

11 Ways That Historical Photos Provide Clues About Our Ancestors

- Professional Photographer – If a professional photographer took the photos, does his name and location or the name of the studio give us a clue as to the ancestor's residence?
- Type of Photo – Daguerreotype? Tintype? Cabinet card? Can provide you with timing information.
- Photo Frame – was it in a cardboard frame that often had the photographer's name and city or address?
- Clothing – the clothing that was worn can give us great clues as to the date of the photograph and therefore clues for our research.
- Hair Style – clues about the timing of the photo.
- Furniture and Props – in a professional photograph – more timing clues.
- Surrounding information – such as landscape, signs, furniture, machinery, automobiles, and even technology, such as radios and televisions. This can give you dating clues as well as the location of the photo; in some cases their residence location or where they went on vacation.
- House Architecture – many photos were taken on the outside of a home. I even have many photos where the house number is included. The architecture of the home can provide some clues as to its location.
- Gravestone Photo – terrific birth and death date information (although not always accurate) and who the person is buried next to or near can provide additional clues.
- Writing on the back – many times the name(s) of the folks in the photo were written on the back. But since you don't know who wrote the names or when they were written, caution should be taken as to their accuracy.
- Postcards – in the first few decades of the 20th century, special postcards with a photo on the back were mailed. Obviously, the writing in the corresponding part of the card can provide great clues.

For the best information regarding dating an old photograph – it would be very helpful to visit Maureen Taylor's [Photo Detective](#) website. And in the U.K., [Jayne Shrimpton](#). Both have numerous articles and books pertinent to photo analysis.