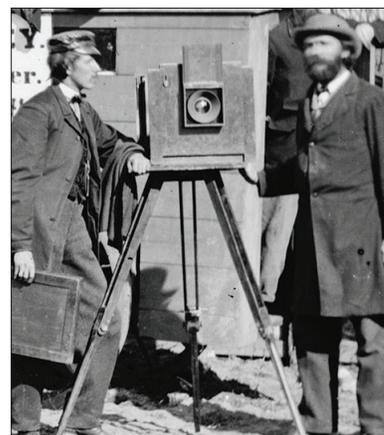


CIVIL WAR PHOTOGRAPHS: NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND NEW USES

This resource was created by Sam Klotz, the 2014 Liljenquist Family Fellow at the Library of Congress

The Civil War era was a particularly important moment in the history of photography. During this era photographs began to dominate American visual culture, as new technologies and new formats brought depictions of battle scenes, wartime leaders, and everyday soldiers into private homes as never before. Examining the photographs produced by these new technologies can both shed light on the culture of the era and provide insights into the history of this powerful form of visual communication.

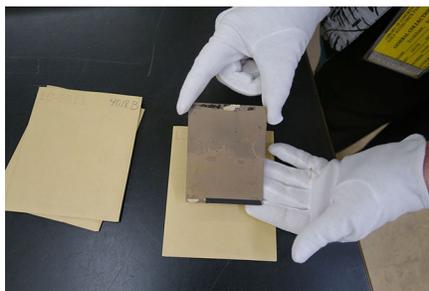


Unknown location. Wagons and camera of Sam A. Cooley, U.S. photographer
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/cwp2003001044/PP/>

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Primary Photographic Technologies in Use

The Wet-Plate/Collodion Process (1850s-1900s) was a developmental breakthrough from earlier photographic technologies such as the daguerreotype and the calotype. The collodion process involved coating a glass plate with light sensitive chemicals and exposing it to get a negative image. This process was significant because of its short exposures and efficiency, and it was used to create the types of photographs listed below.



Collodion negative with hands for scale

The Ambrotype (1850s-1860s) – a collodion negative placed against a dark background, which made the image appear positive. Ambrotypes were not reproducible because the positive image could only be created by manipulating the negative. After developing ambrotypes, photographers often added watercolor to give their images a life-like effect. The ambrotype was a preferred portrait medium because it was both cheap and easy to make. Its name is derived from the Greek word “ambrose,” meaning immortal, suggesting the image’s capacity to immortalize a constructed image of the self.



Two ambrotypes of different sizes

The Tintype (1850s-1930s) – a collodion negative, like the ambrotype, but printed on iron (not tin, despite the name). It also was not reproducible. The tintype peaked in popularity during the Civil War Era because of its durable surface. The tintype, like the ambrotype, was often colored, and superseded the ambrotype as the preferred portrait medium because it was the cheapest and most efficient form of photography at the time. These photographs cost as little as twenty-five cents and thus were often more casual in nature.



Two tintypes of different sizes

The Albumen Print (1850s-1900) – a collodion negative printed on paper coated with a surface layer of a beaten egg-white solution. This layer gave the prints great brightness and detail, consistent quality, and tonal range. Unlike the ambrotype or tintype, photographers could produce many albumen prints from one negative. Albumen prints were used to capture everything from landscapes to portraits.



Standard-sized albumen print

Other technologies included *opalotypes* and *ivorytypes*, glass negatives similar to the ambrotype and tintype, though more expensive and notable for their rich color.



Ivorytype

Photographic Presentations of Technologies

The Stereograph (1850s-1920s) – consisted of two albumen prints placed side by side on a small card, captured by a camera with two lenses separated by two-and-a-half inches. The compound image was viewed using a *stereoscope*, a device that merged the two images into one. This gave the illusion of three dimensions and allowed the stereograph to make distant places come to life.



From left to right: Stereograph card, stereoscope, stereograph card viewed through stereoscope

Carte-de-visite (1850-1860s) – a small albumen print mounted on a piece of cardstock measuring approximately two-and-a-half by four inches. Like the tintype, though less durable, the carte was a cheap and easily producible way for people to preserve images of themselves. Cartes were also used to depict celebrity figures, tourist attractions, and to convey promotional messages.



Carte-de-visites with hands for scale

Photographic books also became increasingly popular during the Civil War, and newspapers and magazines used photographs as the basis for printed engravings. Sometimes, photographers even photographed illustrations for reproduction.



Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the War

SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Today, we see photographs everywhere. The Civil War era marked the first time photographic technologies brought many people into visual contact with subjects outside of their daily life. Ask students to discuss how images of current events in faraway places affect how they think about those events. Invite them to imagine how they would relate to an event they cannot see. How would being able to see images shape their response?

Ask students to study the technology visible in "Wagons and Camera of Sam A. Cooley" and then think about the photographic technology they most often use. How would the size of the camera affect use? Invite students to list as many other factors as they can that would affect how and where they would take photographs. As a follow up, students might research photographic processes from the Civil War era and consider how that has changed over time.

Historians have discovered that in the photograph "Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter", Alexander Gardner moved the body into position and added the rifle, which is not a sharpshooter's rifle but a Springfield rifle, from his own belongings. Ask the students: Given that we often assume photographs to be accurate representations of the world, how does this information change your perception of the photograph, its title, and the accompanying prose description? How does this information affect your perception of other photographs that you might not expect to be posed? What questions can we ask to discern how true to life a photograph is?

Ask students to choose and examine a photograph they like. What aspects of the image could be controlled by the photographer? What could not be controlled? How do these considerations affect the way you respond to the photograph?

In the 21st century U.S., most people can take a photograph whenever they want. During the Civil War, however, having one's photograph taken was rare enough to warrant carefully composing every aspect of the photo. Ask: If you were preparing for the only photo you would ever have taken of yourself, what would you want your photograph to say about you? What items, animals, or other people would you have with you? How would you pose? What would you stand in front of? Who would you send it to? If time permits, ask students to bring their items to class and take their "only" photograph.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



The Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/lilj/>



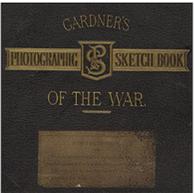
The Gladstone Collection of African American Photographs

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/gld/>



Civil War Glass Negatives and Related Prints

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/cwp/>



Gardner's Photographic Sketch Book of the War

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/01021785/>



Popular Print Processes Represented in the Prints and Photographs Division

http://www.loc.gov/rr/print/coll/589_intro.html

PRIMARY SOURCES WITH CITATIONS



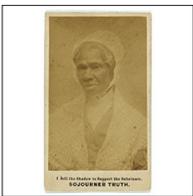
"[Battle-field of Gettysburg – Northern portion of Gettysburg, from a position west of the town, near the Theological Seminary.]" Photograph [Stereograph]. c1868-80. From Library of Congress, *Stereograph Cards*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/97507605/>



Ayer, George F., photographer. "[Abraham Lincoln.]" Photograph [Tintype]. c1864-70. From Library of Congress, *Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2014646216/>



"Sojourner Truth." Photograph [Carte-de-visite] .c1864. From Library of Congress, *Gladstone Collection of African American Photographs*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98501256/>



Shepherd & Smith, photographer. "[Kager Mays, African American soldier, half-length portrait facing front.]" Photograph [Carte-de-visite]. c1864-65. From Library of Congress, *Gladstone Collection of African American Photographs*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010647912/>



Gardner, Alexander. "Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter," in *Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook of the War*. (Philp and Solomons, 1866), 90. From Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/01021785/>



Gardner, Alexander. "The Home of a Rebel Sharpshooter," in *Gardner's Photographic Sketchbook of the War*. (Philp and Solomons, 1866), 89. From Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/01021785/>



Russell, Andrew J., photographer. "[Union soldiers in front of a house.]" Photograph [Albumen Print]. c1861-65. From Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2006683261/>



"[Unknown location. Wagons and Camera of Sam A. Cooley, US Photographer, Department of the South.]" Photograph [Wet-plate/Collodion Negative]. c1860-65. From Library of Congress, *Civil War Glass Negatives and Related Prints*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/cwp2003001044/PP/>



"[Unidentified soldier in Union uniform and two women.]" Photograph [Tintype] . c1861-65. From Library of Congress, *Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010648935/>



"[Elias Teeple in Union uniform with saber and Smith and Wesson revolver.]" Photograph [Tintype]. c1861-65. From Library of Congress, *Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010648765/>



"[Unidentified African American soldier in Union uniform and gloves with musket; another soldier waits at the side.]" Photograph [Tintype] . c1863-66. From Library of Congress, *Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010648980/>



"[Three unidentified men in Union uniforms and two unidentified men, one pointing a revolver at another's head.]" Photograph [Tintype] . c1861-65. From Library of Congress, *Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010648373/>



"[Unidentified soldier in Union musician's uniform.]" Photograph [Tintype] . c1861-65. From Library of Congress, *Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2013645717/>

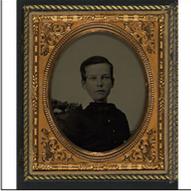


"[Unidentified soldier in Union uniform with dog and unidentified woman.]" Photograph [Tintype] . c1861-65. From Library of Congress, *Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2013645726/>



"[Two unidentified soldier in Union uniforms with canteens playing cards and smoking in front of painted backdrop showing landscape with houses and trees.]" Photograph [Ambrotype]. c1861-65. From Library of Congress, *Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2013645725/>



"[Private Charles H. Bickford of B Company, 2nd Massachusetts Infantry Regiment as a young boy.]" Photograph [Ambrotype]. 1850-55. From Library of Congress, *Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010650360/>



Rees, Charles R., photographer. "[Unidentified soldier in Confederate officer's uniform with sword.]" Photograph [Ambrotype] . c1861-65. From Library of Congress, *Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2012649891/>



Jones & Bro., photographer. "[Unidentified soldier in Union officer's uniform.]" Photograph [Ivorytype] . c1861-65. From Library of Congress, *Liljenquist Family Collection of Civil War Photographs*. <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2014647509/>