Baby Feeding in Early Photos

By Charles Harris
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Of course, Teresa and I, are collectors of the bottles and love them along with the stories that they tell to us. One of my personal favorites, as may be evidenced by my contributions to Keep Abreast (newsletter for the American Collectors of Infant Feeders) are the photographs of the infants and small children actually using the bottles that we have in our collections. That just thrills me no end. What better proof positive than an actual photograph. Partially what started this article is that most antique mall dealers have no idea of how to identify the different types of photos and just label them Daguerreotypes because they have heard that these are old photos. Wow!!

But these photographs open up another can of worms. If someone at the time of the taking of the photo did not write information on the back, how are we going to be able to date it? This is a little of what I'm hoping to pass on to you at this time. There are certain characteristics that are quite reliable, as reliable as designs of some of the feeders telling us about the date of their manufacture.

Daguerreotype Photographs

Introduced:	1839
Peak Years:	1852-1854
Waned:	1858-1860
Last Made:	1865

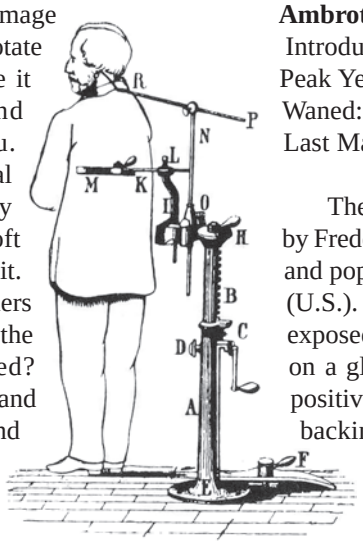
A "Dag" that has information — "Taken at Cincerd (Covington) Ky. 1854." Note the stain around the image that is common on Daguerreotypes. No baby bottle here.

The Daguerreotype was invented by a Frenchman. It was Daguerre's and France's gift to the world, except for England. He patented the process in England, which made England the only country in the world that could not make use of the process free of charge.

The first successful photography that was commercially available to the world was the Daguerreotype photo, invented by Louis-Jacques-Mande Daguerre, who perfected the world's first practical photographic process. The process consisted of taking a copper plate, polishing it to a mirror finish. Then this polished copper plate was silver plated and polished again. Next the plate was placed in a closed box where it was exposed to iodine vapors. Now sensitized, the covered plate was inserted into the camera for exposures taking as long as 30 minutes and averaged no less than five minutes. No wonder you rarely see a person smiling — try holding a smile more than a few seconds! Next the plate was developed by placing it in a box with fumes of heated mercury. A finishing bath of hyposulfate of soda made the image permanent.

Daguerreotypes are easily recognized by their appearance — a very silvered background with a delicate image on their surface. As you rotate the image from side to side it will seem to appear and disappear in front of you. Please, never touch the actual image — it will severely damage it. Even a very soft make-up brush will scratch it.

How do the photographers even get a sharp image of the people being photographed? They used a headrest — a stand with arms that reached around to each side of the head. The rest of the body was anchored by sitting, resting against a pedestal or even holding the shoulder of the husband seated in the chair. Yes, the man was seated so the lady could show off her beautiful dress. The lack of smiles was not entirely related to the length of the exposure, but also due to the hardness of the times, which were difficult to say the least.



Head and body rest dating from the 1850s. (*A New History of Photography, 1998.*)

Sure, we have the patents and registrations issued by our governments to document what was actually invented, when and why. Yes, these are a very valuable part of the research tools available to us, but do they always really help us in our research? Not always. You have to realize that many of these patents are actually for minute factors — maybe the design of a mold for the casting of the baby bottle that we are interested in, or in the way that the parts of the mold fit together. The possibilities are endless. One thing that these patent numbers do for us is to inform us that this particular bottle was actually in existence during that actual year.

Advertisements are also wonderful for the same reasons. They actually give us a year of existence and very likely a drawing or photograph of the bottle in use at the time. But what has happened to those few bottles that we have seen the advertisements for, even published in the KA, but the Bottle Guide and Rarity Guides have a rarity of "0" listed. They have never been seen in reality.

Ambrotype Photographs

Introduced:	1854
Peak Years:	1857-1859
Waned:	1861
Last Made:	1865

The Ambrotype was invented by Frederick Scott Archer (Britain) and popularized by James Cutting (U.S.). The Ambrotype is a thinly exposed negative image produced on a glass plate and viewed as a positive by the addition of a black backing.

The Ambrotype needed the black backing behind the image to produce the desired positive effect. This was done by putting a black cloth or paper behind the image. It was

An Ambrotype of an American Indian grandmother feeding with a medicine bottle, hose AND nipple, circa 1850s. Her features carry one back in time, showing the extreme pressures of nothing more than pure simple existence.

An Ambrotype of a Confederate soldier, taken no earlier than 1861, when the Civil War started taking place and changed the history of our great country.

A Tintype that came out of a photo album with no matte of any kind. Note the cloth covering the chair and the mother holding the baby. This baby is drinking out of an old whiskey bottle that has been converted to a feeder by using a straw, hose and nipple. Consequently it, too, was one of the "Murder Bottles."

also accomplished by coating the reverse of the glass plate with asphaltum, a hard tarry type of substance. The best solution and most permanent was the use of a dark ruby red glass plate in the first place, but it was more expensive. The Ruby Ambrotype had the advantage of not creating the shadowing effect in the dark areas that was evidenced when looking off angle at the image, caused by the black surface being about 1/16 inch behind the image.

Tin Type Photographs

Introduced:	1856
Peak Years:	1860-1863
Waned:	1865
Last Made:	1867*

*The last tintypes to be contained in cases were produced around 1867, marking the end of cased images. They were still being produced in various other forms until about 1930.

Like the earlier types of photographic images, Tintypes, or Ferrotypes, were a one or single generation type of photo. Actually tin was never used. Like the Daguerreotype and Ambrotype, the image that you happen to be holding in your hands is the only one like it in existence. It could not be reproduced except by re-photographing that completed image. Like the Ambrotype, it was viewed as a positive image because of the black backing behind the image. In this case a thin piece of tin was undercoated with a black Japan varnish and the sensitized emulsion was coated on top of the tin, prior to exposure.

Because the tintypes continued to be produced until the 1930s, they are a little difficult to date. First if they are in their original hard case, or if you can see scratching from the brass matte that originally framed the image they are

A tintype that came out of a hard case. There are slight bends in the plate under the ornate gold plated matte from rough handling. It is hard to see, but she is drinking her milk out of a turtle-style bottle with the straw, hose and nipple attached. The difficulty of cleaning and sterilizing the hose gained this type bottle the nickname of the "Murder Bottle."

definitely pre-1867. But it is very easy to place a later image in a case. You need to look at the image and try to note datable items in the image, such as a Baby Bottle that was not manufactured till a certain date. Normally if an Afro-American is portrayed in a tintype, it is most likely after the 1860's due to being affordable to the lower financial echelon of people of the time. If an Afro-American appears in a Daguerrotype or Ambrotype, this person was most likely highly respected by their owners and they are quite valuable images.

Cartes de Visite (CDVs)

Introduced:	1854
Peak Years:	1859-1866
Waned:	1870
Last Made:	1905

The Cartes de Visites are French for "card with picture" or in modern terms a calling or business card. In size, they were about 2 1/2 inches by 4 1/8 inches. It was popularized in France by Andre-Adolphe-Eugene-Disderi. The front carried a photographic image of the person with a space at the bottom for his signature or the photographer's imprint. There is a book in existence listing nearly every known American CDV photographer in business during the Civil War years: "A Catalogue of Civil War Photographers, Compiled by George F. Witham." For me it is most

E. B. Nock,
Photographer,
122 Ontario Street,
near Public Square,
Cleveland,
Ohio.

Three illustrations: a Civil War era CDV image of a baby drinking out of a pewter nursing bottle. This photo with the two different widths of double gold lines dates it to the 1863-1866 era. The pewter bottle, from the Dr. John Gimesh collection, is identical to the one in the photo. The back mark below the photo also proves the photo's 1860-1865 dating.

invaluable.

The CDV image was a very thin albumin paper print that was glued to a thin card about the thickness of an index card. The original negative was on glass and it was printed on to an albumin paper. This made multiple prints possible and they became very popular throughout the world.

The earliest CDVs were on thin blank cards dating from the inception till about 1860. During the Civil War years, 1861-1865 and up until 1868, the great majority of the cards had a double gold borderline around the image and square corners. If the double gold line border has the lines the same width, the image dates to 1861-62. If one line is thicker than the other the image dates to the period of 1863-1866. Rarely were other colors used. Also, on the back side of the CDV, if the two or three lines of small words incorporates the words "Negatives" or "Duplicates," the image dates to 1863 or later. During the period of Aug. 1, 1864 until July 31, 1866, all photographs and other documents were required to have a documentary tax stamp affixed to the backside. These taxes were to help pay for the expenses incurred by the Federal government during the great American Civil War.

After 1869, with the realization of the accidental bendability and damage of the thinner cards and images, a thicker card was used and in 1871, the corners were rounded. Various colored mounts were introduced around 1873, and by 1875, the edges were trimmed in gold gilt. By 1880 the card stock was thick and sturdy, and rich, dark colors were common. The backs of these cards contained the photographer's imprint which was incorporated into elaborate printed designs. In 1890 the cards were again made thicker with scalloped or other fancy edges.

ANDERSON & CO.

Photographic Art Palace,
Old No. 121, new, 1311 Main St.,
Op. Mitchell & Tyler's Richmond, Va.

A green 3c Proprietary Tax stamp dates this image to between Aug.1, 1864 and July 31, 1866. The photographer even put his old and new addresses in the backmark.

Cabinet Cards

Introduced:	1863
Peak Years:	1870-1900
Waned:	1905
Last Made:	1920s

The Cabinet Card was introduced by the British at the Windsor and Bridge studios in London. With the advent of better lenses and larger cameras they began using the whole plate process (previously prohibitively expensive). Many of the cameras had two lenses and two images produced on the negative plate. This could be done by uncovering one or both of the lenses at one time for duplicate shots or different shots. After in the Victorian era they were used to doing everything in a big way.

A cabinet card with the thin red line border showing a nice Turtle bottle (Murder Bottle) and an elaborate back mark printed on the front.

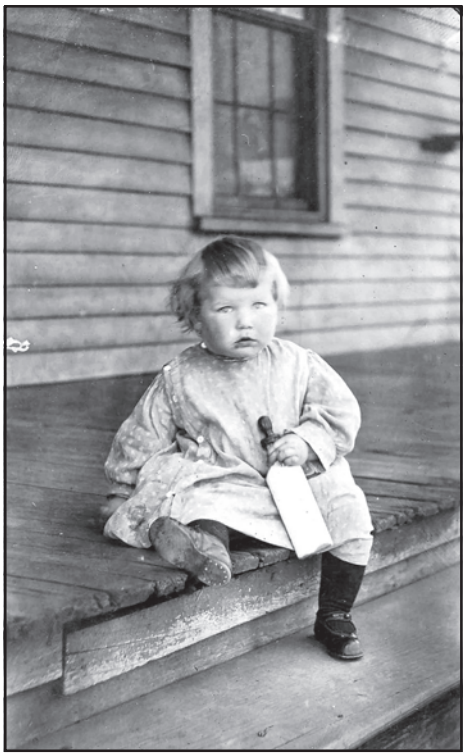
The Cabinet Photo was 4 inches by 5 1/2 inches on a 4 1/4 inch by 6 1/2 inch card — four times the image area of a CDV. Prior to the new larger albums the cards were displayed on the parlor cabinets, thus inspiring the name Cabinet Cards.

Dating the Cabinet Cards is similar to the CDVs. They didn't really catch on until the late 1870s, so prior to then, they are scarce. The earliest Cabinet Card mounts were lightweight and light in color, often with a thin red line about 1/8 inch from the edge. After 1880, various colors were used and the area below the image contained the photographer's imprint. Cards with the beveled gold edge date from the period 1885 to 1892. Maroon faced cards were produced during the 1880s and cards from the 1890s often had scalloped edges and were imprinted with elaborate patterns on the back.

Another datable feature is the Real Photo Post Cards. They came into existence about 1910 and were used up into the 1930s. They are the standard post card size, and quite often, the ones that were mailed will have a postmark on the reverse.

I know that I seem to have been heavily emphasizing the history of photography, but it's progress heavily helps us in the dating of the baby bottles (or any bottle in the photograph) that are prized in our collections. After about 1900, the camera became a tool of the amateur and the dating of the photos becomes much more difficult and unreliable in research. Also the commercial studios changed very little in appearance over the first 60 years of the 20th century.

A definitely elaborate Victorian young lady in her exquisite dress and hat. This Cabinet Card has the beveled gold edge which dates it to the late 1880s. Many of the ladies of this period would not breast feed because it was beneath their dignity. Just a fad, I suppose.



The "real photo" post card is really a unique form of its own. Often the photographer traveled from house to house plying his trade like the old tin tinker. This young child is using a medicine bottle, capped with a very large nipple. I personally love this type of photo because it show how much of America really lived.

A commercial studio portrait showing a cute little girl with her nippled medicine bottle along with her favorite doll.

References:

Collector's Guide to Early Photographs, by O. Henry Mace © 1990.

Catalogue of Civil War Photographers, compiled by George F. Witham © 1988.

Exposing America, by David Horn © 2006.

Introduction to Civil War Photography, by Ross J. Kelbaugh © 1991.

Pure Poison, by Charles David Head
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sinkhole fillers, I told Cousin Billy that we needed to forget about the pot and think about our hides and get the heck out of there. Ever optimistic Cousin Billy retorted that nobody would ever know we had been in the valley, much less catch us red-handed gathering some of the crop.

It was then I remembered the crack in the poison bottle's "head" and responded: "We may not get caught in here, but if we are and *by the right one*, it's going to be PURE POISON for us!"

A gunshot at the head of the valley accomplished what my admonishments could not – get Cousin Billy moving toward the truck, We reached home without encountering anyone and reminisced about our day's adventures.

I placed the poison bottle on my night stand where it would be among the first things I saw the next morning, serving as a constant reminder for me to try to make it through the days ahead without getting a matching crack in the skull!

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This is a true story and one very few people have heard until now. Although Cousin Billy and I wanted to revisit the valley, we never had an opportunity to do so. It is anyone's guess as to how long the valley was used to grow marijuana prior to our visit, or how long the operation continued. However, two years ago, I noticed a photo on the front page of my hometown newspaper that a major crop of pot had been confiscated and hauled away by the Jackson County, Alabama Sheriff's Department. While I am not certain, there is a possibility that this pot came from the same field Cousin Billy and I had stumbled onto in November 2001.