LOST & FOUND
A Collection of Photographs Gives Clues to the Past

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April. 2020

Introduction

This collection of abandoned photographs shows individuals with obvious visual impairments. I first started collecting these rare images when I started working in ocularistry. I was drawn to photos with obvious defects of a single eye (monocularity) or both eyes which many times indicating the individual is blind. Examining these antique photos, I would attempt to diagnosis the resulting condition or assemble a narrative based on any relevant information I could obtain from the image itself or the surrounding card stock frame.

These images are worthless objects whose value had long expired. Stuffed into shoe boxes and relegated to the lowest position at flea markets and antique stores, they are discarded, overlooked and rarely even priced. When a few are rescued from oblivion and presented for purchase, an interesting improvisation often follows. Their value has never been considered. After a deal has been struck, the question arises from the seller: "What do you do with those things?"

Several years ago, I built an article around an exceptional cabinet card photograph I had found of an infant black girl. This article was published in the Journal of Ophthalmic Prosthetics and later in Digger Magazine. Shortly afterword's, a condensed written appreciation of this image was published in the Washington Post. This inspired me to gather a few more photographs of anonymous individuals to explore which are presented here.

These following snapshots of people were chosen for a variety of reasons. Sad to report, I have hundreds of such images I have collected over the years. I often ask myself "What were these people in these photos doing?" "What were their relationships to one another?" "Who was behind the camera, and what was he or she seeing at that moment?" These portraits reveal their secrets or sometimes very little is exposed. The individuals existence in these antique images seems predetermined, and since the photographers are many times unknown, the photos

have their own independent life, unattached to a human creator.

Few people create grand legacies or make great gestures in society. Rather, most individuals live their lives within a small quiet world. Many depart unnoticed, leaving behind no awards, estates or monumental achievements. These photographic relics offer clues to the identities of the individuals who left them, and some things of their lives.

What can we learn from these pictures? What can they teach us, these stray bits of history? These images of nameless ordinary people who worked, ate, hoped and laughed, they carved out an existence and occasionally found time to enjoy themselves. All the while struggling with an obvious disability. They loved their family. They had dignity: they died.

These lost pictures have found a new home here.

I stumbled upon a wooden box of forgotten photographs in an antiques store in Manhattan. One "cabinet card" portrait (a contact-printed black-and-white photograph mounted on dark card stock) caught my attention. This image of a monocular girl, about 3 years old, was probably taken in the 1920s.

It prompted me to open my wallet amid the dust and clutter in this small shop. I collect old medical items. And, as an ocularist, I appreciate and sympathize with individuals who are missing one or both eyes.

Losing an eye does not define a person. Yet, because of how cosmetically conscious society seems today, it is difficult to envision a monocular child sitting for a formal photograph without a prosthesis or a covering.

Eye disease and loss is not limited to any demographic group. Health care has evolved since the 1920s, but its availability can still be elusive, especially for minorities. This photo reminds me how far health care has come, yet how far it has to go.

DAGUERREOTYPE

Blind OU?

Hand position indicates "scholar"

Head tilt inferior-cowering
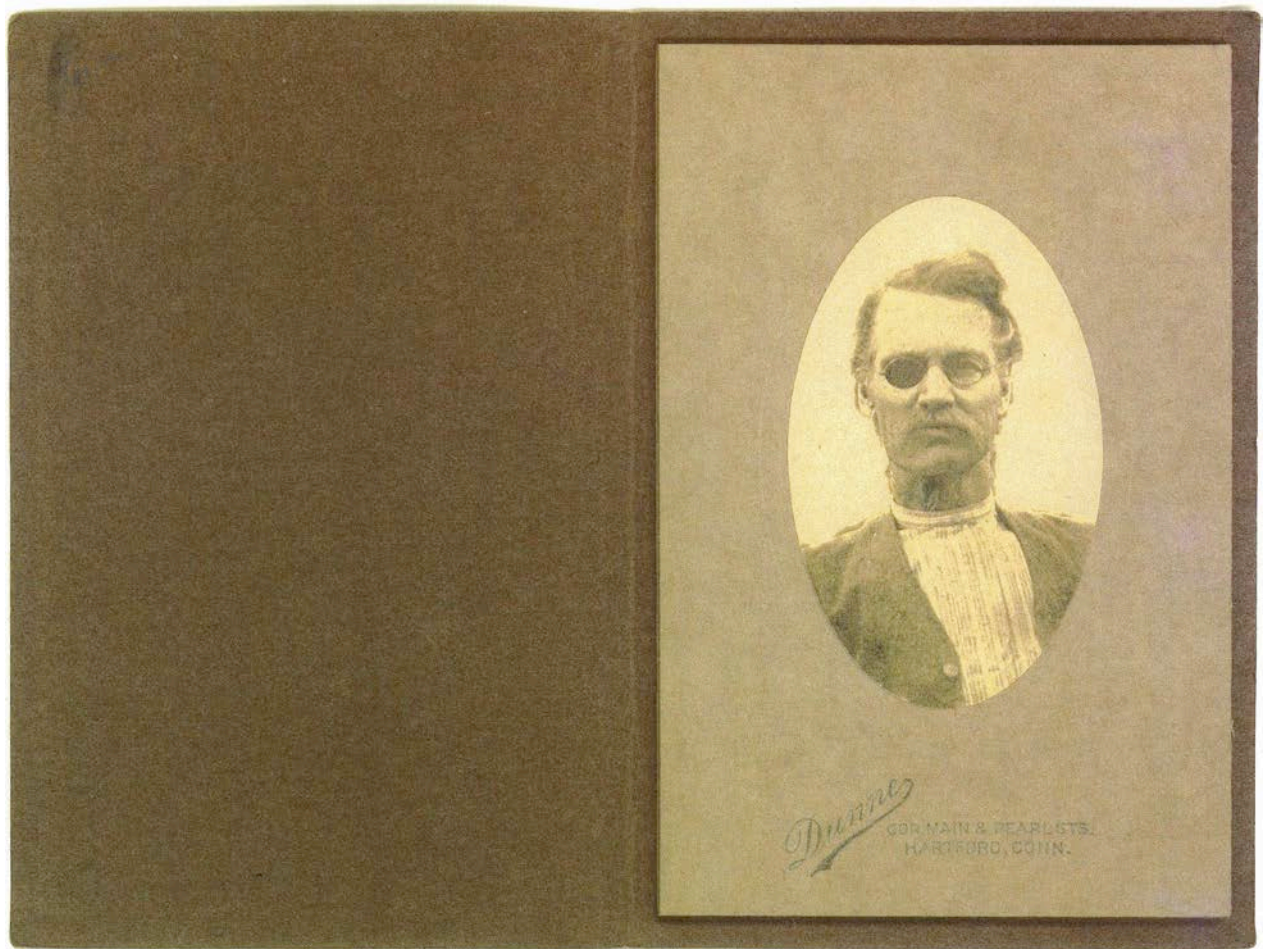
Face-front

CABINET CARD
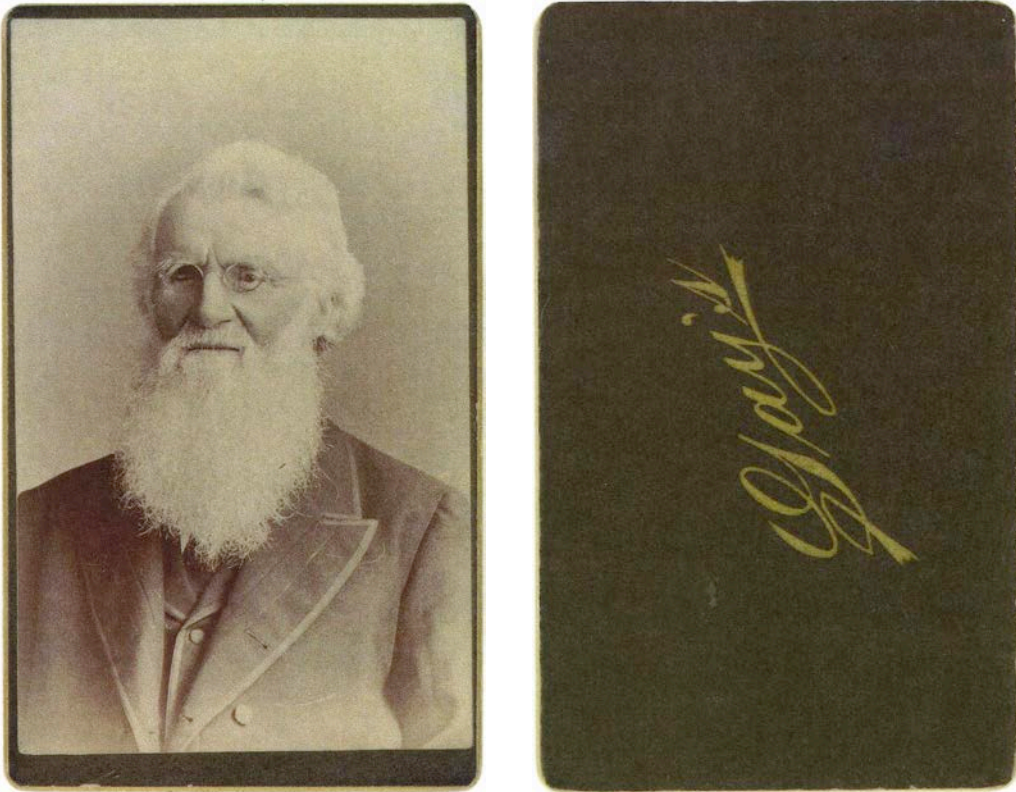
OD- absent eye; also "best side" toward camera

Dapper suit/vest, double-breasted

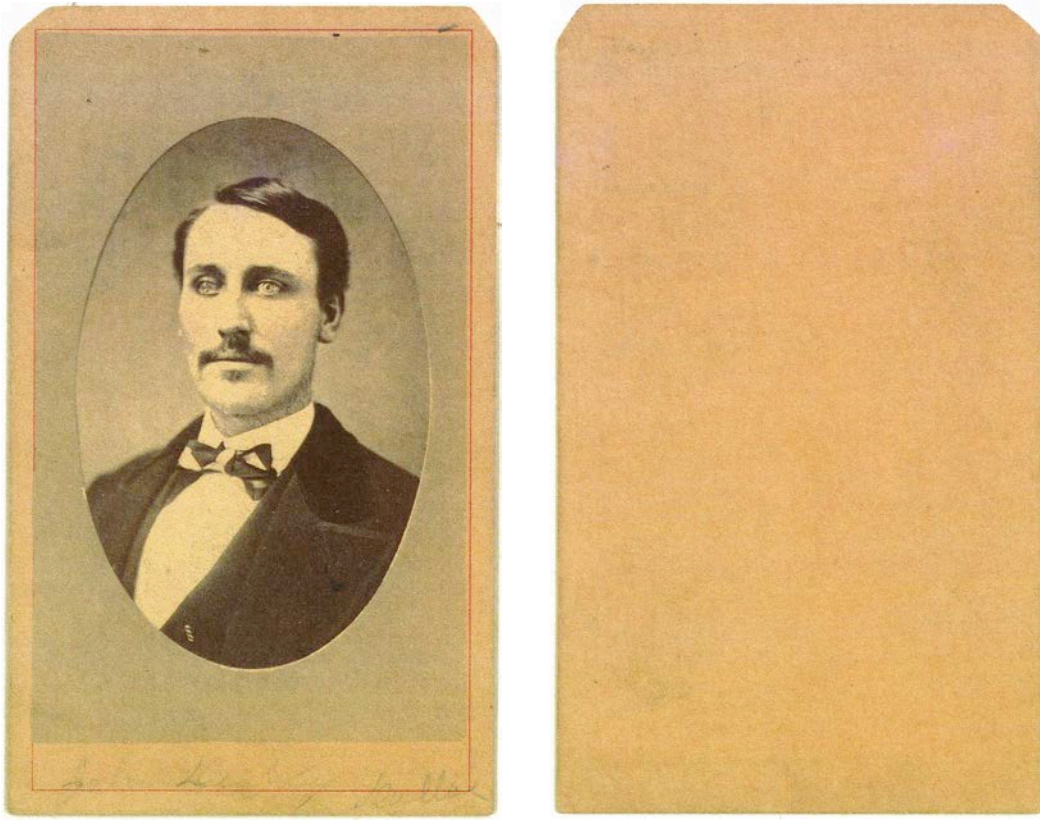Stern look/ outdoor life

Hair=hat-shaped

CARTE DE VISTE

Traumatic (head & neck)

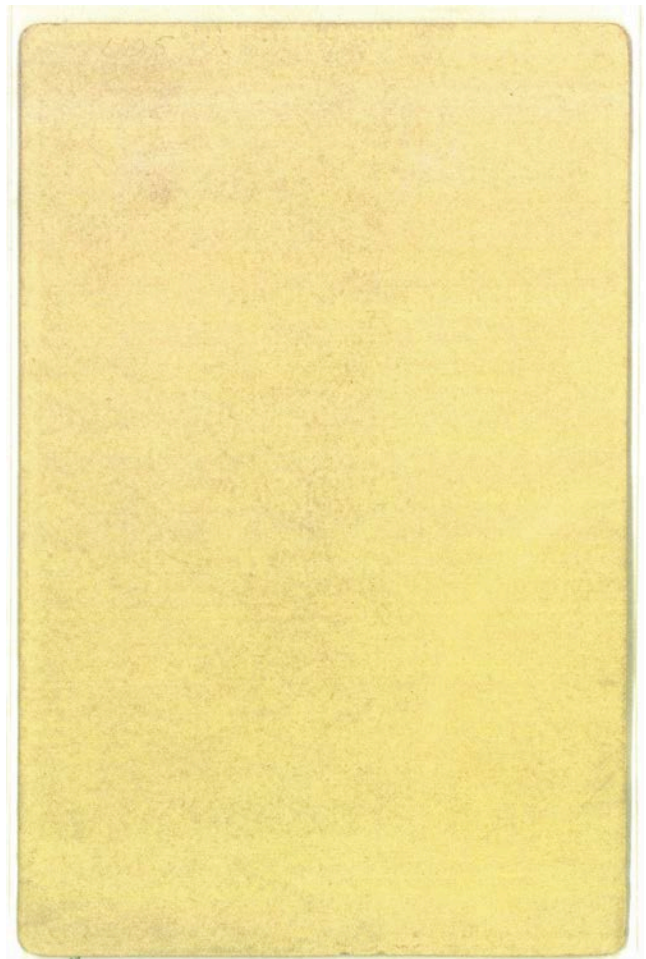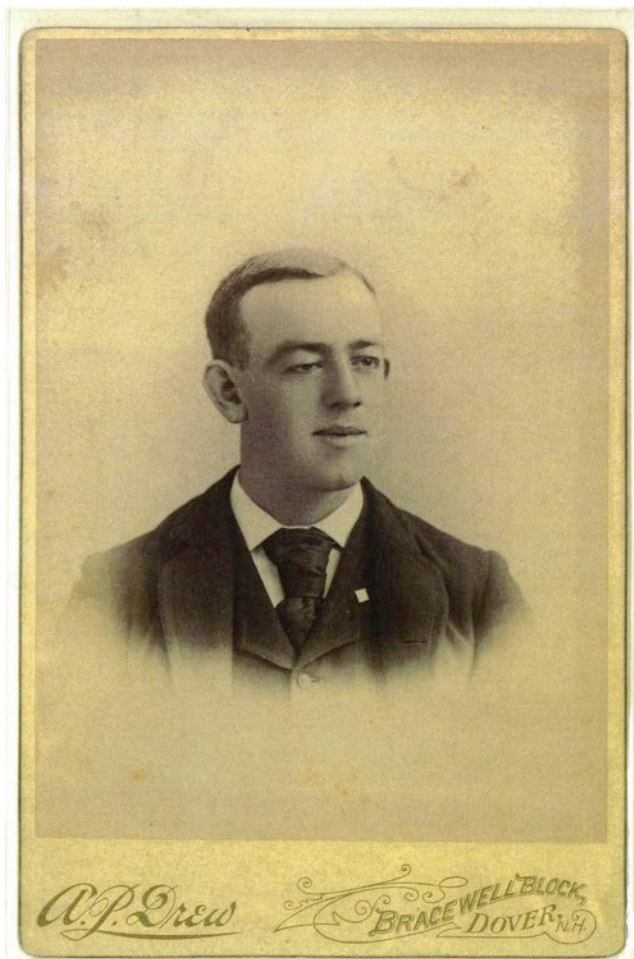Occluder is practical

Hartford, Connecticut region

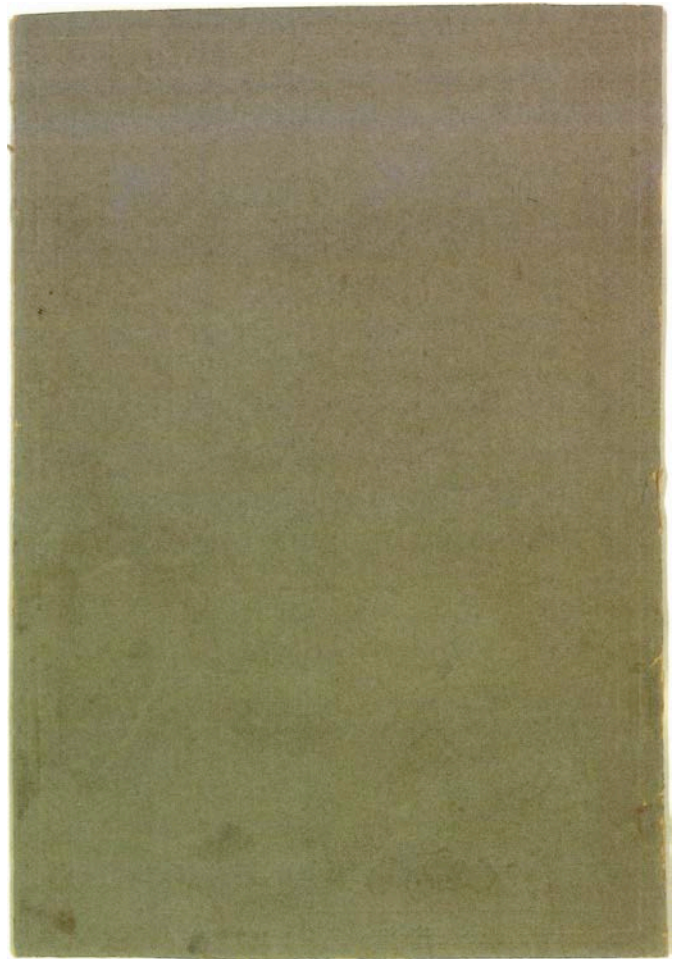# CARTE DE VISTE

Decent Prosthesis, OD

Dapper

CABINET CARD

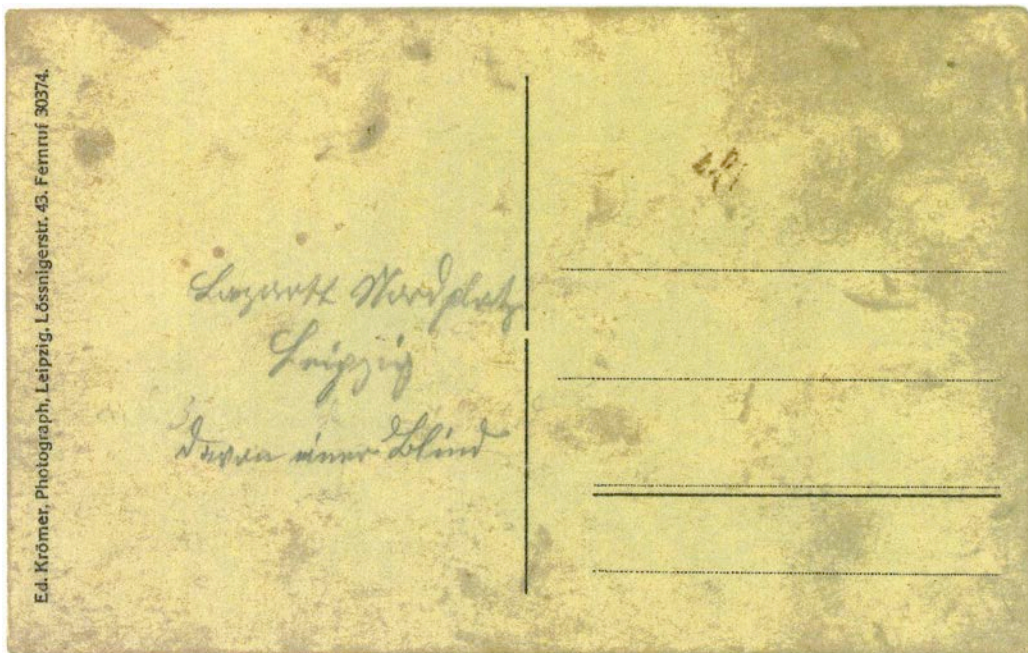"Best side" is prosthesis

Salesmen?

Dover, New Hampshire region

CABINET CARD

Patch is relevant on farm
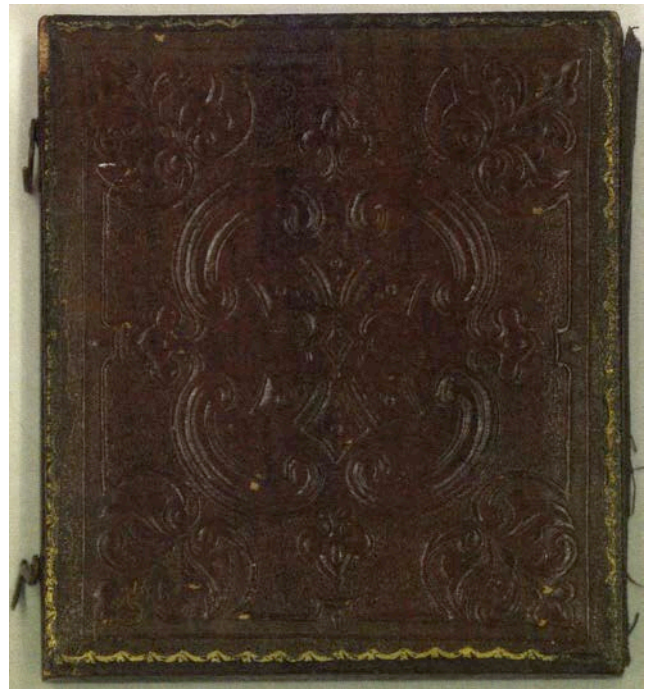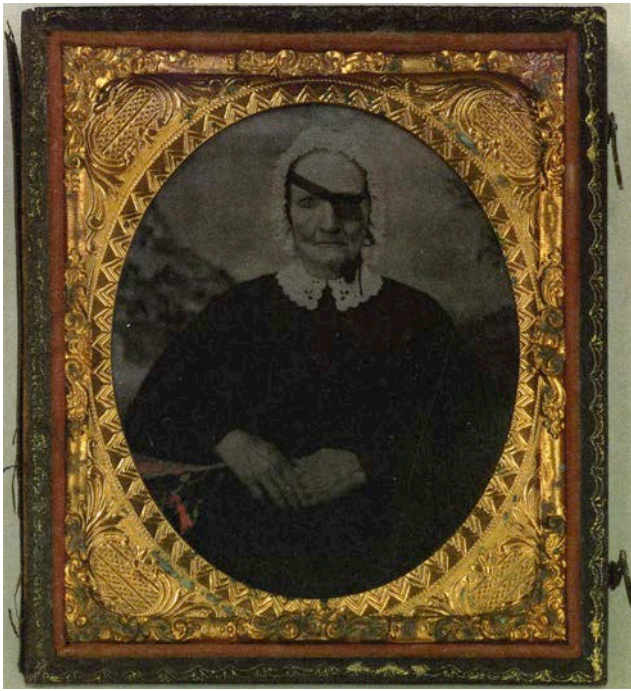
Traveling Photographer

(dirt gets in the socket)

Collective Monocular military unit-Germany

(war wounds) (proud of)

Patches being more obvious, these would never accept a glass eye
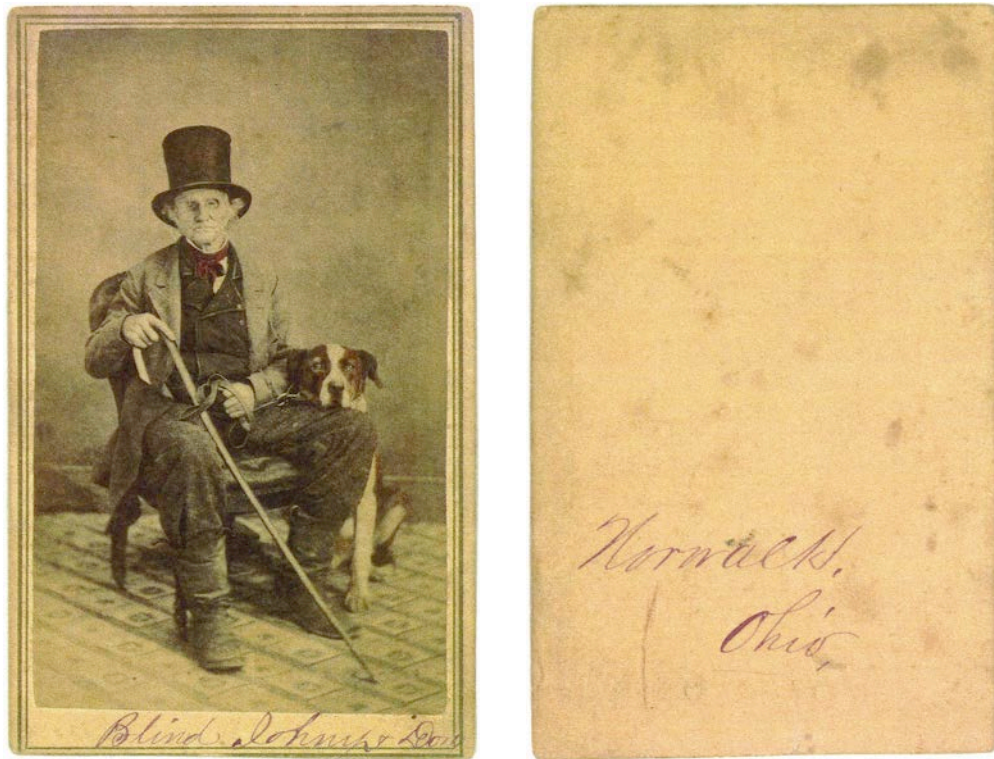
Covered head

Patch is practical

(Largest patch ever)

Remember me

CARTE DE VISTE

Blind Johnny + dog (handwriting)

Photo applied to card= intended for exchange

Photographers own collection, city on back (Ohio)

CABINET CARD

Face front= by appearance, confident

Hands are covered,

No wedding ring (spinster)

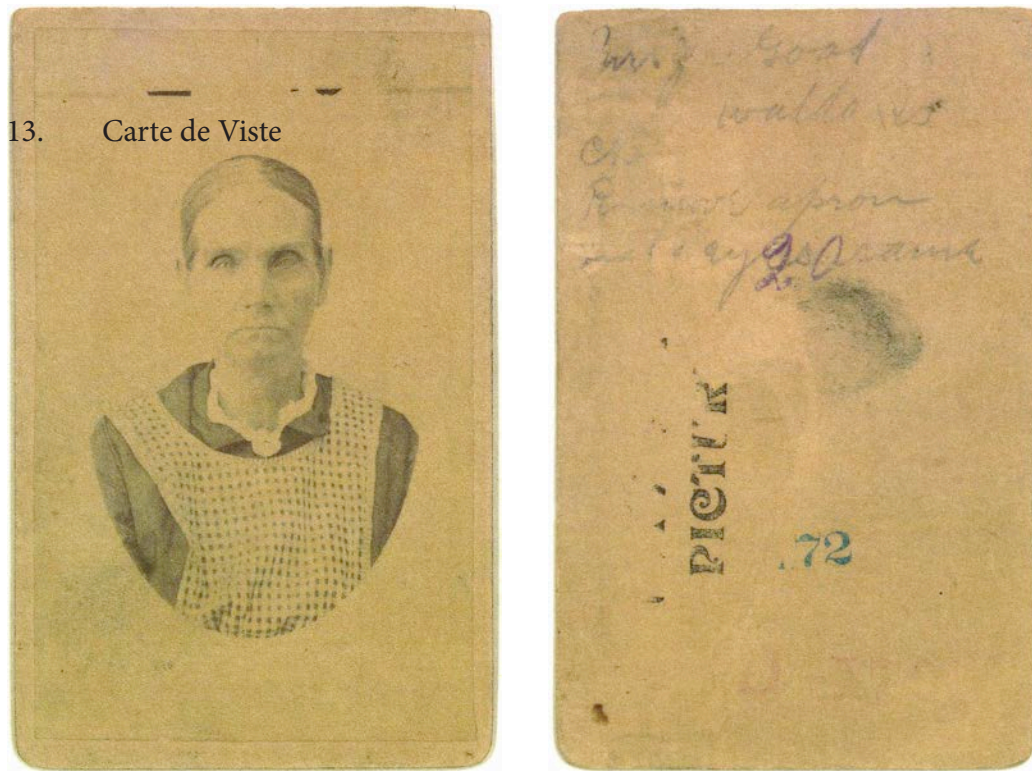Poor looking prosthesis,

German origin

Military cadet

Off-ax's, "best side" forward

German origin
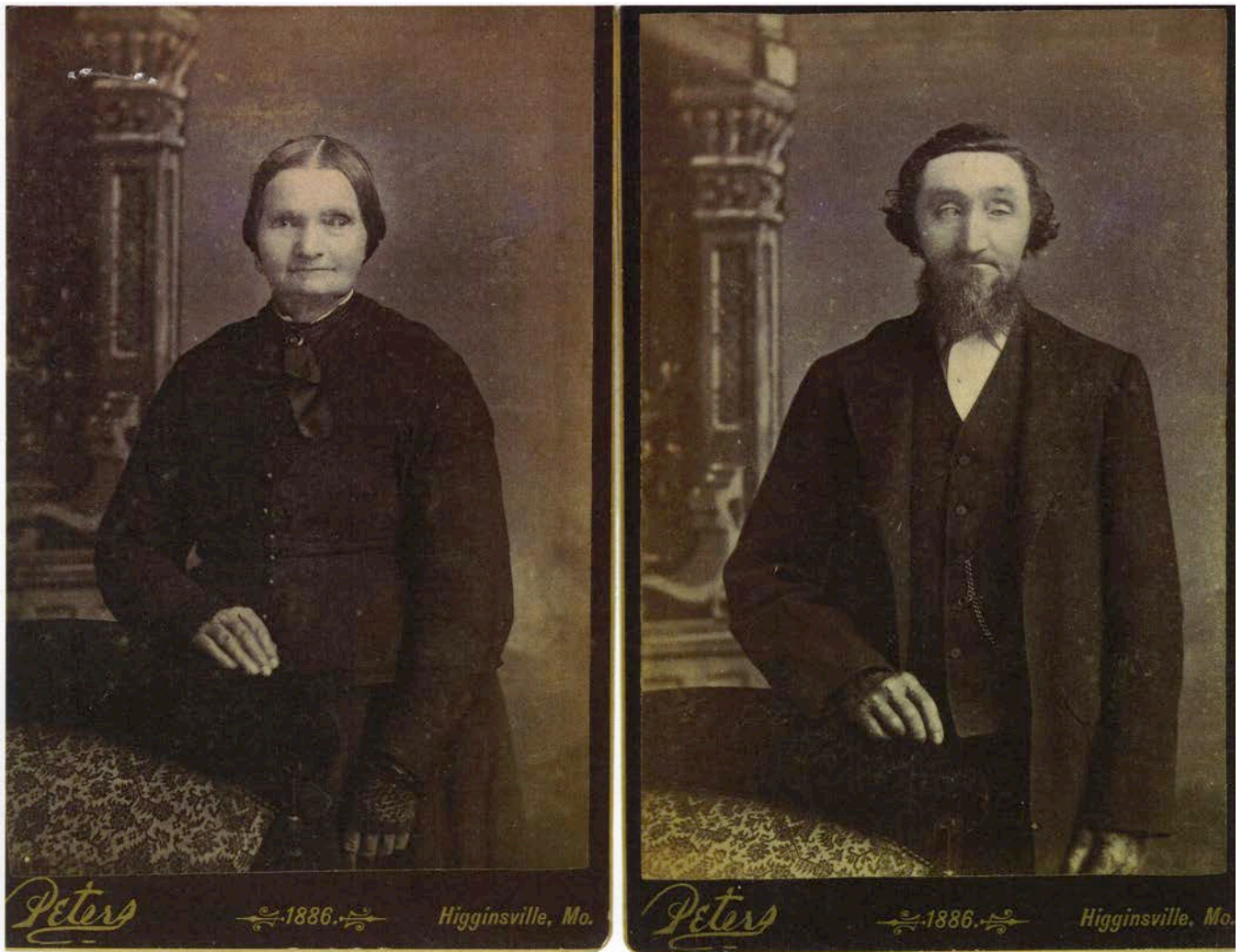
13.   Carte de Viste

Traveling photographer

Photo outside home, blind OD

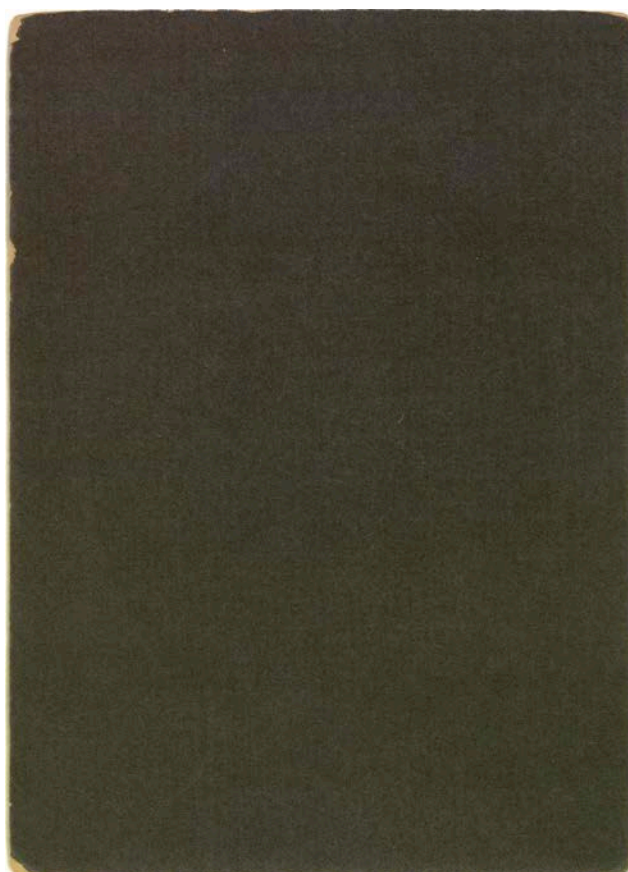Still wearing apron

A record of existence

CABINET CARD

Unique couple – both blind

Trauma to OS, possibly Civil War Veteran?

Suit worn at Studio
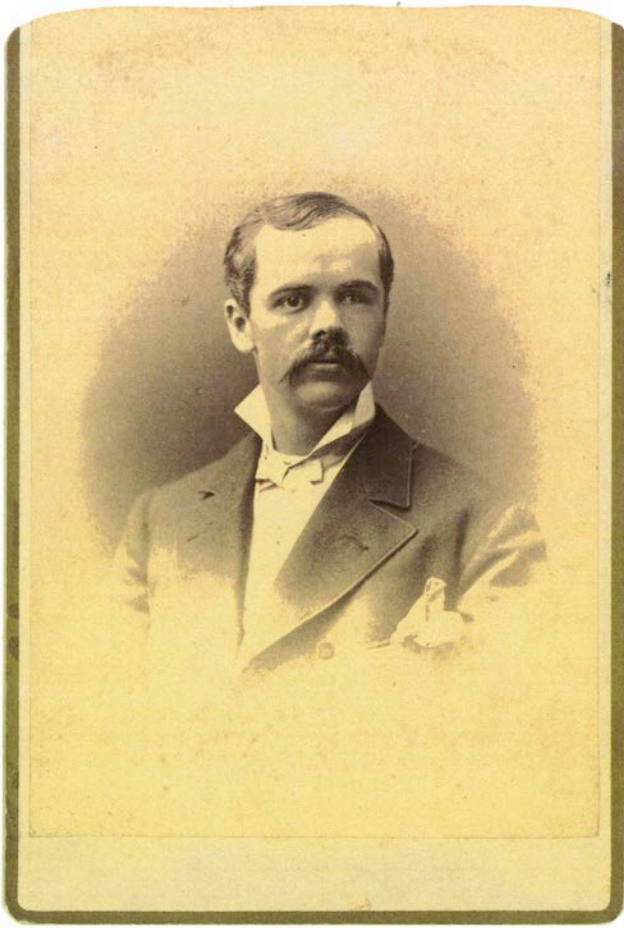
Dated in 1886, Higginsville Missouri

Old Country-mourning?

OS- possible burn?

CABINET CARD

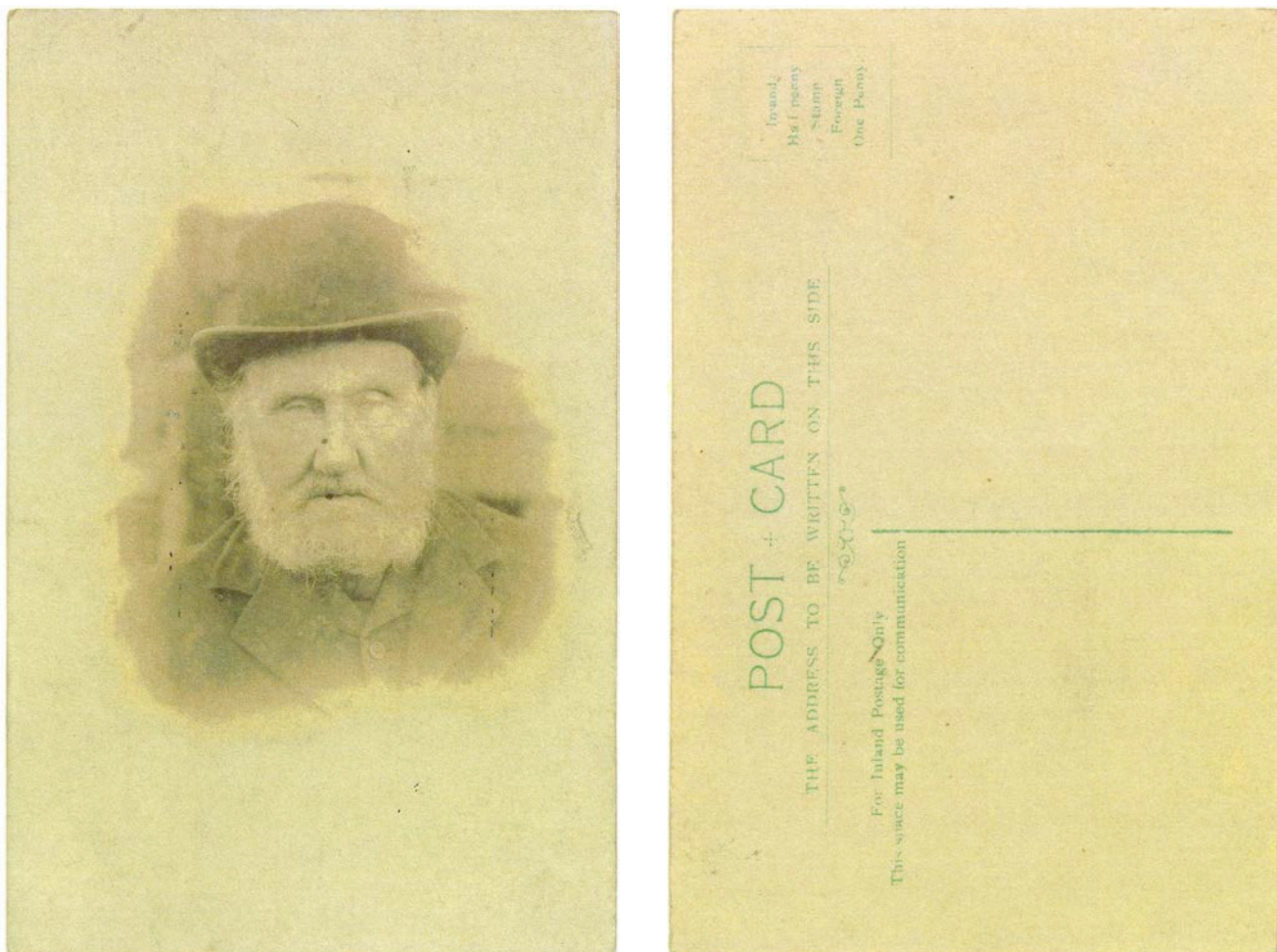(Dapper) small man

Oversized suit= borrowed

Still- a confident face, even asymmetric
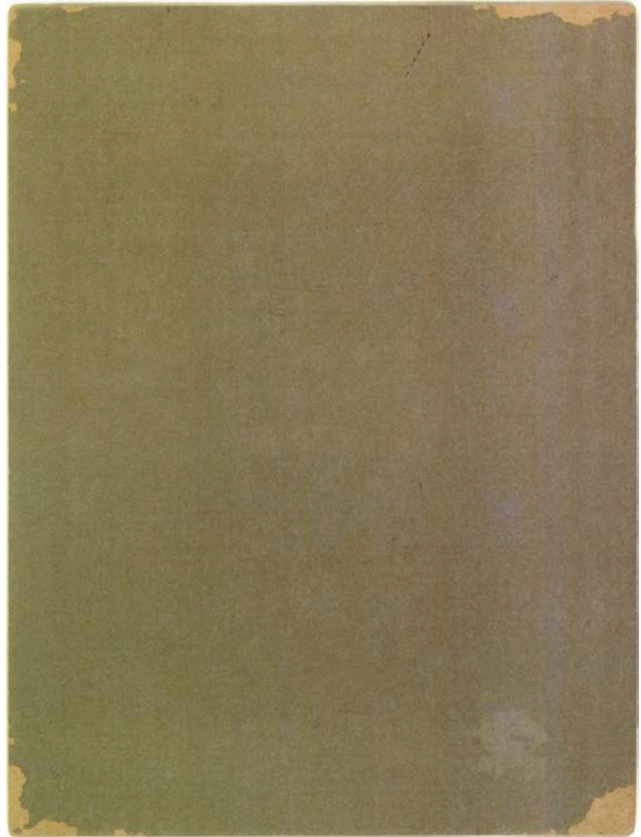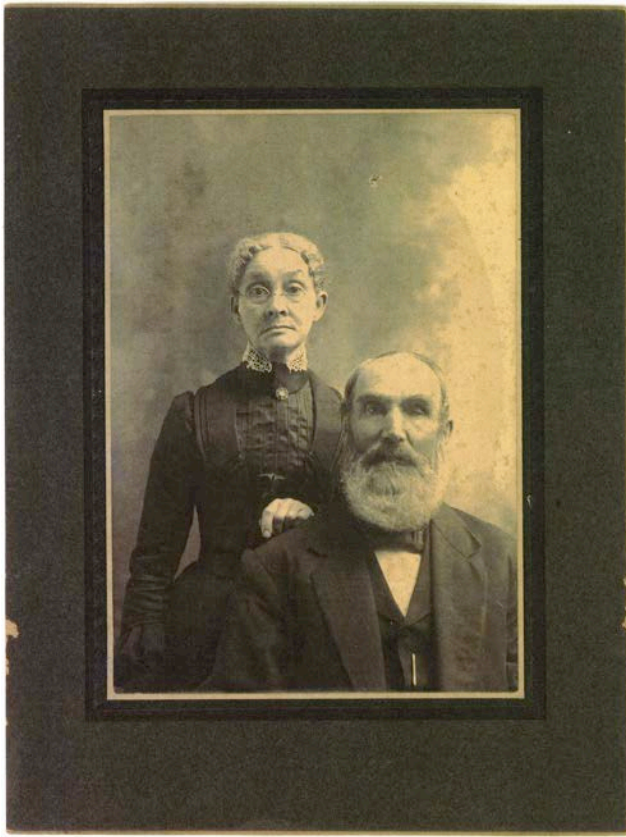
Dayton, Ohio area

Artistic

Exterior photo, not in a studio

Dorsum of nose is saddled

Traumatic wound to eyes

Penny postcard never mailed
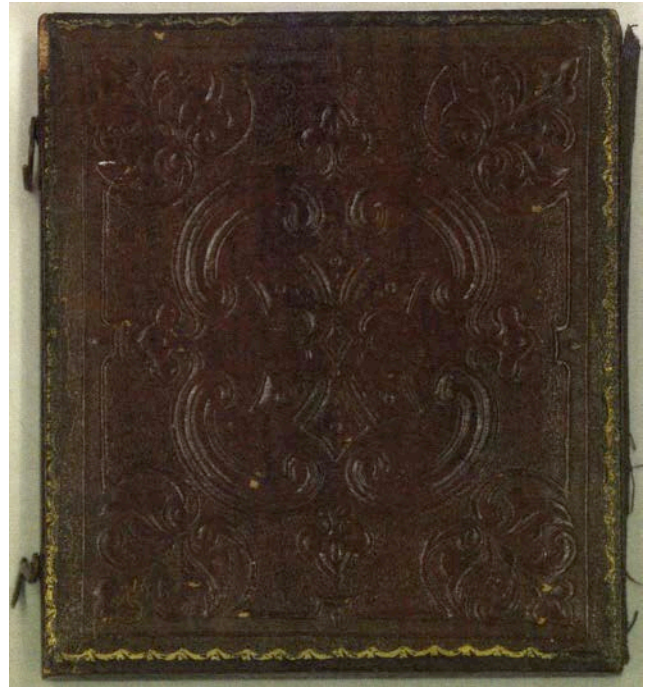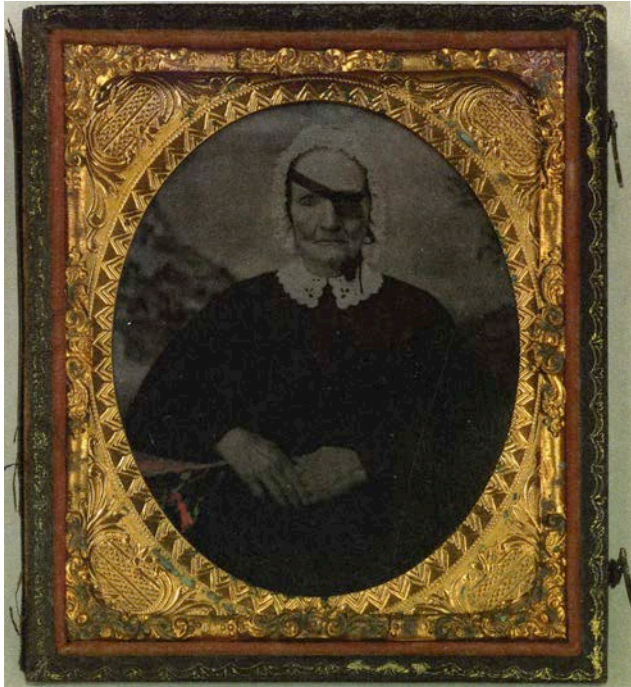
CABINET CARD

Well-dressed couple

The photographer long noted studio advise "open your eyes"

She shows no ring

Common 19th Century Vintage Photo Types

DAGUERREOTYPE

The daguerreotype was created by Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre and is known by photography experts as the first practical form of photography. Daguerreotypes were produced on a thin copper metal support that had a polished coating of silver that was mirror-like. Daguerreotypes were sealed in glass for protection. In America, daguerreotypes were often placed in hinged, wooden cases with paper or leather coverings.

Height of Popularity: 1839-1860
Distinguishing Features: They can either take on the look of a negative or a positive depending on how the light hits them and the angle in which you're viewing them. Also look for their highly-polished silver support.

ALBUMEN

In 1850, Louis-Desire Blanquart Evrard improved upon Talbot's salt prints by introducing albumen paper. Photographers would coat a thin sheet of paper with egg white which would hold light-sensitive silver salt on the surface of the paper, preventing image fading. Once it was dry, albumen prints were used just like salted-paper prints and the image would form by the darkening properties of the sun on the chemicals. Most of the surviving photographs from the 19th century are on albumen paper.

Height of Popularity: 1855-1890
Distinguishing Features: Albumen prints take on a rich, purple-brown hue. When you examine these photos, look for paper fibers through the albumen overlay. You can also usually see a fine lateral cracking across the glossy photo surface. The support is typically thin and also coated with albumen.

Albumen prints were often mounted on cardboard carte-de-viste (CDVs). Introduced in the 1850s in Paris, France by Andre Adolphe Eugene Disderi, CDVs were very popular in both the United States and Europe until the turn of the 20th century.

CARTE DE VISTE
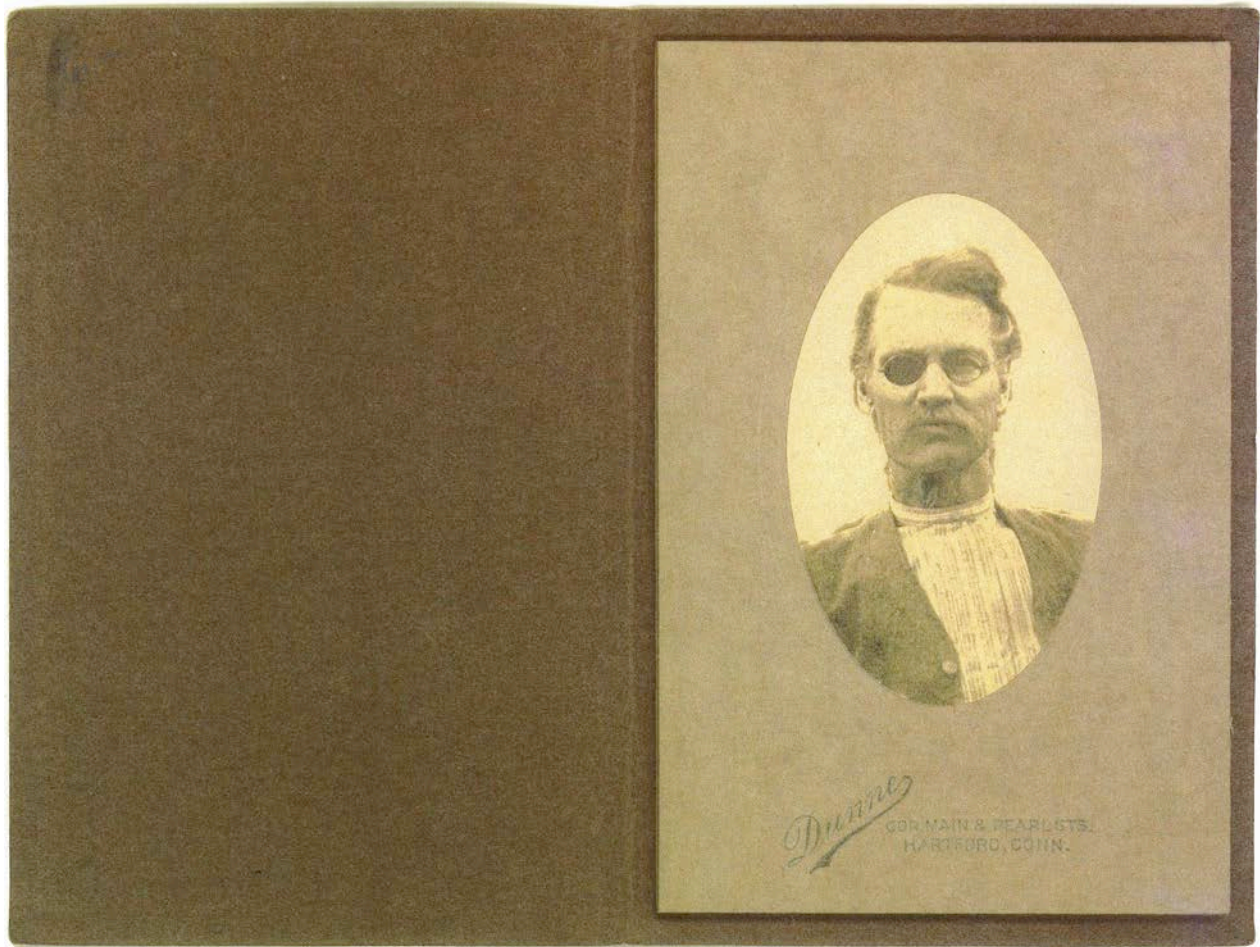
Height of Popularity: 1860-1890
Distinguishing Features: You can distinguish a CDV from other card mounts mostly by the size: 2.5 x 4 inches (63 x 100 mm) or slightly less at times. Look also for the photographer's imprint and the type of image itself (most CDVs are portraits). All of these characteristics can help you determine a correct date within just a few years of the photo's origin.

TINTYPES

Introduced in 1856, the tintype also known as a melainotype or ferrotype was produced on a plate of thin metal. And just like the ambrotype and daguerreotype, the method didn't use negatives and was directly exposed in the camera. Some small tintypes were also placed in cardboard mounts much like the CDV.

Height of Popularity: 1856-1900
Distinguishing Features: Look for a thin, metallic plate holding the positive image to distinguish a tintype from an ambrotype. Also try to look for mount plates that are brown or red. The most common size to look for is 2 ½ x 3 ½ inches.
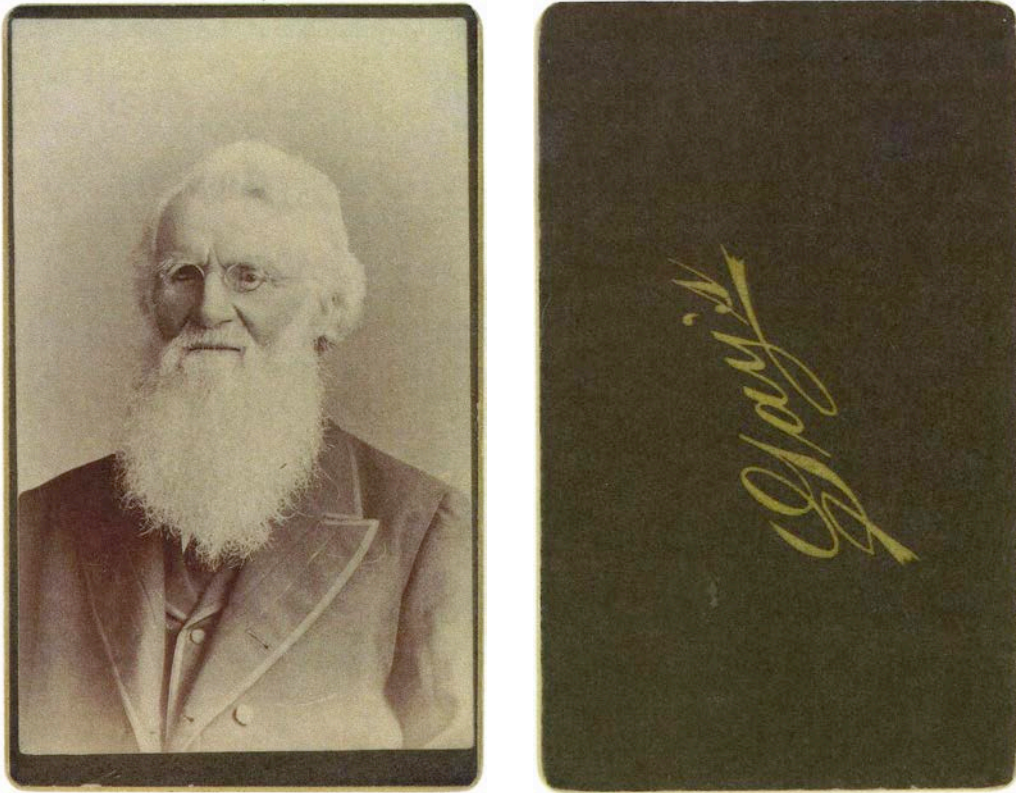
Introduced in 1866, the cabinet card, like the CDV, was an albumen-coated, card-mounted photograph which was also quite popular in America until the 1890s.

Height of Popularity: 1870-1890s
Distinguishing Features: Look for card-mounted photos that are 4.25 x 6.5 inches (108 x 164 mm). Most are portraits and don't include the name of the subject. An extensive logo can typically be found on the back of the card.

PICTURE POSTCARD
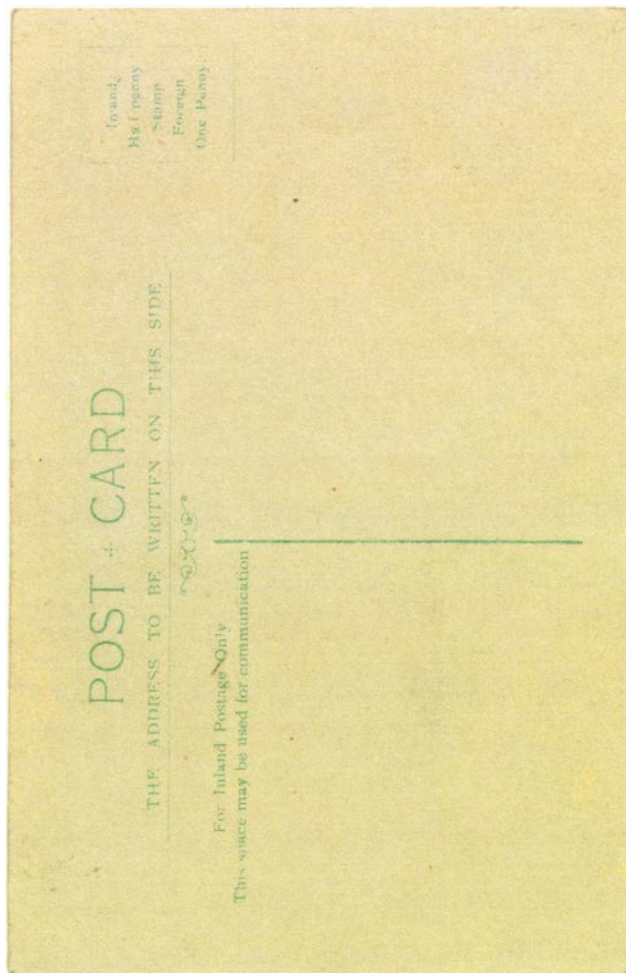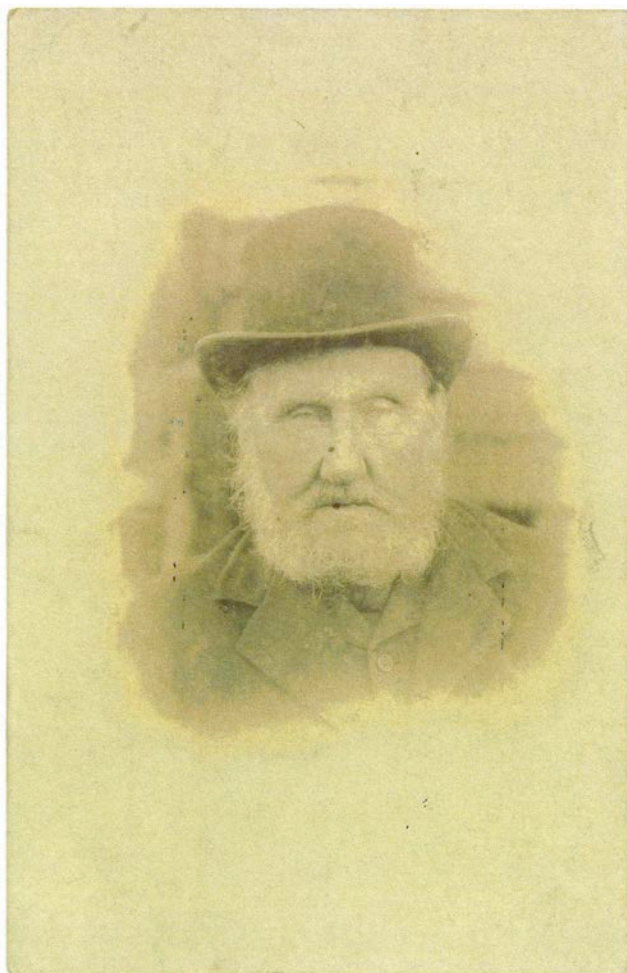
In the late 19th century, the picture postcard became an inexpensive way to mail images to friends and relatives. You could purchase postcard views of locations sold by the Detroit Photographic Co. and others, or you could request to have your portrait printed as a postcard by a local photography studio.
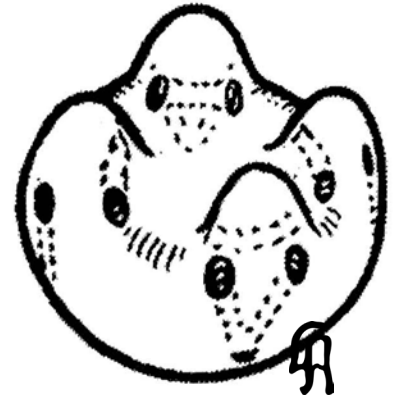
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