Museum of History & Culture digital collections  
<https://virginiahistory.org/research/collections>

## 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.
- Taylor, Maureen A. Family Photo Detective. Family Tree Books. Cincinnati, OH. 2013.