Guide to the Cased Photographs from The Bancroft Library and the California State Library

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Collection Summary

**Collection Title:** Guide to the Cased Photographs from The Bancroft Library and the California State Library

**Extent:** ca. 515 items (chiefly daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and tintypes) and ca. 85 photographic prints (salt prints).

**Repositories:** The Bancroft Library
- University of California, Berkeley
- Berkeley, California 94720-6000

California State Library
- Sacramento, California

**Languages Represented:** English

**Access**
Restricted originals. Viewing prints available for most items. Access procedures and restrictions vary by repository. In most cases advance notice or an appointment is required for use. For more information, see each repository's finding aid, or contact the institution directly.

**Publication Rights**
Copyright has not necessarily been assigned to the holding repository. All requests for permission to publish pictorial materials must be submitted in writing to the institution that holds the desired image. Any permission for publication granted is given on behalf of the holding institution as the owner of the physical items and is not intended to include or imply permission of the copyright holder, which must also be obtained by the user.

**Preferred Citation**
Refer to the introductory text in the finding aids for each repository for instruction

**Bibliography**
Berg, Paul K. *19th Century Photographic Cases and Wall Frames.* Huntington Beach (Calif.): Huntington Valley Press, 1995.
Rinhart, Floyd and Rinhart, Marion. *The American Daguerreotype.* Athens (Ga.): University of Georgia Press, c1981.

**Acquisition Information**
Items from various sources, including gifts to the library and library purchases.

**Funding**
This publication was supported in whole or in part by the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered in California by the State Librarian.

Project Abstract:
The present finding aid is a guide to cased photographs and related images in the collections of The Bancroft Library and the California State Library. It was created by Bancroft Library staff in the year 1999-2000, funded by a grant from the U.S. Institute of Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act. The project's goal was to preserve, describe, and digitize cased photographs held by the two institutions. Cased photographs were defined as daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and early tintypes, generally dating from the period ca. 1845-ca. 1870. The main goals of this project were to preserve and to provide access to these exceedingly rare and significant pictorial documents, many of which date from the era of the California gold rush, as the first step in the creation of a comprehensive state-wide digital collection of cased photographs within the Online Archive of California.

The Bancroft Library owns over 400 cased photographs, all of which have been cataloged and digitally reproduced as part of this project. The California State Library's contribution to the site was 78 of its approximately 200 cased photographs.

For a detailed description of the project and its procedures, please refer to the project website:
http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/casedphotos/project.html

Scope & Content
Format, rather than subject content or provenance, is the basic criterion for inclusion in the present finding aid. While the core formats are cased photographs of the 1840s, 1850s and 1860s, related materials are also included. Daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, tintypes (or ferrotypes), and collodion positives on leather or cloth (pannotypes) are the typical media which fall under the definition of cased photographs. In addition to these, the present finding aid contains some media with physical characteristics similar to these, such as opalotypes, crystoleum photographs, and some painted miniatures. For explanations of these media and processes, refer to the Glossary of Terms, below.

Also included are selected early photographs on paper from The Bancroft Library collections. These objects, known as salt prints or salted paper photographs, certainly do not share the physical characteristics common to cased photographs and painted miniatures, yet the era of these earliest photoprints overlaps with the daguerrean era. The subject matter of the selected photoprints is complimentary to the subjects of many of the cased photographs. Their inclusion has strengthened this site as a resource for California landscape photographs and mining views from the period prior to 1865.

Each institution was responsible for its own selection of images, therefore criteria for inclusion will vary. Please see each institution's cased photograph finding aid for further details:

Bancroft's cased photograph finding aid
California State Library’s cased photograph finding aid

In terms of subject content, the vast majority of images are studio portraits. In general, landscape views, building exteriors, street scenes, still lifes, and other non-portrait views are rarities among daguerreotypes and other cased photographs. While the focus of the holdings represented in this project is California and the American West, portraits found in the collections may originate from any number of locations.

Non-portrait views in the collections include important views of gold mining; often placer mining in the river beds of the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains. Views of gold rush boom towns in California mining districts are also present, as are city views of San Francisco, Sacramento, and other California towns.

Glossary of Terms:
Ambrotype:
collodion positive photograph on glass. The ambrotype plate is actually a glass collodion negative that is underexposed or bleached. It appears positive when viewed against a black backing, which was achieved using any number of materials, including asphaltum applied to the plate, a blackened metal backing plate, dark fabric, or use of a dark ruby or violet colored glass. The process was patented in 1854 and was popular in the United States until the middle of the 1860s. Like the daguerreotype, an ambrotype is a unique image, the plate being exposed directly in the camera, therefore not resulting from an intermediary negative.

Clear glass:
most common, with black backing to make the image appear positive.

Colored glass:
collodion on dark colored glass; may be red ("ruby"), violet, or blue in color.

In relievo:
the black backing was not applied to the entire plate, but only behind the image area. A white or colored or patterned backing could then be added to appear as a backdrop and give a slight three-dimensional effect.

Cutting's Patent:
a process intended to protect the image from water damage. The ambrotype plate was sealed to a second glass plate using a layer of balsam. The image plate’s emulsion side faced the glass backing plate or cover plate. Usually, the image plate was on top, the backing plate was blackened with asphaltum, and no cover glass was used. Many examples of imitations or infractions of this patent have been found, with peculiar variations on the idea of sealing two glass plates together. A typical form of deterioration often visible is a fern-like separation of the image plate from the backing plate.

Asphaltum:
black tar-like backing often applied to blacken the backs of ambrotype plates. Application methods varied, and it can appear as a thin varnish or a thick coating.

Bare plate:
term used in the current project to indicate an image plate without its preserver, mat, cover glass, or other packaging. Bare plates were photographed as part of the preservation treatment process when image details were revealed that would otherwise be obscured within the image package.

Calotype:
see Salt Print.

Case:
usual containment for cased photographs, typically made of leather over wood or paper over wood, thermoplastic, papier mache, velvet, or sometimes tortoise shell or mother of pearl. They generally are decorated with a motif or scene: geometric patterns, floral arrangements, and historical or mythological figures are typical. Thermoplastic "union cases" represent the earliest commercial use of plastic, and they date from 1853. These cases are often mistakenly referred to as "gutta percha", which is incorrect.

Case motif:
the decorative pattern on the exterior of the case. In the Bancroft cased photograph project, an attempt was made to identify cases and locate them in one of four reference sources on miniature cases. (See Bibliography for works by Berg, Krainik, and Rinhart). Under Case Notes on each item record in the finding aid, a motif has been described and, if it was located, the reference source was noted, followed by a code or plate number, such as "Rinhart 135". Users should note that Rinhart numbers 230 and higher are found in their work The American Daguerreotype rather than their American Miniature Case Art, which contains the lower plate numbers.

Case well:
the recessed area of a case that holds the image, generally on the right side as the case is opened. Double cases have two wells, with an image in each. The image package is set snugly in the well.

Cloth photograph:
see Pannotype.

Cover glass:
protective glass covering surface of daguerreotypes and most cased ambrotypes and tintypes. Cover glass was placed over the brass mat and, generally, sealed to the plate with a paper tape around its edges. The brass preserver was then placed around this package. Some ambrotypes were cased without cover glass, with the brass mat at the surface. For the Bancroft Library collection, a protective cover glass was added over the mat of such objects. See also: Salting.

Crystoleum:
albumen photographic print (on paper) adhered to the inside of convex glass, waxed or oiled for transparency, and hand colored from behind. An additional convex backing glass may be added. This process was popular later than the cased photograph era, and examples date from the 1870s to ca. 1900 or later.

Daguerreotype:
photograph on silver-plated copper. This is the earliest viable form of photography, and its introduction is usually dated to 1839, although successful experiments in the process predate this by some years. It is named for Louis Jacques Mande Daguerre (1787-1851). A daguerreotype is a unique photographic object, the plate being exposed directly in the camera, with no intermediary negative and therefore no multiple "prints". It is "wrong reading" (the image is reversed) unless it has been copied, or a reversing prism was used. The daguerreotype was the dominant
photographic process well into the 1850s, at which time the ambrotype, the tintype (also called the ferrotype), and the paper photograph contributed to its decline. The daguerreotype process was largely out of use by about 1860.

Die maker (or die-engraver):
the maker of the die cylinders (or molds, for thermoplastic cases) used to emboss a particular decorative motif in the leather, paper, or cloth case covering. Occasionally the name of the die maker appears in very small letters on case exteriors.

Ferrotype:
see Tintype.

Half plate:
see Plate sizes.

Image Package:
term used in the present finding aid to refer to the elements immediately surrounding or sealed together with the image plate. The term is not in general use, but has been applied here as a matter of convenience. As a unit, the image package would be set in the case well. It may consist of some or all of the following: image plate, brass mat, cover glass, brass preserver, paper seal, and possibly a backing of glass, metal, paper, fabric, or other material.

Image well:
see Case well.

Leather Photograph:
collodion positive photograph on blackened leather, similar to a pannotype. In a case and under glass, they may be indistinguishable from tintypes and ambrotypes.

Maker:
see Photographer.

Mat:
brass mats are almost always present on cased photographs, and are usually sealed between the image plate and a cover glass.

Melainotype:
see Tintype

Ninth plate:
see Plate sizes.

Opalotype (or Opal Picture):
carbon transfer or collodion positive on white glass, known as milk glass or porcelain glass.

Pad:
the fabric surface inside the case cover, generally made of silk or velvet over batting. Velvet pads were often embossed with decorative motifs or the name and address of the photographer.

Pannotype:
collodion positive photograph on cloth (oil cloth or linen) blackened with asphaltum or similar black, waxy substance. They are closely related to leather photographs. In a case and under glass, they may be indistinguishable from tintypes and ambrotypes.

Photographer:
Usually, photographers are not identified on cased photographs. Some blind-stamped their names and/or business addresses on their brass mats, and others embossed this information in the velvet pad within the case cover. Occasionally, a pencilled note is found on the paper lining of the case well. Names of case and mat manufacturers or die makers are sometimes found on cases and mats and must not be confused with photographers’ marks.

Plate (image plate vs. backing plate):
plate, in the present finding aid, usually refers to the surface on which the image appears: the silver-plated copper plate of a daguerreotype, the glass of an ambrotype, or the iron plate of a tintype (or ferrotype). The term "backing plate" or "metal plate" was used for a piece of metal or glass added behind the image plate, either as a black ambrotype backing or for strength. (Cloth or paper was also used for this purpose.) See also: Plate sizes.

Plate mark:
a stamped hallmark on a daguerreotype plate that identifies the manufacturer of the plate. Smaller plates cut down from whole plates may or may not exhibit plate marks. Plate marks typically bear a mark specific to the maker, and often a number (40) denoting the silver content. Marks are typically symbols (stars, eagles, lambs, etc.), initials, or company names.

Plate sizes:
Daguerreotype plates were manufactured to (or cut down to) standard sizes, based on fractions of the whole plate. (Other sizes, such as one third or two thirds plates were more commonly used in Europe.)

- Whole plate = 6.5 x 8.5 in.
- Half plate = 4.25 x 5.5 in.
- Quarter plate = 3.25 x 4.25 in.
- Sixth plate = 2.75 x 3.25 in.
- Ninth plate = 2 x 2.5 in.
- Sixteenth plate = 1.38 x 1.63 in.

Preserver (Protector):
the preserver or protector appears as the outermost brass frame around the image package. It is made of thin brass and is crimped around the edges of the image package, and is on the exterior of the cover glass. Daguerreotypes prior to the late 1840s generally did not have preservers, but they may also be lacking from later examples.

Protector:
see Preserver.

Quarter plate:
see Plate sizes.

Rail:
the edges of the case and case cover, framing the image package or the pad.

Salted paper print (Salted paper photograph or salt print):
early common form of photographic print on paper, pre-dating the albumen print which was predominant in the 19th century. More common in England and Europe in the 1840s, most American examples date from the mid-1850s to early 1860s. Early European examples, termed Calotypes or Talbotypes (invented by William Henry Fox Talbot), were printed from waxed paper negatives. Examples from the American West of the 1850s were usually printed from wet collodion glass negatives.

Salting:
typical deterioration obscuring daguerreotypes. Salting may have the appearance of beads of moisture (or "weeping") or of a dry, crystalline substance inside the cover glass. It is the result of condensation (resulting from temperature and humidity changes) interacting with the glass, and is generally composed of silica and sodium hydroxide. (See Barger and White, p. 175-181.) Usually it is on the cover glass and not the plate and can be easily removed by a conservator, although it can cause damage to the plate itself.

Seal:
generally, strips of paper adhered with glue or paste around the edges of plates and cover glass to seal the image from the atmosphere. Sealing prevents tarnishing of daguerreotype plates. Original seals are often made from writing paper and may have fragments of annotations or other text on them. Archival filmoplast seals have been used to reseal image packages in the Bancroft Library collection.

Sixteenth plate:
see Plate sizes.

Sixth plate:
see Plate sizes.

Tintype (or Ferrotype):
collodion positive photograph on an iron plate. The process dates from the mid-1850s and, in different variations, was popular in the United States well into the 20th century. Given that the plate is iron and not tin, "ferrotype" is the technically accurate term. However, common usage in the United States is "tintype", and this is therefore the term preferred by the Library of Congress and in the present finding aid. The earliest American tintypes often bore "melainotype" or "Neff's Patent" markings on the plate. Like the daguerreotype and ambrotype, the tintype was a unique image, the plate being exposed directly in the camera, therefore not resulting from an intermediary negative.
Union case:
common name for thermoplastic miniature cases, used generically for this type of case.
Well:
see Case well.
Weeping glass:
see Salting.
Whole plate:
see Plate sizes.

Notes on Descriptive Cataloging:
The descriptions present in this finding aid follow rules set forth in Anglo American Cataloging Rules, 2nd edition (AACR2) and in Elisabeth Betz's Graphic Materials. However, the specialized nature of the objects and the descriptive detail that was desired led to the creation of many local standards and descriptive conventions. For further information on description, see the frontmatter of each repository’s finding aid.

Controlled subject terms used in both the California State Library and The Bancroft Library’s finding aids are listed below, divided into terms used for people and those used for other image content.

Actors
Actresses
African Americans: used for Afro-Americans, black people.
Aged persons: used for elderly, senior citizens.
Authors
Boys
Children
Chinese
Couples: used for mixed gender couples of unknown relationship as well as husbands and wives.
Families
Fathers & children
Girls
Governors
Indians of North America
Infants
Legislators
Men
Miners: see also Gold mines and Mining.
Mothers & children
Musicians
Nannies
Pioneers
Pioneers -- California
Racially mixed children
Soldiers: used for men or boys in uniform. Most are Civil War soldiers.
Teenagers
University of California (1868-1952) -- Faculty.
Women.
Young adults
Buildings: see also Commercial buildings, Hotels, Churches, Dwellings, and Cabins.
Cabins: see also Buildings.
Carriages & coaches: see also Carts & wagons.
Guide to the cased photographs and related images from The Bancroft Library pictorial collections, bulk ca. 1845-ca. 1870

Contributing Institution: The Bancroft Library.
Berkeley, California 94720-6000

Physical Description: ca. 440 items (chiefly daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and tintypes)

Scope and Content Note
Approximately 440 cased photographs and related images from the collections of The Bancroft Library. Included are daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and tintypes dating from the 1840s through 1860s. Also present are some painted miniature portraits as well as other photographic processes such as opalotypes, pannotypes, and crystoleum prints.

Note
View Finding Aid

Cased photographs selected from the collections of the California History Section of the California State Library

Contributing Institution: California State Library
Sacramento, California

Physical Description: 78 photographs (in 74 cases)

Scope and Content Note
78 cased photographs selected from the collections of the California State Library. Includes daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and tintypes (also called ferrotypes) dating from the late 1840s to the mid-1860s. Subject matter is chiefly portraits of California pioneers and mining scenes, mining districts, and towns of the California gold rush.

Note
View Finding Aid

Guide to the Cased Photographs from The Bancroft Library and the California Stat...