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Photographic Gems Can Be Found in the Dutton Family Papers

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Photographic Gems Can Be Found in the Dutton Family Papers

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a daguerreotype, a process named for Louis Daguerre, the French artist and physicist who invented the method that became prominent from 1840 to 1860. The Daguerreotype's reflection comes from a silver plated sheet placed behind the image. A less expensive process, known as an ambrotype, was developed where a black backing replaced the silver plate, still providing contrast for the glass-mounted image. Ambrotypes were less expensive to produce and became popular in the 1850s and 1860s. A portrait of Wheelock Craig serves as an example of a beautifully preserved ambrotype in the collection.

Few collections in Fogler Library's Special Collections Department provide such a comprehensive glimpse of the evolution of photography in the 19th century as the Dutton family papers. This Ellsworth family's documents include letters, family records, and original copies of the sermons of Wheelock Craig, a prominent Congregational minister born in Augusta, Maine. One notable aspect is the nearly 600 professionally taken photos representing the work of more than 100 different professional studio locations as far flung as California, Dakota Territory, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Italy, France and Germany. Dozens of images were taken throughout Massachusetts, and twenty five Maine photographic studios are represented, providing a glimpse of a lively industry in Maine by the 1860s.

The Dutton family is known to have had connections to several families in Augusta, including the Wheelock, Craig, and Briggs families, but one can only image how the family may have been connected to all of the individuals in all of the images, whether family, friends, business associates, or whether someone in the family became an avid collector. Very few images include names or dates, but the processes used to create them provide some clues as to when they were taken.

Three early, non-paper based photographic processes are represented within the family's collection. One photo identified as "Wheelock Craig and Bride" is mounted on glass and has the mirror-like reflection characteristic of



Ambrotype of Wheelock Craig from the Dutton family papers.

Several tintype photographs, or images mounted on black painted tin, were saved by the family. Even less expensive than glass-plated methods, tintypes were common from around 1855 until the turn of the century. Photo studios purchased large plates of metal and produced relatively standard sizes ranging from a whole plate (6 1/2" x 8 1/2") to a sixteenth-plate (1 3/8" x 1 5/8"). As is true in the examples in the Dutton family papers, this often meant the photographs had irregular cuts and slightly crooked edges. The tintypes are also easily distinguished from the other early methods in that tintypes are attracted to a magnet, while the glass-based photographs are not.

Tintypes that were particularly small, measuring less



It is literally true, then, that photographic gems can be found in the Dutton family papers, along with several other formats of interest to those looking at the history of photography.

By the end of the 1860s, paper mounted portraits used as calling cards became popular. Known as *cartes de visite*, these images were slightly larger than a typical business card of today. Another preprinted album in the collection was used to gather dozens of portraits of women in hoop skirts and men in jackets with velvet collars common in the Civil War era. In the early 1870s, similar prints mounted on larger cardstock (measuring 4 ½ by 6 ½ inches) emerged as the more common format. Hundreds of examples of this size, known as “cabinet cards,” were saved by the Dutton family.

While many names, dates and events related to these photographs have now been lost, the photos continue to provide an opportunity to examine the scientific, stylistic, artistic, and societal trends that surrounded their creation. For more information or a chance to see items in the Dutton family papers, contact the Special Collections Department at 207.581.1686 or email spc@umit.maine.edu.

A guide to the collection can also be found online at www.library.umaine.edu/speccoll/FindingAids/DuttonFamily.htm

Left: Tintype from the Dutton family papers. Tintypes are easy to discern from other early photo processes because they are attracted to a magnet.

Below: Examples of cabinet cards saved by the Dutton family.

than an inch by an inch, where also known as “gems.” This tiny format was the most widely produced form of photograph in the United States in the 1860s. Several duplicate images could be captured at once by using a multi-lens camera and then clipped apart, making for an inexpensive format. The small size was also perfect for mounting in jewelry including locket or broaches. The collection includes a miniature, preprinted photo album set to hold eight gems in recessed pockets, four on the front and four on the back.

