

FRAMED AT THE WARNER SITE
20LV334
BRIGHTON, MI



Abstract

Excavations at the historic Warner site, 20LV334, have yielded a carte-de-visite frame patented in 1862.

Introduction

Several thousand images related to multiple generations at the historic Warner site have been analyzed and scanned over the past decade. This collection of photos includes snapshots of family life dating to the 19th, 20th, and 21st centuries originating in large part from extended family members as well as resident direct descendants. Although photos of any type are rare in the archaeological context, along with related accessories, excavations at the Warner site have yielded fragments of a metal picture frame.

Four fragments of a thin cuprous carte-de-visite (CDV) frame were recovered from units 560520N, 565480S, 555530E, and 555490E. The fragments are fully embellished on the front with finely stamped images detailing scrollwork, leaves, flowers, hummingbirds, and an urn superimposed on a textured background. The outside edge is scalloped with a series of symmetrically spaced dots following the curved exterior outline. The surface of both sides exhibits a soft green patina free of corrosion.

The reverse features an extension of folded metal with protruding tabs along the interior edge. One of the folds still clasps the edge of card stock preserved within it. Inscriptions on the folds include “J.

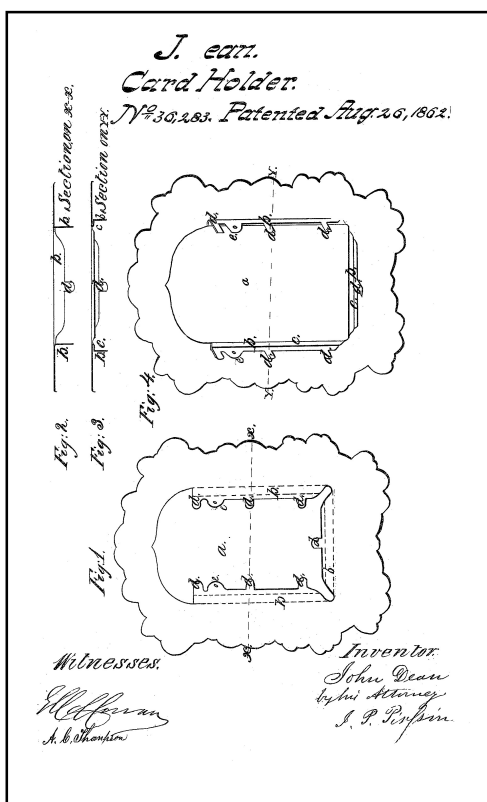
DEAN'S. PATENT AUG. 26 1862." on one fragment and "DEAN & WORCESTER. MA No 84" on another. Measurements for the fragments are:

Unit	Weight (g)	Length (mm)
560520N	2.3	72.53
565480S	1.3	28.68 (folded)
555530E	2.2	72.17
555490E	0.6	28.10 (folded)

The thickness of the fragments is 0.44 mm and the width at the widest point is 17.80 mm.

Discussion

John Dean, of Worcester, MA was awarded patent number 36,283 for a "Card-Holder" on August 26, 1862. The main advantage of Dean's design included simplifying the process of creating a picture frame made by manufacturing it from a single piece of stamped sheet metal. Tabs cut from the inside edges of the frame were folded back to form a carriage for the protective glass plate and the carte-de-visite photograph, holding them securely in place. Dean also claimed that the bends forming the carriage also worked to provide rigidity to the frame. He described that the border could be "gilt, engraved and decorated, to suit the taste and fancy" (Dean 1862).



John Dean's innovation provided a simple but attractive method for framing carte-de-visite photographs.

Dean's invention is a natural extension of picture framing that conformed to technological changes in photography during the mid 19th century. Predecessors of the carte-de-visite, the daguerreotype, ambrotype, and to some extent the tintype were very often encased in protective leather or thermoplastic cases and elaborated with gilt or brass matting. In fact, Dean also patented an "Improvement in Mats for Daguerreotypes" a year earlier in 1861 (Dean 1861). Dean's 1862 innovation adapts the previous idea of framing and displaying photographs with attractive metal matting to the new carte-de-visite format. The inscription of "No 84" on the frame fragment may suggest a variety of design/decorative styles were produced by Dean.

Beginning around 1859, this new style produced photographs on paper mounted on card stock rather than using glass, iron, or copper plates. Carte-de-visite production spanned as late as the 1880s, but was especially popular around the time of the Civil War until overtaken by the larger cabinet card style in the 1870s (Phototree.com 2010). The images were produced on standard sized paper (2 1/8 in x 3 1/2 in) and card stock (2 1/2 in x 4 in) (Nolan 2014). The biggest advantage of the carte-de-visite format is that multiple copies of the same image could be made from a single negative. They were originally inspired by

calling cards that were often left when visiting friends and relatives and became known as the “card photograph” (Nolan 2014).

Despite a collection boasting over 4,000 scanned images, only a handful of Warner family photos have been dated to the 19th century. Included in the inventory of 19th century photos are several cartes-de-visite as well as cabinet cards. Two cartes-de-visite of unidentified infants were discovered in the attic of the 1855 Greek Revival home. One is unmarked while the other is labeled on the back “W. H. Brummitt, CROFOOT’S NEW BLOCK, (Opposite Hodges House), PONTIAC, MICH.” Brummitt was in business at that location from 1871-1894 (Tinder 2013). This photo has tentatively been identified as an image of the author’s great grandfather, Herbert A. Warner, born in 1885.



A carte-de-visite discovered in the attic of the 1855 Greek Revival home is tentatively attributed to a third generation family member circa 1885.

Conclusions

Card stock fragments preserved in the frame suggest that it once held a photograph, in particular a carte-de-visite, possibly from around the time of the Civil War. There is no indication that the frame included glass or was embellished with gilt. It is unclear why fragments were found nearly fifty feet apart, why or when it was originally discarded, and why two pieces appear to be (intentionally) folded. The pieces appear to originate from a single frame that is not completely represented. Other artifacts found in adjacent units suggest a possible late 19th century deposition, as one fragment from 560520N was found a little more than five feet north of Feature 9, a late 19th century ash pit. The fragment found in 555530E was found adjacent to Feature 12, a late 19th century/early 20th century privy. However, it should be noted that artifacts possibly dating to the 1850s have also been recovered in those areas leaving room for ambiguity regarding use longevity.

By the time of the Civil War, changes in photographic technology yielded lower costs as well as increased availability and distribution. Matching this transformation were the frames that housed the images on card stock backing. Manufactured of stamped sheet metal, the frames such as those offered by Dean on the east coast would have been inexpensively mass-produced providing an attractive yet economic way to display photos even as far away as rural Brighton, MI.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank all the volunteers who have assisted in field and lab work over the years that make analysis and publication of finds like this possible.

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