



## LOUISA ADAMS' PHOTO ALBUM AND THE CARTE DE VISITE CRAZE

Susan E. Leath, Town Historian  
March 2013

Today, we take for granted the ubiquity of photographs. They are simply everywhere from the printed page in books and magazines to the digital files of email and Facebook and a zillion other places in between. Our homes abound with photos stashed in shoeboxes, pasted in albums, or part of artful scrapbooks. It was not always so.

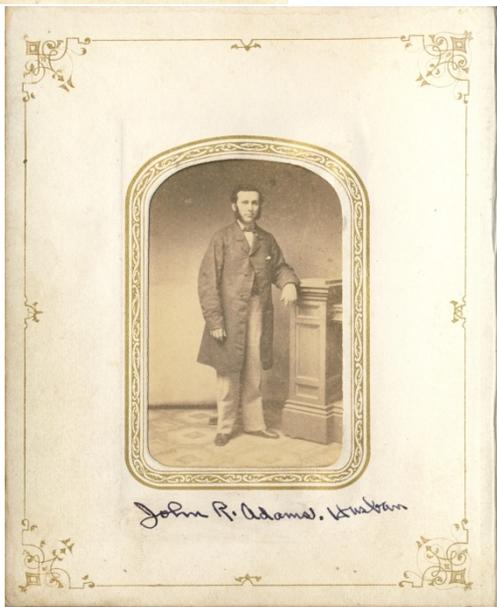
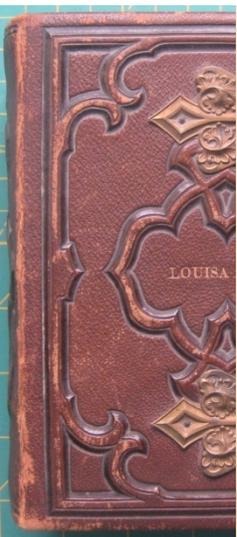
While the first practical form of photography, the daguerreotype, was introduced to the public in 1839, it was the carte de visite that made photography a world-wide craze. These miniature portraits, about 2 ½” by 4”, were invented in France in the early 1850s and introduced in New York City in the summer of 1859. The new style of photo was affordable, of a standard size and easily sent in the mail.

Soon family and friends were exchanging photo portraits and collecting them in albums. The Civil War added to the popularity with soldiers often having their picture taken before being separated from their families. Images of celebrities like Abraham Lincoln and Queen Victoria became available and people would try to have them autographed. “Cardomania” was born. In 1863 Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, “Card portraits, as everybody knows, have become the social currency, the “green-backs” of civilization.”\*

Louisa Adams was not going to be left out of this popular trend. Her c.1860 album contains 50 photographic portraits. The majority are carte de visite photographs of family and friends. Louise Haswell (she herself spelled it both ways) was born in 1837. Her Haswell ancestors settled in Bethlehem. She married John R. Adams on May 1, 1858. They had two daughters Jessie and Grace. She died in 1912. Her husband was the son of Nathaniel Adams, the prominent Adams family of Delmar.



The album, donated recently by the Sandra and John Papson, has a striking, indisheartening feature. Jessie, Louise and John Adams names are carefully inscribed beneath their portraits. The rest of the album’s 47 portraits had also been identified, and then just as carefully, the names have been erased.



\*Find this quote and more about the history of photography at <http://www.photographymuseum.com/histsw.htm>