

Dating Photographs By Format and Technology
(Chronological listing)

Positive Images:

Daguerreotype: 1839-1865. Peak years 1850s

Generally found in a case.

Can be dated by mats and cases – simple designs are the earliest
(Negative)

Ambrotype: 1854-1865. Peak years 1857-59

(Because it is a wet-plate collodion negative, it can't be before 1851)

Generally found in a case.

(Negative)

Tintype: 1856-1930. Peaked in 1860s.

(Collodion negative on japanned iron)

brown/chocolate period 1870-1885

gem period 1863-1890

carnival/street photographer period 1875-1930

Albumen paper: 1850-1895

Characteristic purple or brownish tones.

The whites are cream-colored

The paper is very thin and tends to curl

Carte-de-visite format: 1860- 1900. Peak 1859-1866

Later styles/edging fancier

Tax stamps August 1864-August 1866

Cabinet card format: 1866-1900s.

Dated by stock color, edging styles

Other sizes: boudoir, imperial, promenade, panel

Stereoviews: 1850s-1930s

Can be dated by color, edging, & curvature

Cyanotype: 1880-1920. Blue in color

A popular amateur process

Platinotype: 1880s-1920s

Usually from a photo studio.

Sometimes the image will have transferred to the mat board or tissue paper

Postcard format:

“Private mailing card” – 1898-Dec 24, 1901
“Postcard” – Dec 24, 1901-1907 – message is on the front image
“Postcard” – 1907 - message is on the back, “divided backs”
Velox – 1902, Azo 1904
Azo upward triangle 1907-1912 generally

Fiber/RC prints (after 1900):

Fiber chlorobromides (brown-black with cream base) – 1920s-50s
Bromides (blue-black with cream base) – 1950s-now
RC (plastic coated) – 1960s-now

Color: professional use began 1905. Amateur use began 1935.

Negatives

Wet plate: 1850-1890s

Dry plate: 1871-1930s

Common names on boxes: Seed, Cramer, Sears

Nitrate: 1888-1951 (Very thin curling negatives before 1900)

Kodak circular prints: Kodak #1 1888 (2")
Kodak#2 1889 (3")

Acetate safety film: 1937-1960s. Says “safety” on it

Polyester film: 1950s. Thicker base.

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