PHOTOGRAPHIC TREASURES:
BRINGING YOUR RESEARCH INTO FOCUS

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INTRODUCTION:
When doing genealogical research on your Ancestors-It usually involves the collecting of names, dates, and places. Sometime genealogists overlook aspects of their lives. Discover how photographs can add a new dimension to your family tree.

PHOTOGRAPHY THAT EXISTS TODAY:
The first permanent photograph was an image produced in 1826 by the French inventor Joseph Nicephore Niepce. His photographs were produced on a polished pewter plate covered with a petroleum derivative called “Bitumen of Judea”, which he then dissolved in white petroleum.

*Daguerreotypes (Very popular from 1839-1860)*
The daguerreotype proved popular in response to the demand for portraiture that emerged from the middle classes during the years that preceded the Industrial Revolution. This demand—that could not be met in volume and in cost by oil painting, added to the push for the development of photography.

*Ambrotype (Produced between 1854-1881)*
The ambrotype was much less expensive to produce than the daguerreotype, and it lacked the daguerreotype’s shiny metallic surface, which some found unappealing. By the late 1850s, the ambrotype was overtaking the daguerreotype in popularity; by the mid-1860s, the ambrotype itself was being supplanted by the tintype and other more modern processes.

*Tintype (Widely produced 1856-into the 1920’s)*
The tintype can be seen as a modification of the earlier ambrotype, replacing the glass plate with a thin sheet of japanned iron. Tintypes are simple and fast to prepare, compared to other early photographic techniques. A photographer could prepare, expose, develop, and varnish a tintype plate in a few minutes, quickly having it ready for a customer. Earlier tintypes were sometimes placed in cases, as were daguerreotype and ambrotypes; but uncased images in paper sleeves and for albums were popular from the beginning.

*Carte-De-Visite (CDV) (Available 1858-1910)*
The CDV was a type of small photograph which was patented in Paris. The carte de visite photograph proved to be a very popular item during the Civil War. Soldiers, friends and family members would have a means of inexpensively obtaining photographs and sending them to loved ones in small envelopes. CDV photographs of Abraham Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant and other leaders of the day became an instant hit with the public. People were not only buying photographs of themselves, but also photographs of noteworthy individuals.

By the early 1870s, Cartes De Visite were supplanted by the Cabinet Cards, which were also usually albumen prints, but larger, mounted on cardboard backs.
Cabinet Cards (Popular from 1866-to the 1920’s)

The Cabinet Card was the style of photograph which was universally adopted for photographic portraiture during that late 1860’s. It consisted of a thin photograph that was generally mounted on cards measuring 4¼ by 6½ inches.

Owing to the larger image size, the cabinet card steadily increased in popularity during the second half of the 1860s and into the 1870s, replacing the carte de visite as the most popular form of portraiture. The cabinet card was large enough to be easily viewed from across the room when typically displayed on a cabinet, which is why they became known as such in the vernacular.

In no small part owing to the immense popularity of the affordable Kodak Box Brownie camera, first introduced in 1900, the public increasingly began taking it’s own photographs and thus the popularity of the cabinet card declined.

Post Cards (Available from 1893 to the present)

The first American postcard was developed in 1873 by the Morgan Envelope Factory of Springfield, MA. Later by 1873, Post Master John Creswell introduced the first pre-stamped "Penny Postcards". These first postcards depicted Interstate Industrial Exposition that took place in Chicago. Postcards were made because people were looking for an easier way to send quick notes. The first postcard to be printed as a souvenir in the United States was created in 1893 to advertise the World Fair-then being held in Chicago, IL.

Other Types of Photographs:

Calotype (Popular from 1840’s until Tintypes)

Calotype or sometime called Talbotype is an early photographic process first introduced in 1838 by William Henry Fox Talbot using paper coated with silver iodide. The term calotype comes from the Greek καλός (kalos), "beautiful", and τύπος (tupos), "impression".

Pannotype (Rare-Short lived Process)

These prints were produced between 1854 and 1860 and were made of leather and oil cloth. Because of the difficult process and being rather costly, this process of photography never really became popular. To find an example of one of this style of photograph today is very rare.

WHERE TO FIND PHOTOGRAPHS:

When conducting any type of genealogical research always try to obtain copies of photographs whenever and wherever possible. One of the best non document type of source of information-this will help you further your research. As you look at the type of clothing worn, general overall appearance, and type of photograph used to take the picture of your ancestors.

A. Family Members

B. Library of Congress (great photographic collection-much of it online)

C. State Libraries & Historical Societies (great for more state wide photographs)

D. Local Genealogical & Historical Societies (great
E. United States Military History Institute (great for military images)

F. Historical Museums (large private collection of photographs-Ex: Smithsonian Institute)

G. Public Libraries/Newspapers (Great source for local photographs)

H. Local Company Archives (Example: Pennsylvania Railroad Company-Philadelphia, PA)

I. Private Photographers & Collectors (consult reference materials)

J. Local Colleges & Universities (great for photographs of higher education)

REFERENCE BOOKS:


NOTES: