



# Heartland Science

Ohio's Legacy of Discovery & Innovation



## Communications

From Greenbacks to Lexis-Nexis

### TinType Photography

In 1856, Hamilton L. Smith, while a professor of chemistry and physics at Kenyon College in Gambier, patented the ferrotype in America, popularly known as the tintype. In its 19th century heyday, tintypes were the equivalent of today's digital photography in that they provided inexpensive images quickly.



Many images of the Civil War were tintypes. Recorded on a thin metal (not tin) plate, the relatively permanent and indestructible images could be mailed easily, and many survive today, providing an excellent and detailed "snapshot" history of America and the world from the mid to late 19th century.

Some tintype cameras allowed four images of the same view to be made simultaneously. Then the metal plate could be cut into four different images. Common tintypes are about 2¼ x 3½ inches, but it was the size of the camera back that determined how large the resulting image would be. Most tintype images today have rough edges and are not evenly cut, which is part of their charm.



One of the greatest advances of tintype was that it brought photography to the masses. It was relatively inexpensive. Prior to tintype, photography was reserved for the wealthy. Tintypes became so popular that they were produced for a century and were still being shot broadly as late as the 1950's - frequently at county fairs.

## Did You Know?

- Smith was also curator of specimens that formed the foundation of the collections in the Cleveland Museum of Natural History.
- Smith wrote several textbooks and also devised a system for describing diatoms and desmids.
- A very popular use of tintypes was to photograph the dead.
- The term "tintypes" may be linked to the tin shears used to cut out the images.
- To tell if you have a tintype, see if it will attract a magnet. The iron in tintypes is a distinguishing feature.
- The tintype is more accurately called a ferrotype.



## Find out more...

- [The Tintype Process](http://www.rleggat.com/photohistory/history/tintype.htm)  
([www.rleggat.com/photohistory/history/tintype.htm](http://www.rleggat.com/photohistory/history/tintype.htm))
- [About Tintype](http://www.city-gallery.com/learning/types/tintype/index.php)  
([www.city-gallery.com/learning/types/tintype/index.php](http://www.city-gallery.com/learning/types/tintype/index.php))