

Guide to Understanding Salt Lake County Assessor Tax Appraisal Photographs
Evolution
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This guide is written to understand the periods in which various photographic formats were most likely taken to better identify the photographs, buildings, and history. This is a “best guess” summary based on photographs, evidence, camera technology, and the history of the development of the photography field in the 20th century.

The Tax Appraisal Cards and Assessor Photo collection is one of the most used, and the most unique collections in the Salt Lake County Archives. Being the only record of building history through time, these photos taken by the assessor are an invaluable resource in photo history, and the history of the county.

1934-1950s

The assessor began taking photographs in 1934. These are small rectangular paper photos. Frequently in the 1930s there is a chalk board stand or an assessor holding the board with the serial number. Later photos in the 1940s/50s have white writing on them from the negative. Most likely these photos were shot with a Kodak Six-16 or various cameras requiring a tripod.

These photos are 2 ¾ by 4 ½



Photo with serial number on a chalk board.



Photo with assessor holding chalk board.



Photo with number written on photo negative.

Photo types overlap as new cameras were purchased but old cameras were not immediately phased out. Various notes have been made over time on the backs by assessors and archives staff. Later reassessments of property would include the assessor noting a date on the back, as seen on the back of 16-17-181-010, but the shape, paper, and use of the chalk board tells us the photo is clearly from the 1930s and not 1976.



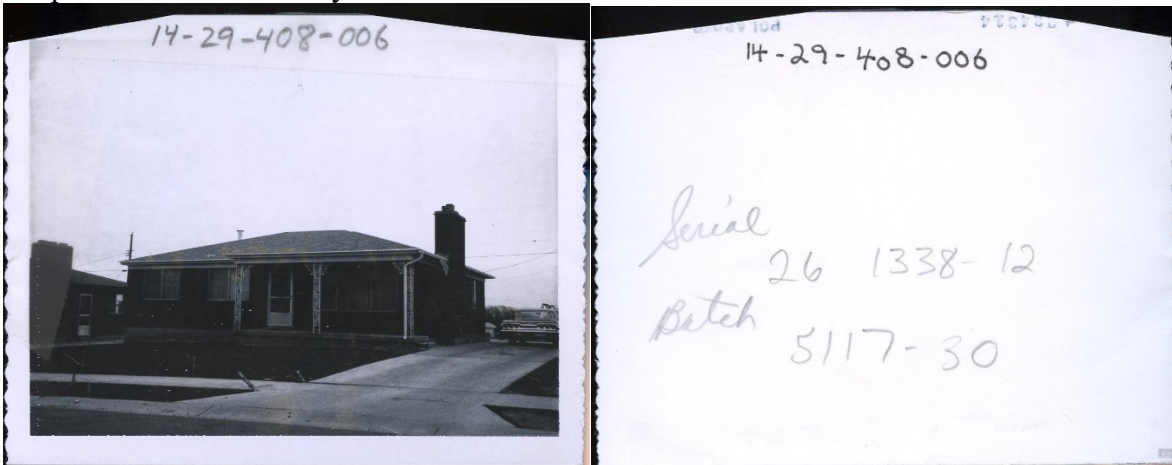
Kodak Six-16

Source: <http://www.artdecocameras.com/cameras/kodak/six-16/>

1948-1960s

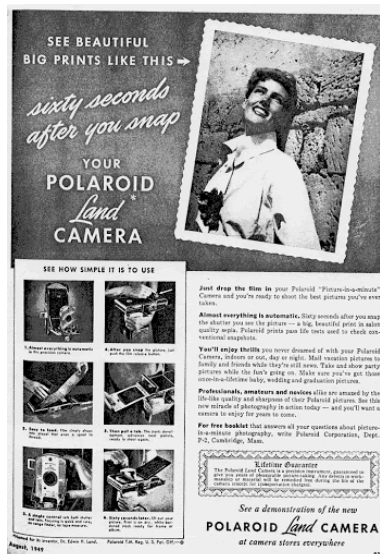
As technology moved forward, so did photo types. The Model 95 Land camera was introduced in 1948 by Polaroid. Photos of this type appear in the county photo history in the 1950s. They had frilled edges, but the frills are often cut off of the photos. These photos were pulled out of the camera as peel apart film and are made of photo paper.

These photos measure 3 1/2 by 4 1/4 in.



Model 95 Land Camera

Source: <https://vintagecameralab.com/polaroid-land-model-95a/>



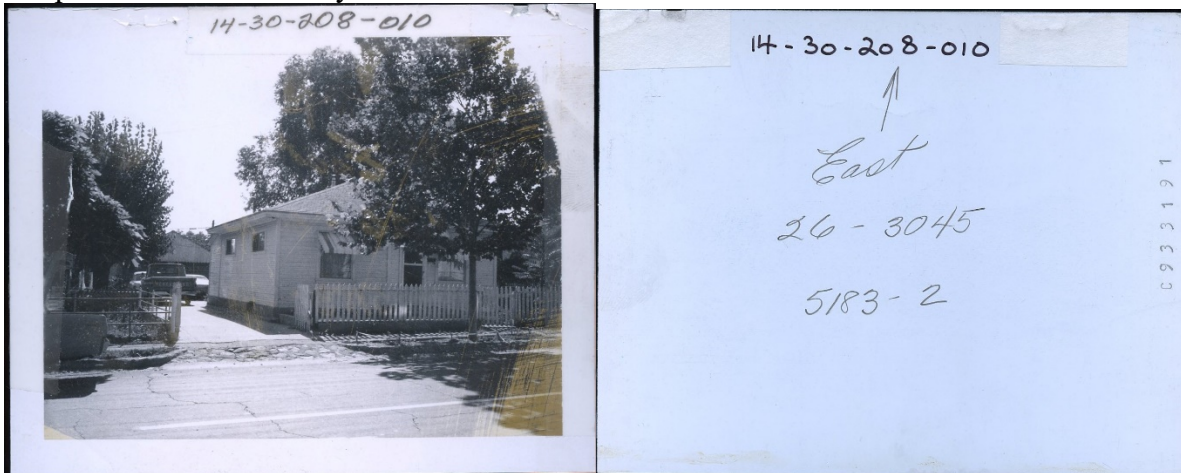
Ad showing frilled edge photographs from the Model 95 Land camera

Source: <http://www.landlist.ch/landlist/landads.htm>

1965-late 1970s

“The later Model 20 Big Swinger came on the market in 1965, and many may be familiar with the regular square Polaroids that this camera produced, which is where we get the regular square Polaroids. Some have grey backs and others have white backs (type of film used). The photo emulsion layers were sensitive to heat, temperature, and touch. Often there is fading and scratching, and the yellow underlayer can be seen due to stripping of the top layer because of improper handling in the initial peel apart and post-peel process.

These photos measure 4 ¼ by 3 ⅜.



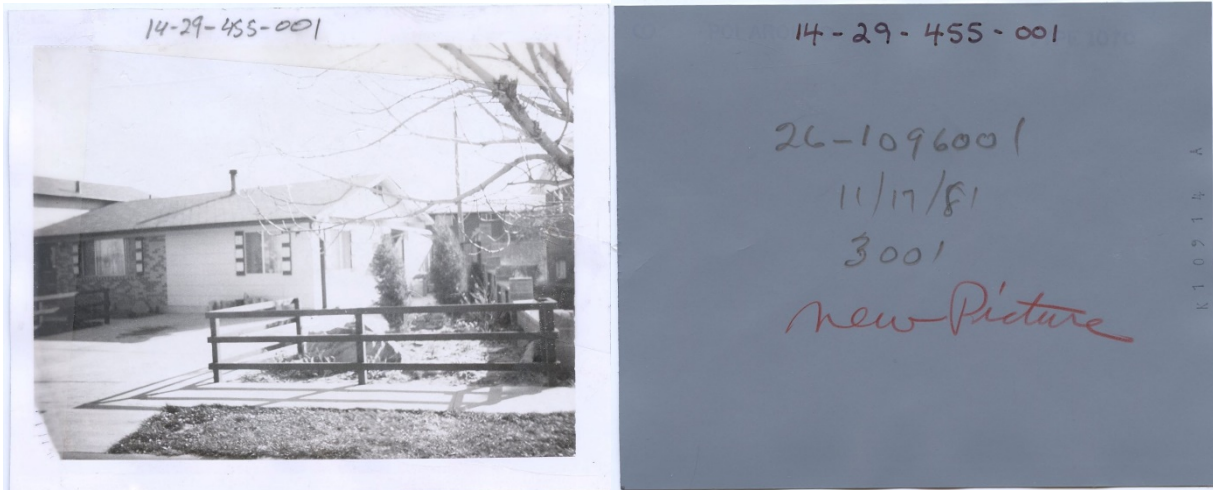
White back Polaroids are made of a regular photo paper



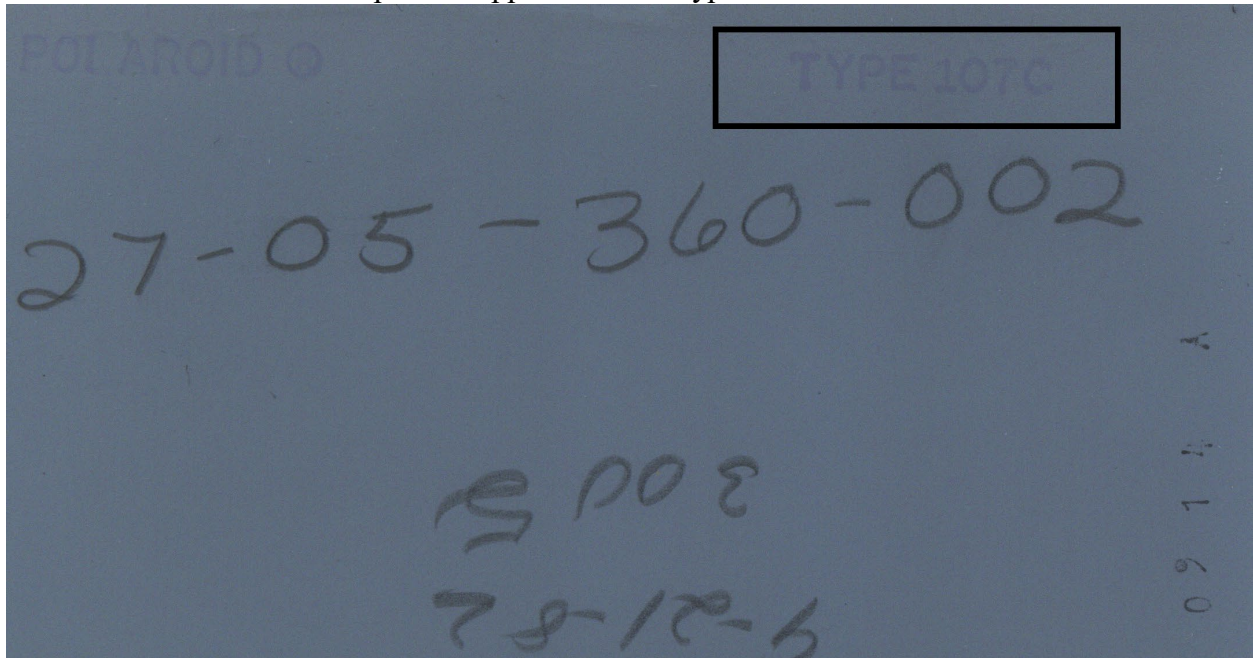
Big Swinger 3000 Camera

Source: <https://utahfilmphotography.com/2014/08/11/polaroid-big-swinger-model-3000-land-camera-2/>

1980s

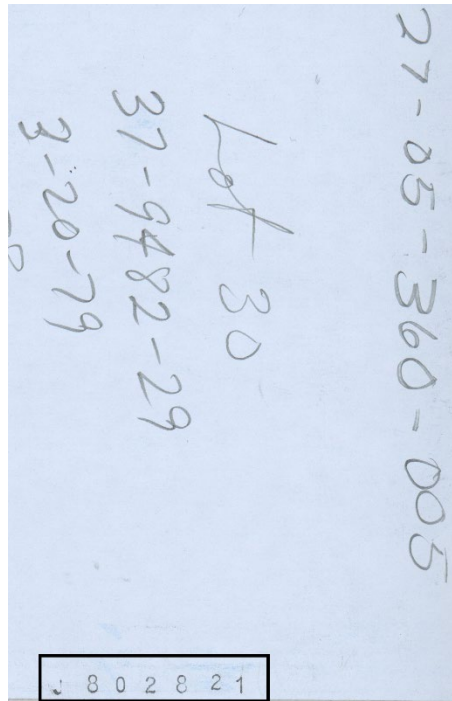


Grey back Polaroids were taken later by the Assessor starting in the early 1980s. They are made of a plastic type of photo paper, usually type “107c” film stock, which is a variety of the type 100 film. The same serial id process applies to these types.



Polaroid Serial Identification--

Polaroids from this period will have a serial number on the back such as “J802821” as seen below which tells us the month, year, and machine number used to produce the film packs, which can be found using the [Polaroid ID guide](#). So, “J802821” translates to: “J” is September, “8” is 1978, and 02821 is the machine and shift information.



Mid 1980s-Mid 1990s

In 1972 Polaroid rolled out the SX-70 instant photos. These have the white edges and large bottom, often used to write on—instant photo became ubiquitous in the American household by the 1980s.

The county appears to have begun using this instant film in the early 1980s. These photos are made of a plastic, paper, emulsion layer, and chemical combination (used to develop the photo upon ejection). These photos were sensitive to heat and temperature during the initial development after being ejected from the camera but were not as sensitive as the Big Swinger peel apart photos. These are the only photos shot in color.

These photos measure 3 ½ by 4 ¼ in.





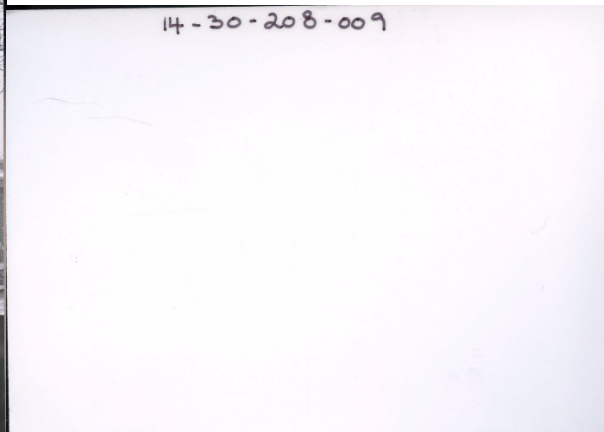
Polaroid SX-70 Camera

Source: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/how-the-polaroid-stormed-the-photographic-world-98275389/>

1990s and forward

Point and shoot cameras took over from the instant polaroid in the 1990s. During this period, the photos are in black and white mainly (sometimes in color) and have the parcel and date digitally stamped in the corner. They are photo paper with emulsion layer. With the advent of digital photograph, satellite imagery, and Google Street view, the need of physical print photos stopped by the 2000s.

These photos are 3 ½ by 4 13/16





Yashica T4 point and shoot camera

Source: <https://www.lomography.com/magazine/269254-lomopedia-yashica-t4>

Batch Numbers

Part of the assessor's process in taking and printing photos involved assign batch numbers. These are often found on the back, and appear as in a grouping of 4-2 (5478-29; 4041-30). These have no relevance for patrons and the archives, but the breakdown of the batch numbers is as follows

5478, 4041 are the sequential order of the batch.

-29, -30: The first number (2, 3) are the property type classification. The second number (9 and 0) are the year.

Helpful References for understanding photo history

Retro Tech: Polaroid by Marques Bronwlee

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6oHrNuXPVck>

Model 20 Big Swinger by Film Photography Podcast.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eUpWrBQr4jc&t=97s>

Polaroid Swinger

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polaroid_Swinger

Polaroid Instant SX-70 Camera

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polaroid_SX-70

Point and Shoot Camera

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Point-and-shoot_camera

Film Identification and Manufacturing Information

https://gawainweaver.com/images/uploads/file/Polaroid_ID.pdf

Polaroid Film Codes

<http://tityrus.free.fr/polaroid/integral/Polaroid-FilmCode.pdf>