Cased Images – Daguerreotypes and Tintypes
Video Podcast Transcript
Minnesota Historical Society

Diane Adams-Graf: It’s easy to look at cased photographs and think that all of these cases hold the same type of photographs when in fact there are different photographic types in cases. Two of the very common image types that they can hold are daguerreotypes and tintypes. There are a couple of ways that you can identify the difference between a daguerreotype and a tintype. A daguerreotype will often have a very mirror like surface that is highly reflective, and this can be a giveaway to that. A Tintype will be a little denser, a little darker.

We can take a daguerreotype and look at how it’s constructed by taking the case apart. The cover often had velvet lining on the inside as part of the protection and decoration. There would then be a piece of cover glass to protect the daguerreotype. A matte which served two purposes one a decorative frame for the image and to protect the daguerreotype from any scratches. The daguerreotype itself which was the image captured on the silver-coated copper plate. And on this too you can see the paper preserver on the reverse which would wrap around the daguerreotype, cover the matte, cover the glass, and seal them all together. This would then be placed in the case.

With this particular image you can see that it doesn’t have a matte, and it is not a daguerreotype. If we were to take this out, we could tell looking at the back of it that it is a piece of iron, tin-dipped iron, and is indeed a tintype with the image affixed.

The daguerreotype is always in a case. A tintype isn’t necessarily always in a case because it could be multiple copies and made on large sheets of tin-dipped iron. You could often find tintypes without cases.

Cased images eventually became a thing of the past with the advent of the carte de visite, albumin prints mounted to pressed paper which were lightweight could made in as many as eight at a time and quickly replaced both the tintype and the daguerreotype.