Identifying & Dating Old Photos

19th Century

If you have an image on glass or metal rather than on paper then it is likely to be one of these early methods.

Daguerreotype (1840's-ca.1860)

Mercury/silver image on silver-plated copper plate often presented in a folding case.

Ambrotype (1850's-1880's),

Silver image on glass plate backed with black paint, paper or cloth - usually framed or cased.

Ferrotype /Tintype (Metal) (1860's-1880's)

Image printed on a metal plate. The most common size was about the same as the carte-de-visite.

Photos with Negatives

Carte de Visite (popular 1860's-1880's)

Small photos 54 mm (2 in) x 89 mm (3.5 in), usually mounted on paperboard. These photos are only fractionally bigger than modern business cards.

Cabinet photos (1870's-1910's)

Roughly the size, though slightly smaller, than the cover of a small paperback book These photos were often mounted on a thick backing board.
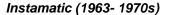
20th Century

Postcard Photos (1903-1920's)

These photos were mainly taken by professionals in studios and the result is a photo on one side and a postcard layout with an area for a stamp on the back.

Film Roll photos (1920's-1950's)

Wallet Size photos 2 ¼" by 3 ¼" (popular 1920s to 1950s) Similar in size to a modern Credit Card used a 120 roll film. This size was the most popular film format in the 1920's through to the 1950's.

Instamatic (1963- 1970s)

A square photo, usually with a white outer frame. These photos are instantly recognizable as post 1963. Colour film usually indicates 1970's

Polaroid/Instant Cameras

Most polaroid camera photos date from the late 1970's. The square format, white border, and soft image are features of the classic Polaroid.

35 mm (popular 1950s+) to today

Most home photos from the 1980's onwards and most photo albums or printing services today work with a 4×6 inch photo.

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