

Dating your  
Family  
Photographs  
with help from the  
Richardson-Sloane  
Special Collections  
Center  
of the  
Davenport  
Public Library



### Photographer/Studio Name

Many photographers imprinted their names, special logos, and sometimes an address on the photo or the mat, as in the image below. These clues provide a great way to pinpoint the time period of an image. *Hastings* appears only in the 1888-1889 Davenport City Directory, making it easy to date this photograph. R. A. Lorenz authored a helpful list of local **Davenport Photographer's from 1858-1915+** which originally was published in the June 1989 *Scott County Iowan*, using Davenport city directories as the source.



## Internal Details—What do you see?

Look at the props used in the image, the physical background, or notations made on the back. This image of the **Davenport Fish and Oyster Market** provides a great example.



Notation on back: "H. H. V. place of business 412 Brady St. Davenport, Iowa  
?\_\_? To right of H. H. Vogt, Mr. Thompson, Derby, Dr. Blancke; others unknown"

What do you see?

Storefront @ 412 Brady Street "Davenport Fish & Oyster Market"

Storefront @ 410 Brady Street "Al Billon, Jeweler and Engraver"

Storefront @ 414 Brady Street "Louis Boy Parlor Goods"

Large fish on a pole in foreground—Men standing in front of stores

Using Davenport city directories it can be determined these businesses were located at these addresses between 1893-1895, helping to date this image.

## What type of image are you looking at?

**Daguerreotype** available 1839 until mid 1850

A small metal photograph with a reflective surface, usually cased

**Ambrotypes** popular 1854 through 1856—A negative on glass that appears as a positive image; backed with a dark background and usually cased; small

**Tintypes** popular 1856 through mid-1930s—A negative on an iron plate coated with a black or brown varnish so it appeared as a positive image; used tin shears to cut the photographs out of the iron sheet; cased or paper mat

**Card photograph**—paper print mounted on cardboard stock

**Cartes de visite** introduced in U.S. 1858-1870.

Calling card stock backing with paper photo attached.

Small in size 2½" x 3½" - 4"

**Cabinet cards** from 1866 with peak years 1870-1905 and a few until 1920. Some had notched or scalloped edges, sometimes with elaborate printing on back, dating from 1892-1905. A dense cardboard backing with paper photo glued on. Typical image measures 4" x 5½"

**Custom sized images** common 1890-1930  
Often pasted on various sizes, but same material used for the cabinet card.

**Stereographs** available 1854-1938  
Two nearly identical images mounted side by side  
3" x 7" (early) or 4" x 7" (later)  
Can be daguerreotypes, glass, porcelain, or card type



## Costume



This is one of the most interesting aspects of researching your image. Looking at hairstyles, hats, jewelry and fashions with regard to styles and details in clothing can help establish dates for photographs. One highly recommended reference resource is Joan Severa's book *Dressed for the Photographer*. There are many informative websites including those below.

<http://www.cyndislist.com/clothing.htm>

<http://www.ajmorris.com/roots/photo/>

## Genealogical Research

Now combine what you have determined regarding your photograph and compare it to your family history information to assist in further identification. Need some help getting started with your family history, too? Look no further!

Go to the **Richardson-Sloane Special Collections Center's**  
**Beginning Genealogy** page and search in our **Local Databases** to see how we can help.

## Preservation

An important credo when working with photographs is “DO NO HARM”. In other words, DON’T do anything that cannot be undone and DON’T write on the image. There are many outlets for obtaining acid-free paper, envelopes, enclosures and boxes that should be used for long term storage of your important family photographs. Avoid using any glue or tape on photographs. Wearing cotton gloves while handling photographs keeps the natural oils from skin from damaging images, too. If you have an image you want to display it is highly recommended that you make a fine copy and display that rather than risk the damage our daily environment can cause to photographs.

## Image Collections Available at the Richardson-Sloane Special Collections Center Davenport Public Library

The historical photograph collection at the Davenport Public Library contains approximately ten thousand images of Davenport and Scott County dating from the late 1800s to the present.

One of the largest portraiture collections maintained in the Special Collections Center is that of the Free-Hostetler Studio. The nearly 18,000 images in this collection were taken by the Hostetler Studio (ca 1890-1920) and the Free Studio (ca 1950-1970).

The Upper Mississippi Valley Digital Image Archive is an online visual collection of historic images showcasing the Mississippi River Region along the Iowa/Illinois border. This continually updated photograph collection includes images that date from the 1870s to the 1950s and cover a wide variety of topics.

Copies for personal use of images owned by the Richardson-Sloane Special Collections Center are available for purchase.

For further information contact the  
**Richardson-Sloane Special Collections Department**  
[specialcollections@davenportlibrary.com](mailto:specialcollections@davenportlibrary.com)

