Notes on a Family Album*

I sit before some photographs of people I don't know.
Mom said, "They are your relatives,"
But that was long ago.

She used to get the album out
And put me on her knee:
Then pointing, with a story line
Tell family history.

The captions used were all her own,
Each time developed new.
We never thought to write them down
Before her life was through.

I see some family features now:
I have begun to care.
Since Mom is gone, I cannot ask,
"Whose picture is that there?"

If you have photos in a book
Without a caption, too.
Go get a pen and label them,
Or you may wonder, "Who?"

* by Mary F. Heisey

Dating Photographs*

aid to identify subject and place in time and location

◆ Photographic Process
- Daguerreotype, ambrotype, tintype, carte de vista, cabinet card

◆ Purpose of Photo - what’s the occasion?
- individual or group (family/military/students/occupation/sports)

◆ Clothing and Fashion
- women almost always dressed in Sunday best; men not as often

◆ Hairstyles: men, women, boys, girls

◆ Poses: stern or frivolous?

◆ Photographer and Address

◆ Notes written on photo: back and front; why saved?

* Szucs and Luebking, The Source (1996)
Family Chronicle, Dating Old Photographs 1840-1029 (2000)
Primary Early Photographic Processes*

◆ Daguerreotype 1839-1864
- Louis Daguerre 1839
- silver plated copper plate
- http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/daghtml/daghome.html

◆ Ambrotype 1854-1860s
- on glass backed with dark paint, cloth or paper
- less expensive than daguerreotype
- developed within minutes of exposure; fragile

◆ Tintype 1856-early 1900s, even into 1930s
- like ambrotype but on sheet iron, thus durable, cheaper
- black back after 1860, brown back after 1870

*Daguerreotype (usually under glass with brass matt), ambrotype and tintype were unique images without negative) often displayed in an ornate leather case with hinged cover; some dating by slight changes - generally replaced by cheaper paper images and reproducible negatives

Paper Photographs*

◆ Carte de Vista 1859-1890s
- 2 ½ inches by 4 ¼ inches (or 2 ⅜ by 3 ⅞)
- thickness <0.024” (to 1869), >0.036” (aft 1887)

◆ Cabinet Card 1866-1910
- 4 ¼ inches by 6 ½ inches

◆ Postcard 1870s+: Univ./Historical Soc. collections

◆ 20 Other Mounting Styles (~5% bef 1900)

◆ Aft 1900, amateur photography blossomed

*Paper images with reproducible negatives; other distinguishing details (card color, edges, style of imprint on back, tax stamp, offer of duplicates, head size), to further refine date estimate discussed in Family Chronicle, Dating Old Photographs 1840-1929 (2000) and http://www.familychronicle.com/Dating19thCenturyPhotos.html
Karen Frisch-Ripley, Unlocking the Secrets in Old Photographs (1992)
Alison Mager, Children of the Past (1978)
Primary Photo Printing Processes*

- **Cyanotypes 1840-1880**
  - uniform blue image on matte surface; mostly amateurs

- **Albumen Papers: dominant 1855-1895**
  - slightly glossy to very glossy surface on very thin paper
  - adhered to secondary support to prevent curling
  - reddish-brown to black; yellow in non-image areas
  - most carte de vista and cabinet cards were albumin

- **Carbon Prints late 1860s-1920s**
  - relief effect when viewed at a low angle

- **Other:** Salted Papers 1840s-1860s, collotypes: 1850s+
  - photogravures 1870+; letterpress halftones 1880s+
  - gelatin/collodin developing-out/printing-out papers 1880s+

*Paper images with reproducible negatives; technical details including gloss, color tones, 30X detail, fibers showing, fading propensity, see James E. Reilly, *Care and Identification of 19th Century Prints* (1986)

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Paper Photographs

30X View

*for more technical details including gloss, color tones, image detail at 30X (fibers, ink deposition/penetration), image deterioration, see James E. Reilly, *Care and Identification of 19th Century Prints* (1986)
Clothing and Fashion in Photography*

- Photos “required” one’s best clothing
- **Women:** 1840s: high tight corsets; tight sleeves
  - early 1850s: hair with broad loops over tops of ears
  - 1860s: dresses with wide billowing sleeves
  - 1870-80s: dresses more narrow than previous hooped skirt look, but had bustle or bulge at back
  - during 1890s: vertical puff over shoulder in dresses grew
- **Men:** 1850--57: neckties stiff, horizontally tied, 2” wide
  - facial hair fashion changed over time
  - young boys wore dresses; hair parted opposite from girls

*See also: Alison Mager, *Children of the Past* (1978)

Posing for the Photo: stern or frivolous?

- Before 1900, more individuals than groups
- Before 1900, almost always stern (slow film)
  - how long can you hold a smile?
  - with faster film, photographers urged a “smile”

grandmother, granddaughter, grandfather?
Photographer and Address

To learn what years photographer was at address on back of photo, use:
- annual city directories (list photographers in back)
  -- data usually gathered the year before published
- newspaper advertisements (more current)
- census (every decade)
- account books and other business records
- biographies; Google the photographer:

Edward Sidney Dunshee (Edward⁴, Thomas³, Thomas², Thomas¹), AKA Sidney Dunshe, was born 6 Jan 1823 Bristol VT, died 23 May 1907 at 1523 Fairmount Ave., Philadelphia and was buried 25 May 1907 in Mt. Vernon Cemetery, Philadelphia. In the 1850 census, he (an artist) and Sarah A. Arnold resided in Fall River MA. In 1857 he and Cornelius E. Dunshee were photographers in Fall River. By 1873 Edward Sidney Dunshee and Thomas Rice Burnham were operating a photo gallery as "Dunshee & Burnham" at 323 Washington, Boston. From 1873 to 1876 he and Edward Byron Dunshee were operating photo galleries as "Edward S. Dunshee & Son" at the 3 Tremont Row gallery in Boston. In the 1880 census he resided at 1330 So. Chestnut St., Philadelphia. In the 1900 census he resided with Annie Eva Oram at 1523 Fairmount Ave., Philadelphia.

* abstracted from: http://www.thedunshees.com/DunsheeFamilyHistory/duns000i0002.htm

Homework

If you have photos in a book
[or all in a box or drawer or ?]

Without a caption, too.
Go get a pen and label them,
[butter don’t harm them]

Or you may wonder, "Who?"

…and so will your grandchildren!