

## Mat Texture and Weight

Along with the opening shape, the surface texture and thickness of the mat are indicative of the photograph's date.

Mat surface textures changed frequently. Early versions were very coarse, frequently described as pebble-like. These were used into the latter part of the 1840s. However, a less coarse version that resembles a sandy surface started replacing the rough pebble texture which disappeared around 1846. The mats also became thinner, which by the late 1840s were half as thick as those from early in the decade.

## From Heavy and Simple to Light and Elegant

Mats followed a design trend that is also seen in preservers over time: Heavy to light, thick to thin, and plain to elegant. While manufacturers strived to improve mat appearance, one of their motives was to reduce cost.

Thinner, mass produced, stamped mats were cheaper to produce than earlier versions. Surface textures evolved from pebble-like rough plates, to sandy textures, to smooth surfaces, to smooth with punched designs, to thin foil-like brass with intricate stamped patterns.

## Stamped Elaborate Mats

By the early 1860s, mats were nearly paper thin and very ornate with scrolls and geometric artwork covering the whole mat. These were cheaper to produce as they were stamped out of thin sheet brass. This would have helped reduce costs also, as the daguerreotypes were now competing with newer and cheaper photograph alternatives. These same mats (cases and preservers too) were used with all cased images: daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and early tintypes.

When the Civil War started, many mats were produced with patriotic artwork. These stamped impressions fre-

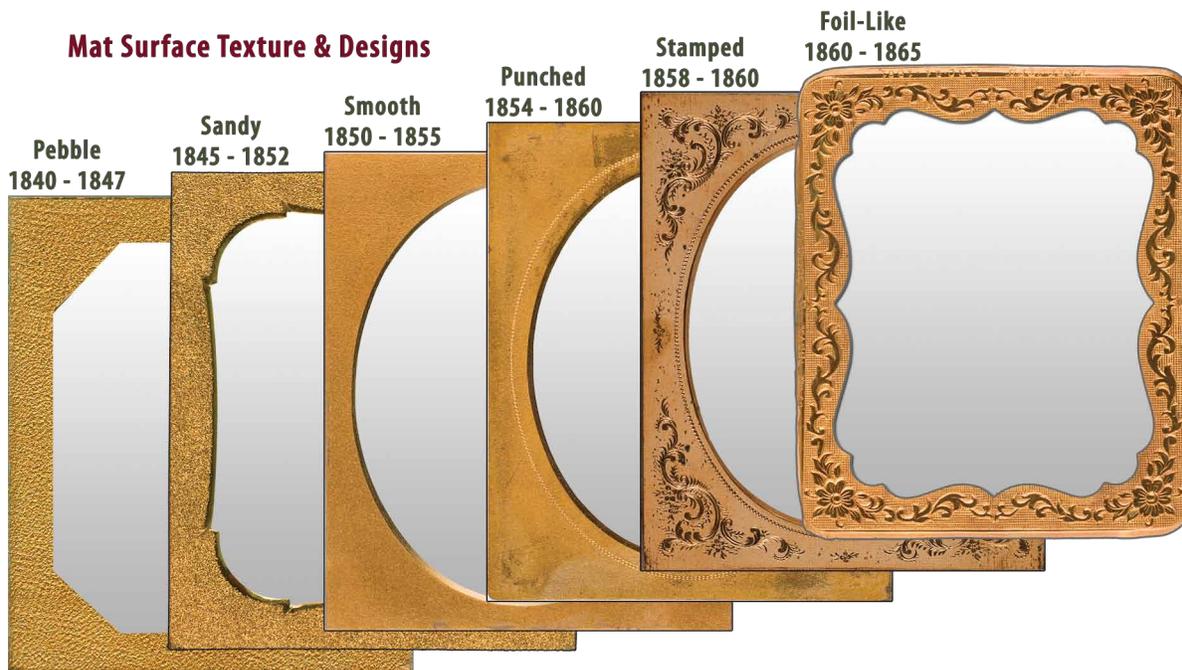


Figure 4-5. Mat surfaces changed over time from crude heavy brass plates to elegant and thin pieces of art.

quently included flags, stars, banners, canons, and other militaristic images. Close analysis of elaborate artwork may reveal these traits and give you a good clue that the mat is from the 1860s.

As mat shapes and textures evolved, the exact transition dates between them are not well defined. As with all dating techniques, supporting evidence from other clues should be used with mat analysis.

Summary

Analyzing mat characteristics along with other clues will give you a reliable estimate of the photograph date.

Mat Characteristics	
Characteristic	Date Used
Coarse, Pebble-Like Surface	1840 - 1847
Sandy-Like Surface	1847 - 1852
Smooth Surface	1850 - 1858
Thin Foil-Like with Artwork	1859 - 1865
Stamped Patriotic Artwork	1861 - 1865

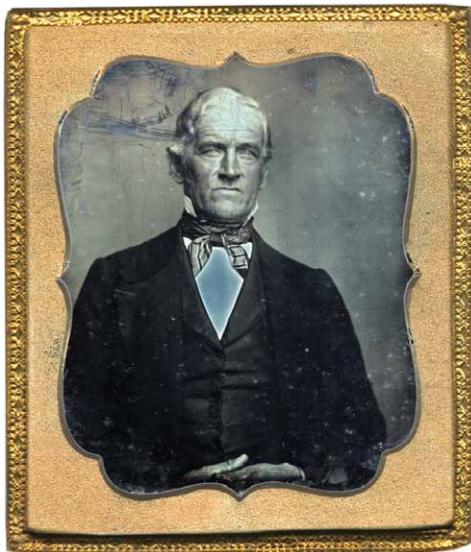


Figure 4-6. Coarse Pebble surface, c. 1842.

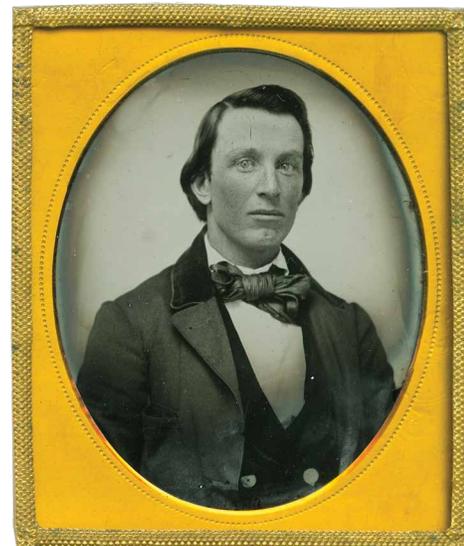


Figure 4-8. Smooth surface, c. 1852.



Figure 4-7. Sandy surface mat, c. 1848.

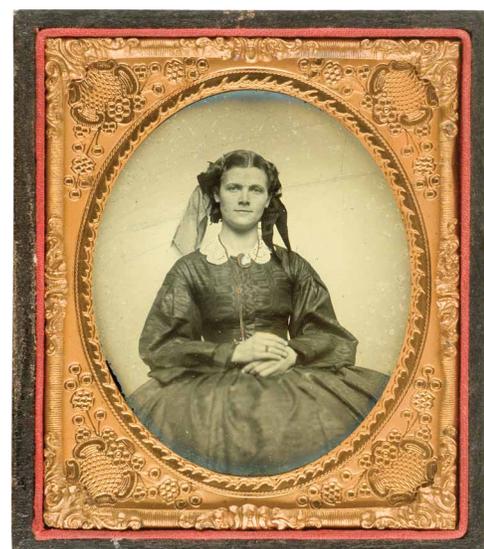


Figure 4-9. Stamped foil-like, c. 1860.