

CHAPTER 6 ~ 1930 – 1939

The 1930s endured the harshest depression in United States history. The economic calamity slowed business investment, technology advances, and the purchasing power of consumers. While consumer photography purchases did not come to an absolute halt, spending money on photos would be considered frivolous compared to feeding the family.

Camera, film, and print characteristics improved only slightly during the 30s, with Kodachrome color slide film introduced in 1935.

Fashion and style evolved incrementally, yet the boom in *talkie* motion pictures helped film stars and starlets influence the appearance of everyday people as well as movers and shakers.

Automobile looks actually changed dramatically during the decade. Model identification is useful for dating photographs as it became increasingly common to use cars as props in snapshots. All of these areas of study offer clues to dating the decade's photographs.



Figure 6-1. 1930 Photograph of newlyweds. Light copper toning was applied to the photo.

Studio Photographs

The Depression affected the studio segment of photography more than others, yet formal shots did not disappear altogether. Production of graduation pictures seemed to have actually flourished. With costs coming down and quality going up, important school pictures were still deemed worthwhile. Designs shown here are not restricted to class pictures, but could have been used on any photos, minus the class designations.

The *Art Deco* style, generally acknowledged as beginning in the mid-1920s, started to influence all manners of decoration by the mid-1930s. Most notable were building facades from theatres to office structures. Early 1930s picture frames and folders were generally classical in design, adorned with scrolls and intricate artwork. As the '30s progressed, Art Deco elements are frequently seen in artwork around the picture. Photographs in Figures 6-6 and 6-7 are perfect examples.



Figure 6-2. 1930 Class Photograph



Figure 6-3. 1930 Class Photograph



Figure 6-4. 1932 Class Photograph



Figure 6-5. 1933 Photograph



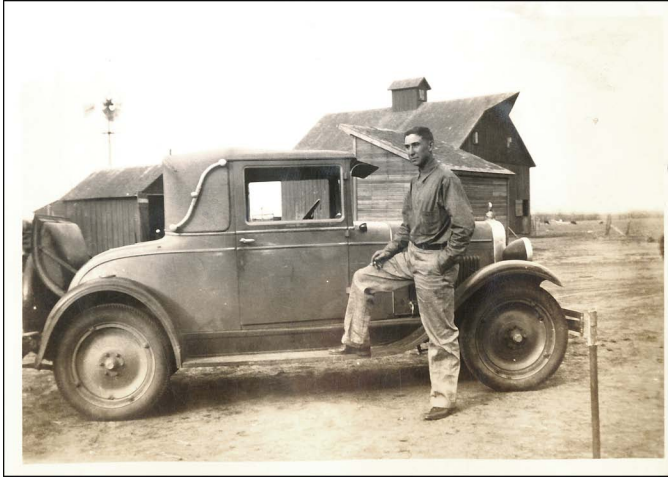
Figure 6-6. 1936 Photograph



Figure 6-7. 1939 Photograph

Snapshot Photographs

Snapshots continued to capture the imagination of everyone. From stiff family photos, gatherings and holidays, to frivolous pictures taken of school children and young adults.



By the 1930s the automobile was becoming a necessity of life, and owners and admirers alike took pride in posing for a picture with the prized machine. This is helpful many times as the automobile in the photo, even those in distant backgrounds, can be used to help date a photograph.

Figure 6-8. 1935 Glossy photo, actual size. (3½ x 2½).

Identifying the automobile in a picture can give you a clue as to the date of the picture, but this is not perfect. This automobile is a 1928 Buick, though the photo was identified and dated on the back as 1935.

While this photo was dated, if it was not, you could be sure the photo was taken after 1928. The car certainly does not appear new, and the known owner was a young farmer. He probably bought the car used.



Figure 6-9. 1939 Glossy photo, actual size. (3½ x 2½).

Young ladies *working* on a 1937 Plymouth. Certainly a whimsical staged picture, an example of photographs becoming part of young people's social lives.

Look closely at any license plate year. This one is slightly obscured, however it does show a 3 and possibly an 8 for the year.

These snapshots are from 120 format film, one of the popular sizes used in the inexpensive Brownie cameras.

Appendix A includes a gallery of cars from 1900 to 1950. All makes and models are not included, yet the general look and styles were similar among manufacturers.

Artistic Borders & Ragged Edges

To create photograph prints with eye-appeal, fancy borders were added on a some photos in the late 1920s. This decoration flourished during the 1930s and is found in the 1940s.

Another artistic characteristic introduced in the 30s was a ragged edge to the print, becoming more common in the 1940s. This may have been influenced by some cabinet cards from the 1890s that were cut in a similar fashion.



Figure 6-10. Fifth grade photo from 1937-38 school year. Actual size.

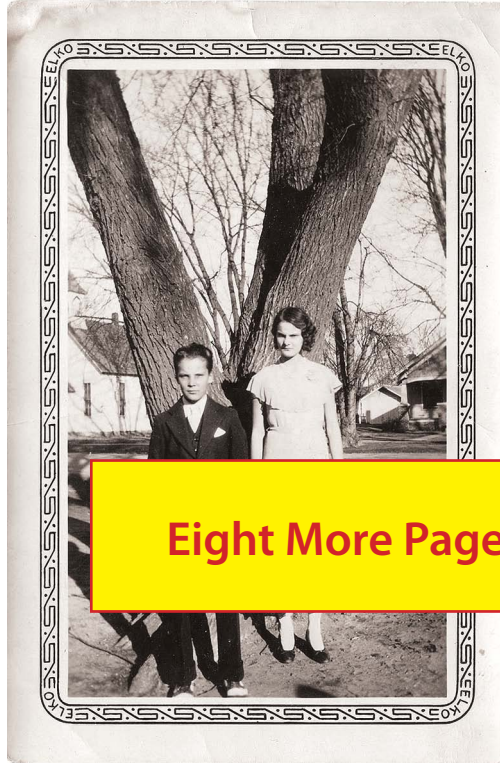


Figure 6-11. Brother and sister in 1933. Notice the developer's name, ELKO, in the corners.

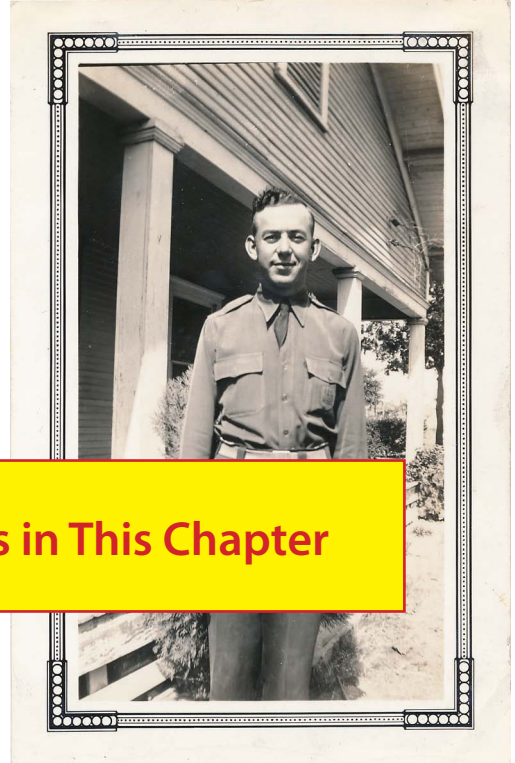


Figure 6-12. Proud ROTC cadet in 1938. The Art Deco look influenced borders late in the decade.

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Figure 6-13. Photographic print with ragged edges of a father and three of his sons in 1937. Actual size.