

Clues for Identifying and Dating Photographs

Hint: A magnifying loop or glass can be a great aid to picking out details in photos that are not labeled.

- ✓ Is there anyone else in the family that can identify these photos? (Don't wait too long to check.)
- ✓ Is there a calendar in the background anywhere? What about newspapers, magazines or advertisements?
- ✓ Are there other people, such as babies or grandparents in the background? Are there pets included in the picture?
- ✓ Are there holiday decorations in the background? Can you tell the season of the year? Is there snow or are there leaves on the trees? How big are the trees in the picture?
- ✓ What kind of clothing is the person wearing? Coat? Summer clothes? What style is the clothing? Is the person wearing a work, military or school uniform?
- ✓ What home was the picture taken in?
- ✓ What home decorations or furnishings are in the picture? Is there wallpaper on the walls? Are there baby items or children's toys in the background?
- ✓ Is there a family picture included in the background? Who is the "baby" in the picture? Are grandparents included in the picture?
- ✓ Are there other photos in the background? Are there photos of in-laws?
- ✓ Who in the photo is wearing wedding rings?
- ✓ Are there other photos with similar processing color or paper that have been dated?
- ✓ How many birthday candles are on the cake?
- ✓ What model of cars are in the picture? Can you read a date on the license plates?
- ✓ Are there other relatives with similar pictures that have been dated?
- ✓ Are there buildings, billboards or other community landmarks in the picture?
- ✓ Collect all the information you can about your family. Eventually the pieces may fit together.
- ✓ Are there identifying marks or dates made by the photographer?
- ✓ Remember these generalities: 1) Most photos mounted on cardboard were taken in the early 1900's or before. 2) Postcard photos were popular around 1910. 3) Children in dresses before 1920 may be male or female. 4) Color photos were not taken until the 1950's and were not common until the 1960's.