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)

   (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


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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