

ART TO ZOO

News for Schools from the Smithsonian Institution, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Washington, D.C. 20560

April 1986

Nineteenth-Century Family Portraits: Looking into Home, Sweet Home

Have you ever stared at an old family portrait, wondering—How did people fasten those clothes? Did that stern face ever smile? Didn't anyone ever slump? Would I have been me if I had lived then? What was it like to grow up in that kind of family?

Perhaps because they seem at the same time familiar and mysterious, the people in old portraits have the ability to set us thinking. This issue of *Art to Zoo* explores how you can put this ability to work in your classroom.

Why Families?

One reason we have chosen to focus on families is that family life is familiar and important to your students. Another reason is that the changes in family structure that occurred in the 1800s reflect major trends in nineteenth-century American history—trends like industrialization, urbanization, immigration, the expansion and diversification of the market economy, the settlement of the West, and the increase in social stratification.

To familiarize you with what is probably the most intimate of these connections—that between industrialization and family structure—here is some basic background information about families in early colonial times, and about the transformation of family structure in the nineteenth century.

Historical Background

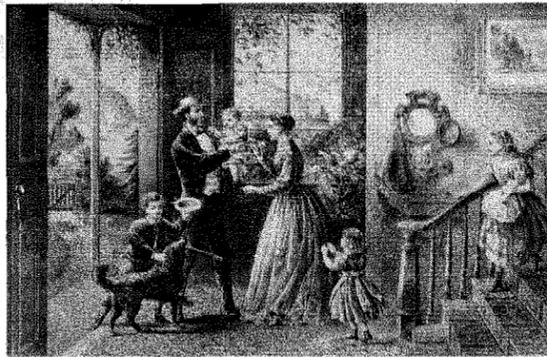
Families in Early Colonial Massachusetts

Early colonial families produced almost everything they needed. Family members cleared the land and built houses. They made their furniture. They grew their own food, spun their wool, wove their cloth, sewed their clothes. They manufactured shoes and soap and candles.

• **HOUSEHOLDS.** Carrying out these tasks involved a tremendous workload. The more people there were in a household to perform these jobs, the better off the family was likely to be. Many households took in people from outside the family. They often boarded children from poorer families; these children worked as apprentices or servants. Unmarried women generally continued to live with their parents or with a married brother or sister. Bachelors were often required to live with a married couple approved by the local magistrate. All household members helped with the work.

• **CHILDREN.** In addition to these outside hands, the family labor force included the parents' own children. Colonial families tended to be large (although the mortality rate was also high). As in many agricultural societies, children were an economic asset and were put to work at a very early age.

To do so made moral as well as economic sense to these early colonists. They thought that idleness was dangerous because it left mind and body free for sinful thoughts and actions. What we now interpret as the healthy energy and spontaneity of children, the early residents of Massachusetts interpreted as evidence of their innate depravity. Human beings, in their view, were born sinful; only through individual salvation could each person avoid eternal damnation. Believing this, loving parents were concerned above all that their children be saved. Salvation depended on God's grace; parents could only prepare their children for this grace by training them to subdue their will, which might otherwise interfere with perfect submission to God's authority. "Surely there is in all children," said a



Sex roles are clear in this Currier & Ives print. The mother and daughters emerge from the interior of the home to greet the males as they return from a more active life outside. (Library of Congress)

preacher of the time, "a stubbornness . . . arising from natural pride which must in the first place be broken. . . ."

The way to achieve this was to instill fear—fear of physical punishment and fear of damnation. Of course, then as now, individual parents varied in their child-rearing methods; some parents of that time were surprisingly lenient and affectionate. Nevertheless, a stern approach to childrearing was the norm.

Childhood was not otherwise looked upon as a separate stage of life with its own characteristics and requirements. From the time they were very young, children were treated as miniature adults. They worked with adults and spent what free time they had around them. They wore adult styles of clothing and were expected to exhibit adultlike control over their own behavior.

• **FAMILY AND SOCIETY.** In early colonial Massachusetts, the family was considered an integral part and the smallest unit of society. Both social units—family and society—were to be governed in similar ways. Kings and fathers were often compared.

Another indicator of the close knit between family and society was the power of the government to intervene in affairs that we would today consider private. Magistrates could, for example, order a couple who had separated to resume living together. They could sentence a disobedient child even after his parents had punished him. (In fact, one seventeenth-century Massachusetts statute allowed the authorities to put to death a child sixteen years or older who had struck or cursed his parents. Such a sentence was apparently never carried out.)

Colonial families provided a number of services that today are taken care of by government and private agencies. Within the family children usually received both formal education and vocational training. The family treated the sick and provided shelter to orphans, the elderly, and the homeless. Local magistrates had the right to order a family to board outsiders who could not provide for themselves—orphans, indigent and elderly people, sometimes even criminals.

Industrialization and the Cult of Domesticity

The world was changing fast for Americans by the second half of the nineteenth century. The country was turning into a complex industrial society based on manufacturing, farflung national and international markets, and increasingly differentiated social classes. The more rigid prescriptions for childrearing that had made sense in the more stable, agricultural early colonial society were no longer appropriate.

• **CHANGES IN THE ECONOMY AND CHANGES AT HOME.** We have seen that the early Massachusetts colonists produced almost everything they needed. Even as the economy grew more complex in the later colonial period, home was still the focus of economic activity. Artisans usually had home workshops, and the beginnings of industrialization in the early years of the Republic did not change this situation. However, in time industrial machinery became more complex and important, and manufacturers saw that the most efficient way of organizing production was to assemble machinery and workers under one roof. The factory system was born.

This process occurred at different times and at different rates in various industries. The first large textile mill in the United States was built in Massachusetts in 1813, but the period of most rapid industrialization began around the time of the Civil War. By the turn of the century, the transformation of the United States into the world's foremost industrial power was complete.

In this industrial society, families no longer produced most of the items they needed, but instead used cash to buy them. To earn this cash, family members had to work outside the home. *Industrialization changed families from producers into consumers, and split the world into two spheres—the workplace and the home.*

Conditions in the workplace grew increasingly harsh as the century progressed. In this period of rapid expansion, industry was largely unregulated and workers had little protection. Moreover, the flood of immigrants that poured into the country during this time created stiff competition on the labor market. Change and insecurity characterized all levels of the working world.

Perhaps to compensate for these stresses, people began to perceive their home as a sanctuary, a retreat governed by different principles than those ruling the workplace. In the home, the old, familiar values could be maintained. In the home, the work-pressured father could rest and be regenerated, and the children could receive a firm moral grounding.

The home and the objects within it came to be regarded as possessing redemptive powers. The ornateness of Victorian architecture and interior decoration expressed this belief. Buildings and interiors were designed to embody values like harmony, culture, and beauty—values that offered the greatest possible contrast to the brutal functionality of the commercial world.

• **ROLES OF FAMILY MEMBERS.** Family members now had separate spheres of activity.

Father: The father was legally the absolute head of the household and his wife was his property. But his presence at home tended to be limited. Most fathers worked from early morning until late into the evening, six days a week.

Mother: In the father's absence, it fell to the mother to guide and discipline children, as well as give them attention and physical care. But in this world split between workplace and home, the mother had a larger role as ruler of the home. She was considered pure, un sullied by the questionable values of the marketplace.

An entire literature grew up to explain to women how to carry out this role. Over a hundred magazines for women flourished during this period, and one child-rearing advice book after another was published. Whole industries, like the baby food industry, grew up to support mothering. Women were taught that their role was crucial to the future generation. They were praised

for their devotion to others and censured if they expressed an interest in "selfish" goals. They were to be devoted, submissive, and pious.

Of course, this family pattern was possible only for families in which the father earned enough to support all family members. In practice, this meant middle-class families. Nevertheless, a substantial proportion of the families in the country organized their lives along these lines, and for countless poorer families this pattern was a social ideal to strive for.

Children: In the nineteenth century people regarded children very differently than in colonial times. Re-

ligious attitudes had shifted gradually through the 1700s, and by the turn of the century the belief in infant depravity had virtually disappeared. Now children were regarded as innocent, unformed creatures highly susceptible to influence.

This malleability placed a heavy burden of responsibility on a conscientious mother. She had to protect her children from all bad influences. Every detail of every aspect of her children's lives was thought to bear on their development. Physical and moral climate were intimately connected. Cleanliness, orderliness,

and regularity of habit were associated with virtues like self-control, patience, and industry. (It is no surprise to find one of the best known pediatricians of that time suggesting that babies be toilet trained at the age of one month!)

By providing a healthy environment, thoughtful explanations, and a good example, a mother should be able to gently guide her offspring into good habits. Corporal punishment, if used at all, was appropriate only as a last resort when all gentler methods had failed.

Sample Lesson Plan

After you have become familiar with the information outlined above, you will be ready to develop a teaching approach in line with your curriculum needs. The sample lesson plan that we have outlined here suggests how a group of family portraits—all except one of which were made between the end of the Civil War and the turn of the century—can be used to introduce a unit on nineteenth-century American history. (The approach can easily be adapted to meet other learning objectives, using the same portraits or others of your choosing. A few suggestions for doing this are given in *Other Ways to Use Family Portraits*, on page 4.)

Step 1: Comparing Two Families

Begin by having your students examine the two pictures that appear on this page. You may wish to photocopy the pictures, to enlarge them using an opaque projector, or simply to cut them out and pass them around. However you decide to make them available, it is essential that both pictures be large enough to show clear details and that students examine them at the same time and long enough for a thorough look.

Tell your students that the first image shows a family in colonial times. (People in early Massachusetts did not make portraits of themselves working at home, so we have had to use a picture made later. It still illustrates the organization of early colonial households.)

The second picture* is of a family in Washington, D.C., in 1881. (The family in the portrait is that of President James A. Garfield. The portrayal of the family is typical of the depiction of middle-class families at the time.) Both families are shown at home.

First ask the children to point out *what the two pictures have in common*. They will probably say that both pictures apparently show a family, with adults and children; both families are at home; neither family seems remarkably rich nor remarkably poor; both pictures include family belongings like furniture and other items; and the people in both pictures are engaged in a variety of individual activities.

Then have your students point out *ways in which each picture is different from the other*. Use the children's answers to make two lists side-by-side on the chalkboard, one for the early colonial picture, the other for the late-nineteenth-century picture.

For the colonial picture, the children are likely to come up with answers like:

- Most of the people are working.
- The room appears to be set up to live in, but also for doing various kinds of work.
- The family's belongings include not only house, clothing, and furniture, but also tools.
- There are several more than two adults.

Answers for the nineteenth-century picture are likely to include:

- All the people are either doing nothing or are involved in leisure activities.
- The room seems to be just a living room, not a workplace.
- The room has lots of decorations.
- The father is the central figure, seated in a chair almost like a throne.
- The mother is also a central figure. She stands taller than anyone else in the picture, but she is posed bending over, in a far less comfortable and imposing stance than the father.

Step 2: Providing Historical Context

Begin by reminding students that family organization is connected to social organization. In a society in which most people are farmers, for example, families differ from a society in which most people work in offices. And as a society changes, families are likely to change. Give the children a chance to guess about differences between the societies in which the families in the two pictures lived. Where did people work? Was it more common for people to make things or to buy things? Which society had more big towns?

Then use information from the background materials in this issue of *Art to Zoo* to give students as much historical information as you think useful. Since



A colonial family working at home. (Bettman Archives)

the shift from an agricultural to an industrial economy is the central theme underlying the transformation of the family, you may wish to illustrate your presentation with pictures of workplaces and workers during this period of change.

Step 3: Finding Answers

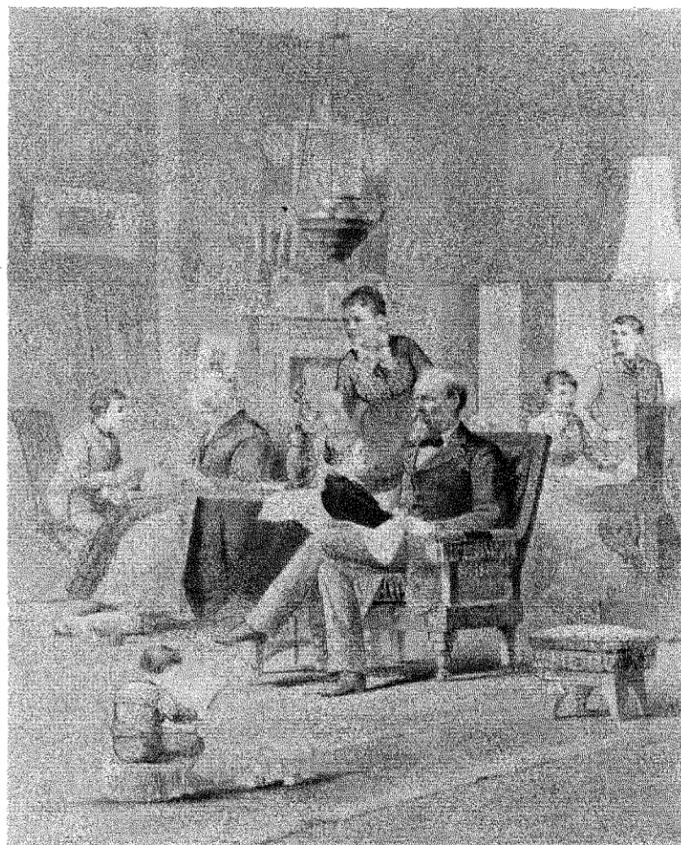
Now have the children use a worksheet like the one shown here. Work as a group to answer the questions on early colonial families. These answers should be based on the picture the students have examined, on the information you have given them, and on their knowledge of the colonial period from earlier units or reading.

When they have agreed on answers, instruct students to work individually to find answers for nineteenth-century families. To do this, they will have for extra clues five photographs of families of that period. To keep children from being confused because these new pictures look so different from the ones they have examined, explain that these are photographs, while the previous ones were prints of artists' drawings.

You may point out that a picture—even a photograph—does not necessarily tell how things *usually* were. Sometimes the situation shown in a photo is very rare. However, the pictures the children will use *have been chosen to show typical families*. In this case students may make valid generalizations from what they see.

To keep the lesson fairly short and narrowly focused, end it here. Homework could be a writing assignment based on the materials your students have covered.

continued on page 4

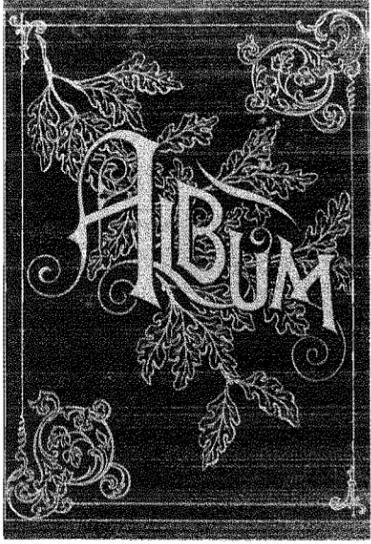


The Garfield family relaxing in their parlor in 1881. (Library of Congress)

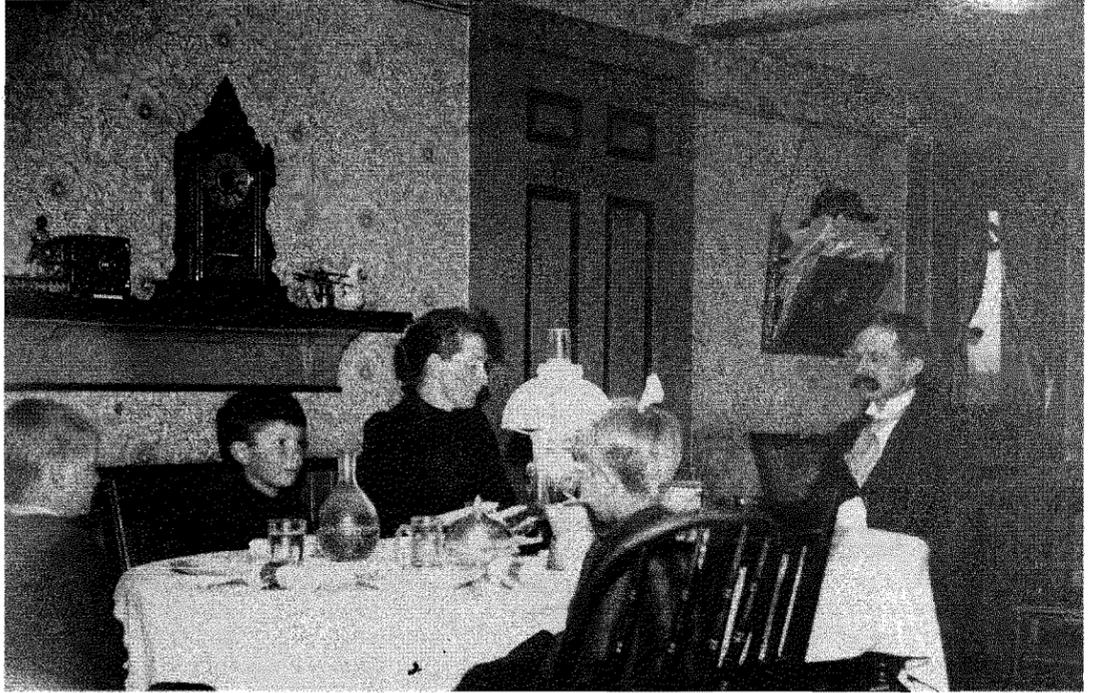
WORKSHEET ON FAMILIES

Characteristic	Answer	Evidence for Answer
Family Size:		
How many people lived in the household?		
How many of these were children?		
Family Functions:		
<i>Work:</i>		
What kinds of work did people do at home?		
Who worked at a paid job?		
Who cooked?		
Who took care of the children?		
<i>Education:</i>		
Where did children learn to read?		
Where did children learn to work?		
What other services did families perform?		
Main Activities of Each Family Member:		
Father		
Mother		
Boys		
Girls		

*This picture, which belongs to the Library of Congress, Division of Prints and Photographs, is included in "Private Lives of Public Figures: The 19th Century Family Print," an exhibit currently on display at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery.



A late-nineteenth-century photo album cover. It is unlikely that the photographs would have been arranged as they are on this much larger page. (Office of Folklife Programs)



Does the mother's role seem different from the father's in this turn-of-the-century Wisconsin family? (State Historical Society of Wisconsin)



Home and family as a peaceful haven. Leonard Dakin took this photograph of his wife and child in 1890 as his father and brother looked on. (New York State Historical Association)



Looking quiet and somewhat glum, the women sit together at the center of this Massachusetts portrait. At the edges of the group stand the men, holding tokens of mobility—a bicycle and a walking stick. The two boys sit in front, smiling. (Lancaster Historical Society)



The Matthew Taylor family in front of their home in Anacostia, District of Columbia. The grandmother seems central; grandmothers were important figures in many late-nineteenth-century families. (Anacostia Neighborhood Museum)



What tells you that this corner belongs to these 1890s children? (Library of Congress)

Here is one possibility. Ask the students to choose one of the nineteenth-century pictures they have studied and imagine they are one of the children in the family portrayed. They are writing a letter to a French cousin whom they have never met, but who is going to visit the United States for the first time in a couple of months and will be staying with their family. Have students tell the cousin about their family and its day-to-day life.

To present a longer lesson that will be fun for your students and will enrich their understanding of Victorian families, go to Step 4.

Step 4: Using Pictures to Explore Values

When students have a clear grasp of the basic characteristics of the late-nineteenth-century family, have them approach the photographs they have already used with a different question in mind. Now, instead of concentrating on the demographic evidence contained in the pictures, they will focus on *the choices that went into the making of these pictures*.

Ask the children to bring in a photograph of their own family in time for the beginning of this activity. Tell them the photograph should, if possible, include everyone in their family, but no outsiders. They should also prepare for the activity by reading the articles in the Pull-Out Page of this issue of *Art to Zoo*.

Begin the activity by pointing out that whenever people take a picture they make many choices. Ask students to think of examples of such choices:

- Where will the picture be taken?
- Will it include family property? If so, what kinds?
- What types of occasions will be recorded? (Most families now show only happy occasions. You might point out that the Victorians also photographed dead persons, at the funeral or elsewhere.)
- Who will be included?
- Will people pose?
- Are people supposed to behave in a certain way? (Are your students, for example, allowed to continue an argument with a brother or sister while a photograph is being taken?)
- Are they supposed to dress in a certain way?

Follow-up Activities for American History Unit

You may wish to have your students use what they have learned to move into other topics in nineteenth-century American history. Here are a couple of possibilities.

Other Ways of Living

Have the children conduct research into one of the following:

- pioneer families in the West,
- immigrant families in New York City, or
- Black families in the rural South.

Each student should then write a paper describing the similarities and differences between the families they have chosen and the middle-class families they have been studying in class. Each essay should include and discuss at least one photograph.

Historical Comic Strips

Have students read about one of the following people and about the issue of main concern to each of them:

- Jacob A. Riis (urbanization)
- Susan B. Anthony (women's rights movement)
- Samuel Gompers (labor movement)

Have each student create a short comic strip that shows the person they have chosen commenting on the family life of the time. Comments should reflect the speakers' real-life preoccupations.

- Are the answers to these questions the same for all kinds of photographs?

Have students answer these questions about their own family photographs. Then ask them to compare their families' choices with the choices that appear to have been made by the families in the historic photographs, including the ones on the Pull-Out Page. Remind them of the technical constraints that they have read about on the Pull-Out Page.

Point out that the *choices* people make depend on their *values*. Their choices give us information about their priorities. On the chalkboard, write a list of priorities that might be expressed in a family photograph—for example, spontaneity, control, orderliness, unity, charm, respectability, wealth, devotion, diligence, obedience, authority, peace, fun-lovingness. Go through the list with the class, asking the children to try to find a picture—old or new—that seems to show that this value was important to the family in the photograph.

• **TAKING THEIR OWN PICTURES.** Now the children are ready to take their own photographs. Divide the class into small groups. One person in each group should role-play the photographer; the rest of the group should role-play the members of a late-nineteenth-century family. Each "family member" should know his or her name, age, and position in the family. First each group should have time to discuss what props they will need and to plan their photographic session. The following day they can bring in their props and take their pictures.

When the photographs have been developed, the children would probably enjoy making a Victorian photo album in which to display them. The picture page in this issue of *Art to Zoo* shows the cover of one such album, and the children could find out more about typical albums. Photo albums were popular gifts in the late nineteenth century.

A variant of this activity is to have each group select three priorities from the list discussed in class and try to make family photographs that illustrate each of these priorities. Props are not necessary for this activity. When the children have prints of their photographs, they could see whether class members outside their group can guess which priority each picture expresses.

Other Ways to Use Family Portraits

Family portraits can be used to pursue a variety of other learning objectives. Here are just a few examples.

- If appropriate portraits are available, they may be used to introduce any period or place, using an approach similar to the one used in the Sample Lesson Plan.
- Family portraits may be used to study special aspects of past material culture. For example, students can learn how people dressed by looking at portraits; and by organizing a group of portraits chronologically, they can trace changes in clothing styles.
- Family portraits may be used in teaching art history. Students could, for example, examine paintings of late-nineteenth-century families to explore how they are different from photographs of similar groups. Or they could study family portraits painted by a single artist of the period.
- Children whose families have enough pictures at home may use them as the basis of a writing assignment to create an illustrated history of their family.



House Keys Available

Many of the families in the portraits you have been looking at lived in the kind of Victorian houses described in "House Keys," the December 1981 issue of *Art to Zoo*.

If you want to draw on both issues as you explore late-nineteenth-century family life with your students, a limited number of copies of "House Keys" is available free of charge, on a first-come-first-served basis. To obtain a copy, simply send your request to:

House Keys
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
Arts and Industries Building, Room 1163
Smithsonian Institution
Washington, D.C. 20560

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Smithsonian Institution Press

Associate Editor: Ruth W. Spiegel

ART TO ZOO brings news from the Smithsonian Institution to teachers of grades three through eight. The purpose is to help you use museums, parks, libraries, zoos, and many other resources within your community to open up learning opportunities for your students.

Our reason for producing a publication dedicated to promoting the use of community resources among students and teachers nationally stems from a fundamental belief, shared by all of us here at the Smithsonian, in the power of objects. Working as we do with a vast collection of national treasures that literally contains the spectrum from "art" to "zoo," we believe that objects (be they works of art, natural history specimens, historical artifacts, or live animals) have a tremendous power to educate. We maintain that it is equally important for students to learn to use objects as research tools as it is for them to learn to use words and numbers—and you can find objects close at hand, by drawing on the resources of your own community.

Our idea, then, in producing *Art to Zoo* is to share with you—and you with us—methods of working with students and objects that the Smithsonian education staff members have found successful.

We are especially grateful to the following individuals for their help in the preparation of this issue of *Art to Zoo*:

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PULL-OUT PAGE



ART TO ZOO—April 1986



The photographer posed this family so the mother could hold her baby's head steady. Do you think that these three people had ever faced a camera before? (Museum of American History, Division of Photographic History)

Stern Faces, Smiling Faces: Why People Posed as They Did

One hundred and fifty years ago, most people had no means to get an idea of what they had looked like as babies. Only the very rich could afford to have a portrait made of themselves as babies, or at any other time in life.

Then came the first cameras. Within a few years, a very little bit of money could buy almost anyone a permanent record of what he or she looked like.

Imagine you are living in a small town in those early days of photography. You have heard of photographs and you have even seen a few. And now your family has finally decided to travel to the biggest town in your area to have a photographer make a family portrait.

You don't know quite what to expect. The idea that just sitting there in front of the camera can make your image appear on a glass plate halfway across the room is so magical that it seems a little scary.

You guess that this will probably be the only time in your life that your picture will be made. The image on the glass plate will be the way you will remember yourself as you grow old, and the way your children and grandchildren will remember you. That makes this seem serious, and makes it important to you that you look your very best.



The two young men seem to form a wall that both protects and confines this young mother and her baby. (Museum of American History, Division of Photographic History)

Of course you wear your Sunday clothes. You sit very straight and stare right into the camera. You want to look honest and dependable and hard-working, because these are qualities that are particularly respected in the time and place where you live. Besides, you know that people who joke around too much are not taken seriously.

The photographer tells you what to do, and helps you pose so you will look the way you want to look. His studio is full of props for many different effects. Even if your family are pioneer farmers, you can be photographed among statues and curtains, seated like royalty on heavy carved chairs, if that's your wish.

Is it surprising if you look solemn on such a serious occasion?

Will the headrest be enough to keep this man from moving while he is being photographed? (Library of Congress)



Don't Move

When photography was first invented, in 1839, a person had to sit absolutely still for almost 20 minutes in bright sunshine to be photographed. Within a year, this time had been cut to two minutes, then to half a minute and less.

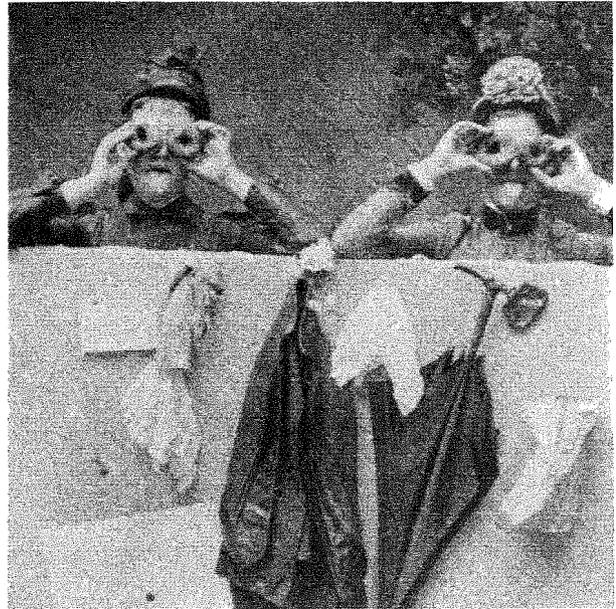
But even 30 seconds is a long time to sit totally still. If you think it's easy, try it yourself. Keep a

clock in front of you and see how long you can sit without moving any part of you at all. No blinking! Make sure the clock has a second hand. Have a friend watch and tell you if you make any movement. Try the same experiment smiling and have your friend tell you the moment your smile stops looking natural.

Later Changes

In the years that followed the day you had your portrait taken, photography continued to improve. It grew simpler, cheaper, and more commonplace. Soon people could expect to be photographed a number of times during their lives, so the process of being photographed became more familiar. Consequently people began to feel more relaxed in front of the camera and sometimes they even hammed it up, both in home shots and in studio portraits. By the 1880s, the camera was changing from a stranger you had to put on company manners for, into a member of the family, a part of everyday life.

Two girls clowning around in a photographer's studio in the 1890s. (Museum of American History, Division of Photographic History)



What Can You Remember about This Family?



(Columbia Historical Society)

Edward S. Schmid and his family posed for this picture in the 1890s. The Schmid's owned a popular pet store in Washington, D.C.

Look at the Schmid family portrait for one minute.

Then turn the page, and see how many questions about it you can answer. Warning: look carefully, as some of the questions are tricky!

Why Didn't People Take Their Own Family Photographs?



Family snapshot made with one of the first Kodak cameras. (Museum of American History, Division of Photographic History)

For more than 40 years after photography was invented, people practically never took pictures of their own families the way we do now. If they wanted a picture of their family, they went to a photographer. This was because making photographs in those days involved awkward equipment and unhealthy chemicals. Cameras were big and too heavy to hold for long, so special three-legged stands (called *tripods*) were needed. And when it came to developing your photos, you couldn't just send the film off to the lab: you had to do it yourself—fast. Until the invention of dry-process photography in 1880, pictures had to be developed as soon as they were taken. This meant that photographers either had to take the pictures in their studio . . . or bring their studio to where they were taking pictures, sometimes in a horse-drawn wagon.

It was only in the 1880s that photography equipment began to be handy enough so that a few amateurs started taking pictures at home. There, it was easier for families to feel relaxed and informal in front of the camera.

It wasn't until 1888, however, that home photography on a large scale began. In that year, the Eastman Kodak Company started selling a small, hand-held camera that made it simple for families to take their own pictures. This camera produced round pictures on a roll of flexible film that came sealed inside the camera. You took the hundred pictures on the roll, then mailed the whole camera to the Kodak plant. There the film was removed from the camera and was developed. Then the camera was loaded with a new roll of film, resealed, and sent back to you along with the pictures—and you were ready to shoot again. “You press the button, we do the rest” was the Kodak slogan.

What Can You Remember about This Family?

Here are the questions about the picture on the last page. No fair peeking back.

- Name two studio props that appear in the photo.
- How many children are there in the Schmid family?
- Is the child on Mr. Schmid's lap the smallest one?
- Which adult is *not* holding a small child?
- How many people are standing?
- Where are the two people in striped clothing sitting?
- Only one person has an open mouth—who?
- Is the father wearing a vest?

Caras Serias, Caras Sonrientes: Porque la Gente Posaba Asi

Hace ciento cincuenta años la mayoría de las personas no tenían los medios para saber como eran cuando eran bebés. Solamente los muy ricos podían pagar para mandar a hacerse una pintura al óleo de ellos, de bebés o en cualquier otra época de su vida.

De pronto aparecieron las primeras cámaras fotográficas. Dentro de muy pocos años, un poco de dinero podía comprarle a cualquiera una prueba de como era el o ella.

Imagínate que vives en un pequeño pueblo en esos primeros días de la fotografía. Tu has oído hablar de fotografías e inclusive has visto algunas. Ahora tu familia ha finalmente decidido viajar al pueblo mas grande de la región para que un fotógrafo les tome una fotografía familiar.

Tu no sabes exactamente que esperar. La idea que solamente sentarte ahí, en frente de la cámara, hace aparecer tu imagen en una placa de impresión en medio del cuarto, es tan mágico, que te da un poco de miedo.

Tu crees que esta será probablemente la única vez en tu vida que te sacarán una fotografía. La imagen en la placa de impresión será como tu te recordarás cuando estés viejo, y como te recordarán tus hijos y tus nietos. Esto hace de esta ocasión algo serio, y es importante que te veas lo mejor posible.



El fotógrafo posó esta familia de tal forma que la madre pudiera mantener derecha la cabeza del bebe. ¿Crees tu que estas personas habían estado frente a una cámara antes? (Museo de Historia Americana, Division de Historia Fotográfica)



Los dos muchachos parecen formar una pared que los dos protegen y restringen esta joven madre y su niño. (Museo de Historia Americana, Division de Historia Fotográfica)

Claro que tu usas tus mejores ropas. Te sientas muy derecho y ves directamente a la cámara. Tu quieres verte honesto, responsable y trabajador, porque estas son las cualidades que son especialmente respetadas en el tiempo y lugar donde vives. Además, tu sabes que la gente que hace bromas todo el tiempo no es tomada en serio.

El fotógrafo te dice que hacer, y te ayuda a posar para que te veas como quieres verte. El estudio del fotógrafo está lleno de objetos para crear diferentes efectos. Aunque tu familia sea campesina, puede ser fotografiada entre estatuas y cortinas, o sentada como realeza en sillas muy elegantes, si es esto lo que deseas.

¿Es sorprendente entonces que te veas tan solemne en una ocasión tan seria?

¿Funcionará este apoyo para la cabeza para impedir que el hombre se mueva mientras lo fotografan? (Biblioteca del Congreso)



No Te Muevas

En 1839, cuando se inventó la fotografía, una persona tenía que sentarse absolutamente quieta, por 20 minutos, a pleno sol, para ser fotografiada. En menos de un año, el tiempo de posar había sido reducido primero a dos minutos, y luego a medio minuto.

Pero aún 30 segundos es bastante tiempo para sentarse absolutamente quieto. Si crees que es fácil, prué-

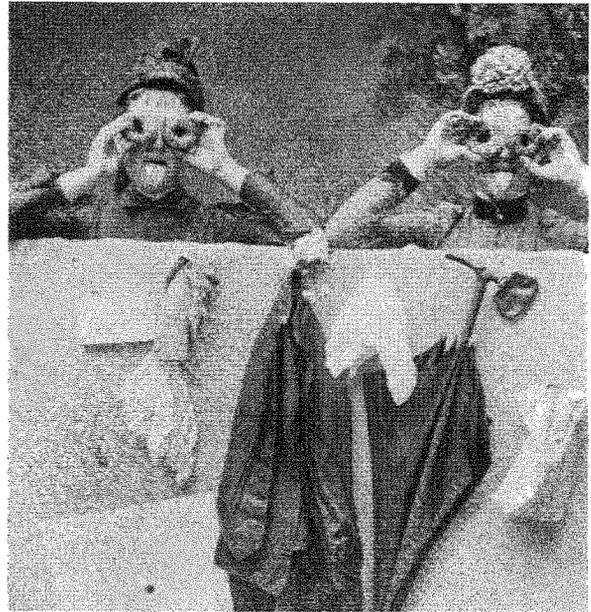
balo tu mismo. Pon un reloj delante de ti y ve cuanto tiempo puedes sentarte, sin mover ninguna parte del cuerpo. ¡No puedes abrir y cerrar los ojos! Asegúrate que el reloj tiene dos manecillas. Que un amigo te vea para decirte si te mueves. Haz el mismo experimento sonriendo y que te diga tu amigo cuando tu sonrisa ya no parece natural.

Cambios Posteriores

La fotografía continuó mejorando en los años siguientes después del día en que te retrataron. Fotografar se volvió mas simple, mas barato, y mas común. Pronto la gente podía esperar a ser fotografiada varias veces durante su vida, el proceso de ser fotografiado se hizo mas familiar.

Por eso, la gente comenzó a sentirse mas a gusto frente a las cámara, a veces hasta a hacer bromas tanto retratándose en casa como en un estudio. En los 1880s, la cámara pasó de ser vista como un aparato extraño, en frente del cual uno debía actuar, a ser vista como un miembro de la familia, una parte de la vida diaria.

Dos niñas haciendo payasadas en un estudio de un fotógrafo en los 1890s. (Museo de Historia Americana, Division de Historia Fotográfica)



¿Que Puedes Recordar de Esta Familia?



(Sociedad Histórica de Columbia)

Edward S. Schmid y su familia posaron para esta fotografía en los 1890s. Los Schmid eran dueños de una popular tienda de animales en Washington, D.C. Mira el retrato de la familia Schmid por un minuto.

Después dobla la página y ve cuantas preguntas sobre la fotografía puedes contestar. Aviso: ¡Mira con cuidado porque unas de las preguntas son engañosas!

¿Porque la Gente no Tomaba sus Propias Fotografías?

Por mas de 40 años después de que se inventó la fotografía, la gente prácticamente nunca le tomaba fotografías a sus familias como lo hacemos ahora. Si querían una fotografía de su familia, la gente iba donde un fotógrafo. Esto era porque tomar fotografías en esos días requería equipo complicado y el uso de productos químicos peligrosos. Las cámaras eran demasiado grandes y pesadas para sostenerlas por mucho tiempo. Aparatos de tres patas (llamados trípodes) eran usados para apoyar las cámaras. Cuando se tenían que desarrollar las fotografías, uno no podía mandar la película a un laboratorio de fotografía: Uno tenía que desarrollarlas uno mismo, y rápido. Hasta la invención de la fotografía de proceso seco en 1880, las fotografías tenían que ser desarrolladas tan pronto como se tomaban. Esto significaba que los fotógrafos o tenían que sacar las fotografías en su estudio, o llevar su estudio adonde iban a tomar las fotografías, a veces en un carruaje tirado por caballos.

Fue a principios de los 1880s que el equipo de fotografía comenzó a ser más fácil de mover y los aficionados empezaron a tomar fotografías en casa. Ahí, era más fácil que las familias se sintieran más a gusto, en frente de la cámara.

Pero no fue hasta 1888 que la práctica de fotografiar en casa, en gran escala, comenzó. En ese año, la compañía Eastman Kodak empezó a vender una cámara portátil, pequeña, que hacía más fácil que las familias tomaran sus propias fotografías. Esta cámara producía fotografías redondas, en un rollo de película flexible que venía sellado dentro de la cámara. Uno tomaba las cien fotografías en el rollo y luego enviaba la cámara entera, por correo, a la planta Kodak. Ahí la película era sacada de la cámara y desarrollada: entonces la cámara era cargada con un nuevo rollo, sellada de nuevo, enviada al dueño con las fotografías ya desarrolladas, y así el dueño estaba listo para tomar más fotografías. “Usted aprieta el botón, nosotros hacemos el resto” decía el anuncio de Kodak.



Fotografía familiar hecha con una de las primeras cámaras Kodak. (Museo de Historia Americana, Division de Historia Fotográfica)

¿Que Puedes Recordar Acerca de Esta Familia?

Aquí están las preguntas sobre la fotografía de la última página. No se puede ver otra vez.

Mencione dos objetos de estudio que aparecen en la fotografía.

- ¿Cuántos niños hay en la familia Schmid?
- ¿Es el niño en el regazo del señor Schmid el más pequeño?

- ¿Cuál adulto no tiene un niño en brazos?
- ¿Cuántas personas están de pie?
- ¿Dónde están sentadas las personas que usan ropa a rayas?
- ¿Solo una persona tiene la boca abierta, ¿Quién?
- ¿Usa chaleco el padre?