

## Picture Stories

John M. Hoenig and Nadine A. Hoenig describe the stories revealed by photographs.

### One last glimpse

In the 1890s, a process was developed for putting photographic images on porcelain. It became fashionable to adorn gravestones with photographs. A positive photographic image rich in metal salts was made on a thin film. The film was affixed to the porcelain and the porcelain was placed in a furnace. The film burned away leaving the image, which was then touched up and possibly colorized. Then a glaze was applied and the porcelain was put in the



*Figure 1. Previously unknown relatives of Nadine, seen for the first time courtesy of gravestone images.*

furnace again to seal the image. The result was supposed to be a permanent image but the process did not live up to the claims. Few images remain from so far back but in some cemeteries one can find pictures from the 1920s and 1930s (see [www.forgotten-ny.com/CEMETERIES/mtzion/mtzion.html](http://www.forgotten-ny.com/CEMETERIES/mtzion/mtzion.html)).

Nadine recalled seeing photographic images on graves in Belgium in the 1960s. On a recent trip home she found the practice still in use in Belgium with images now printed in color. Imagine visiting a cemetery to gather a few details about the life of a relative and getting a glimpse of the relative in a photo...

### Hard feelings

When going through your relatives' photo collections, it is not



*Figure 3. This was a photo of Augustin and his wife Germaine. Augustin's mother excised the wife from the photo.*

uncommon to come across mutilated photos in which an individual has been cut out or obliterated from the photo. This is a sure sign of hard feelings. In this photo from Belgium, Augustin's wife Germaine was cut out by Augustin's mother, who blamed Germaine for the early demise of her son.

### Soldier boy

A colleague gave us this photo which shows relatives on their farm in Hastings, Michigan, in 1917 or 1918. The two relatives in WWI army uniforms are Herman (left) and Elias (right) Getman. (Figure 1) But



*Figure 2. Photo of a colleague's relatives in Michigan in 1917 or 1918. The two boys in World War I American army uniforms are Herman (left) and Elias (right) Getman. Why is there no evidence Herman served in the Army?*

there is no record of Herman serving in the military and, in fact, he was too young to enlist. Our colleague investigated and found that family lore has it the boys' father was furious his sons had enlisted. He needed them on the farm. So, he took their birth certificates to the recruiting office and tried to get them discharged. Herman was only 15 (though he'd told the recruiting officer he was 18) and was discharged. Elias served in the Army Air Corps.

It is important to recognize that interpreting photos is not without its perils. A colleague told us of a photo of his uncle in a military or military-style uniform. The uniform was supplied by the photographer, and the relative never served in the military. Similarly, Nadine has a photo of her uncle taken in a photographer's studio in Belgium in the 1930s. He's posed with a tennis racquet in his hand. But, uncle did not play tennis. The racquet was supplied as a prop by the photographer.