HISTORY OF PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT #2: OLD PHOTOGRAPH

The History of Photography is not only composed of master photographers, and masterful photographs. But, it is also rich with masterful unidentified "found" images, and inspired family photos. Sometimes these treasures are thrown out, or other times they are kept as precious mementos, or even collected as vernacular works of art. You can find old photographs at antique stores, collectible photo fairs, ebay, and most easily, in your own family albums. Students with an interest in history/nostalgia, and old things will have the opportunity to play the role of historian and collector, if they choose this project.

You must submit a written proposal in a paragraph or so, describing your project choice by Session 3. Late Proposals will adversely affect your grade. Completed project due Session 11.

PROJECT INSTRUCTIONS: FOLLOW THE GUIDELINES TO FORMAT YOUR PROJECT

Begin your project by locating a photograph that can be dated before the 1960’s. Talk to your parents, grandparents, relatives, friends, etc for access to their albums if necessary. You may be delighted to find an ancestor you will have the opportunity to research. Find a photograph that intrigues you, and which will be a good starting point for your further investigations.

Use visual clues to help you determine the approximate range of dates when the photograph was made, if other forms of verification are not available. Ask as many questions as possible from the person who possessed this photograph. Often such conversations can yield important information. Once you have established the approximate date the image was made, you may construct the technical history of the image.

GUIDELINES: Your report on an old photograph should follow these guidelines: 4-6 Pages required, 10 point font typed, double spaced and edited thoroughly. Follow this outline, Page 1: Technical History Page 2, 3: Personal History, Page 4-6: Period History. Period History must consist of at least 1 page. If you quote directly from any source, you must give proper citations. Provide a bibliography of books and sources used for research. The photo must also be included, a copy is fine or scanned printout.

#1 TECHNICAL HISTORY: For this part of the investigation, you will describe what you see, and perform any necessary research to discover what photographic processes may have been used. Include in your technical history the following information:
-Description of Photograph, Size, Shape, Mount, Tone
-Condition of Photograph
-Exposure/Printing Process Used
-Approximate date made, citing reasons for your claim

#2 PERSONAL HISTORY: For this part of the investigation, you will study the photograph for clues
-Is there a background or story to the photograph that you know of?
-What is depicted in the photograph? What assumptions can you make?
-Are there any contextual clues? Was this photograph part of an album, part of a collection?
-Are there any hints on the photo, or from elsewhere, as to its photographer or subject?
-What personal significance does the photo have for you, and your own sense of memory or emotional history?

#3 PERIOD HISTORY: For this part of the investigation, you will place your photograph in a historical context.
-Perform some research to discover a photographer who was known for working in this particular medium. Learn more about this photographer’s work, such as when was he/she working? What kind of images did he/she make? How do those images compare to the one you are discussing? Compile your notes on this comparison, and then write a one-page synopsis comparing your selected old photo with one that best suits a parallel study, by a photographer working in the same medium. Summarize the work of the photographer you chose to compare old photo with, as well, as any formal elements, style considerations, and subject matter relevant.

For ex: Say you found an old b/w urban street photo from a 35mm negative from the 1940’s, depicting children playing. In your research you found that Helen Levitt used a hand-held Leica camera in the 1940’s, and photographed this subject matter. Compare the two images per guidelines described above.