

A delicately tinted, late-1850s English portrait of a young man with his well-trained terrier mix who sits upright and holds a small pipe in his mouth. This image on glass is preserved in an exquisite, mother-of-pearl case designed to resemble a gold-trimmed book. Ambrotype



Images from the dawn of photography prove that times, technology, and fashions may change, but the love between humans and their dogs is eternal.

PHOTO ALBUM: VICTORIAN DOGS AND THEIR PEOPLE

By Brian Patrick Duggan

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY BRIAN DUGGAN COLLECTION



With the Westminster Kennel Club making a big splash in the newspapers every year (and other regional clubs being formed), these men and boys from Milford, Massachusetts, jumped on the bandwagon with their own club with scent hounds—my first 19th-century dog photo. Boudoir Cabinet mount



Two English ladies pose with their Irish Setter puppies in the 1890s. The pups are likely littermates. Cabinet mount

What a curious dog photo!
I've never seen one like it
before ...

At a paper ephemera show years ago, I spotted it in a bin of photographs. Thirteen men and boys with five scent hounds stood outside a shack, posing with pots, axe, broom, bamboo pole, and shotgun. They were the “Kennel Club, North Pond, Milford, Mass, Summer 1895.” I thought it very funny and bought it. Then I got to wondering what other antique dog photographs were out there. As it happily turned out, a good deal.

BEGINNINGS

In 1839, two men working independently in France and England invented different but equally effective

methods of using sunlight and sensitized strata to capture an image from life. Louis-Jaques-Mandé Daguerre used polished, silver-plated copper sheets while Henry Fox Talbot used chemically salted paper. These were the first commercially viable processes. Subjects had to remain motionless for many seconds to produce a blur-free likeness (mechanical shutters weren't commonly used until the 1880s). Iron stands with head rests helped to steady adults but there was no such help for small children—or fidgety dogs.

The first dog photos date to the early 1840s, but for a good portrait, the canine subject had to be well-trained, tired, or even asleep. To achieve stillness, an off-camera assistant might reveal a caged

canary, call the dog's name, or mesmerize Rover with a treat. Affectionate owners solved the height disparity between



Here the photographer was asked to center on Viking, an English Pointer. The owner, standing behind a draped table, held his dog's head with one hand and offered a treat with the other. A rare instance of the dog's details being noted on the back—"Viking, aged 3 yrs 3 mths Sep. 1884" CDV



Seated in an adjustable studio chair, a strikingly unusual pose where the terrier-mix in his lap looks directly at the camera while his owner looks off at 90 degrees. At the top and right side, the gray "swoop" and angular white area are random artifacts from the wet plate developing process. Tintype, 3 3/4 inches x 5 1/8 inches

dog and human by sitting together on a couch (lap-snuggling was another excellent solution).



French painter Jean-Louis Ernest Meissonier in his studio with a young Borzoi, 1862–63. Meissonier (1815–1891) is famous for realistic paintings of military and costume figures, horses, and dogs (as well as sculpture). Meissonier posed with his Borzoi (an unusual breed outside of Russia, then) for other photos so I suspect the hound may be named in some letter or journal. CDV

Photographic processes evolved (with overlaps) from Daguerreotype and salted paper to ambrotype, albumen paper,

and tintype, right up to the invention of the Kodak box camera in 1888 with roll film, which allowed, for the first time,



Above: AKC Champion Hector (Saint Bernard), from Mr. K. E. Hopf's *The Hospice Kennels*, Arlington, New Jersey, photographed in 1887 with little Aunt Jackie or Naomi (different notes on the back contradict each other). The breed was recognized in 1885 and Hector was an early prizewinner, often exhibited at the Westminster Kennel Club show. Oversize cabinet mount

Right: The relationship of this old gent and his beloved Pug is evident. Taken in the English Riviera, circa 1890, they've neatly solved the dog-human height disparity challenge. CDV



doggy snapshots without a professional—and easy duplication.

PHOTO-MANIA

Queen Victoria commissioned many portraits of her favorite pooches. When Sharp, a Border Collie-type, died at age 15, she had his photograph and lock of tail hair specially framed. These black and white images could be delicately tinted to make tongues pink, neck ribbons pale blue, and brass collars highlighted in gold paint.

The earliest photographs weren't easily duplicated, so each was a unique treasure for intimate enjoyment with family and friends. As lens technology and chemical processes improved, exposure times lessened. Even in the 1870s, Chicago

“artist” Alexander Hesler bragged about his “photographic victory” in capturing a steady image of a rat terrier standing on three legs with tail up and mouth open. Dog portraits could be made on ambrotypes (glass), tintypes, and on paper with *cartes de visit* or CDV (trading card size), cabinet cards (larger sizes), and even stereo views. During the early 1860s, it became possible to commercially produce multiple duplicates on paper, so people could now easily share photographs by mail.

PERSONAL QUEST

Sitting for one's likeness then was a more momentous occasion than today, and because it was difficult to hold a

natural smile for long exposures, people (including children) didn't. A hint of a smile is occasionally seen but the affection between dogs and their people is amply



One chilly day during the 1860s, this middle-class Bridgeport, Massachusetts, couple brought their old dog to the studio for a family portrait. CDV



A mid-1850s Southern hunter with his Catahoula Leopard Dog—who moved his head during the long exposure despite his owner's steadying hand (count the "three" noses). Ambrotype in decorated, pressed paper case

demonstrated with body language, proximity, mutual gaze, and just that the dog was included in a significant, personal event.

Standards and Preservation

Decide what qualities in dog images are important (and these will evolve for you). Mike Medhurst, a collector and dealer in vintage photographs, puts it this way: "When I buy dog images for my collection, I look for artistry and the connection between the dog and the sitter and/or the connection between the subjects and myself as viewer."

Quality: Sharp focus with good contrast, tonal range, and composition—in better or excellent condition (but rare content can eclipse poor condition).

Interaction: Demonstrable relationship between dog and person (if present), with pleasing pose.

Breed or type: Is the dog recognizable or identified as such?

Data: Period notes might give date, name, lineage, or even accomplishments. If undated, can the photograph be reasonably attributed to one decade?

Storage: Protect them from direct sunlight. Paper images should be kept in an archival, PVC-free polypropylene sleeve and a pH-neutral box or album. Ideally, the storage environment has climate control with reasonably *consistent* temperature and humidity. Archival storage products can be had from [Archival Methods](#) and [Century Photo](#).

Cataloging: Record the photograph's details for posterity—subject, cost, source, any written information, and your collection number (e.g. BPD-001). Write the latter in erasable pencil on the back.

Where to find them? Sources can include antique shops, flea markets, auctions, dealers, and even your relatives.

To look and learn: Here are links to museums with excellent 19th-century dog images: [Getty Museum](#), [Metropolitan Museum of Art](#), [George Eastman Museum](#), and [Victoria and Albert Museum](#).

Sighthounds are my particular interest but their images tend to be scarce, as many of those breeds weren't common in the West during the 1800s. During that century, a good many breed types were still evolving, and I do enjoy the challenge of trying to identify a breed when there is no definite information on the photograph.

COLLECTING DOG PHOTOGRAPHS

When I was first bitten by the dog photo-collecting bug, practically every

dog image mesmerized me, and I bought many despite their quality being less than desirable. But after study, learning from experts and veteran collectors, and looking at many, many images ([The Daguerreian Society](#) is a great resource), I'm much more selective. Most importantly, I've formed my own criteria for the differences between a great dog image, a good one, and a poor one. As a wise man once told me, "it's natural to grab the inexpensive or



Above: Circa 1890, an English country gentleman with his young Irish Wolfhound—a breed newly reconstructed after near extinction in the early 1800s. The brown spots are “foxing” from contact with acidic paper but don’t detract from the image’s elegance. The mount was trimmed, cutting through the photographer’s mark, probably to fit a frame or album. Imperial Cabinet mount, Brian Duggan Collection

Left: Mr. E. Chamberlain of Massachusetts loved big dogs. Here he poses with Landseer Newfoundland Bruno in the harness of his custom-built dog cart. There is evidence to suggest Chamberlain gave these CDVs away as a calling card or personal advertisement. CDV

iffy-quality when first starting but, at some point, sell your mediocre stuff and buy a fine piece. Repeat that every chance you get.”

So here are a few images illustrating facets of the human-dog relationship, which are no different from what we have today. I hope you find them worthwhile. **FD**

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In an elaborate studio set, in the mid-1860s, this American girl poses with her Mexican Hairless dog, an extremely rare breed in the 19th-century United States. 3 5/8 inches by 2 3/8 inches, tintype

To learn more about Louis-Jaques-Mandé Daguerre and the Daguerreotype, see [That Dog in the Daguerreotype, Family Dog, November/December 2021](#)

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