

Identify Your Ancestor In That Photograph

Strategies To Analyze & Determine Who Is In Your Family Photographs

by Lisa Lisson



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Introduction

Beginning to research our family's genealogy seemed to be the signal for the relatives to clean out their closets and under the beds. After visiting family members, I would return home with boxes of photographs and family keepsakes. Turns out my ancestors were pack rats, and thank goodness they were! They just were not the best organizers when it came to their photographs and papers.

As a result, the photographs and family papers were in complete disarray. Most smelled so musty the boxes could only be opened outside in fresh air on our deck. Most photographs were not labeled and were no longer in their albums. Most had been stored inside a trunk in an old tobacco barn for 50+ years!

The task before me was to identify all the individuals in the photographs. Such an undertaking was a daunting task to be sure. I have made a lot of progress in the past 12 years, but I have been able to introduce the current generations of the family to their ancestors by putting faces and names together. Still, more work is yet to be done.

I have studied and learned much about dating and identifying old photographs. *It is possible* to identify those unknown individuals in your ancestors' photographs. Throughout *Identify Your Ancestor In That Photograph* I will share the strategies I used (and continue to use) to identify my unknown photographs.

What you can expect in *Identify Your Ancestor In That Photograph*.

1. **Instruction** on effective strategies for dating and identifying your photograph.
2. **Tasks** related to each strategy. These are a great way to put into action what you have learned!
3. **A Workbook** to work through as you evaluate your photo(s).
4. **Access to an Exclusive Facebook Group** to chat and share with other readers of [Identify Your Ancestor in That Photograph: Strategies to Analyze & Determine Who Is In Your Family Photographs](#). I will be in the Facebook group as well, so be sure to join the conversations.

Go ahead and join the [exclusive Facebook group](#) now! [Click over and request to join](#). I look forward to our discussions and hearing about your successes in the [Facebook group](#).

You may be asking “What if I still cannot identify of my ancestor?” Yes, this may happen. As genealogy researchers we know solving research puzzles takes time. Regardless, you will know more about your photo than when you started increasing your chances of identifying your photo in the future.

Before We Get Started....

Before we get started studying the strategies for identifying those unknown photographs, I recommend you pick one (1) unidentified photograph from your collection to work with as you go through the book. In a sense I will come along beside you as you work to identify the individuals in your family's photographs.



Pick out an unknown photograph to work with
and let's get started!



Chapter 1

The Provenance of Your Photograph

How did you come to have your photograph(s)?

Let's begin thinking about the *provenance* or the history of ownership of your photograph.



(Source: Unsplash)

How did you come to have the photograph(s) in your family collection?
Who had the photograph before you? Which side of the family saved the

photographs through the generations? Which side of the family are the individuals in the photo from? Was the photograph in with a group of others? If so, what other photographs are in the group? Are some of those photographs identified.....even if just by surname?

Knowing the answers to any if not all of these questions can help place your unknown photograph in a particular family line. That alone will narrow down the possibilities of the individual's identities and move you closer to identification.

Is (or was) your unknown photograph in an old family photo album? Pay attention to the grouping of photographs. Often in family photo albums, the groupings of photos tend to be family groupings. Just as performing cluster genealogy can help break down your genealogy brick walls, determining the identity of others (either in the photograph or in the album) can provide valuable clues to identify your specific photograph.

Photographs in an album can also give a general timeline of the family's activities and the growth of children over time.

If photographs must be removed from a photo album for preservation purposes, scan the album or take digital photographs of each album page first. You will be able to maintain the family groupings and the timeline created by the photo album.

The photograph below is the one I will be using as an example throughout the book. It came to me as a loose photograph in a box of other miscellaneous family photos. This particular photograph has been in family since at least the early 1900's, but no one living knows the identity of this young man. Is he family or is he a family friend? The answer was unclear.



(Source: Private Collection of Lisa Lisson)

Provenance of the Photograph

The photograph was in a box of photographs that belonged to my paternal great grandmother Esther Richardson Talbott (1896-1925). This particular photograph and others were in the possession of her daughter Elma Talbott Solomon of South Boston, VA for many years. After Elma's death, the photos came into my possession. The photos were in no particular order and most were not labeled. Also, photos of varying types and ages were in the same box.

Clues to Carry Forward

For the photograph above, two clues were learned from its provenance:

- The photograph is from my paternal side of the family which includes the surnames Richardson, Talbott and Elliott. These families were living in Pittsylvania, Halifax and Mecklenburg Counties, Virginia. I could eliminate my maternal side of the family from consideration.
- The young man was important to Esther Richardson Talbott. He could be a family member or possibly a friend.

Now It Is YOUR Turn

For your unknown photograph, answer the following questions:

1. How did your photograph come into your possession? Who was the original owner?

2. Which family line is your photograph most likely linked?

3. Was the photograph in a group of other photographs? If so, do you know the identities of the other photographs?

Chapter 2

Determine the Type of Photograph You Have

In the previous chapter you learned the importance of a photograph's provenance or history of ownership. You thought about how you came to possess your family's photographs and the possible family line(s) the individual could belong to. You may have realized you knew a lot about your photograph or you may have determined very little about your photograph. Either way, that's okay.

Let's move to the next step.

There are 6 basic types of antique photographs. **Determine the type of photograph you are working with to narrow down the date of the photograph.**



Determine what type of photograph you have.

The 6 Types of Photographs

1. Daguerreotype (1840's – early 1860)

Daguerreotypes were popular from the 1840's -1860's. They are typically small with the most common size being 2 3/4 x 3 1/2 inches and housed in a case. Developed by Louis-Jaques-Mandé Daguerre, the daguerreotype involved exposing a silver-plated sheet of copper to a chemical fumes. Since the daguerreotype is on polished silver, it is reflective like a mirror. The image appears to almost “float”. Daguerreotypes are very fragile. They should be stored away from direct light and away from extreme temperatures. (In other words, keep them out of your attic!)



Daguerreotype (Source: [Daguerreotype collection \(Library of Congress\)](#))

2. Ambrotypes (1855-1865)

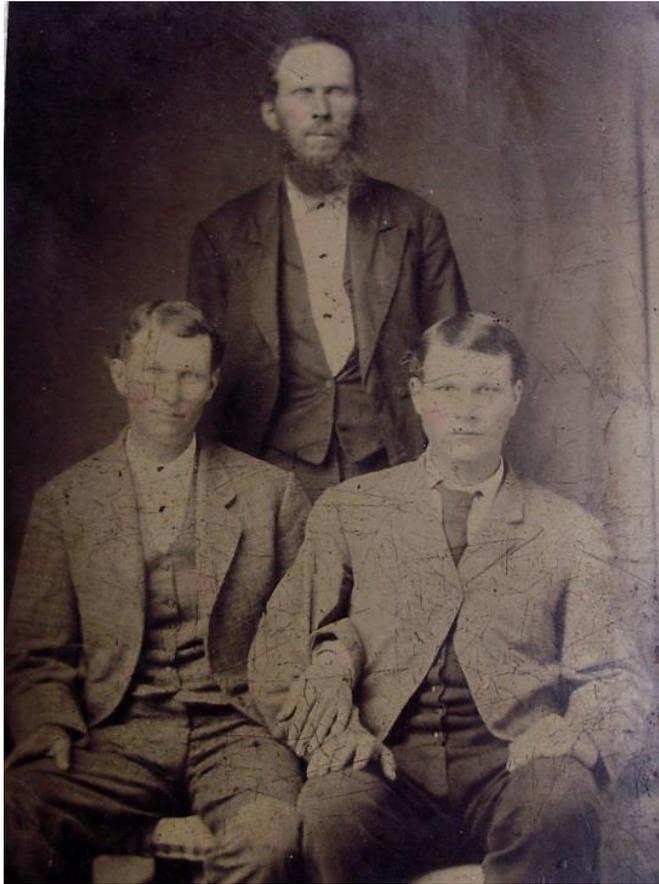


Ambrotype

(Source: [Ambrotype/Tintype filing series \(Library of Congress\)](#))

Ambrotypes are in small hinged cases like the daguerreotypes, but do not have that reflective, mirror-like quality. Ambrotypes are produced by the wet collodion plating or an emulsions process and the image is created on the glass. These, too, were fragile and were placed in small hinged cases. Like the daguerreotype, keep them out of direct sunlight and away from extreme temperatures.

3. Tintypes (1856-1890's)



Tintype (Source: Personal Collection of Lisa Lisson)

Tintypes were popular for more than 30 years. Instead of glass, the image was on an iron plate. Early tintypes were in small, hinged cases like the daguerreotypes and the ambrotypes. However, the cases were soon replaced by paper sleeves. Often today, tintypes are found in one's collection without the sleeves.

In the 1890's the tintypes were popular in carnivals. These images often show our ancestors in more relaxed poses sometimes allowing us a glimpse into their personalities.

Because the tintype was popular for so many years, the researcher needs to study the fashions worn by the tintype subjects to further narrow the time frame for the photograph.

4. Cartes des Visites (Introduced in 1859)

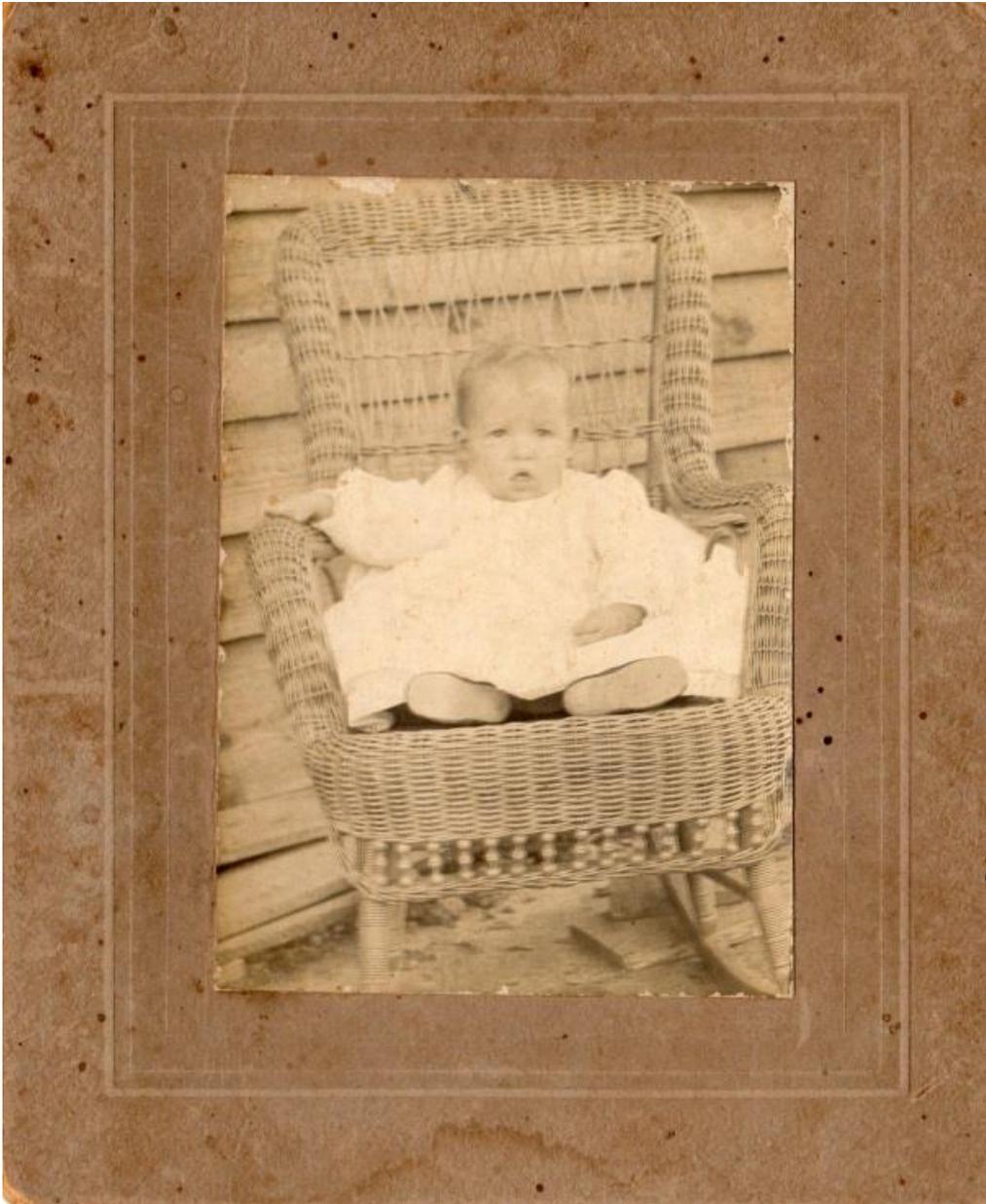


Carte de Visite (Source: Personal Collection of Lisa Lisson)

These small albumen printed photographs were popular in the 1860's-1870's. Measuring 2 1/2 " by 4", the photographs were mounted on a thick paper and used much as the calling card was used in the 1850's. The Civil

War saw a rise in the carte de visite's popularity as soldiers and families exchanged photographs. You will often see carte de visite referred to as a CDV.

5. Cabinet Cards (1860-1890's)



Cabinet Card (Source: Personal Collection of Lisa Lisson)

Cabinet cards and cartes des visites (CDV) are often confused. Like the CDV, the cabinet card was also an albumen print on thin paper and mounted on thicker paper. The primary difference is the cabinet card is larger and may have a photographer's logo on the reverse side. The cabinet card reached its peak popularity in the 1880's.

Because the cabinet card was used for many years, studying the types and colors of the papers used are essential to determining the age.

The cardstock of earlier cabinet cards (from ~ 1866 – 1880) were cream colored or off white. After 1880 other colors of cardstock such as dark green, red, burgundy, black, brown and dark gray were being used.

Characteristics of the photograph itself provide clues to the date it was taken. The photograph I am using as an example throughout this book is a thick brown "cardboard" stock measuring 4 3/4 x 6 3/4 inches. The size, thickness and color of the photograph identify it as a **cabinet card**.

Cabinet cards were at their highest popularity in the 1880's and 1890's. While not as popular in the early 1900's, cabinet cards were not rare either. Bold colors on the back such as deep browns, reds and greens began being used in the 1800's-1890's and into the 1900's.

The photograph of the baby above is a cabinet card dating from 1880's to the early 1900's. The brown color of the cardstock indicates the cabinet card is more likely from the early 1900's.

6. Real Photo Postcards



(Source: Private Collection of Lisa Lisson)

Real Photo Postcards (RPPC) were popular from 1907-1920. Because the RPPC could be sent through the mail, it had some unique features such as the design, postmarks and stamps that help date the postcard and place it in a location.



Post 1907 RPPC

Photographs of individuals or groups of individuals were developed on a thicker cardstock. “Postcard” is written on the back. In 1907, the divided back was used creating a space on the left for the message and a space on the right for the address. Dating a photo postcard as pre- or post- 1907 is a quick task.

A postmark on the RPPC will certainly date the postcard. Often these are not legible, but when they you can make quick work of dating the postcard.

You can also have a location for the sender and an address/location for the recipient. All of this is relevant information for dating the postcard and identifying the individuals.



Post 1907 Photo Postcard (Source: Private Collection of Lisa Lisson)

If the stamp is still attached to the postcard, what is its value? Up until 1958, postcard stamps cost 1¢ (1 cent). From 1917-1919, a postcard stamp cost 2¢ (2 cents). The increase correlates with World War I and reflects the government's need to raise funds for the war effort.

Was the postcard in your possession ever mailed? Could it be an extra your ancestor had? Could it have been hand delivered or exchanged in person? Remember how we used to do that with our extra school pictures? If that is the case, then the person in the photograph lived in close proximity to your ancestor. Knowing the history of the postcard and in whose possession it was during the years, will help you identify an unknown individual.

Note: I have given you a brief description of the common types of photographs you may come across. If you would like to learn more on a

certain type (or all!) of the photograph types, see the **Resources section** (page ____).



Clues to Carry Forward

Looking at the photograph from Chapter 2, more clues were gathered by determining the photograph's type:

- The photograph is an irregularly shaped cabinet card.
- The size $2\frac{3}{4} \times 8\frac{3}{4}$ inches and the deep brown color indicate the photograph dates to the late 1890's – early 1900's.

Now It Is YOUR Turn

For your unknown photograph, determine the following:

1. Measurements of Your Photograph

- Width _____
- Height _____

2. Thickness of Your Photograph

- Thick "cardstock" paper? _____
- Thinner paper photograph? _____
- Is your photo metal? _____

3. Color

- Color of cardstock: _____

4. What is your best estimation for the time period of your photograph? _____

Chapter 3

Use Google Image Search of Your Photos in Your Genealogical Research

Like most everyone these days, I search the internet using a search engine such as Google. I search using keywords and phrases. I “**google**” everything! Everything that is *except* the images in my family history files.

Think of the potential....

You ancestors’ photos could be in someone else’s closet. Those photos could be on someone else’s blog about **their** ancestors. Perhaps you could identify an unidentified ancestor on another researcher’s blog. Perhaps another researcher could identify an unidentified photograph from your blog. I routinely post on [Are You My Cousin?](#) unidentified photographs of people in my files in hopes they will be identified.

Unfortunately, Google and other search engines do not search for images on subscription based websites such as [Ancestry](#), [FindMyPast](#) and [MyHeritage](#). You will have to search those databases individually.

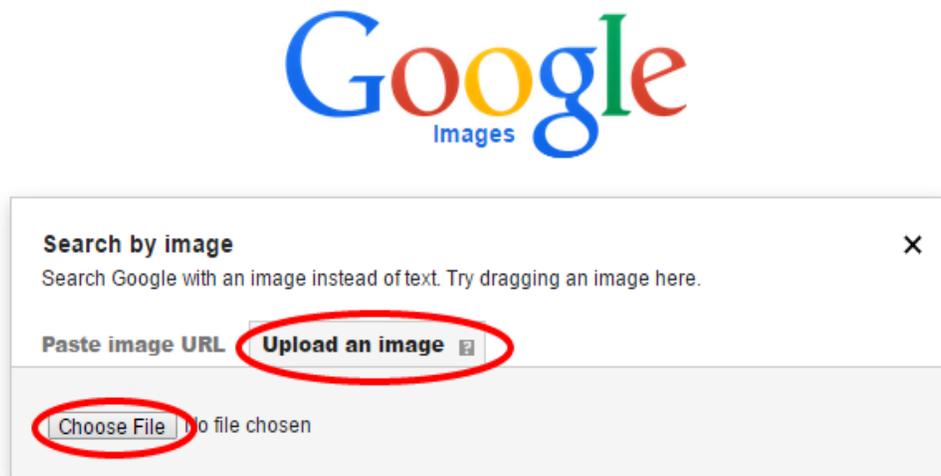
Back to Google Image Search.....

Below are the steps to search for an image on Google.

1. Go to www.Google.com/imghp. Click the camera icon on the right side of the search box.



2. Click “Upload an Image”. Then choose the image from your computer.



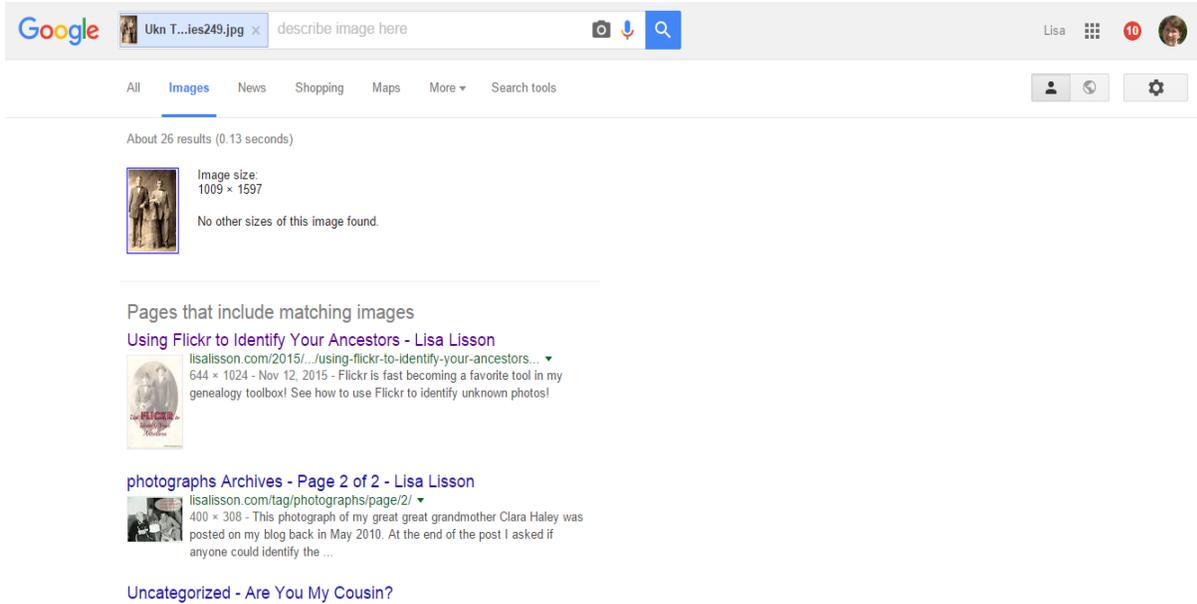
3. Highlight the image you want to search and click “Open”.

As an example, I uploaded the following photograph.



The search results are below.

As you can see, the image of the young men was found nowhere else on the internet other than my own website.



If this happens to you, take a closer look at the results you do get. You will get “similar photographs” returned in your search results. While not a match for your photograph, you can still use these photographs to help in the identification and dating process. Click on photographs with similarly dressed people or similar types of props or poses. If those are of known individuals and/or a known date, you can compare your photograph to those and get clues to the date your photograph was taken.

There are certainly no guarantees when performing your google image search on your unknown photograph, but the time required to do you image search is minimal. Success is possible and when you find it, you will be doing the genealogy happy dance!

How did your google image search turn out?

Clues to Carry Forward

- Unfortunately, no new clues came from the Google image search of my unknown cabinet. If that happens for you, just move on to the next strategy. Not every strategy yields a positive result.

Now It Is YOUR Turn

1. Perform a Google image search on your unknown photograph.
2. If your photograph is not found, explore the “similar photographs” for potential clues to dating your own photograph.

Chapter 4

Let's Talk About Tax Stamps!

I was browsing through a local antique shop recently and came across a photo album. The album was obviously old and held a few cartes des visites and cabinet cards. As I examined the photographs, I flipped one over and discovered an orange stamp on the back. I was immediately able to date the photo.

The Sun Picture Tax

Have you gone through your ancestors' photographs? Have you found any with a stamp on the back? If so, you can narrow down the date the photograph was taken to a narrow point in time.

Known as **The Sun Picture Tax**, the government charged a tax on photographs from 1 August 1864 to 1 August 1866. The amount of tax per photograph varied based on cost of the photograph. Tax stamp denominations were most commonly 1, 2, or 3 cents. The popular cartes des visites (CDV) were among those photographs required to have tax stamps during this time period. One cent stamps began being charged for less expensive photos from March 1865 to 1 August 1866. After 1 August 1866, this tax law was repealed.

Why did such a tax exist?

The Sun Picture Tax was a **revenue tax** designed to generate money for the government as the long Civil War continued to be

fought. Photographers were to charge this revenue tax on photographs, daguerreotypes and ambrotypes. Once the customer paid the appropriate tax, the photographer placed a stamp on the photograph, initialed it and dated it. By doing this, the photographs essentially canceled the stamp and showed the tax paid.

What genealogist would not do the genealogy happy dance to find a specific date on an ancestor's photograph?

Sometimes, the researcher is not always so fortunate. The tax stamp may be present, but have no date, simply an "X". Photographers were human and took shortcuts. Simply writing an "X" was simpler and quicker. Over the years, the stamp may have fallen off leaving a darker square where it was. While these instances do not provide an exact date for the photograph, the existence of the stamp (or the outline) does give the researcher a time period for the photograph.



Tax stamps can narrow down a photograph's age.

Photograph Tax Stamp Denominations

Photograph tax stamps were different colors based on their denominations.

- **Green** - 3 cent stamps were **green**. Photos requiring this stamp cost 25-50 cents.



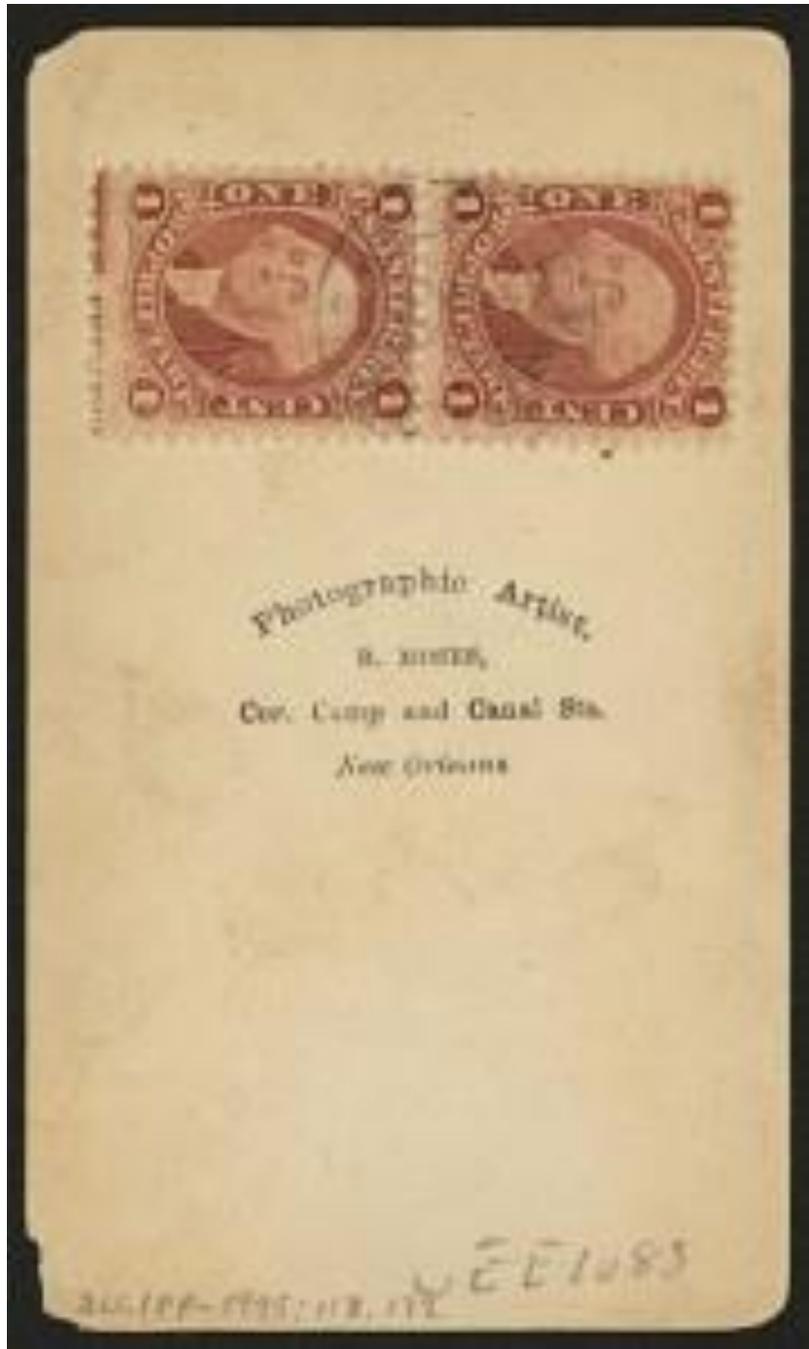
Example of a Tax Stamp
(Source: [Library of Congress](#))

- **Orange** or **Blue** – 2 cent stamps were either **orange** or **blue**. Photos requiring this stamp cost 25 cents or less.



(Source: [Library of Congress](#))

- **Red** – The rare 1 cent stamp was **red** and only used from March 1865-1 August 1866. Photos requiring this stamp cost less than 10 cents.



Example of Red 1 Cent Stamp
(Source: [Library of Congress](#))

- **Red** – The 5-cent stamp was used on photographs selling for 51 cents to 1 dollar.



5 Cent Stamp on a Daguerreotype (Source: [Library of Congress](#))

Photographers were obviously very much against this taxation. With war-time inflation and the rise in the number of photographers' studios and competition, an added tax raised the cost of doing business even more.

I have given you the basics on the tax stamps and identification of your photograph's time period above.

If you are interested in reading more about the tax stamps during the Civil War explore Bruce Baryla's website [The Civil War Sun Picture Tax](#) .

Clues to Carry Forward

- The date of the photograph in our example has already been determined as the late 1890's to early 1900's. Since it was out of the time for the tax stamps, this strategy was skipped.

Now It Is YOUR Turn

1. Flip your photograph over.
2. Is there a tax stamp affixed to your photo? _____
3. If so, what color and denomination is it? _____
4. Is there an outline of where a tax stamp likely was? _____

Chapter 5

Let's Talk Fashion!

Fashions in a Photograph

Having their photograph taken was an "event" for our ancestors. As you and I do when we prepare for a family photo, our ancestors paid particular attention to their appearance and fashion was important.

The styles of clothing worn by our ancestors in their photographs are valuable clues in determining the time frame a photograph was taken. Don't forget the hairstyles, too!

After all, if I ask you to imagine what a woman wore in the 1980's, we all immediately have a visual of that 1980's style with big shoulder pads, power suits and big hair!

The 1950's? We think poodle skirts, pedal pushers and saddle shoes.

Attention to fashion and styles was no different for those earlier decades.

Fashions came and went. When attempting to identify an unknown individual in a photo, we need to familiarize ourselves with the styles our ancestors may have worn.



As you examine the clothing of the individuals in a photograph, take note of details such as the shape or height of a collar, the shape of the sleeves, or the fit of a dress bodice. Were large bows or buttons being worn. What is the shape or style of a man's tie? What is the cut of a man's coat? How wide are the lapels?

Fashion details changed over time and continue to do so even in today's fashion world. It is difficult to be an expert in fashions for all decades. Fortunately, many fabulous resources are available for your reference.

[Godey's Lady's Book](#) was an American women's magazine from the 19th century and is good resource for early women's fashions.

For more on women's fashions, the magazine [Harper's Bazaar](#) is a great resource. First published in 1867, for 150+ years Harper's Bazaar has

catered to middle- and upper-class women. The magazine featured everything from European fashion to how to's for wear new hair styles to fiction to articles on homemaking and women's social issues.

HARPER'S BAZAR.

A Repository of Fashion, Pleasure, and Instruction.

Vol. IV.—No. 3] NEW YORK, SATURDAY, JANUARY 21, 1871. [SINGLE COPIES TEN CENTS
\$4.00 PER YEAR IN ADVANCE.

Ladies' House Dresses. velvet ribbon. The bustle-waist is trimmed in the same manner. Bands of ribbon are trimmed with pleated ruffles and a bow of colored ribbon. Fig. 2.—VIOLET SILK DRESS WITH VEILED CLOUTIER OVER DRESS AND YARD. The dress is trimmed with a wide gathered sash, which is edged with a wide-pleated ruffle. Show the figure on narrow side of the material. The over dress is draped at the sides, and the bottom is lined with violet silk, and trimmed with black lace and violet velvet, as shown by the illustration. The waist is trimmed with velvet, lace, and silk. The bustle collar and underclothes trimmed with wide-pleated Swiss muslin ruffles. Violet silk ribbon bow for the hair.



LADIES' HOUSE DRESSES.

21 January 1871 Harper's Bazar (Source: [Google Books](https://books.google.com/books?id=...))

[The Sear's, Roebuck and Co. historic catalogs](#) are another good resource for women's fashions from 1896 up through 1993 and are available on [Ancestry.com](#).



1860's Photograph (Source: [Library of Congress](#))

Hairstyles in a Photograph

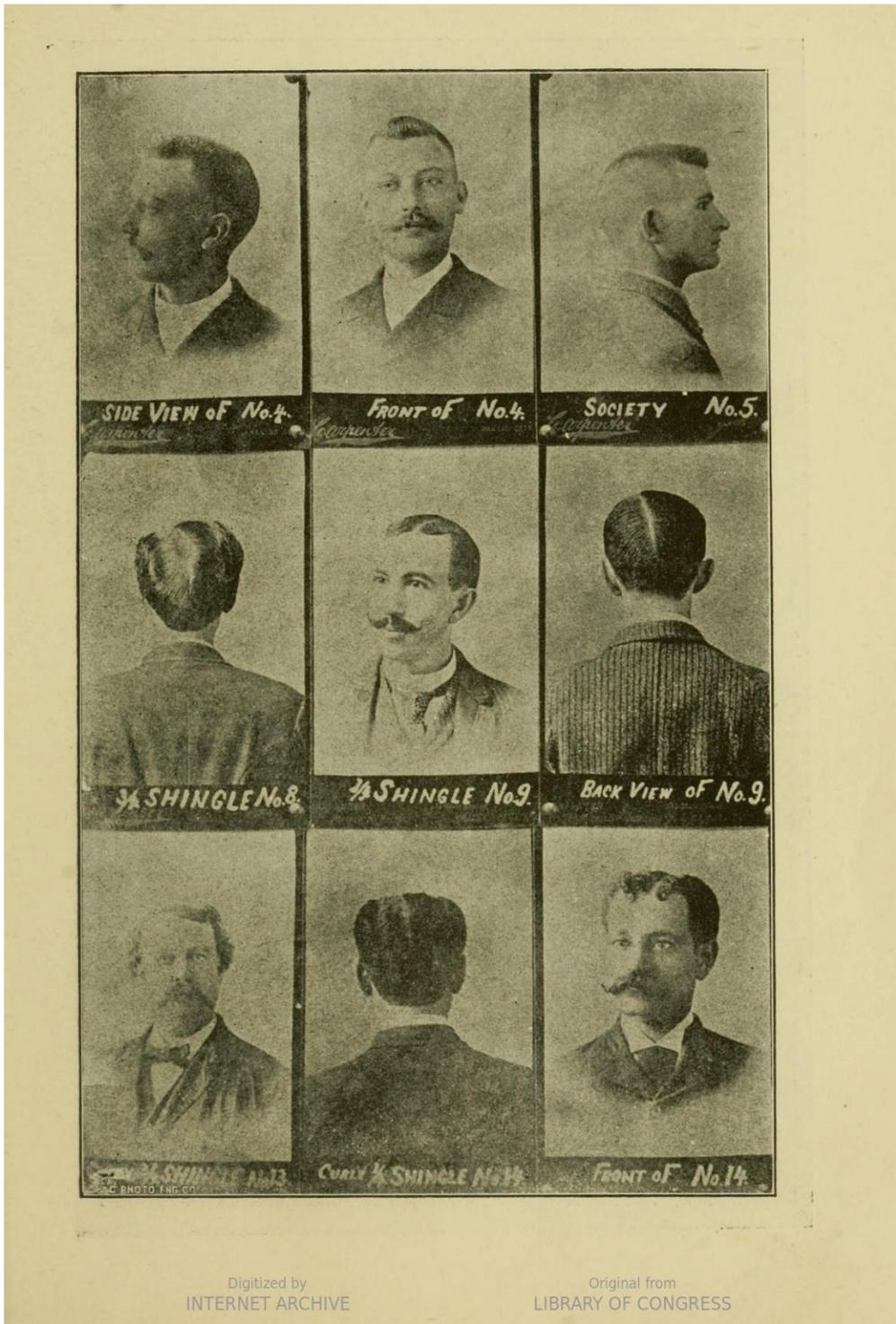


Mary Elizabeth Scott (Source: From Cynthia Welcher)

Just like the style of clothing, the photograph's subject's hairstyle will provide information about the time period the photograph was taken. Was the hair parted on the side or in the middle? How was the front of the hair styled? Did the individual have bangs?

Pay attention to your ancestor's hair! This holds true for men, women and children.

Below is a sample of the varieties of men's hair fashions found in the [Barber Instructor and Toilet Manual](#) for 1900.



Digitized by
INTERNET ARCHIVE

Original from
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

1900 Men's Hairstyles from [Barber Instructor & Toilet Manual](#) ©1900 (Source: [HathiTrust](#))

If children are in the photograph, the hairstyle can indicate the gender of the child when their fashions do not clearly indicate male or female. Typically, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, young boys' hair was parted on the side and young girls' hair was parted down the middle.

In the photo below, note the child's side part indicating the photo is of a male child.



Cabinet Card of Unknown Male Child (Source: Personal Collection of Lisa Lisson)

If you are unfamiliar with the fashions of your ancestors' days, take time to learn more. Many great resources are available to assist you.

Examples include:

- [Fashionable Folks: Bonnets and Hats, 1840-1900](#) by Maureen Taylor
- [Victorian Fashions and Costumes from Harper's Bazar, 1867-1898 \(Dover Fashion and Costumes\)](#) by Stella Blum
- *Harper's Bazar* at [Google Books](#)
- [Fashionable Folks Hairstyles 1840-1900](#) by Maureen Taylor is a great resource
- [Fashion-Era](#)
- [The Historic Catalogs of Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1896-1993 Collection at Ancestry.com](#)
- [Out-of-Style: An Illustrated Guide to Vintage Fashions](#)



Props Used in a Photograph

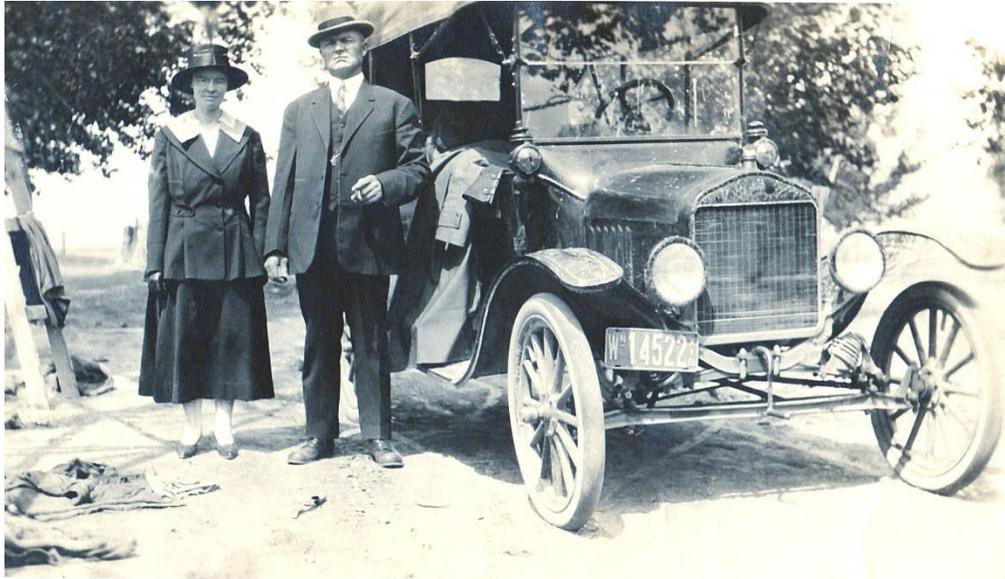


Notice the wicker settee and the backdrop (Source: Private Collection of Lisa Lisson)

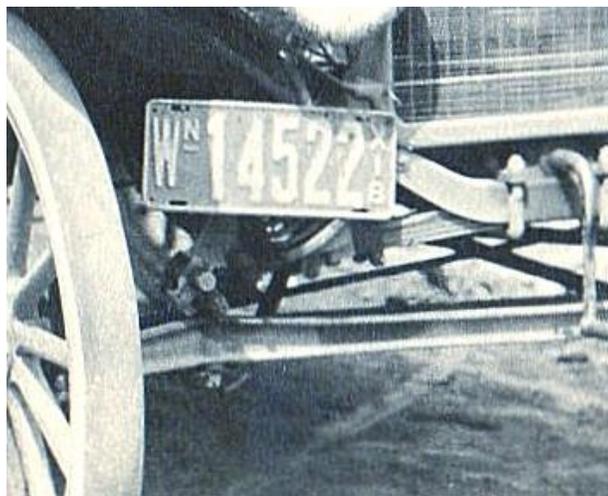
Look closely at any props or scenery being used in the photograph with the individual(s).

What props are used in the photograph? What type of backdrop is used? Was the photograph taken in a studio? Was the photograph taken in front of the family home? Are any of the individuals wearing military uniforms? The style of a military uniform can place the individual in a specific time.

Is there an automobile in the photograph? The make and model of a car can date a photograph as well.



A close up of the license plate...



... reveals a 1918 Washington state license plate placing this couple in Washington in 1918.

The answers to all of these questions provide important information on time, place and family line of the unknown individual.

Back to our example from Chapter 1.....



Clues to Carry Forward

Looking at the young man's hair and clothes, this cabinet card can be dated to the 1910's.

- The short, well-groomed hair parted off center was popular in the 1910's.
- The long double-breasted coat he is wearing was popular in the 1910's.
- No props were used and the photo appears to have been taken in a studio with a plain backdrop.

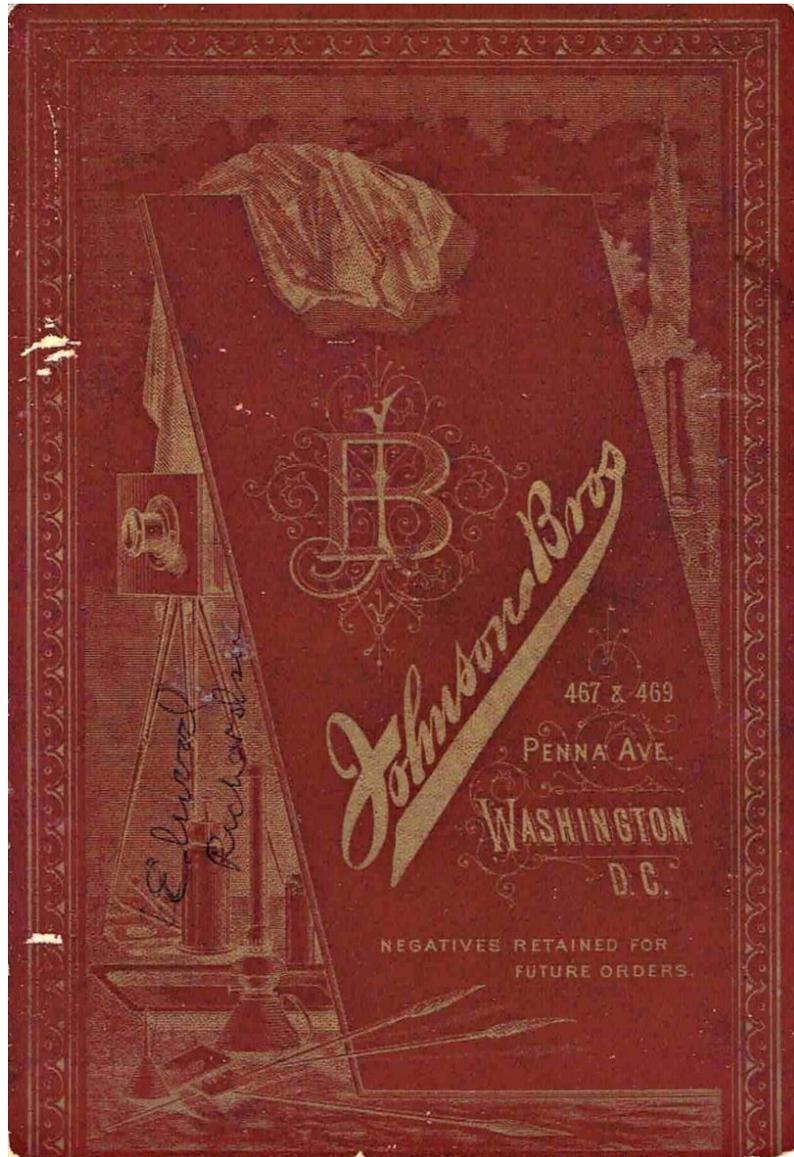
Now It Is YOUR Turn

Examine your unknown photograph and answer the questions.

1. If a woman, describe the style of dress she is wearing. Pay attention to the sleeves, fit of the bodice and type of collar.
2. If a man, describe the style of suit he is wearing. Pay attention to the length of coat, the type of collar and tie. Is he wearing a hat? What type?
3. Describe the hairstyle of your ancestor in the photo.
4. Use the resources presented above to determine the time period your ancestor would have worn these fashions.

Chapter 6

Research the Photograph's Photographer



(Source: Private Collection of Lisa Lisson)

You cannot miss the photographer's logo on the back of this cabinet card. A photographer's mark may be on the back or the front of the cabinet card. Earlier cabinet cards typically have smaller, more discreet marks or simply a photographer's name.



(Source: [Library of Congress](#))

A photographer's logo provides valuable clues when attempting to identify a photograph including the location where the photograph was taken. Research into the photographer can provide a time frame and a location for the photograph as well.



Knowing the photographer provides valuable clues about your photograph.

In this example, the photograph was taken by Johnson Bros. Photographers of 467 & 469 Penna. [Pennsylvania] Ave. in Washington, D.C. A search of

Washington, D.C. directories revealed a number of Johnsons as photographers from the 1860's – 1920's.

BERRY & WHITMORE CO. | **F and 11th N. W.** | **Diamonds, Watches, Jewelry,**
Odd Things Not Found | **Stationery, Engraving, Tiffany**
Elsewhere | **Favrile Glass and Bronzes**

826 JOH 1911 DISTRICT OF JOH

There are 34 different Wines from Ten Specialty Growers in California in the Stock of CHRIS. XANDER'S, FAMILY QUALITY HOUSE, 909 Seventh Street.

Johnson John P, driver, 1220 R nw
 Johnson John P, janitor, Ivy City ne
 Johnson John R, carp, Congress hts
 Johnson John R, cornicemkr, 2318 I nw
 Johnson John R, lab, 238 Oakdale pl nw
 Johnson John R, waiter, 1412 12th nw
 Johnson John S (Johnson Bpos), 714 E se
 Johnson John S, lab, 56 Seaton pl ne
 Johnson John T, chemist, 329 H ne
 Johnson John T, clk int, 706 7th ne
 Johnson John T, slsmn, 421 Q nw
 Johnson John V, printer, 801 H ne
 Johnson John W, clk, 1206 O nw
 Johnson John W, clk cen o, 2132 Pa av nw
 Johnson John W, driver, 104 4th nw
 Johnson John W, gateman, 509 Lamont nw
 Johnson John W, lab, 1835 Benning rd ne
 Johnson John W, lab, 1520 C se
 Johnson J Orville, photogr, 467 Pa av nw
 Johnson Jos, brklyr, 314 D se
 Johnson Jos, coachman, 1332 Wallach pl nw
 Johnson Jos, cook, 228 1/2 O nw
 Johnson Jos, driver, 332 W nw
 Johnson Jos, lab, 2120 C nw
 Johnson Jos, lab, 328 H sw
 Johnson Jos, lab, 58 Pierce nw
 Johnson Jos, lab, Sargent rd ne

Johnson Josephine R, grocer, 475 C nw
 Johnson Joshua, lab, 1426 R I av nw
 Johnson Joshua, waiter, 1230 6 1/2 pl nw
 Johnson J S, police, 1008 I nw
 Johnson Julia, 823 3d sw
 Johnson Julia, cook, 1421 8th nw
 Johnson Julia, dom, 1333 N nw
 Johnson Julia, laund, 418 N nw
 Johnson Julia, wid Armistead, 1810 L nw
 Johnson Julia G, clk cen o, 1337 T nw
 Johnson Julius, clk i c c, Vienna, Va
 Johnson Julius, lab, 1128 Bladensburg rd ne
 Johnson Julius L, g ptg o, 723 3d nw
 Johnson J Wilton, photogr, Kenilworth
 Johnson Kate, clk, 1002 1st nw
 Johnson Kate, dressmkr, 421 Q nw
 Johnson Kate, sewing, 427 V nw
 Johnson Kate, laund, 2616 H nw
 Johnson Kate, laund, 424 N nw
 Johnson Kate P, clk p o d, 3431 Oakwood ter nw
 Johnson Kath, wid Moses B, 450 Franklin nw
 Johnson Kath E, asst supt, National Homeopathic Hospital
 Johnson Kath M, 1477 Newton nw
 Johnson Kath M, pub libr, 1627 H ne
 Johnson Katie, cook, Insane Asylum
 Johnson Kellar, lab, 106 3d nw
 Johnson Kitty A, cook, 1262 21st nw
 Johnson L A, lab, 1512 Corcoran nw
 Johnson Lamonte K, g ptg o, Silver Spring, Md
 Johnson Landonia, dom, 111 Schott al ne
 Johnson Lars J, mach, 349 11th se

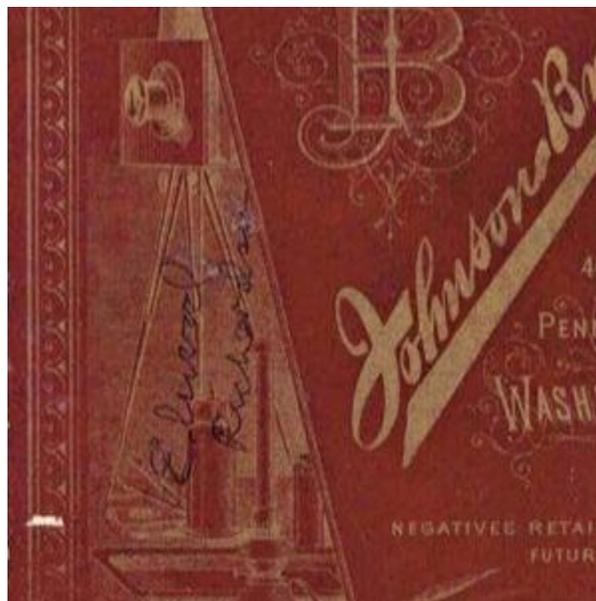
1911 Washington, DC Directory (Source: [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com))

City directories can be valuable resources when searching for possible photographers of your ancestors. Directories will give you a location and often the occupation of individuals (in this case, photographer.) Because directories came out yearly, you can track a photographer year by year giving you the ability to place the photographer and your ancestor in a specific time and place.

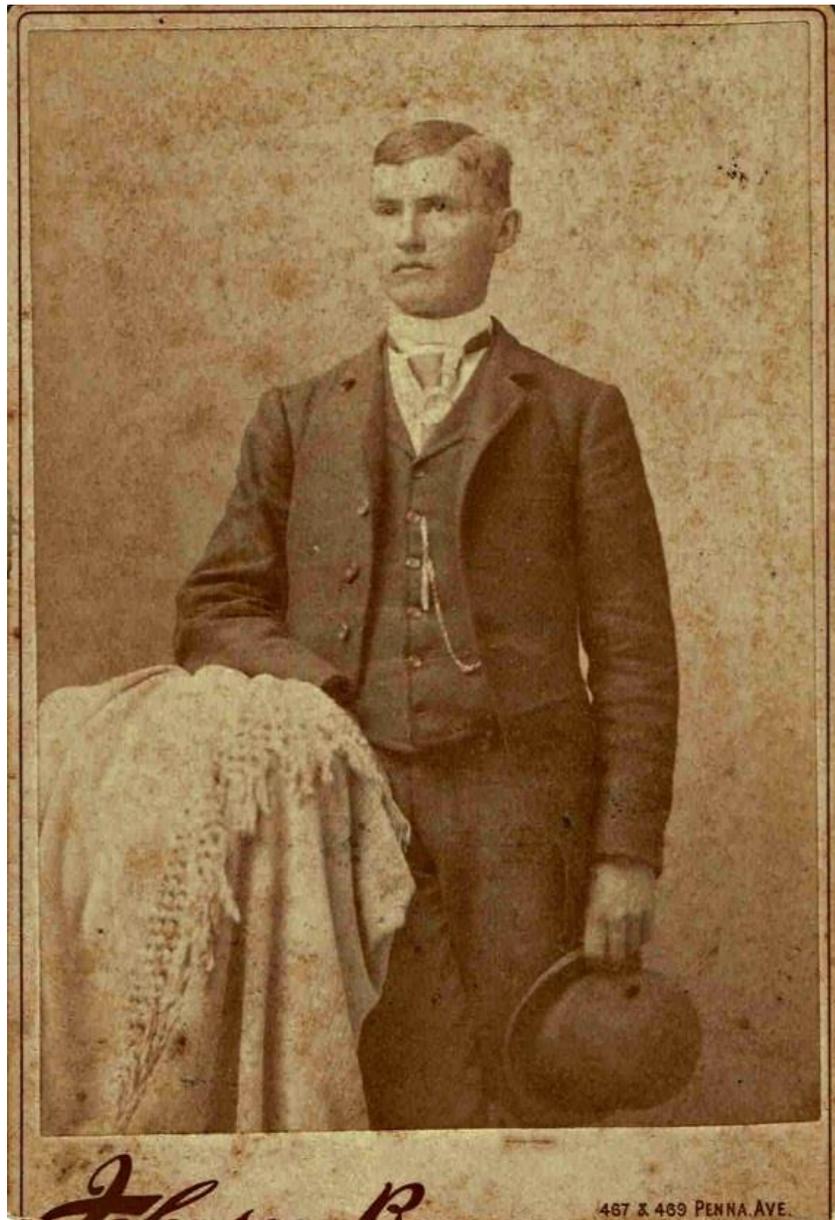
If directories do not exist for the area you are researching, the census records will help you place the photographer and your unidentified ancestor in a time and place. You can search the census using the photographer's name or search by occupation (photographer) and location. Take that information and determine which of your ancestors could have been in that area during the time and potentially had their photograph taken.

By researching the Johnson Bros photographers in the earlier photograph, the young man was identified as William F. Elliott, a first cousin of Esther Lee Richardson.

You may have noticed the name Elwood Richardson written on the back of the cabinet card in blue ink (!). Elwood was Esther Richardson's younger brother born in 1911 and could not be the young man in the photo. This represents a relative incorrectly identifying the photograph before it came into my possession.



Tip: Just because a photograph is labeled, if the identification does not make sense, verify it for yourself.



William F. Elliott (Source: Private Collection of Lisa Lisson)

You can read more about this particular photograph and how the young man was identified in Appendix A (page ___)

Clues to Take Away



This is a close up of the photographer's mark on our sample photograph. The photograph was taken by Campbell & Co Artists in Richmond, VA.

- This photograph places the young man in Richmond, Virginia during the 1910's. This is consistent with the location of Esther Richardson's family lines.

Now It's YOUR Turn

1. Does your photograph have a photographer's logo on the back?
2. Is the photographer's name on the front of the photo at the bottom?
3. If so, what is the name and location of the photographer?
4. Use the census records and city directories to determine the time period the photographer was working in the indicated location.

Chapter 7

Compare Your New Information with Your Family Tree!

Putting the Clues Together

Now is the time to turn to the family tree and previous genealogy research.

You have worked through your photograph's history, determined the photograph's type and studied the fashions worn. You have determined an approximate (if not specific) date the photograph was taken.

Now is the time to look at the family tree you have built through your genealogy research.

Who in your family tree fits the date and history of your photograph?

You may well come up with several individuals in your tree who the photograph could be. That's okay.



You may well come up with several individuals in your tree who the photograph could be. That's okay!

You may know immediately who is in the photograph or you may come up with several potential candidates the individual(s) could be.

If you identify more than one possibility the individual(s) could be, you still have more work to do. We will talk about that in the next chapter.

Putting All the Clues Together

Let's review what we know about the example we have been looking at throughout the last few chapters.

- The photograph is from my paternal side of the family which includes the surnames Richardson, Talbott and Elliott. These families were living in Pittsylvania, Halifax and Mecklenburg Counties, Virginia.
- The young man was important to Esther Richardson Talbott. He could be a family member or possibly a friend.
- The photograph is an irregularly shaped cabinet card of the type common in the late 1890's – early 1900's.
- The style of the young man's clothes and hair were popular in the 1910's.
- The photographer was in Richmond, VA in the 1910's.

My family tree was searched for young men on the Richardson, Elliott or Talbott family lines living in the early 1900's in Virginia.

Putting all the clues together, the young man in the cabinet card was identified as **Sumpter H. Adams (1891-1935)**, a first cousin of Esther Richardson.

Now It's YOUR Turn

Look back at your family tree and previous genealogy. Can you make a positive identification? If not, determine who are possible candidates for the individual(s) in the photo and move on to the next strategies.

Chapter 8

Find Clues to Your Ancestor's Physical Appearance

Do you know what your ancestors looked like?

Do you know their physical characteristics?

Do you know how tall they were? How short?

The color of their eyes and hair?

What traits ran in the family?

Did they have any physical deformities?

If we as genealogists know even some of these things, we can use that for comparison to identify individuals in a photograph. This is especially helpful if you have determined your photo has more than one potential candidate.

Let's look at places to find physical descriptions of your ancestors.

5 Places to Find Physical Characteristics of Your Ancestor

- 1. WWI Draft Cards** – Includes height (tall, medium or short), weight (slender, medium or stout), eye color, hair color, if bald and physical deformities.

REGISTRATION CARD 5'01 No. 12

1 Name in full Cassiem Howard (Family name) 25 (Age, in yrs)

2 Home address Jonesboro MO (Town) (State)

3 Date of birth Nov 21 1891 (Month) (Day) (Year)

4 Are you (1) a natural born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) have you declared your intention (specify which)? Natural born citizen

5 Where were you born? Jonesboro MO USA (Town) (State) (Country)

6 If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?

7 What is your present trade, occupation, or office? Farming

8 By whom employed? Self

9 Where employed? Jonesboro MO

10 Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 18, or a sister or brother under 18, wholly dependent on you for support (specify which)? wife, child

11 Married or single (which)? married Cause Causes

12 What military service have you had? Rank none branch none years none Nation or State none

13 Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)?

I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.

Cassiem Howard (Signature of registrant)

REGISTRAR'S REPORT

1 Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? medium Slender, medium, or stout (which)? medium

2 Color of eyes? Brown Color of hair? Brown Bald? no

3 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? no

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

S. S. Shaw (Signature of registrar)

Precinct Broadway

City or County Lee

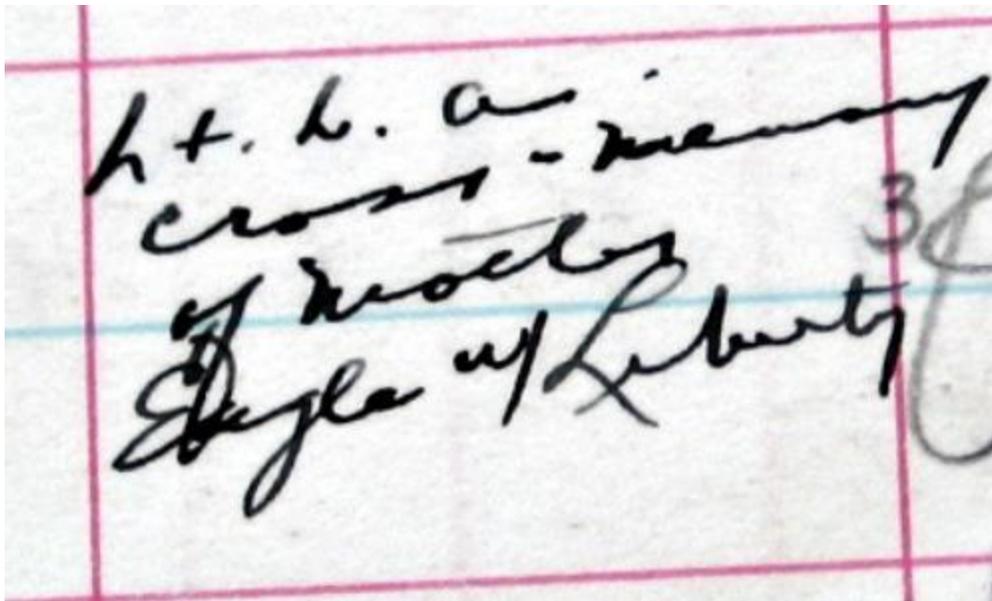
State MO 6/17 (Date of registration)

WWI Draft Card (Source: [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com))

2. WWII Draft Cards – Includes height, weight, eye color, hair color, complexion, and lists physical deformities.

3. Civilian Conservation Corp (CCC) Records – Includes height, weight, eye color, hair color, complexion, physical deformities.

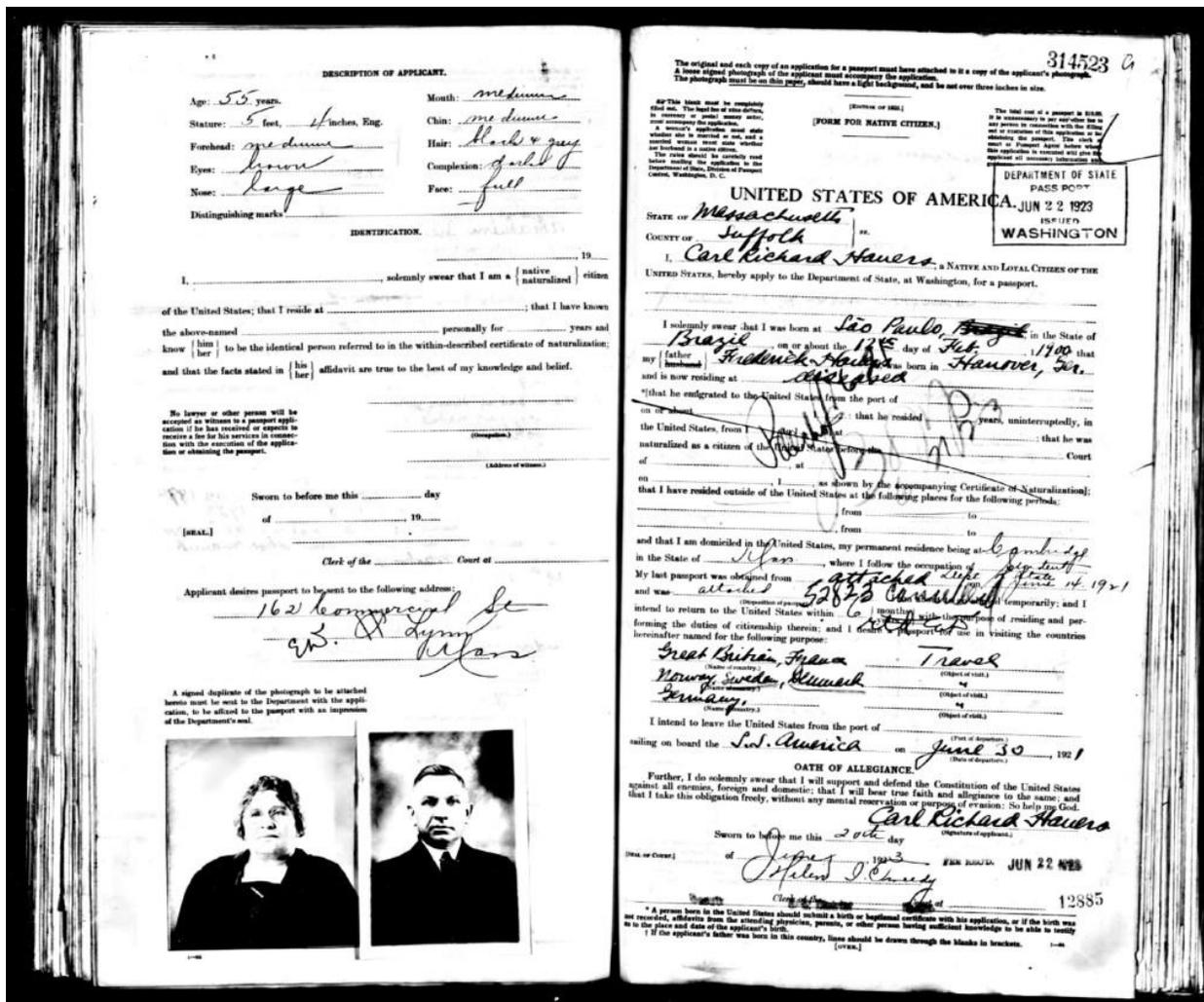
4. Jail Records - (varies) Includes height, weight, eye color, hair color, tattoos, scars, physical deformities. Note the details on this inmate of Deer Island, MA in 1940. On his Left lower arm is a tattoo of a cross in memory of his mother and a tattoo of an eagle with Liberty.



Description of Inmate's Tattoos

5. Passport Applications – (varies with time period) Includes height, weight, eye color, forehead, face shape, chin, mouth, hair color, complexion, and physical deformities. Often there is a photograph of the applicant!





1921 Passport Application of Abraham Jacobs (Source: [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com))

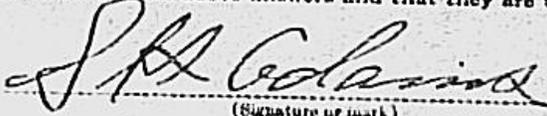
6. ****Bonus** Oral History** – Don't forget your family's oral history. Statements like "The Carrs were always short." can help rule out the tall lanky young man as not a Carr.



What did your ancestor look like?

Clues To Take Away

A look into my family tree had revealed Sumpter H Adams of Virginia was likely the identity of the man in the photograph, but taking things one step further, I found Sumpter's WWI draft record.

Form 1 2467		REGISTRATION CARD		No. 2,53
1	1936	Name in full (Given name) Sumpter Hutcherson Adams	(Family name)	Age, in yrs. 25
2	Home address (No.) 414	(Street) Wilson	(City) Danville	(State) Va.
3	Date of birth (Month) 08	(Day) 25	(Year) 1891	
4	Are you (1) a natural-born citizen, (2) a naturalized citizen, (3) an alien, (4) or have you declared your intention (specify which)? Natural Born			
5	Where were you born? (Town) Near Danville		(State) Va.	(Nation) USA
6	If not a citizen, of what country are you a citizen or subject?			
7	What is your present trade, occupation, or office? Elevator Erector			
8	By whom employed? Moffatt Machine Mfg Co.			
	Where employed? Chas Lott KC			
9	Have you a father, mother, wife, child under 12, or a sister or brother under 12, solely dependent on you for support (specify which)? Brother under 12			
10	Married or single (which)? Single		Race (specify which)? Caucasian	
11	What military service have you had? Rank None; branch			
	years: : Nation or State			
12	Do you claim exemption from draft (specify grounds)? No			
I affirm that I have verified above answers and that they are true.				
 (Signature or mark)				
If person is of Alien descent, tear off this corner.				

WWI Draft Record of Sumpter H Adams (Source: Ancestry.com)

Page 1

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REGISTRAR'S REPORT

1 Tall, medium, or short (specify which)? Medium Slender, medium, or stout (which)? Medium

2 Color of eyes? Grey Color of hair? Very Dark Bald? No

3 Has person lost arm, leg, hand, foot, or both eyes, or is he otherwise disabled (specify)? No-

I certify that my answers are true, that the person registered has read his own answers, that I have witnessed his signature, and that all of his answers of which I have knowledge are true, except as follows:

H. H. Harbrough
(Signature of Registrar)

Precinct 2nd Ward *Central*

City or County Daniels *Sumter S.C.*

State of S.C. *Sumter S.C.*

June 5th 1917
(Date of registration)

WWI Draft Record of Sumpter H Adams (Source: [Ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com))

Sumpter Adams is described as medium in height and build with grey eyes and very dark hair. While the draft record provides a general description, nothing here contradicts with the theory of the man being Sumpter Adams.



Close Up of Photograph in Question

The dark hair and lighter eyes are consistent with the photograph.

Now It's YOUR Turn

1. Explore genealogical records for a physical description of the potential candidates you identified in Chapter 7.

Chapter 9

Identifying Ancestors in More Modern Photographs

How do you identify individuals in more “modern” photographs?

Many of you have photographs similar to this one. It may be a faded photograph from the 1960’s or 1970’s. Certainly this is a “modern” photograph compared to the ones presented in previous chapters. As photography became more popular and more affordable, more and more photographs were taken. Add double prints to that and the result is a lot of unlabeled photographs in shoeboxes!



(Source: Private Collection of Lisa Lisson)

The photograph above is of the four children of Silas Baker Carr and Winnie Haley (Halifax County, VA). The task is to identify which sister is which in the photograph. In the absence of other relatives to ask, think about where you can find a physical description or another photograph of one or both sisters.

Sources For Finding Your Ancestor's Likeness in a More "Modern" Era

- **School Yearbooks** – Local county historical societies often have early yearbooks for the county.
- **Church Directories/Histories** – Check with the church (es) your ancestors/relatives attended. The church historian or other church members can be great resources.
- **Family Histories** – Previously written family histories can contain family photographs.
- **Society Pages of the Newspapers** – Your ancestor's photograph may appear in the society pages as having attended a party, gala or other social event.
- **Distant collateral relatives** – *No cousin is too distant to potentially have photographs or other information on your ancestors.* Yes, it is time consuming to track them down. It is even a little scary to contact a relative you have never met. I encourage you to do it anyway. With social media, finding those distant cousins is easier than ever. Some of my best family information has come from reaching out.

- **Facebook Groups** – Facebook groups for specific locations of genealogy research and surnames are good places to network with other researchers with similar interests. Often photographs may be posted and clues worked on together.

Now It's YOUR Turn

1. If you are working with a more modern photograph, explore one of the options above to determine the physical characteristics of potential candidates.

Chapter 10

Post Your Photograph to Photo Sharing Sites

Have you gotten this far and still are not sure of the identity of the individual(s) in your photograph?

That's okay. You know more than you did, just not enough. Sometimes you need to utilize others in your search.

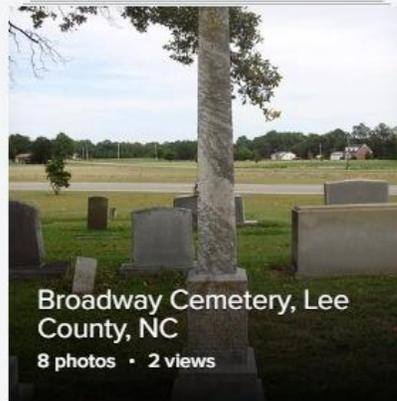
Posting your photographs to photo sharing sites can help get more eyes on your photograph and increase the chances of someone recognizing your photograph.



Post your photographs to photo sharing sites to get more eyes on your photograph.

Flickr!

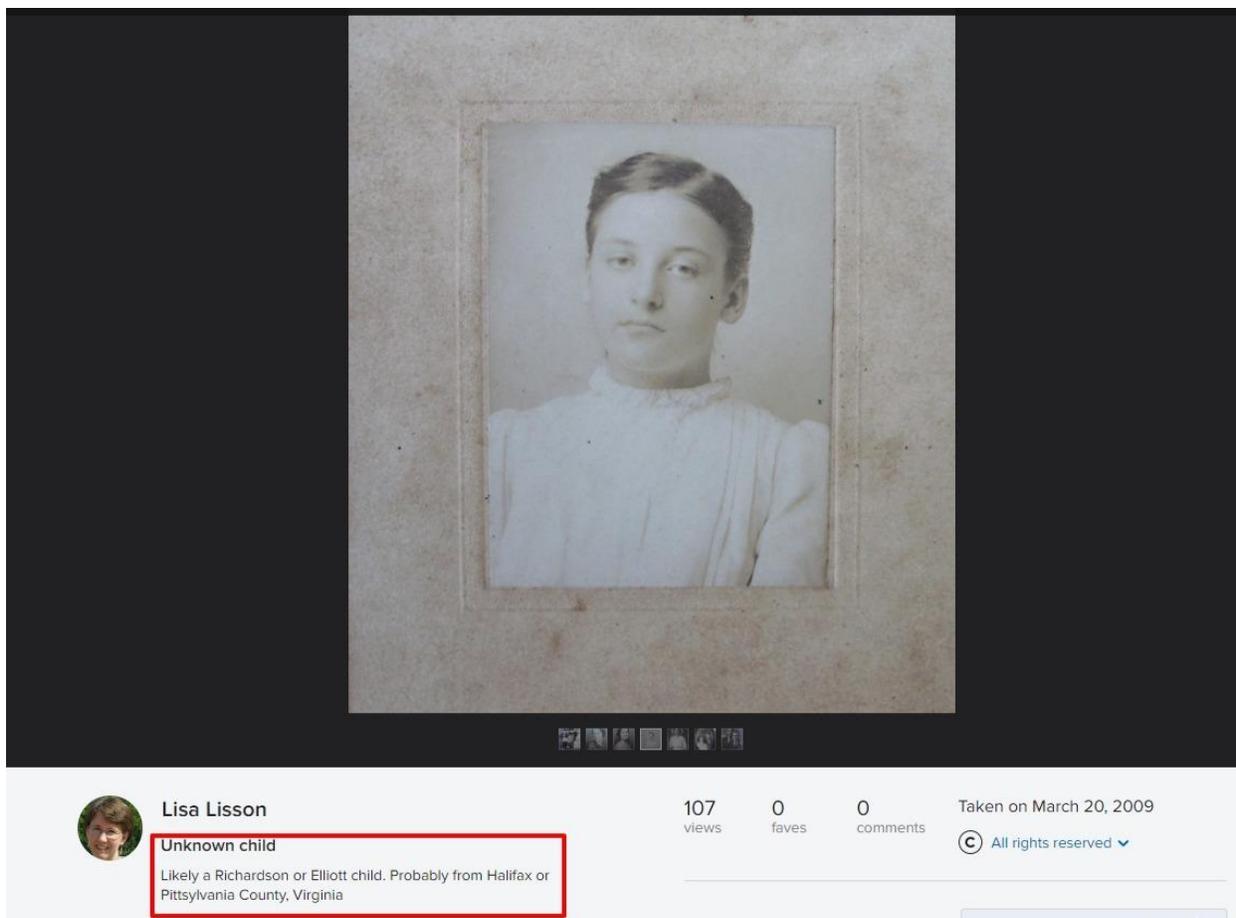
[I created an album in Flickr entitled “Unidentified Ancestors”](#) and uploaded the unknown photograph I have been using in this challenge as well as a number of other unknown photographs.



Flickr Album Example

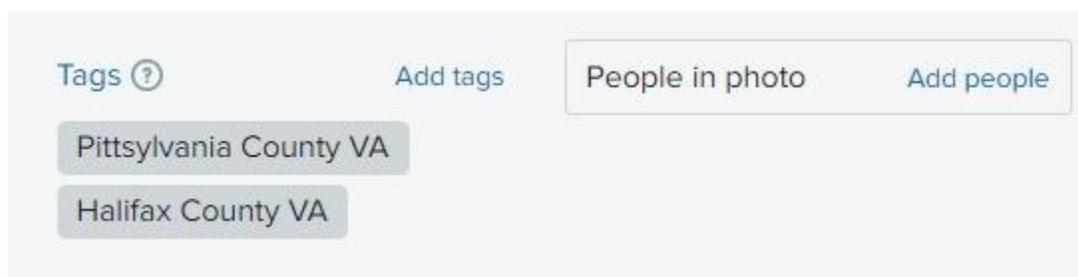
Descriptions were added to each photograph. Known information about the photograph was shared.

When creating an album on [Flickr](#), carefully craft the album's description. Include keywords such as locations and surnames if known. A good description will help other genealogy searchers find your photographs.



Example of a Description for a Photograph in a Flickr Album

Tags were also created for each photograph. Tags included location names if known. If a surname was known, that was also included in the tag.



Example of Tags on a Photograph in a Flickr Album

Once completed, albums can then be shared on your social media sites. Simply click the arrow (circled in red below). A unique link will be provided

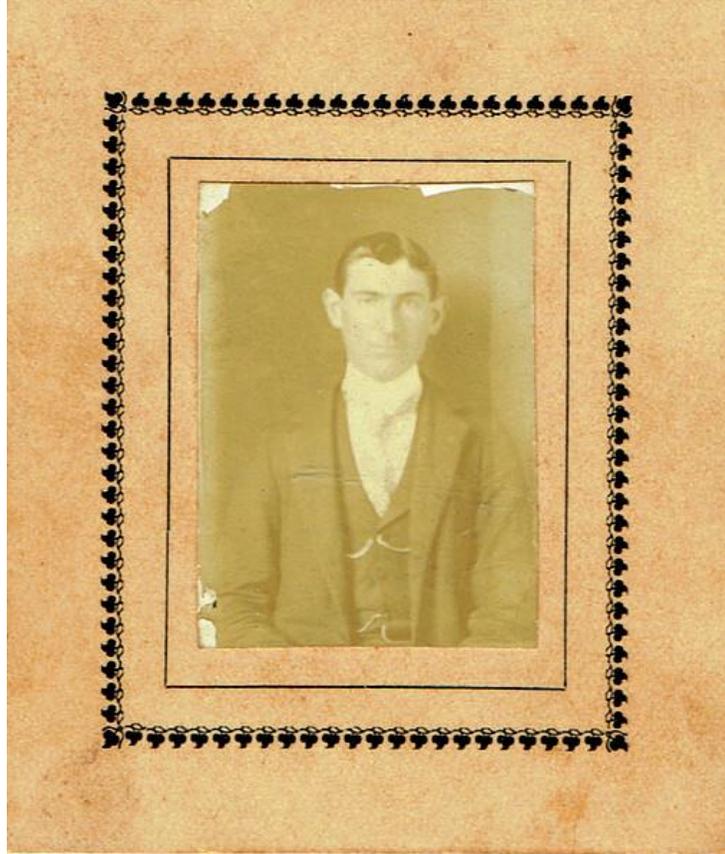
for you to share on your social media sites or in an email to fellow researchers and family.



Providing a link back to the album (which in this case has 90+ photographs) is a much more efficient way of sharing each of these photographs. Sharing the album link is also more polite and does not clutter up Facebook groups, etc. with just your photographs.

Facebook

If you know the area your photograph's subject was likely living, post the photograph in a Facebook group for that county's genealogy group. I posted the following photograph on the Pittsylvania County, VA genealogy Facebook page, and within 24 hours, he was identified as **Raleigh Edgar Henderson (1877-1933)**.



(Source: Private Collection of Lisa Lisson)¹.

[DeadFred](#)

Post or search for orphaned photographs on [DeadFred](#). Searches can be performed on a surname, location and even a specific photographer.

[Forgotten Faces, Forgotten Places Facebook Group](#)

Join this active Facebook group for displaying identified and unidentified photographs that have been rescued with the hope of returning them to their descendants.

Genealogy and Historical Society Newsletters

Ask the local genealogical society if you can place your photograph in their newsletter asking for assistance in identifying the individual. Provide any information you have already discovered on the photograph. Some societies will allow non-members to contribute to their newsletter. This is a way to get more people looking at your photograph.

Now It's YOUR Turn

1. Post your photo to Photo Sharing Sites such as [Flickr](#), Facebook Groups (location and surname focused), [DeadFred.com](#) or one of the other suggestions above.
2. Check back on the sites periodically for any possible new additions.

Conclusion

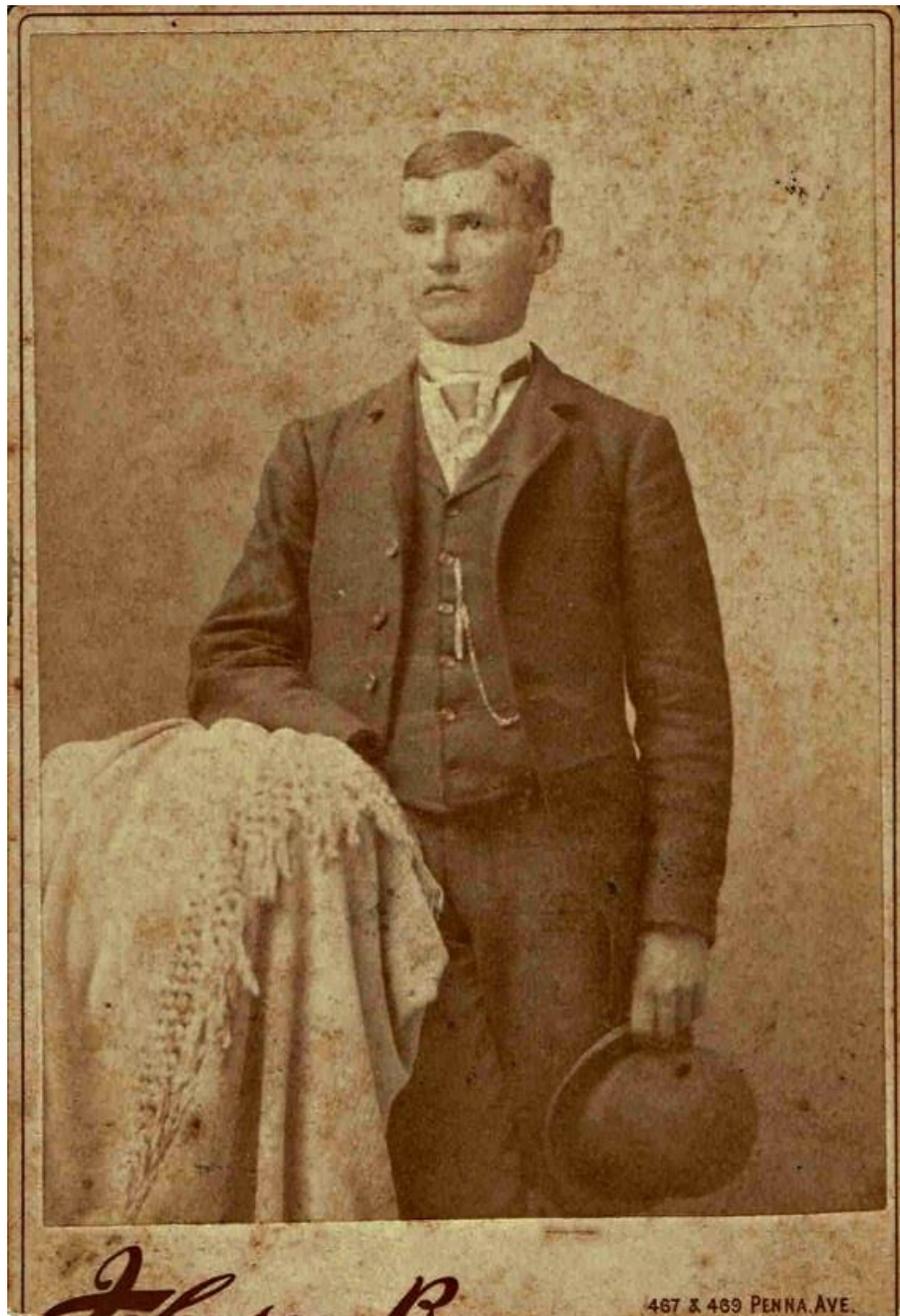
Here we come to the end, but not really. There is always another photograph to date and another individual to identify.

Do you still have a burning question? Do you have a wonderful success story you would like to share? Let's keep the discussion going!

I have created a [private Facebook group](#) especially for you! [Head over and request your invite!](#)

Appendix A
A Case Study

Let's walk through the steps used to identify this photograph.



1. Record the Provenance of Your Photograph

This photograph was found in my great grandmother's red flocked photo album. The album was coming apart and showing signs of mildew. All of the photographs (carts des visites and cabinet cards) were taken out of the album before I could see them in their original

order. This caused the loss of any sense of family groupings.

While any sense of family groupings was lost, knowing **the photograph belonged to Esther Lee Richardson Talbott** narrowed the family lines to Richardson, Talbott, and Elliott. Because the majority of photographs pre-dated Esther's marriage into the Talbott family, the photographs including this one likely were from the Richardson or Elliott families.

Esther Richardson Talbott was born in 1896 and died in 1923. That indicates the photographs in her album pre-dated 1923.

What we know so far: The photograph was most likely from the Elliott or Richardson family and pre-dated 1923.

2. Determine the Type of Photograph

This particular photograph was a thick "cardboard" stock measuring 4 1/4 x 6 inches. (The bottom of the photograph is cut off, perhaps so it would fit in the album better.) The size and thickness of the photograph identifies it as a **cabinet card**.

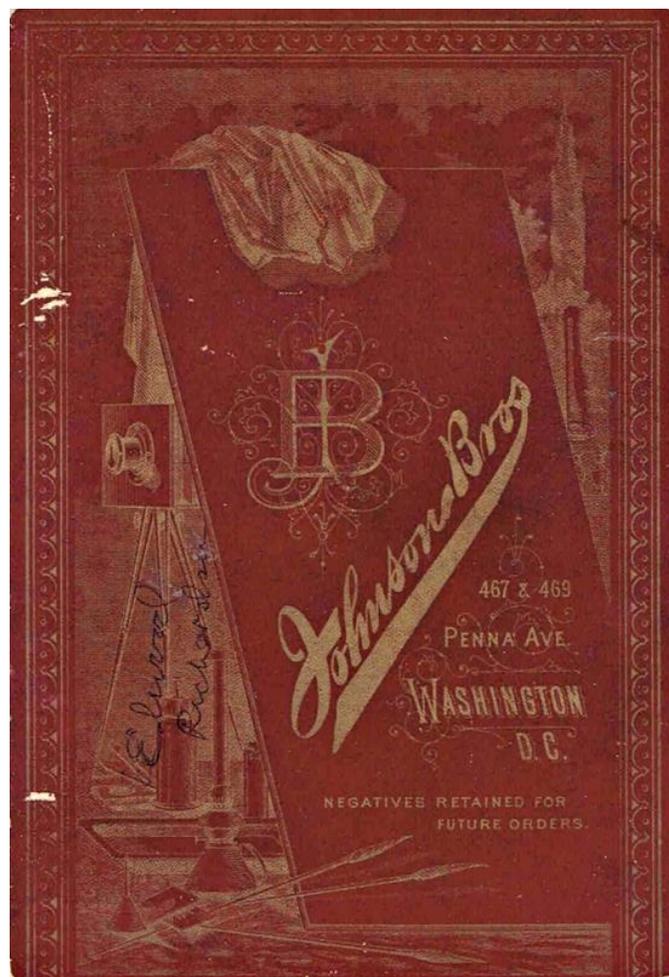
Cabinet cards were at their highest popularity in the 1880's and 1890's. While not as popular in the early 1900's, cabinet cards were not rare either.

The color of the photograph is a cream-colored background with a dark red/maroon on the back. Bold colors on the back such as deep browns, reds and greens began being used in the 1800's-1890's and into the 1900's.

What we know so far: This cabinet card dates to the 1880's-early 1900's.

3. Research the Photographer

You cannot miss the photographer's logo on the back of the cabinet card. **Photographer's logos provide valuable clues** when attempting to identify a photograph including the location where the photograph was taken. Research into the photographer can provide a time frame for the photograph as well.



In this example, the photograph was taken by **Johnson Bros. Photographers** of 467 & 469 Penna. [Pennsylvania] Ave. in Washington, D.C. A search of Washington, D.C. directories revealed a number of Johnsons as photographers from the 1860's – 1920's.

What we know so far: We have a location for the photograph as Washington, D.C. The time period determined in #2 above is consistent with Johnson Bros photographers being in D.C.

4. Date the Fashions Worn in the Photograph

Look at how the man is dressed and the style of his haircut. He has a trim haircut and is wearing a fitted high cut vest. The jacket has three buttons, a popular style in the 1910's. The bowler style hat in his hand was a popular style in the 1910's, too.

Performing a google image search on men's clothing styles in the late 1800's and early 1900's helped place this young man in the 1910's.

What we know so far: The fashion this young man is wearing places him in the 1910's.

5. Put the Clues Together

To recap, the photograph is a cabinet card and dates to the early 1900's/1910's. The young man is most likely part of the Richardson or Elliott family lines.

Now it is time to turn to the family tree and previous genealogy research.

This photograph was taken in Washington, D.C. yet no family lines of the Richardson or Elliott families resided in or near Washington, D.C. Neither of these family lines had the means to travel such distances.

There was **one family member** that joined the military and traveled extensively: **William F. Elliott (1883-1961)**.

William Elliott was the son of **C. R. Elliott** [Cromulus Robert Elliott] and a first cousin to Esther Richardson. He was also a frequent letter and postcard writer to Esther Richardson from 1909-1915. (William was even a beau of Esther's!) Fortunately, Esther saved these postcards and letters which remain in the family today.

COMPANY "M" SEVENTEENTH INFANTRY
UNITED STATES ARMY
FORT MIFERSON, GA.

March 11, -1913

Dear Esther:

Your letter received a few days ago, and was very glad to hear from you all, and to know that you are getting on well. I am enjoying life fine, and had a nice time in Washington D.C. I will send you a picture that I had taken there, that is Emmett with me. I guess you would know him any way. It was the first time I have see him for about (4) years. I am not looking for any time Easter, for I am going to stay close at home, now till I am discharged, my time are getting too short. I have only till the 27th of April. Give all my love and best wishes, tell Nattie, all right if she had rather make canvas clothes.

Reviewing the postcards and letters William sent to Esther revealed William's reference to his trip to Washington, D.C. in 1913.

Success!

William was the only person in the family tree that fit all of the clues.

Resources

Websites

- [Family Old Photos](#)
- [Dead Fred](#)
- [Forgotten Faces, Forgotten Place Facebook Group](#)
- [Library of Congress – Photos, Prints and Drawings Collection](#)
- [Fashion-Era](#)
- [PhotoTree.com](#)

Books

- [Fashionable Folks: Bonnets and Hats, 1840-1900](#) by Maureen Taylor
- [Victorian Fashions and Costumes from Harper's Bazar, 1867-1898 \(Dover Fashion and Costumes\)](#) by Stella Blum
- [Fashionable Folks Hairstyles 1840-1900](#) by Maureen Taylor
- [Fashions and Costumes from Godey's Lady's Book](#) by Stella Blum
- [Godey's Lady's Book](#) - Free
- [Sear's Roebuck & Co. Historic Collection](#)
- [Harper's Baza\[a\]r](#) – Free on Google Books

Tools

- [Vivid-pix](#)
- [Magnifying Glass](#)



Lisa Lisson is the writer, educator and genealogy researcher behind [Are You My Cousin?](#) and believes researching your genealogy does not have to be overwhelming. All you need is a solid plan, a genealogy toolbox, and the knowledge to use those tools.

Specializing in southern research and finding those elusive female ancestors, Lisa is passionate about helping others find resources and tools to confidently research their genealogy.

Lisa can be found online at [LisaLisson.com](#), [Facebook](#), and [Pinterest](#).