



### **Nancy Camel's Manumission Paper**

This document that manumitted or set free Nancy Camel, a former slave.

Paper, W 5, L 8 in.

Antietam National Battlefield, ANTI 13927



***Photograph of Nancy Camel***

This is a photograph on Nancy Camel, a former slave who lived on the Roulette farm. Paper, cloth, metal. W 3, L 5 in, Antietam National Battlefield, ANTI 13942.



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## ***Keeping History***

### **Cartes-de-Visite - the first pocket photographs**

**By Georgen Gilliam Charnes**

One of the most immediate ways to experience history is to give it a face. Hairstyles, lace collars, jewelry, literally give expression to the faces of people from our island's past. In the vault of the NHA are small records of these personal details, saved and traded then as we save images of our loved ones today. These little records are called cartes-de-visite.

A carte-de-visite is a piece of thick board measuring 4 ¼" x 2 ½" with a photograph mounted on it. Usually the subject is a single person, either standing or sitting; often it's only a view of the head and shoulders. They were immensely popular in the nineteenth century, surpassed only by tintypes (an image mounted on metal) in popularity.

Up until the mid-nineteenth century, it was the custom for people to leave a calling card when they visited friends and relations. Many houses had small tables in the foyer to hold the received cards of visitors. Building on this custom, the "carte-de-visite," or "visiting card" was invented by André Adolphe Disdéri in Paris in 1854. He made his cartes-de-visite with a special camera that allowed him to take eight images with one negative. However, legend has it that the process did not become popular until Napoleon III visited Disdéri's studio in 1859. While they never were used in quite the same way as calling cards, the name "carte-de-visite" stuck to the small card-mounted images.

Cartes-de-visite were much cheaper to buy than images made from the earlier processes of photography. They were also less delicate, requiring no velvet-lined cases, which made them ideal for mailing to friends in far-away places. Cartes-de-visite of famous actors, members of royal families, and works of art were also commercially available. Specially prepared albums were readily available for the collector of cartes-de-visite.

The photograph mounted as a carte-de-visite is almost always an albumen print, a photographic process that resulted in a slightly glossy, warm-toned, clear. The albumen process involved coating paper with egg white and sodium- or ammonium chloride. This paper could be stored for years, but to use, it had to be sensitized by floating it in a silver nitrate solution and used immediately. It was then placed in contact with a negative in a frame and exposed to light (often sunlight), rinsed in water, bathed in gold chloride for the warm tones, and finally placed in a fixative solution. Albumen prints are also always mounted on thick cards, because without support they roll up into cylinders. Albumens almost universally fade and yellow with age, and also develop minute cracks. Some experts say that up to 80% of prints in nineteenth-century historical collections are albumens.

The popularity of cartes-de-visite peaked between 1860 and 1866, when the "cabinet card," and other forms of card-mounted albumen photographs became more popular. These types of photographs are easily identified by their size. A card-mounted photograph that is 4 ½" x 6 ¼" is called a "cabinet card." The "Victoria" was 3 ¼" x 5", the "promenade" was 4" x 7"; the "boudoir" was 5 ¼" x 8 ½", the "imperial" was 6 7/8" x 9 7/8" and the "panel" was 8 ¼" x 4."

If you have cartes-de-visite or other card-mounted photographs, the most important consideration to keeping it preserved is where you have it stored. Extremes of temperature and high humidity are terrible conditions for storing photographs, so taking them out of the trunk in the attic would be a good first step. Light of any kind, but especially sunlight, will fade your image. If you want to display the photograph, you may want to consider having a copy made and display that, or frame the original behind U-V filtering glass. Archival-quality photograph albums, scrapbooks, or boxes can be used for storage. While cheap plastic albums may seem fine to you, such albums that have been in an attic for too many years can destroy your photographs.

Here at the NHA, we have hundreds of cartes-de-visite in our archive. The faces of men, women, and children are daily reminders that history is all about people - families, friends, and loved ones gazing expectantly into the future.

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