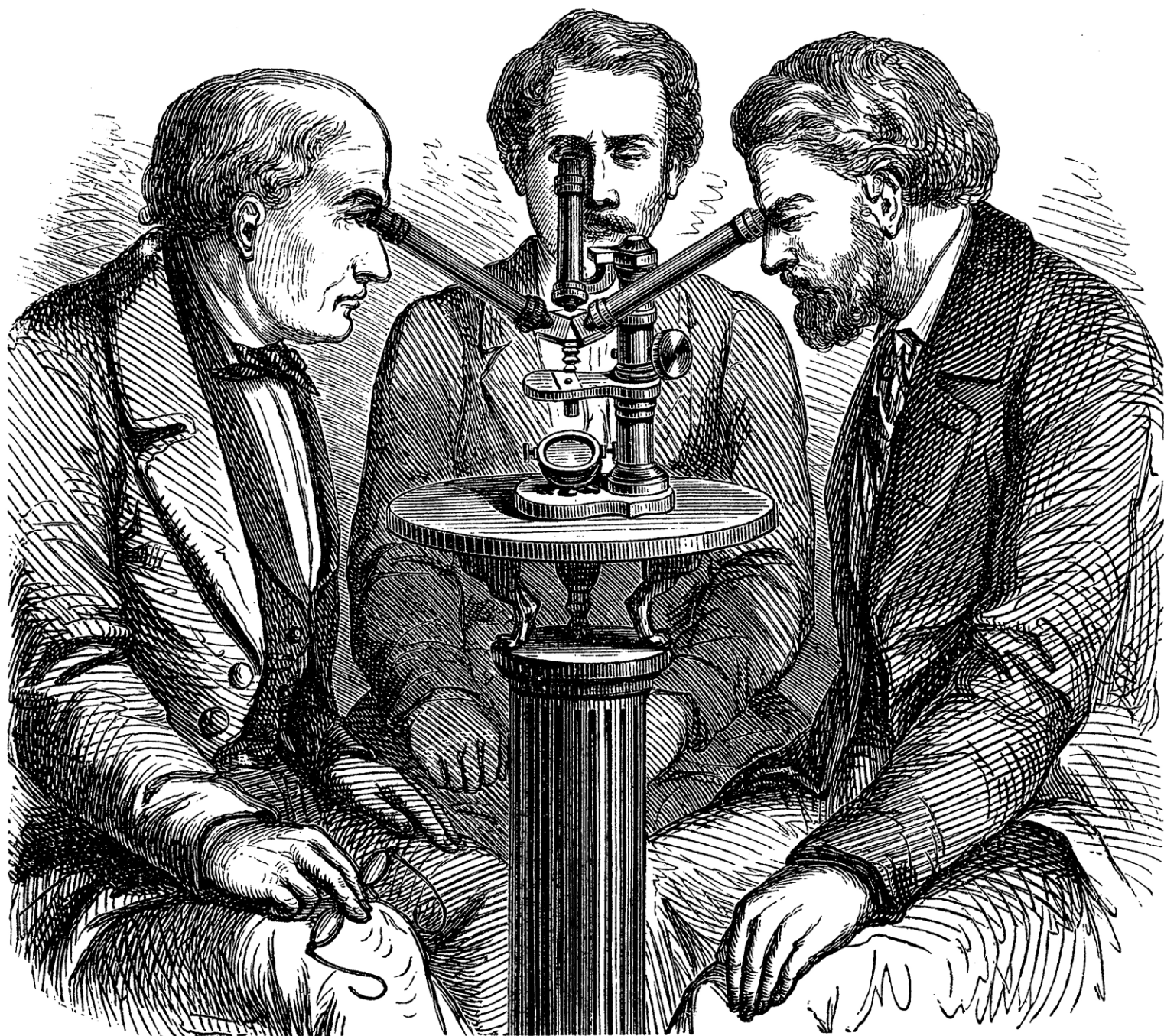


Arming you with knowledge and tools to combat counterfeit images

Fakes, Forgeries and Frauds

By Perry M. Frohne



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About This Guide

This guide is a compilation of columns, “Fakes, Forgeries and Frauds: Arming you with knowledge and tools to combat counterfeit images” by Perry M. Frohne. The columns appeared between Autumn 2019 and Autumn 2023 in *Military Images*, a quarterly magazine with a mission to showcase, interpret and preserve historic photography from the Civil War period. The order of the columns has been changed, and some modifications have been made to the text, for this publication.

This guide is offered as a service to photograph collectors of all levels of experience with the goal of educating and raising awareness of fake images—and giving you the tools you need to detect them. These images, created with the intent to deceive, entered the marketplace as early as the 1980s. They will always be out there. The guide will give you confidence and practical knowledge to help you avoid costly mistakes.

Perry M. Frohne is the owner of [Frohne’s Historic Military](#). He has been investigating fake images for more than 25 years. He is a *MI* Senior Editor. Contact Perry at perryfrohne@aol.com.

Cover photograph: *iStock*

PART 1

Develop Your Sixth Sense for Fakes

Will Rodgers truly was a keen observer of his fellow man. His bit of wisdom quoted here applies to the military images marketplace. Over the years I have met all three types. But, sadly, most collectors and dealers fall into the last category. This is where those with evil intentions thrive.

I have peed on that fence many, many times, before learning my lesson. The main reason I bought fake images was avarice, pure and simple. The lure of a fantastic image for sale at a low price clouded my normally analytical (and cynical) mind. I believed the seller had made a mistake to my advantage!

These bargain purchases arrived in the mail, and I anxiously opened each package. When the image inside was authentic, I congratulated myself for good judgment. When it was a fake, my disappointment was

palpable. Most of the time I could get my money back, but sometimes I didn't. That feeling of avarice still comes over me and I have to fight it—especially on eBay.

What motivated me to write this guide? I would love to tell you it's an uncontrollable urge to be helpful. In truth, the real reason is money. I sell a lot of military images, and the influx of fake photography hurts my bottom line. It likewise destroys trust in the image market itself.

Through the years, my customers would get ripped off, and many of them actually quit collecting images due to their fear of being taken.

This needs to stop.

What qualifies me to assist you in this learning process? Well, I have learned many valuable lessons in 30-plus years of traveling the world, setting up at hundreds of trade shows, and looking over thousands and thousands of early photographs of all types. I have spent years reading about early photography, going to museums and appraising photographic (and general Civil War) collections for institutions and collectors.

In 1998 I began to fight against fake images on my website *Modoc1873.com*. Sadly, my "Fakes and Frauds" section has only grown larger over time. Judging by the emails I have received over the years, the information on my site has kept good people from losing their hard earned money to image fraud. This gratifies me. These experiences, and my own buying mistakes, have equipped me to fight those who would take advantage of our inherent trust in the honesty of our fellow humans.

This introduction contains general information and a short history of why images are being faked. Other parts highlight specific ways to help you identify counterfeits, and to build your fake image knowledge base.

Let's start with a brief history of the why and how fakes came to be.

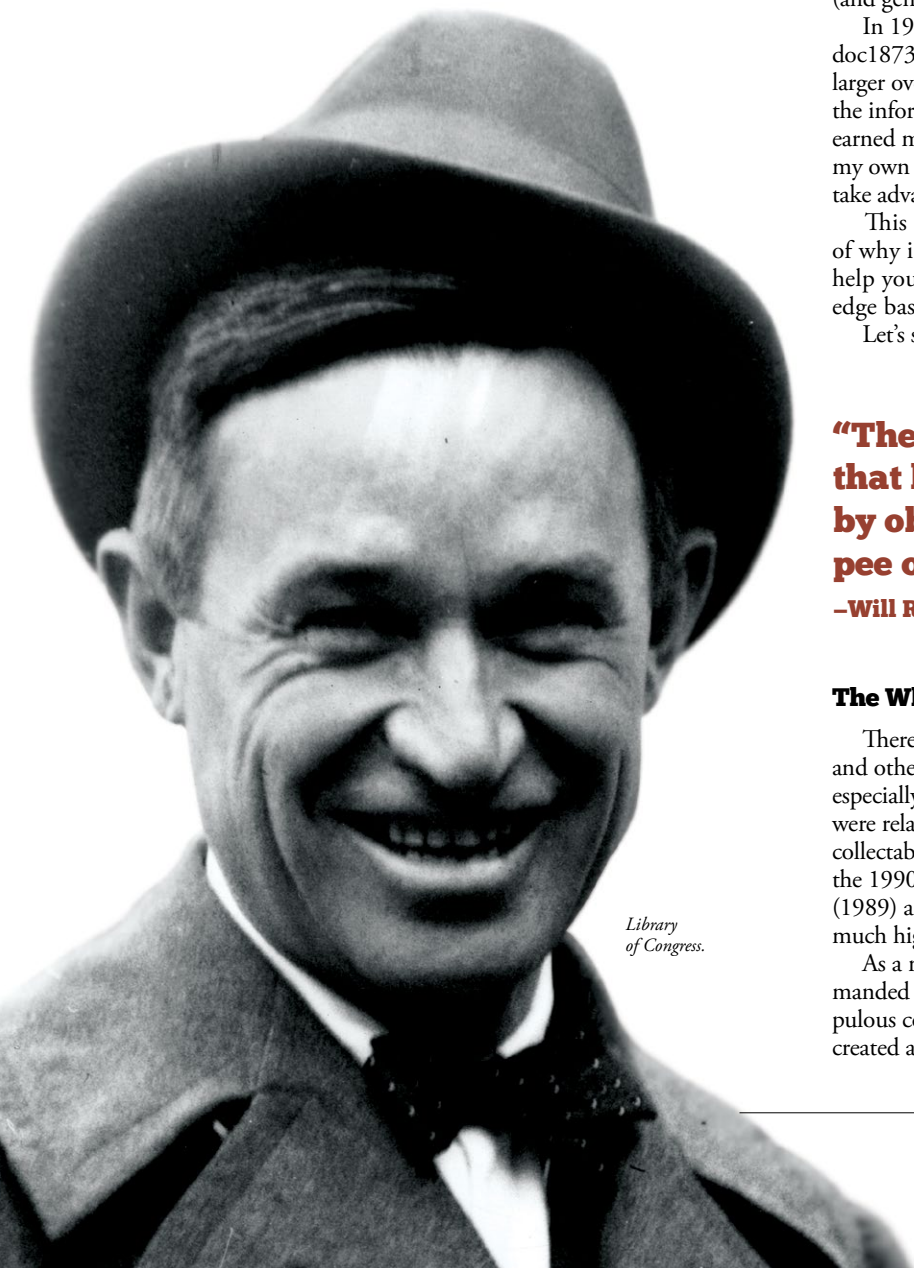
"There are three kinds of men. The ones that learn by reading. The few who learn by observation. The rest of them have to pee on the electric fence for themselves."

—Will Rogers

The Why

There had long been fake belt buckles, falsely identified swords, and other misrepresented collectibles to intentionally deceive buyers, especially at gun shows. Photos initially avoided this fate because they were relatively cheap. But a dramatic increase in demand for Civil War collectibles occurred in the later part of the last century, largely due to the 1990 Ken Burns miniseries *The Civil War*, and movies, notably *Glory* (1989) and *Gettysburg* (1993). Soon, collectibles and images commanded much higher prices than ever before.

As a result, photos that you could once buy for a few dollars now commanded prices in the hundreds (and even thousands) of dollars. Unscrupulous collectors and dealers took advantage of the uptick in prices. This created an environment for creating fraudulent images.



Library of Congress.

The How

In the mid-1990's, the Internet went mainstream. Online auction sites not only became a source for collectors to purchase fantastic material, but also, with little or no seller accountability, to get ripped off. Fake *cartes de visite* became easy to manufacture, and, because of slower web access and low-definition digital images, easy to pass off as originals at high prices. When a buyer complained, the fakers stopped selling under one name and started with another. The verifications and security that keep you safe while surfing today's web were absent.

Comparing examples from the 1990's to modern fakes, I am astounded by the creativity of those doing it today. Making fakes has evolved with better tools to produce them. Better quality fakes are also driven, in part, by technology, as high definition and faster Internet speeds have allowed users to see online photography in a clearer light.

Combat fake images with knowledge

There is no easy way of detecting fakes without experience, and, even then, it can be a tough call. You can't buy experience. You can only acquire it with time.

One key to success involves building your knowledge of Civil War photography before you start spending your hard-earned money. Study as many real images as you can. Looking, touching and analyzing early images at antique shops, old bookstores and trade shows can increase your knowledge of photography of all periods and provides helpful context.

You can also learn how authentic photography was made. Basic knowledge of photographic processes will help you detect when an image is not as represented. One other key: Learn about hairstyles, clothing and uniforms, weapons, equipment, backdrops and other elements of a portrait. Honest buyers and sellers who do not make the effort to learn these details will likely make mistakes. One of the most common complaints I hear involves images for sale described as Civil War period, but in fact date to the Indian Wars or later.

Finally, buy from reputable dealers with money back guarantees. Make sure they have been in business long enough to have established a track record. Talk to your fellow collectors and share information to build a list of trustworthy dealers.

Recommended books

These three books can help build or increase your knowledge base.

Collector's Guide to Early Photographs, 2nd Edition by O. Henry Mace presents the best knowledge guide about 19th century images. The book is basic, though comprehensive. It explains the photographic processes and the fundamental history of photography, and provides general explanations of the subjects and condition of individual items that affect their market value.

Two very detailed and well-illustrated books offer valuable information for beginning and advanced collectors. Both were written by Gary W. Clark: *19th Century Card Photos KwikGuide: A Step-by-Step Guide to Identifying and Dating Cartes de Visite and Cabinet Cards and Cased Images* & *Tintypes KwikGuide: A Guide to Identifying and Dating Daguerreotypes, Ambrotypes, and Tintypes*.

You can find all these books from a variety of sources at inexpensive prices.

Developing a sixth sense

I hope this introduction can help you develop a sixth sense—that inexplicable gut feeling that makes us hesitate, pause and consider. Anyone who has viewed an image at a show or online and felt that something was off or simply wrong, may have a difficult time putting a finger on exactly why. The image in question may have a strange color, the wrong mount for the period or some other inconsistency. This pause is what I call my "Fake Radar." Learn to trust that feeling and you will be better prepared to purchase with confidence. You will make errors—we all have—but that goes with collecting anything of value. I believe that this sixth sense is the most important tool in your collecting toolbox.

That's enough for now. We'll start this journey together, and I will do my best to help you identify and avoid any fakes that come your way. Please let me know if you want me to address specific questions. And please share images and stories from when you bought a fake. My email is perrymfrohne@gmail.com.

Together we can learn not to pee on that fence!

Must-Have Piece of Fake Detection Equipment

The different tools needed to detect fakes and frauds in old photography are not expensive to buy and are easy to use. These specialized tools come in handy for collectors on every level.

The list, while not long, includes items easily found for sale on the internet or in local hobby shops. The small upfront investment in these specialized detection tools will be justified every time you avoid purchasing a fraudulent image.

I will cover the more specialized tools in more detail in a future article.

There is one tool every dealer and collector needs now—an illuminated 10x magnifier. Very few items meant to deceive can pass undetected under its strong light and magnification. This is particularly true of bad CDV's and hard images at Civil War and photography shows. The lighting in the large halls or rooms used to host these shows is never adequate for a proper review of any image. While some dealers provide lamps to help you see better, most do



Lighthouse.

not. These little magnifiers are also handy at home when you are inspecting a purchase you made online.

Using a magnifier with a built-in light should expose any problems with an image and can help you detect if it is a fake. I personally use the Lighthouse (Leuchtturm) Illuminated 10x Magnifier.

Mine is well worn because I always carry it with me at shows. Appearance does not matter. You can find them in different styles. What matters is that you can easily inspect an image with it.

This magnifier has saved me a lot of money.

The Weaponization of Technology and Psychology

Over the past few decades, 19th-century photography has experienced only minor amateur attacks from those intent on defrauding its collecting community. Thankfully these fakes are fairly easy to detect for most experienced dealers and collectors. The money to be made from faking images was never enough to interest professional forgers. They focused their efforts on fine art, manuscripts and other high-end items.

The lack of attention from professional forgers has been a saving grace, for it has contributed to preserving the integrity of what we collect. Thankfully this remains true today.

This being said, dramatic changes are taking place within the current ranks of amateurs producing fakes. They are far smarter, have far better technology, and are very close to producing perfect fake *cartes de visite*.

Advantages of affordable technology

Computers, printers and related hardware and software used to create fakes have become dramatically cheaper, and possess much higher quality than the quaint old days of just a few years ago. The lower cost of producing fakes leaves many amateur forgers perfectly content with the money they can take from you.

Technology also allows anyone with knowledge of how period *cartes* were made to search the web and purchase reproduction (period) glue, real albumen paper, and used or new *carte* stock for mounting. It also allows them to research the value of Civil War photography, so they wisely choose subject matter that would not stand out as much as what they used to fake. Remember in the first 10-15 years of the 21st century all the U.S. Colored Troops soldiers or incredibly rare Confederate officers that swamped the on-line auctions? The rare poses of George Custer, Joshua Chamberlain, and other scarce and valuable Union officers? It took a while, but most collectors caught on to the fact these were fakes and stopped buying them. Like the snakes they are, the fakers shed that (fake) skin and have now embraced less spectacular content, such as Medal of Honor recipients, outdoor scenes, or a well-posed armed soldier to fake, along with anything appealing but NOT alarmingly rare. Fakes that will bring good money, but keep the collectors "fake radar" from activating.

Disadvantages of affordable technology

Fakers have learned to produce quality *cartes de visite* on albumen paper. It may be real albumen but there is a hurdle they just can't clear—they can't get the colors correct. They are always a weird shade of gray or too red, etc. Refresh your memory of correct colorization by looking at authentic period *cartes*. The beautiful golden brown hues of authentic *cartes de visite* are almost impossible to match with modern printing methods, but more of the fakes are coming closer than at any other time I can recall. Thankfully most fakes are still just off enough to make you uncomfortable and want to take a closer look. You'll read about examples later in this guide.

Capitalizing on the collector's psychology

Image collectors have a serious competitive drive and really enjoy the thrill of the hunt. This drive spurs us to build our collections—but it can also cloud our judgment at critical times. Most of us will do what it takes to get those special images.

We have all been to shows where a new dealer sets up and everyone jostles each other to get to the front and center of the table. Sometimes voices are raised. The thrill of victory and acquisition is intoxicating (more on this shortly). The same is true online. Check social media sites dedicated to discussing and selling 19th-century military photography. Those who frequent these sites can be aggressive in the pursuit of better images when they are posted. And once the dreaded word "SOLD" is added to the post, comments from those who did not get there in time reveal their disappointment.

It is human nature at work. Forgers know this above all else. They take advantage of these behaviors when introducing their spurious images into the market. They understand that by placing fakes in competitive situations, you are less likely to notice any minor flaws, especially while you are on your way to crushing the competition!

Bottom line: It's good to acquire photographic jewels, but keep your wits about you and always have a close look at what you are buying.

Experienced (older) collectors targeted

A few last thoughts on the psychology angle—Older Collectors in image collecting tend to be targeted by the fakers.

Why?

They tend to have larger amounts of disposable income to spend and the time to spend it! I am now in my 60's and I wear glasses (trifocals). Without them, I am very uncomfortable viewing images. Eyesight is something that diminishes with age. This is hard to admit, but it is true. Bad people factor age into their calculations, as well as how prideful people can be about admitting their need to wear glasses. "I wish I would have brought my glasses" is a common enough refrain in all retail settings. Don't be the one who buys a fake at the show because of poor eyesight. It seems easy enough but you would be amazed at how optically challenged people are for reasons known only to them.

All these subtle and not-so-subtle assaults by fakers make it hard for any collector to be vigilant at physical shows and online marketplaces.

Here are two recent cases that happened to me. They illustrate the weaponization of technology and psychology. Also the greed and stupidity of the author, who should have known better!

Yours truly: stupid is as stupid does

While looking around on a dealer day during one of the major 2019 Civil War shows, I spotted a table of unpacked boxes. A crowd began to form. I felt that beautiful tingle of opportunity, wedged my

Today's forgers "are far smarter, have far better technology, and are very close to producing perfect fake *cartes de visite*."



way in and grabbed a box of *cartes de visite*. Then the fun commenced. The prices were all vintage 1980's, when collecting was still cheap. The fever was on me. I could hardly believe my luck! I confirmed the prices with the seller and built a large stack of goodies. Beads of sweat formed as I guarded my images from prying eyes.

I was half-way down the box when I spotted one of the Holy Grails of photo collecting—the Custer group *carte de visite*. The photo was housed in a Ryker mount, one of those black-framed specimen boxes filled with cotton or other backing and topped with a glass or plastic cover. The photo was marked \$350, which seemed consistent with 1980's pricing. I opened the

Ryker mount and performed the usual inspection. It felt like an albumen, had a back mark and passed muster to my eyes. The profit I'd make on this image alone would make the show a great one for me. I put it back into the Ryker mount, moved it to the bottom of my stack, finished looking around and paid my bill.

I carried the treasure back to my table and put all of it away except the Custer *carte*. I proudly showed off my great triumph to several dealer friends, who congratulated me.

I never once took a magnifying loop to the image. Not one time. In the middle of my self-indulgent tour, I showed it to a friend who did.

Here's the ugly part. The photo was produced with real albumen on real *carte* stock. But there was a problem. The image area bore signs of a laser printer, but of a type I have not seen before. Had I taken the time in the middle of my buying frenzy to take a close look with a loop, I would have noticed the flaw.

I got my money back and I told the dealer he needed to destroy it. I'm pretty sure the seller wasn't the mastermind. I hope.



Purple haze

I bought this image of the famous Confederate guerrilla Champ Ferguson in an online auction for a princely sum. I couldn't help myself—outstanding subject matter and a damn good appearance on my monitor (much better than the way it looks in person). Best of all, while not cheap, I could make some good money selling it.

I didn't know how faded the image was until it arrived in my mailbox. It also possessed an unnatural purplish color that wasn't obvious in the auction photo. Upon closer examination, I ob-



Detail of the fake Champ Ferguson image reveals the indentation on the period mount where the faker removed the original albumen.

served a slight indentation on the period mount where the original albumen had been removed and replaced with this modern albumen print. Seems our genius knew about albumen printing, but not enough to get the color correct.

I had encountered fakes with these telltale signs in years past. The forger had contacted me and other dealer friends at various times over the years with an offer to sell us hundreds of scarce *cartes* if we were interested to meet him in Nashville, Tenn. Never once did he ever commit or send an address or phone number. He bounced around auction sites under different names, swamping them with these faded purple monsters until he got so greedy he was copying famous one of a kind images. Eventually, the alarm bell rang so loudly that a certain online auction couldn't ignore it any longer, and shut him

down. But not before he had done major damage to all of us.

I never asked for my money back and have kept this fake for my Wall of Shame.

Help stop the weaponization

Weaponized technology and psychology are a difficult combination for collectors to overcome. You can help minimize attacks by sharing your experiences and continuing your education in the school of photo collecting. By doing so, we can raise awareness of fakes and make it far less profitable for anyone to produce them.

I am doing my part, working to expose the evildoers and stop horrible breaches that erode our trust. My special focus is on dealers and long-time collectors, who I believe are largely responsible for the majority of fake and fraudulent images. (I realize this theory will likely raise some eyebrows.)

I firmly believe we will eventually be victorious, my friends. Pay attention to everything you're buying and this beautiful hobby will live on for future generations to enjoy.

PART 3

Case Study: A Dealer's Wishful Thinking and the Value of a Second Opinion

At the recent Chicago Civil War show, I was approached by an experienced collector looking for my opinion on a *carte de visite*. The image was supposedly of John Buford, the famous brigadier general and Gettysburg cavalry commander. The collector explained that he was pretty sure it was Buford. But he was confused by what the seller was telling him and about the writing on the back of the image.

He handed the image to me, and it appeared genuine. On first impression the officer sure looked like a younger John Buford. This image could fool most people. But then I turned it over, and written on the back in period ink it read:

Captain A.W. Putnam 7th Inf'y U.S.A.
Born Feb. 2d, 1826, Rutland, Mass.
Died May 2d, 1863, New Orleans, La.

I told the collector that the mystery was solved on the back of the image. This obviously wasn't Buford!

The collector didn't appear to be convinced. He added that the seller had told him that the officer named on the back, Capt. Putnam, had actually owned this Buford *carte de visite*. Then, after Putnam died, a family member or someone who knew that Putnam had owned this image of Buford wrote Putnam's name and life dates on the back.

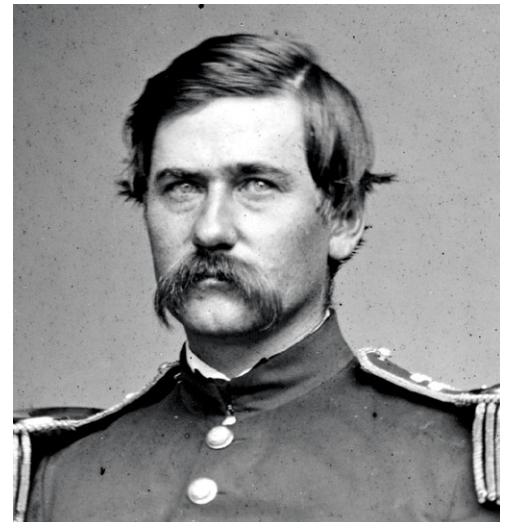
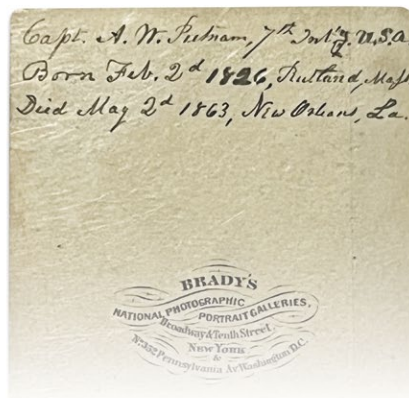
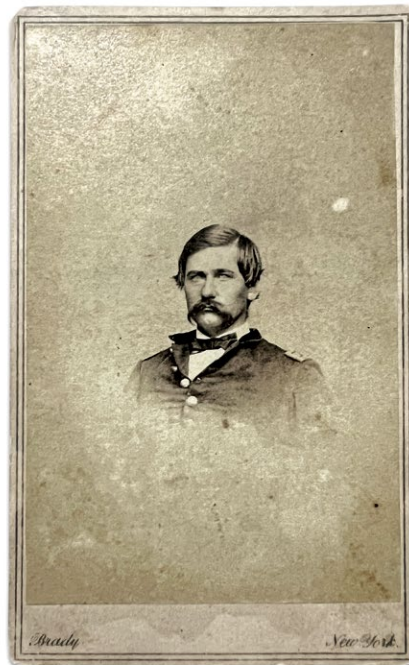
The collector asked me if that was possible? I told him that the seller was telling a falsehood (I did not use those words of course), and that it was actually Capt. Atlee W. Putnam of the 7th U.S. Infantry.

The collector was still not 100 percent sure. So, I did a quick online search for a Buford image, took a photo of the Putnam *carte de visite* and compared the faces side by side for him to see. It was obvious it wasn't Buford!

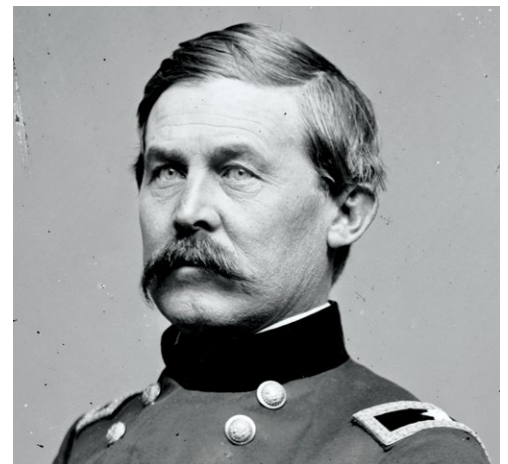
Disappointed, he thanked me for the

help and we parted ways. I was disappointed that someone with that many years of experience would fall for this story, and that a dealer would concoct such a tale. I was, however, also pleased that the story set off the collector's fake radar and he acted wisely to seek a second opinion.

The main lesson of this case study? When in doubt, seek the counsel of others you trust.



National Portrait Gallery.



Library of Congress.

Glass negatives of Atlee, top, and Buford compared to the *carte de visite*, left.

Courtesy of the author.

PART 4

Case Study: Blacklighting Reveals a Modern Forgery

This story has a happy ending for a collector because I had the right tools for the job in my fake detection toolbox. The heroes are my detecting tools—the Kobra Black Light 100 LED Flashlight, and my lighted 10x hand held magnifier. Here’s what happened:

A collector was the successful bidder of a President Abraham Lincoln CDV from a well-known auction house. When he received it he knew immediately something was “off” about it. He decided the image was probably a fake and notified the auction house. He was told he needed the opinion of an expert to get a refund. I was contracted by the collector to give my written opinion, so when I received the image I gave it a thorough examination.

Two issues immediately stood out to me—the so-called “albumen of Lincoln” was slightly too thick and had a very slight shine to it, plus it had a fingerprint near Lincoln’s face. I examined the fingerprint and the edges of the “albumen” with my trusty lighted 10x magnifier loop. I then used the black light to illuminate any other problems it may have. The 10x loop and the black light were the only tools I needed this time, as they proved the image was a fake.

Here is part of the opinion I provided to the auction company: “... This is a modern forgery, remounted on an original Anthony/Brady cdv mount. The image is on glossy paper, which is thicker than authentic period albumen paper. There is a finger print, which is actually in the paper from the surface, not on just the surface. You

can actually feel it when you run your finger over it. That would not be possible on actual albumen paper. Please see the accompanying photograph. I then placed an authentic Civil War CDV with the exact back mark and period albumen next to the Lincoln fake to show the difference between a war date image and the modern fake under blacklight. The difference is shocking as you can see. The fake glows an unnatural bright green color, while the authentic image does not...”

If you don’t have a black light to examine your images I highly suggest you get one. It will show you if an image has been re-glued, touched up or have stains undetected by just your eyes alone. It is incredibly handy and very inexpensive. (We covered the usefulness of the lighted 10x loop in a previous issue.)

The auction house did the right thing and provided the collector a full refund. I love it when the collector wins!



The Kobra Black Light 100 LED Flashlight.

Kobra Products.

My lighted 10x magnifier loop revealed the fingerprint, and the black light illuminated the difference between a fake and authentic CDV.



Courtesy of the author.

PART 5

Bogus Modern Ink Identifications

have very ill feelings—to put it mildly—for those who have brought this next scourge upon the Civil War CDV collecting market. As if it isn't already hard enough to detect if the actual *carte de visite* that you view is real, now the fakers are faking an element that always drives the price of any image higher—the ink identification.

In the early days of collecting, those who focused on specific regiments could trust the identification whether in period pencil or ink. Crooks had no incentive to add false identifications, as the cost of most images normally remained very low. As I have mentioned in previous parts, the dramatic increase in value of all Civil War collectables following Ken Burns' *The Civil War*, and the movies *Glory* and *Gettysburg*, incentivized fakers to add false identifications to unidentified *cartes*.

Old paper and modern ink do not get along

Let's take a look at a fake modern ink identification: "Ivory Leach, 2nd Company Mass. Vol. Sharpshooters." A well-known, and now deceased, image dealer from the East Coast sold this image. A collector bought it sight unseen from his catalog for a considerable sum of money. Upon receipt of the image, the collector thought it looked very suspicious, so he sent it to me for review. Here is what I found:

- The image is an authentic period Brady CDV of a Union sergeant.
- The *carte* has had a fraudulent identification added to the verso. While very obvious to myself, I could see how it could elude the novice or inexperienced collector. I will try to explain as clearly as possible for you in the section below.
- The end result inflated a \$40 or \$50 unidentified image into a desirable \$450 *carte*.



Fake Union sharpshooter.

Now that we know why it was done, here's how you can tell it is a fake. The dead giveaway is the bleeding effect of the ink around each letter, which indicates the signature was added with modern ink. Regardless of what a dealer or fellow collector may say, it is an established fact that modern ink applied to old paper almost always bleeds like this. The exceptions are ballpoint pen and certain markers, which a knowledgeable faker would not use because they are easily recognized as modern ink.

A forgers' weapon of choice for this kind of work is the modern "antique" fountain pen, and they use them for adding fake ids to books, documents,

images and etc. The infamous forger Mark Hoffman eluded detection for a long time because he found a way to stop the bleeding effect by adding a certain chemical to the ink (a great story, check it out on the net). It took the FBI quite a while to figure this out after he became a suspect in bombings in Salt Lake City. Bottom line: Old paper and modern ink do not get along.

Telltale signs

FAKE: The ink will be the same darkness all the way through, and the edges will be ragged due to the ink bleeding into the old paper fibers.



AUTHENTIC: The rich brown ink is visible as outlines around the letters, and bleeding is absent or very minimal.

The next thing I want you to look for is the consistency and the color of the ink itself. Notice the different color blotches, not noticeable to the naked eye, but very obvious under magnification. The fake signature is jet black, not brown. The only signatures of the period that are still black are ones that have not been exposed to air for any great length of time. This is the exception, not the rule. In the scan of the authentic id you will notice the beautiful texture and brownish color of old authentic ink.

Finally, notice the single line in the center of the signature instead of the double line of the normal quill pen from that period of time. Compare the fake Leach signature to an authentic period signature—in this case, Lt. John H. Carter of Company E, 4th Massachusetts Cavalry. This double line of the period quill pen is visible as outlines around the letters. No bleeding of the ink around each letter. Have a good look and learn.

A fake Confederate

Here is an obvious modern attempt at a period id, trying to make a Union soldier CDV into a Confederate by adding the stamp and fake id. Not only is the bleeding effect evident, but also the cursive writing shows a feeble attempt at period penmanship. The forgery is so transparent that it is a joke to experienced dealers and collectors. But we were not the target audience for this CDV. The faker who made this targeted very

PART 6

CDVs That Never Existed

inexperienced collectors. Unfortunately, this time the faker found a buyer in an online auction. It brought many times the value of what an unidentified Union soldier would usually fetch. That's why they do it, folks.



Fake Confederate.

Situational awareness

I can never cover all the fakes that you will run into. In fact, just thinking about it can remove some of the joy of this hobby. I hear that from some customers. This being the case, my goal for this guide from the start has always been to assist you in growing your situational awareness, or as I call it your “fake radar.” The list of

what to be aware of is ever growing, but so is that feeling in your gut that warns you to tread carefully if you have been reading these articles for the past year. From the feedback I'm getting, I'm being told stories from collectors who have avoided the bad purchase at a show or online auction. Some collectors now ask more questions of the dealers, and demand accountability if they buy an image and later discover it a fraud. These may be Orwellian times, but I'm sensing the CDV market is adjusting to the new standards demanded by you, the customers. This truly is an amazing hobby we are all part of! Until next time.

In my introduction, I prepped you for learning to develop your “fake radar” when looking at images. The next step in our educational journey begins now, as we begin exploring in depth this initial example of a fake.

First, I have a couple of housekeeping notes.

It is not my intention to create a “how to” guide for those with evil machinations. But I have to describe and illustrate different examples of fakes to help you recognize one when you see it. Some explanations will be more in depth than others, depending on the type of fake itself.

A little background history

Tintypes were inexpensive to produce by the early 1860s. Also at this time, the demand for cased images (including ambrotypes) had greatly diminished. It was not considered a financially good idea to put a cheap tintype into an expensive case. We now enter the era of the paper tintype sleeve/mat.

In December 1862, Peter Neff, the largest tintype manufacturer at the time, announced he would start making *carte de visite* (CDV)-sized tintypes.



An actual CDV-sized tintype.



Naturally, other photographers followed, producing the CDV size as the new normal for tintypes by the mid-1860s. Paper sleeves with mats with different-size openings and designs were fashioned to hold securely the new generation of hard images. Smaller sizes were also created. The Gem-type and the ninth plate were

both usually applied to CDV-sized card stock by gluing a piece of paper over the tintype back to secure it. The total cost to the consumer fell dramatically, thereby generating more demand.

The current situation

A large group of these mats and sleeves were auctioned off on a popular auction site in 2015 in large quantities. I dreaded these auctions because I knew what would happen. It didn't take long for con artists to start using these mats and sleeves to manufacture a new type of CDV that never existed.

Now, let's move on to our first fake, which in my opinion is a profound insult to history. Two parts make up this woeful tale of fraud. We cover part one now—hiding damaged areas of original paper albumen images behind period mats & sleeves used for tintypes. This type of fake is especially devious because actual materials from the period are utilized to create a false Civil War, and later, period image.

Here's an example. Let's say an unscrupulous person comes into possession of a badly damaged *carte de visite* of a Civil War soldier. The albumen may have tears or extensive stains. Maybe, someone severely trimmed the mount 150 years ago to fit into an album. Bottom line: the image is unsalable as is.

This seller decides to make it appealing by hiding the damage. How is this done, you ask? Simple. First, the person finds a period CDV-sized paper mat with an opening used for tintypes. Then, the person trims the damaged CDV to fit inside the opening of the mat. The next step is to secure the trimmed CDV to the back of this mat. Finally, old paper is glued to the back of the mat; thereby covering the newly trimmed CDV and making it appear authentic. Now, the unscrupulous person has a salable "period" image!

CDVs with paper mats or sleeves over the paper subject itself never existed in the 19th century. If you see one online, at a show or anywhere else, avoid it.

When the fakes first appeared, con artists auctioned only mat covered damaged common soldier CDVs, and then sold them for the usual money a uniformed soldier image would bring. These low-end auctions often eluded my attention, as I have too many common soldiers already in my inventory. It wasn't until con artists got greedy and started using scarcer subject matter that I started to notice them on eBay. Sadly, the crooks keep evolving.

Damaged CDVs are not the only source material being used to create

these fakes. Part two of this fraud, the rapid expansion of subjects and materials covered up with these mats (and sleeves), is alarming. Postwar photographs of President Lincoln, outdoor views of soldiers, CSA officers and other historic subjects, all surrounded by the appropriate sized mat or sleeve, appear at auction with regularity. Broken stereo-view halves are being trimmed, covered and sold as well. Recently, I have found steel engravings with great subject matter trimmed down and covered by a mat at auction. I have also seen 1960's Civil War Centennial reproduction photos used. By trial and error, these con artists are finding out what will pass as authentic.

Bottom line

CDVs with paper mats or sleeves over the paper subject itself never existed in the 19th century. If you see one online, at a show or anywhere else, avoid it. Some will look so authentic that you won't believe it a fake. Eventually these fantasy images will no longer be profitable and will stop being created once collectors become more educated.

For your toolbox

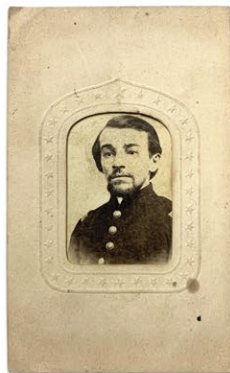
Unless you have eyesight like Superman, you will need a quality, handheld-lighted magnifier or pocket microscope. Typically inexpensive, having one with you while shopping can save you from buying a fake image. There are many different brands and sizes available at reasonable prices online. I utilize both types when looking at photography at trade shows, or while performing appraisals on the road. My favorite is the Topro Mini Jeweller 60X Pocket Microscope. It is small and easily stays in your pocket. I also use Leuchtturm lighted magnifiers (see page xx to learn more about this tool), which provide clear-lighted viewing in a portable size. I suggest putting them on a neckband, as it is easy to leave them behind.

Deconstructing a fake

When I saw this CDV in a paper mat for sale online, I instantly knew it was a fake. I also recognized the soldier image in the mat as one that I had once sold. I had the scan in my files. So, I purchased it. After it arrived, I took it apart and discovered the telltale discoloration that that faker tried to hide.



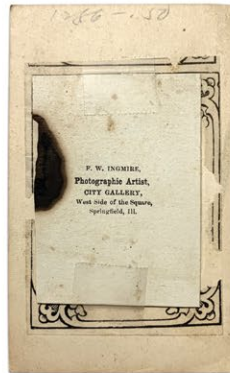
HERE'S THE SCAN of the image I made—long before the faker cut it down and attached it to the mat.



HERE'S THE IMAGE I bought. The photo in the middle is paper, not tin—which was not done during the Civil War.



FLIPPING OVER to the back, a piece of paper that appears period has been glued over the image.



PEELING OFF the paper reveals the back of the photograph with the photographer's name printed on it.



THE FRONT of the image shows a large area of discoloration that the faker attempted to hide behind the paper mat.



THE PAPER MAT is from the period.

Confederate Remounts

In the previous chapter, I uncovered the diabolical practice of remounting Union albumens. In this chapter I will discuss a far darker criminality—Confederate remounted albumens. Sadly, my investigations over the years have found CSA remounts in many forms.

Most were made by:

- Removing Confederate soldier or officer albumen prints from *carte* mounts without backmarks.
- Removing albumens from slightly postwar *cartes* taken after the soldiers had been paroled as prisoners of war, and while still in uniform.
- Removing the albumens from *cartes* of generals with Brady/Anthony backmarks.

All were then remounted on war date Southern photographer *carte* mounts. Doing this dramatically increased the value and the profit for the perpetrators. It still does now.

For example, removing an unknown Confederate soldier from a *carte* with no backmark and attaching it to a *carte* with a Texas backmark will have Texas collectors lining up to pay big money. The reward for deception is a dramatic increase in profit.

My Early Education

I first encountered Confederate remounts at the Nashville Show in the early 1990's, when I was a new full-time image dealer. The reasonably priced CSA generals I just bought for my mail catalog all had Anthony backmarks. While walking around the main building (where the well-known dealers set up), I noticed one dealer had the identical poses in his case, all with Richmond, Va., backmarks. The albumens were very bright and clear, like on my Anthony *cartes*, but the Richmond mounts were brown and did not seem to match the image of the general.

These images were also far more expensive than the Anthony, N.Y., poses I had bought. I didn't understand how we both could have the same photos, but his had Southern backmarks.

Thankfully, I had cultivated friendships with experienced photo dealers who took time to explain how the Anthony Confederate generals I had were used to create the Richmond-backmark images that the other dealer was selling.

They explained the process to me and why it was done—money, money, money. I realized then and there that I would have to learn

who was an honest dealer and who was not. Discovering bad actors among dealers has been a source of great personal disappointment to me over the years.

I was also told that remounting happened all the time, and not just with Anthony-produced Confederate generals. The weirdest part of all this is that no one complained about those images being sold at the show. The other dealers seemed to accept that it happened and just ignored it.

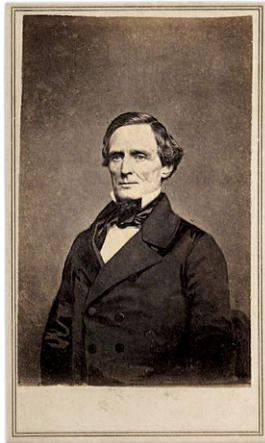
As a rookie making my way into my new business, the acceptance by other dealers of the existence of this fraud really bothered me. Before leaving the show on Sunday, I walked by the case with the remounted CSA generals and my heart sank: The dealer had sold the majority of them to the unsuspecting collecting public. My eyes had been opened.

What you can do

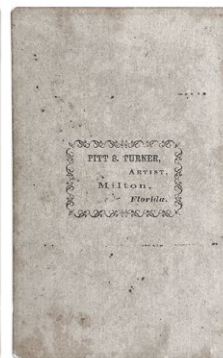
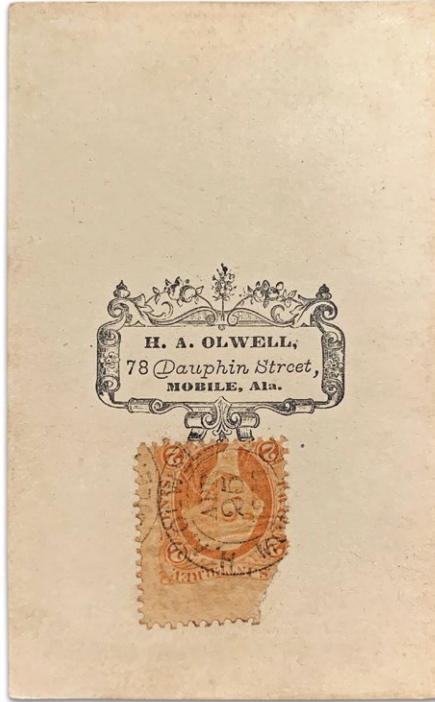
The next time you see a Confederate *carte*, use your 10x magnifier and take a hard look at the albumen print and mount to determine if they belong together. Please refer to the examples I used in the last issue showing photographs of remounts to help you spot them in the future. Get familiar with the variations in uniforms between Southern states. Make sure the Confederate soldier you are buying is wearing the correct uniform for the state the *carte* says he is from!

As for reference books, I recommend *Echoes of Glory: Arms and Equipment of the Confederacy* (Hardcover, Time Life Education, 1992). The expense involved in buying these images alone would make any and

additional pre-purchase knowledge helpful to keep you from buying a remounted *carte*. Lastly, ask yourself if the Confederate general you are looking at really would have his photo taken in a small town in Florida. Use your "Fake Radar" and intuition to pause and think before making that expensive error.



This *carte de visite* of President Jefferson Davis should have had an Anthony backmark similar to the example shown here. It is, however, attached to a mount with a Mobile, Ala., backmark. This is a professional remount job, not the amateur work of some guy in his bedroom. I'm impressed with the quality of this fakery, and angry that it was done.



New Technology + New Equipment = Better Fakes

I've previously mentioned how each upgrade in technology and equipment used to improve our lives also produces a new wave of technically enhanced fakes.

I have a humdinger for your review.

These impressive fakes are hitting the market through an alarming number of new online auctions, separate from the usual suspects. These venues make it almost impossible to track down known sellers of fakes by concealing their identities, and not releasing them for any reason.

The deck is stacked against us.

In this installment, I'll illustrate why you need to be aware of exactly what you are buying and who it is that you are buying it from. I cannot emphasize this enough.

Be ever vigilant.

Convincing authenticity

A very concerned customer sent this image to me as an addition to my collection of fakes. When I first saw it, I thought he had made a mistake. This couldn't be a fake! It had fooled several very experienced image dealers, including yours truly, upon first glance.

This quarter plate tintype has breathtaking content: Two Monitor-class ironclads, including one with twin turrets, and a wooden masted ship with what appears to be another ironclad behind it. Smoke rising from the stacks makes it appear that the photographer caught the ships in motion.

But when viewed with a 10x loupe, the ships are clearly models. I was almost convinced that it was a period photo using models to reenact a ship battle. That's how authentic the overall appearance is.

When held in your hand, there is nothing uncomfortable about this image. The color matches an authentic period image. The mat, glass and preserver are also authentic. When removed from the period case, the back of the image appears genuine as well. There isn't a strange color or any other obvious flaw to set off your fake radar.

I dug deeper to find the reason my customer declared it fake. The backing turned out to be an additional piece of modern tin with one side artificially aged. It fell away when I removed the preserver, exposing a very modern backing to the actual tintype. Scratched on the back is the printed name of a currently practicing tintype-maker,

a creation date and the photographer's signature.

The addition of the false backing leaves no doubt of the seller's intention to sell this fake as the real deal. This crossed the line from art to fakery, along with the use of period mat, preserver, and case.

Thankfully my customer had the integrity to send this to me. I can't thank him enough, because we now have an example of another way to relieve you of your hard earned cash: Modern-made tintypes of Civil War subjects sold as originals.

Photographers must take responsibility

Modern tintypists and ambrotypists, or collodion wet plate photographers, are the source for these impressive fakes. These "artists" must realize that the photos they create can result in good, trusting collectors being defrauded—which is exactly what happened to my customer. These photographers must take steps to guard against the possibility that someone might defraud an innocent collector at some point during the life of the artwork.

One easy way to solve this problem: Include something modern in the image area. It could have been placed in an inconspicuous area, not affecting the content, but still alerting you that it was a not a Civil War image. (In this example, the photographer claims to have used a modern paper mat, which indicates the seller replaced the paper mat with the period items and false backing.)



Elements

Modern tintype of model vessels housed in a period mat.



False backing distressed to look like a period plate.



Back of the tintype hidden beneath the false back (name of photographer redacted).



Modern tintype.

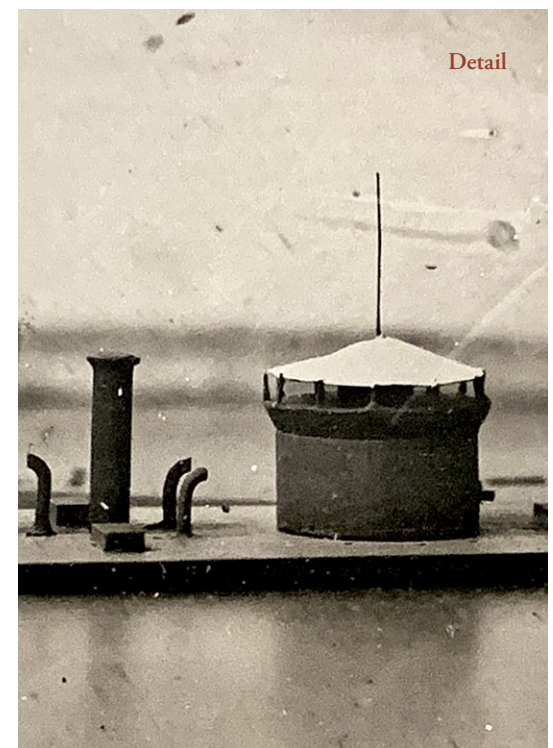


Another tip: They should use a modern mat, preserver, and case. These are easily purchased and send an immediate signal that this is not a 19th century image.

What can you do to protect yourself from being scammed?

I can't say this enough—don't let your guard down at the trade shows or purchasing from online sources. Buy from dealers you trust and that have been in business for a few years (at the least).

Finally, and most importantly, carefully review what you are buying before taking out your money. You will be glad you did.



Rembrandt You Are Not, Sir!

It is time we uncover the shenanigans collectors can run into when collecting Civil War hard images. I define “hard image” as Civil War tintypes and ambrotypes of all sizes and variations. In this section I will give hard image collectors the information needed to detect any deception or fraud done to an image they have purchased or plan to buy.

The photographer’s original hand-tinted artistry

Collectors admire beautiful Civil War hard images they see in person, books and elsewhere—especially those that have been expertly hand-tinted by the photographer. Gently colored rouge cheeks or lips suggested an officer or soldier of substance. Sword hilts, buckles, buttons, watch chains, and medals and badges as well, were often tinted with color or gold gilding. Photographers found new ways to enhance hard images to appeal to the soldier, or the soldier’s family as a memento or remembrance for both sides of the battle lines.

Dirty deeds, done dirt cheap

Remember that wonderful period in the late 1980’s and early 1990’s when Civil War movies hit the big and small screens? First came *Glory* (1989), then Ken Burns’ PBS miniseries *The Civil War* (1990), and finally the glorious movie *Gettysburg* (1993). This four-year period created many new Civil War collectors. While a thriving (albeit modest) Civil War show circuit existed at that time, a number of the new collectors did not know that these shows existed. Where did you go back then to find antiques? Antique Malls and Shops!

Off they went searching for that authentic Civil War collectible to start or add to their budding collection. During the pre-internet days, those places became among the biggest retailers of fakes and frauds of all kinds.

It did not take long for those enterprising spawns of the devil who inhabited some of the malls to figure out how to create new inventory and cash in on the increasing demand and rising prices of Civil War collectibles. To generate traffic they had to keep their cases filled with “authentic” relics, including Confederate and Union hard images.

The problem: Authentic rebel hard images generated the most money and were not abundantly available. Fakers figured out a way to produce them without having to learn how to reproduce a complete ambrotype or tintype.

Fakers began buying Civil War era civilian hard images. They preferred ruby ambrotypes of men wearing military style civilian jackets of gray or a light color. These could be purchased for a few dollars each. Then, they painted colors appropriate to the type of unit and rank they wanted to fake (lots of gold, silver and blue). Very clever indeed.

The result: A new Confederate army.

How they did it

All fakers make mistakes. In this case, they went all out with gold paint and used it like they would never run out of it.

Here’s how they did it. The glass or tin plate would be removed from the case, and then gold paint applied by a fine brush was used to apply rank to lapels—one to three painted stars (not exact but close) or one to three bars on high collars. Touches of gold applied to buttons, belt

buckles, sleeve braid and just about anywhere else covered the fact that this was a civilian image. Depending upon the skill of the con artist, or if the faker had an accomplice who was an artist, the finished product could appear impressive. Fortunately for us, they rarely found an artist.

To finish the job, the faker cleaned the glass and put it back after the paint dried. The new rebel was then put into a case at the antique mall, awaiting the unsuspecting buyer.

The internet came along soon after and this regional fraud turned international.

Golden glow—the real thing

Okay. We know the why and the how. Now, let’s become detectives and save money and a huge dose of aggravation.

The South Carolina soldier shown, courtesy of my friend Dan Schwab, is a genuine civil war ambrotype, professionally tinted as shown. Notice how you can still see the insignia on the buttons and belt buckle. His sleeve chevrons stand out and have no need for gold gilding. Take a good look.

If you see an image representing a Confederate, covered in gold paint, including areas of a uniform not normally painted gold, take time to pause. Give it a thorough visual inspection with at least a 10x loop. Can you see the outline of insignia anywhere near or underneath the gold, as with Dan’s image? You should at least see the outline of the sleeve braid if



Sixth-plate ambrotype by an anonymous photographer. Dan Schwab Collection.

A real portrait of a South Carolina infantryman.

an officer or the collar insignia because the paint didn't quite cover it, if it's an authentic image. Confederate non-commissioned officers normally did not have sleeve insignia colored, as it was dark enough to stand out on its own.

Thankfully, very few of these fake images still circulate for sale all these years later. But some are still out there.

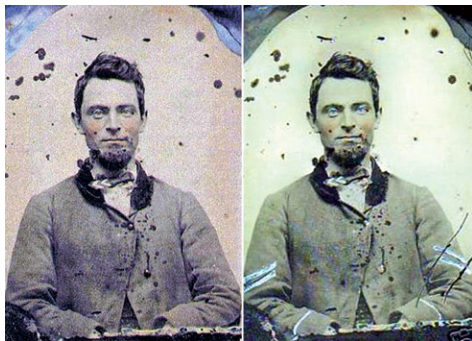
Bottom line: If it has more than a visually reasonable amount of gilding, trust your fake radar and inspect it thoroughly, or give it a pass.

Lord, it's a miracle!

Here is one eyewitness account describing a civilian ambrotype turned into a confederate image. This was sent to me years ago for display on my website, modoc1873.com, as an example of what evil people were capable of.

"I've always collected Civil War hard images because I thought they were harder to fake but now I'm not so sure. I purchased an ambrotype last year because I thought the guy in the image might be military and I thought I might be able to pull something out on the buttons. I scan the image and couldn't pull anything out on the buttons so I resold it last November on eBay for \$20.

I was surprised this week when I saw the same image I sold but he had grown corporal stripes and cuff piping and the buttons are now gilded. The seller was the same guy I sold it to. I emailed him and he claims he doesn't know how the image got altered and claims to have bought it at a gun show. The auction disappeared the next day. I've attached the scan I used when I sold the image and a jpg from the auction this past week. I hope you will add this to help educate others of the dangers of eBay."



Courtesy modoc1873.com-Paintedbubba.

Thankfully, this story had at least a temporary happy ending.

In the Navy?

I think we're on the same page with the magical paintbrush story. So, let's turn our attention to Union hard plates.

First, the real deal. This authentic sixth plate tintype of a double-armed soldier comes courtesy of my friend Mike Medhurst. Notice how the gilding is applied a little heavy, but appears naturally on the belt buckle, and is not applied everywhere in an attempt to fancy up the soldier. Also notice the outstanding dark and light blue hand colored uniform. This is a great image in a full case.

Now have a look at this so-called Union image that comes to us courtesy of fellow Badger Jim Rivest. He purchased this through our favorite online auction ten years ago from a seller who described the man as a family member who served in the 8th Wisconsin Infantry. Knowing that the sleeve insignia was not army, but navy, Jim found an identification close to the original, but this name belonged to a rebel prisoner of war who had enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1864.

An interesting and powerful story, right? A galvanized Yankee sailor? This should be worth a lot of money, right?



Sixth-plate tintype by an anonymous photographer. Mike Medhurst Collection.

A real portrait of a Union soldier.

Jump forward 10 years. Jim and I were discussing this guide, and he brought this photograph out and handed it to me. I immediately recognized it as doctored the moment I saw the poorly painted on navy insignia. Long before this time, Jim had decided the subject was neither an 8th Wisconsin Infantry soldier, nor a galvanized rebel navy sailor.

Piecing together the evidence, it appears this image started out as a civilian wearing light pants, a strange belt, striped shirt and sack coat with at least five buttons. After the application of paint, he was represented as a Confederate prisoner who voluntarily joined the Union navy. This concocted story having failed, a newly invented story portrayed him as a Wisconsin soldier.

Jim had put this image in the place all serious collectors put them—the drawer of shame. More on this subject will come in the future.

Be Careful Out There

As I've cautioned before, always take a very close look at any image you purchase. Do not feel rushed. Trust your fake radar. Purchase from trusted dealers that offer money back guarantees.

I don't care what the story is behind an image. The truth lies in your hands.



Courtesy Jim Rivest.

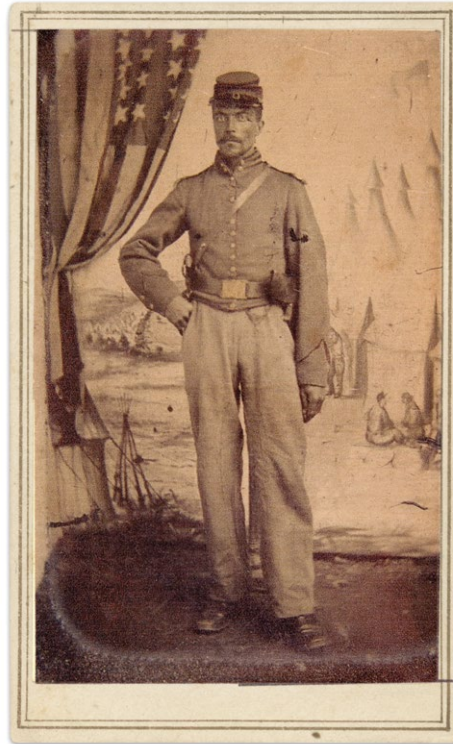
Tintype faked to represent a Union sailor.

PART 10

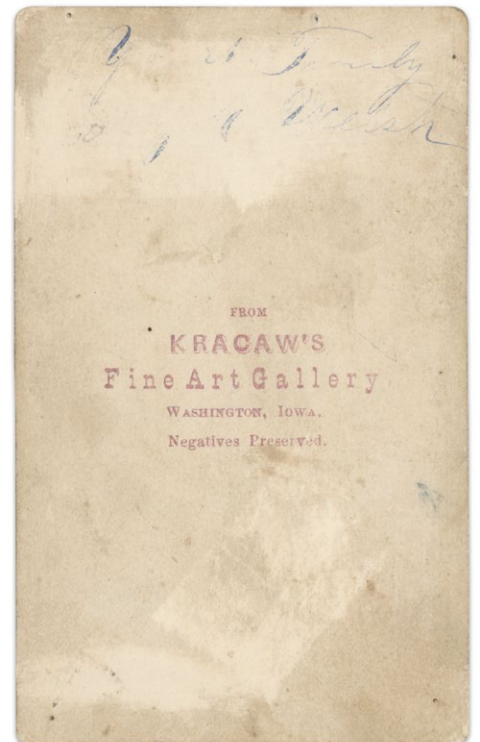
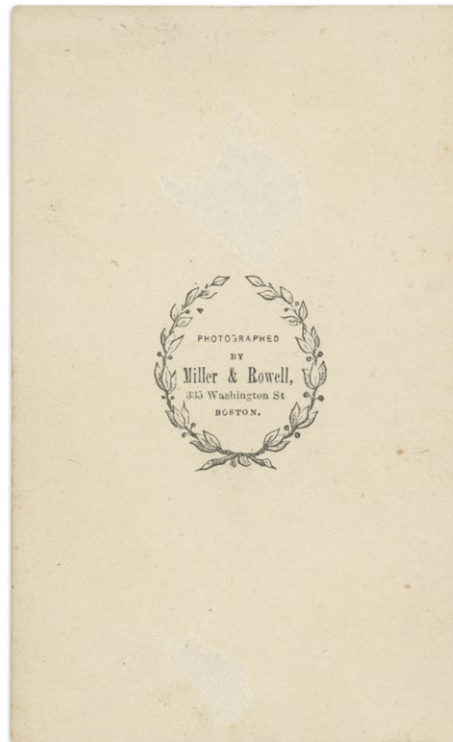
Fake Radar Pop Quiz

Time to put your Fake Radar to the test. Displayed here are five *cartes de visite*. Your challenge is to figure out whether each one is a real period image, or a steaming pile of fakeness. Now, just tell us which are fakes, and which are real period images. Good luck! (Turn the pages for the answers.)

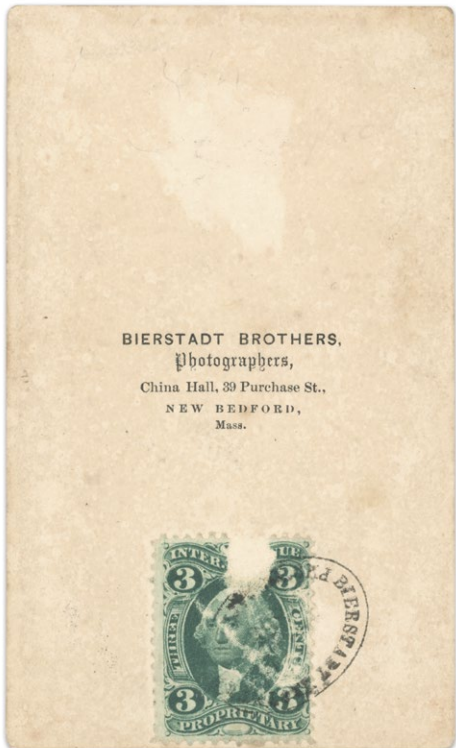
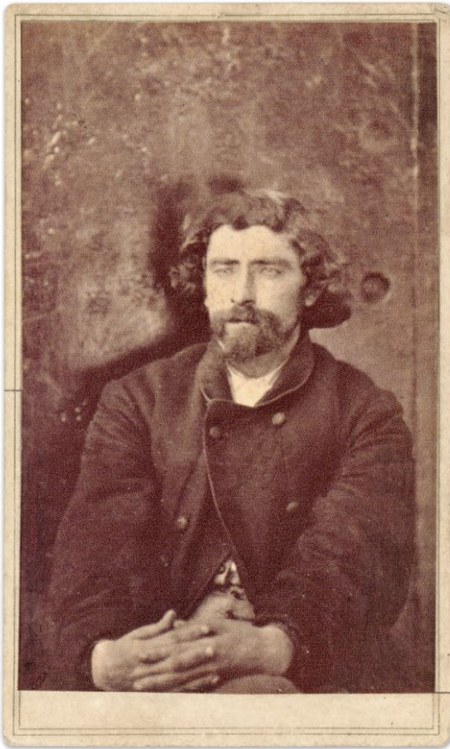
1



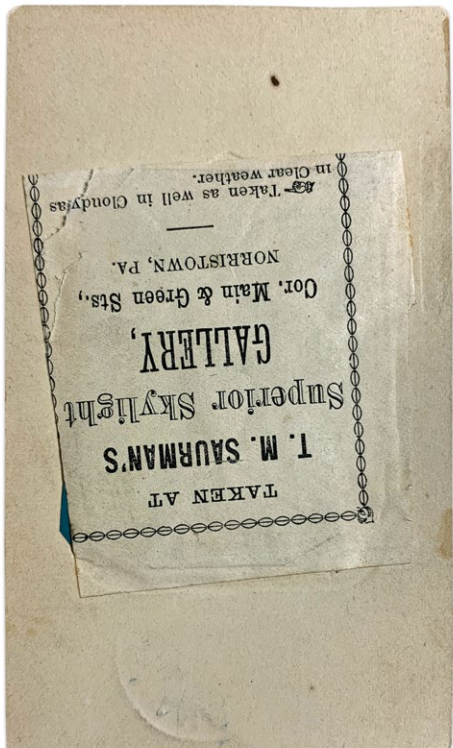
2



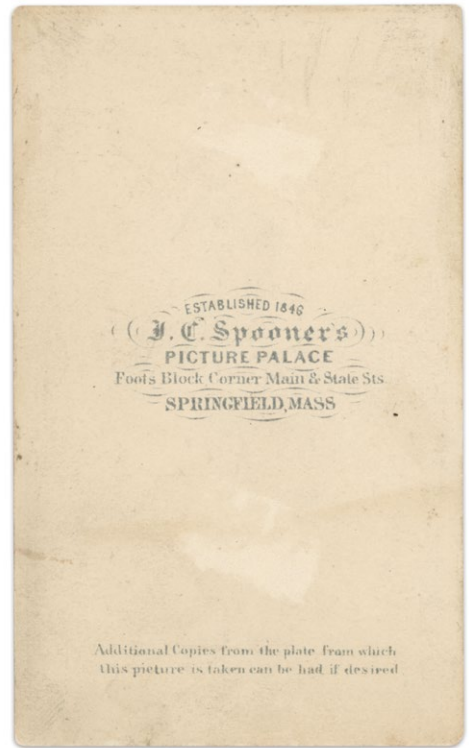
3



4



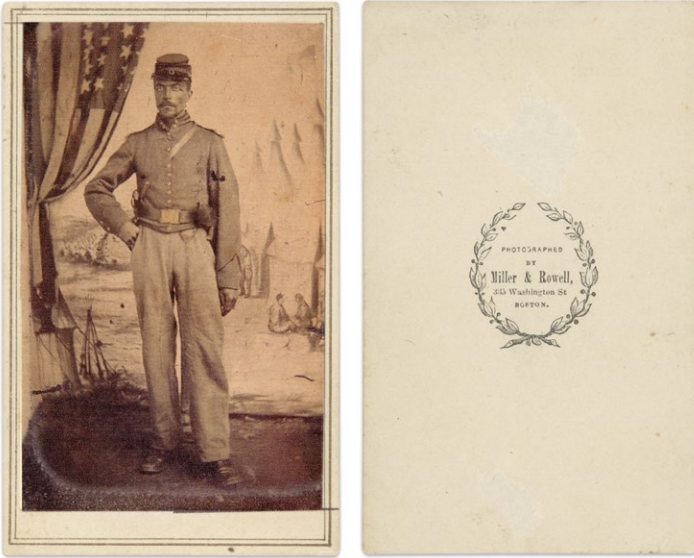
5



PART 11

Results: Fake Radar Pop Quiz

1 Union African American cavalryman with a Miller & Rowell of Boston photographer's back mark



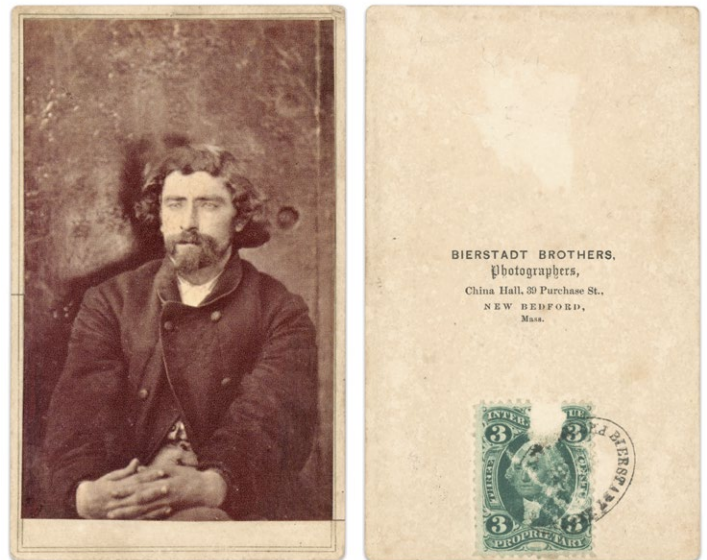
Impressive for sure. But upon closer inspection you notice the leveling line along the bottom right edge of the albumen accomplished using a straight edge (ruler?) to help align the fake albumen on its new mount. They also used it on the upper left hand corner. They didn't erase these lines otherwise they may have gotten away with it. Now that I pointed them out, you can easily see the lines. The graininess and lack of clarity of the image also is a give-a-way to this being a modern fake.

2 Western pose, man leaning on his rifle



Fortunately for us, the albumen they remounted is shorter than the old removed albumen, which left indentations near the red line they could not cover with the new remounted image. You have to look closely, but it is there. Also, they put a small line to help align the fake albumen in the lower right hand corner (as you look), and then failed to erase it. A modern fake for sure.

3 This is considered a fake Lincoln conspirator image



This *carte de visite* pictures Ernest Hartman Richter of German-town, Md. Detectives found his cousin, conspirator George Atzerodt, asleep in Richter's home. Richter told investigators that Atzerodt was not there in an attempt to protect him. The detectives hauled Richter to Washington and imprisoned him aboard the monitor *Saugus*. Richter eventually gained his release.

Why is this image a fake? There are a few giveaways. It has a photographer's back mark of the Bierstadt Brothers in New Bedford, Mass. Alexander Gardner took the original photograph on April 25, 1865, on the *Saugus*, and sent it to Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton for use in the conspirators' trial. The image was never mass-produced for the public. Also notice the lack of clarity and sharpness of the albumen. The final clue is the small alignment mark on the lower right hand corner, just like the others in this group. This is not how period photographers mounted albumens.

4 Soldier in *carte de visite* mount

This is the easiest to identify as a fake image. (See Part 5.)

PART 12

\$7,406.19

This headline represents the total made by one individual selling fake CDVs, in the first four months of this year. By my count, there were 74 fake images sold on the largest continuous online auction website by this seller in that period of time. That's \$1,851.55 per month, and a per image average of \$100.08.

That is a lot of hard earned money effectively stolen from collectors. And this is just one example of how much just one of these crooks is actually pulling in. There are many more. The buyers of his junk could have used this money to buy some spectacular authentic images from professional dealers.

The number of fakes seems to be increasing. As I've discussed in this guide, better technology has made it easier to make these monsters. I have seen some very scary new fakes recently.

Rising prices for higher-quality images are part of the problem. Being in a difficult and challenging economy doesn't help. Bottom line: It's easier (and far more profitable) to create and sell modern fakes of Civil War era images. Also, it can be difficult (and sometimes next to impossible) to get your money back. So I recommend buying from those who have full money back return policies.

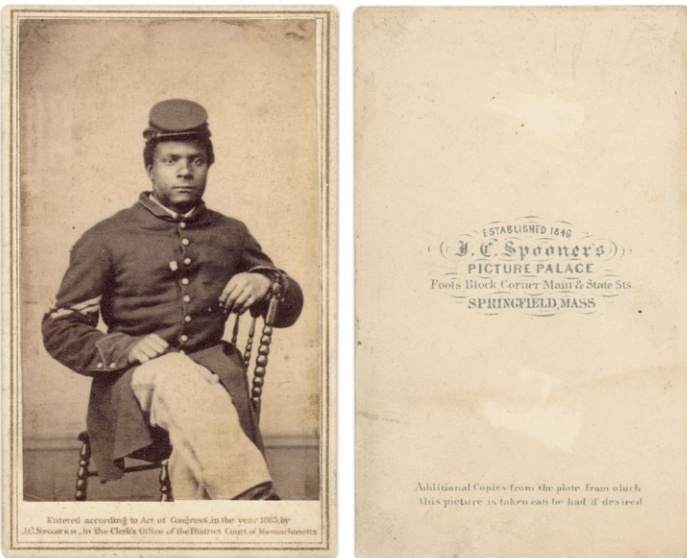
How do we stop, or at least slow down, those who blatantly defraud collectors with these fakes? Knowledge, knowledge and more knowledge! Over the last few years I have given you the tools you need to activate your "Fake Radar," and learn to pause and THINK BEFORE YOU BUY. I've also covered a majority of the fakes appearing on auction sites and at shows. Through feedback and conversations, I have helped a lot of people to do this, for which I am truly grateful. But there remains much to be done.

Many other websites discuss fakes as well. Try typing in "fake civil war photographs" into any search engine.

I'm pleased with the trend of people taking the time to expose fakes and sharing their knowledge with others. Let's put these fakers out of business!



5 Seated African American corporal with a J. C. Spooner of Springfield, Mass., photographer's back mark



Total lack of sharpness and clarity to this soldier's image; a poor image for such awesome subject matter.

Showcase. Interpret. Preserve.

MI

MILITARY IMAGES

MilitaryImagesMagazine.com

ShopMilitaryImages.com