

The Dead Horse Investigation

Crouching Horse, Hidden Locomotive

By Colleen Fitzpatrick

Figure 1. The puzzle: When was this photo taken?



The hat, the horse, the man, the scene...the mystery. Who is he and why was he photographed in top hat and tails sitting on a dead horse in the middle of 8th Avenue in Sheboygan, Wisconsin?

As forensic photo experts, we are well known for our interest in teasing out clues from old photos. So when someone surfed into our website at www.forensicgenealogy.info and alerted me that I had been linked to the Dead Horse photo, I had to check it out. My search led me to the website of *The Sheboygan Daily Press* newspaper, which had recently published a general interest article on the photograph when it resurfaced from the archives of the Sheboygan Historical Research Center (SHRC).

Could this bizarre scene be the result of the tornado that struck Sheboygan while a horse show was in town in 1901? Or maybe the owners of a Sheboygan tannery were staking their claim to the hide after someone's horse died in the street. Numerous theories have been advanced to explain the picture.

What we know for sure is that the horse is dead—we had an expert confirm this, and that the picture was taken at 4:52 p.m. on either May 2 or August 10. The year is between 1865 and 1880. If you want to cut us some slack and allow us to assume that the streets were deserted because it was a Sunday, the only possibilities are May 2, 1869, and August 10, 1869, 1875, or 1880.

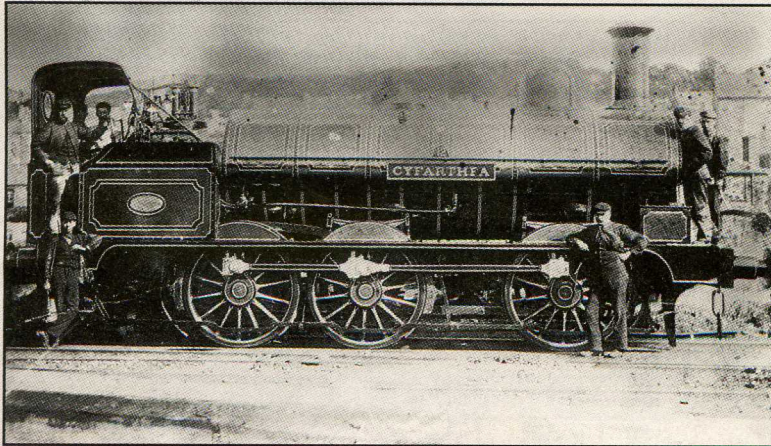


Figure 8. Steam locomotive of the Cyfarthfa Iron Works.

Now look more closely. That's not a chimney. It's the smokestack of a locomotive. The zigzagging white line is the joint between the top and the bottom halves of its boiler. The thick white line nearer the ground is the bottom of the locomotive frame; the horizontal lines below it are glints from its wheels. The white square near the top right of the A-frame building is the semaphore on the other side of the track that was used to signal the train. There is steam from the engine billowing in front of the locomotive. The shed in front of the tracks and the A-frame house behind the tracks could be part of a train depot. It's really not a surprise that the locomotive is hard to see, considering the distortion in perspective created by the wide-angle lens. The outline of the locomotive is shown in Figure 7.

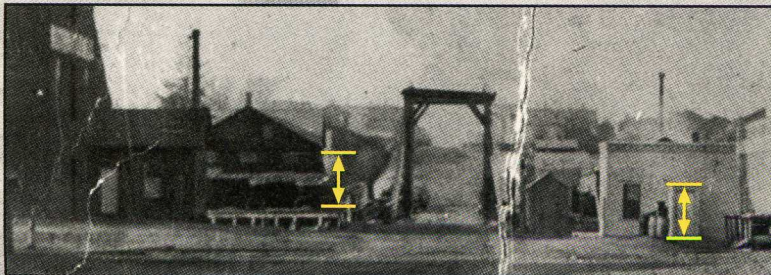


Figure 9. The mystery engine is about the same height as a person.

It's often good to have a sanity check when you work on a picture like this. To make sure we were not imagining things, we investigated the type of locomotive. We also consulted two locomotive historians.

Figure 8 shows a locomotive called the Cyfarthfa, a Penyardren steam engine used by the Cyfarthfa Iron Works in Australia. The Cyfarthfa was built in 1870.⁸ It resembles our mystery engine, with its short smokestack and long body. Like our mystery engine, it has a platform on the front instead of a cowcatcher.

To check the proportions of our engine, we compared it to the door on the shed to the right of the gantry, which was about the height of a person. Our comparison shows that if a man were to stand on the front platform of our mystery engine, his head would be a little higher than the top of the boiler. This is exactly what we see in the photo of the Cyfarthfa.

Surprisingly, the experts we consulted were not at all in agreement about whether the image was that of a locomotive. We consulted with Lee Witten, Secretary of the Golden Spike Chapter of the Railway and Locomotive Historical Society in Ogden, Utah, and with Bob Kreiger, the Vice President of the Union Pacific Historical Society in Cheyenne, Wyoming.

Lee was not convinced he saw a locomotive in the picture. According to Lee: "The picture of the Australian locomotive does not look like anything that an American railroad would have used at that time, at least from what I've seen and read but that's not a conclusive argument on my part. Even if it was like the Australian engine, the pattern of the shadows and that zigzag line simply don't jibe with what you would expect of a cylindrical boiler with domes on it. I'm just not totally convinced it's a locomotive."

On the other hand, Bob not only believed he saw a locomotive, he even thought he knew the type: "Though it's very difficult to see, it would appear by its vague shape to be a small 0-6-0 tank engine used for moving cars about at a yard or docks. No way to know which railroad."

City Directories

Back to the year the picture was taken.

We thought that early Sheboygan city directories might help us narrow down the time period of the photograph. Unfortunately, the town did not have many directories in the 1860s and 1870s. There were only two available through the SHRC, one from 1868 and another from 1875, and they required a bit of interpretation. Evidently Sheboygan did not have street addresses in the 1870s, so that people and businesses were listed only on or near an intersection. This made it difficult to identify the buildings in the picture with businesses that were listed on the corner of 8th (Griffith) Avenue and Indiana.

The 1868 city directory lists three businesses at the intersection, but only one

⁶Sheboygan Centennial Celebration, 1853–1953: Official Souvenir Program and Historic Booklet, August 9th thru 15th, 1953."

⁷Joerns Brothers / *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Sheboygan*

County, (1902), The State of Wisconsin Collection, Travel and transportation, p.17

⁸www.epollitix.com/EN/MPWebsites/Dai+Havard/cadd7449-f6b8-40ac-9e17-6b1fd8649977.htm

and grandiose. The reporter pointed out the potential value of photographic evidence for legal proceedings even though the plaintiff won the case.

Figure 5. The Reiss Docks as they appeared when looking southward from the first Eighth Street Bridge circa 1888.



Now what about the latest date for the photograph? Sheboygan's history gives some important clues.

We recognized the style of the gantry over the entrance to the South 8th Avenue bridge as that of a truss swinging bridge, with the gantry used as the anchor for the trusses. According to *One Hundred Years of Sheboygan, 1846-1946*, by J. E. Leberman, the bridge was constructed in 1846 and rebuilt in 1869, 1881, and 1893. We found a sketch of the bridge from 1888 in the 1953 souvenir program for the Sheboygan Centennial Celebration, that clearly shows a bridge of a different design without a gantry.⁶ See Figure 5. The gantry must have been removed before 1888 during one of the earlier renovations, giving a latest date for the photo of 1881.

We improved upon our latest date somewhat by using information provided by old maps and census records. The 1884 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map shows that the northwest and southwest corners of the intersection of Griffith (South 8th) and Indiana Avenues were occupied by saloons (see Figure 6). This is confirmed by 1880 census records. Yet the shadow that is falling on the man and the horse is not cast by a building at the end of the block; it is cast by a building second from the end. The corner is empty. The picture must have been taken before the 1880 census.

Of additional interest are the two very long shadows extending from the base of the silhouette cast by the building second from the corner. One of these shadows extends behind the man with the dog, with the other located just upstreet from the horse's head. Both shadows extend nearly across the width of South 8th Avenue. Compared with the height of the other buildings in the picture, the posts that cast these shadows were one-and-a-half stories high, the height of the building at this location shown on the 1884 Sanborn map. These posts were probably part of the building's frame during its construction in the late 1860s to late 1870s.

Briefly Thrown Off Track

A serious issue has been raised among the members of our Dead Horse Investigation

Community—the absence of railroad tracks crossing in front of the gantry.

Library of Congress maps and Sheboygan historical publications document that the railroad was completed through Sheboygan in the early 1860s, and later Sanborn maps indicate the tracks ran across South 8th Avenue near the river. Sheboygan was an important depot for the Fond du Lac and Sheboygan railroad in the mid 1870s.⁷ An article in the *Osbkosh Daily Northwestern* on Friday, October 15, 1875, reported that the Williamson, McKenzie & Crawford Co. had unloaded 15,000 tons of coal and wood from vessels into railcars at Sheboygan for transport to Fond du Lac, where the cargo was shipped out by barge via the Wolf River and Lake Winnebago. Railroad tracks should appear crossing the road in front of the gantry during our time period for the photograph, 1867 to 1880. Yet no tracks are apparent in the photograph. Dead horse enthusiasts have proposed several scenarios to explain the missing tracks, from a natural disaster destroying the tracks, to a period when the tracks were removed for repair.

However, we discovered the reason that no one spotted evidence of a railroad crossing near the river is that no one looked hard enough. Believe it or not, there is a full-sized steam-belching locomotive in the picture. It's just well camouflaged. Can you spot it?

Camouflaged Locomotive

Have a look at the A-frame building facing the camera to the left of the gantry in Figure 1. It has three windows in a row, the left one of which is eclipsed by the shed in front of it. The right edge of the house's sloped roof appears cut off by a white chimney. There is a thick white line that zigzags below the windows from the shed to the chimney.

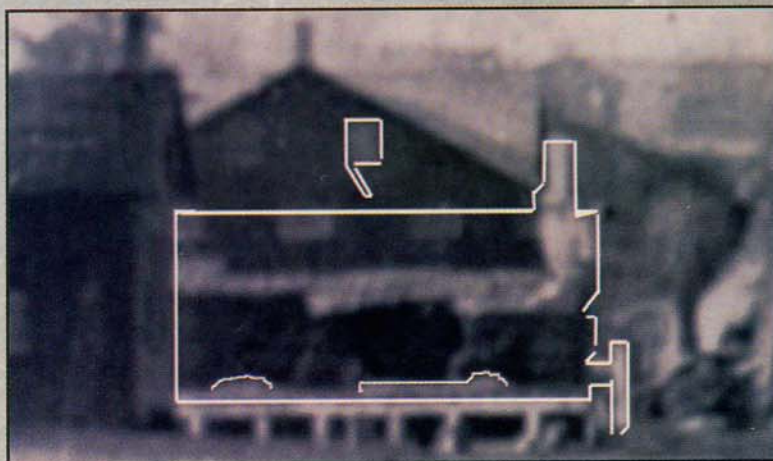


Figure 7. Do you see the locomotive?



Figure 6. 1884 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing the intersection of Griffith Avenue (now 8th Avenue) and Indiana Avenue. Note saloons on the northwest and southwest corners. The circle indicates a one-and-a-half story building.

What are the chances that we could figure this out from the picture? Literally astronomical.

Before reading any further, can you find the large sundial in the picture? Thanks to a high-resolution version sent to us by Beth Dibble, Director of the SHRC, we were able to read the exact time of day and narrow the date to just two days of the year. What? You don't see the sundial?

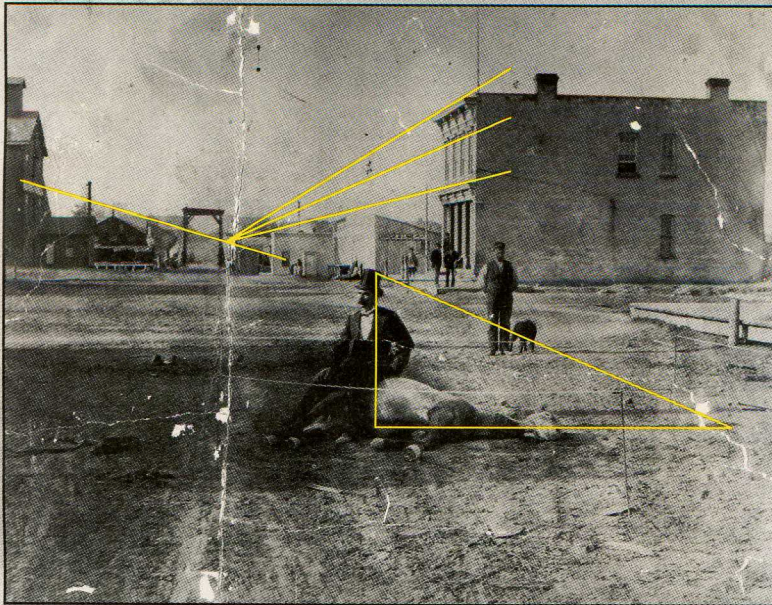
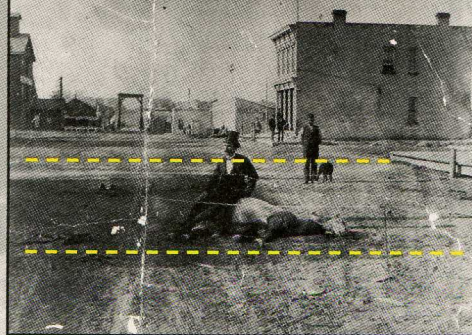


Figure 2. Sundial

Figure 3. The shadows lie almost directly across the street.



It's Mr. Dapper himself! The photographer could not have made it easier to read the time and the date from the length and direction of the man's shadow.¹ Since the picture was taken directly to the north along 8th Avenue looking through the gantry of the Sheboygan river bridge, the shadows point across the street due east. Astronomically and trigonometrically speaking, the sun is due west, at azimuth 270° , with an elevation of 22.85° . An ephemeris² will tell you that

the sun is at this position every year in Sheboygan at 4:52 pm on May 2 and August 10. Why two days? The sun passes through the same point in the sky as it climbs higher during the spring, and as it drops lower during the fall. In other words, what goes up, must come down.

What about the earliest date the picture could have been taken? This is where some knowledge of photography comes in handy.

Since the width of the street was 80 feet, to take in half of it using a normal lens, the camera would have been about 80 feet from the horse. This is clearly not the case. But if the photographer used a wide-angle lens, he could take in this larger field of view even though he was not 80 feet from the horse.

The first wide-angle lens, known as the Pantoscop, was produced in 1865 in Rathenow, Germany, by Emil Busch³ (see Figure 4). Although it was first used in 1867 by Albrecht Meydenbauer for photogrammic documentation of buildings and cityscapes⁴, it was not in common use even in the 1880s.

The earliest date the picture could have been taken was 1865, although it was probably produced after 1867, and likely later. The first mention we could find of a wide-angle lens in U.S. newspapers was a news item in the April 26, 1880, edition of the Chester, Pennsylvania, *Chester Daily Times* describing the use of such a lens in a legal dispute over the building of a new tavern.⁵

Although the bar owner tried to use photographs to defend himself by impressing the judge with the grand appearance of his new establishment, his strategy backfired when he hired a photographer to photograph both the tavern and the plaintiff's much smaller house across the street. Unfortunately, in doing so, the photographer used a wide-angle lens, probably because he could not get far enough away from the tavern to capture it with a normal lens. A wide-angle lens severely distorts perspective, making objects in the foreground appear much bigger and objects farther back much smaller than they are. The photographer made the mistake of photographing the tavern on the diagonal from the opposite corner so that the perspective distortions made it look comical and grotesque. Using the same lens, he photographed the plaintiff's smaller house from directly across the street. The same distortions made the house look much larger



Figure 4. Emil Busch's Pantoscop

¹Thanks to Roger Bailey and Steve Lelievre of the sundial community for their help with understanding the calculations that were required here.

²www.gcstudio.com/suncalc.html

³www.camerapedia.org/wiki/Emil_Busch

⁴www.hasler.net/Meydenb.pdf

⁵*The Chester Daily Times*, Vol. 8, No. 1124, April 26, 1880, p. 1, c.

can be identified. The tall building in the left background with the pointed roof and small structure on top was likely the Bertschy grain elevator located near the river. See Table 1. It makes sense that a locomotive would be parked next to it. Perhaps the train was loading its cars with grain when the picture was taken.

Besides this, the directory does not give us any new information. It only confirms what we already know—that the northeast and northwest corners of the intersection were occupied before 1865 or so. We also know that the two southern corners were built up by the 1880 census, but there are no records to indicate when. Our date for the photo is still 1865 to 1880.

The 1875 Sheboygan city directory does not give too much additional information. In this year, there were five businesses shown at the intersection, but the directory does not designate which corners they occupied. See Table 2. Since it is possible that more than one business was located in the same building, the fact that there are five listed does not give any hints about how many structures were there at the time.

We made one last attempt to date the picture by old photographs of the area, but we ran into the problem that the neighborhood was an industrial area of town. There are few vintage photographs of it, and little documentation on when its roads and buildings were constructed. It is well known that the Italianate building in the background right, occupying the northeast corner of the intersection, was the Evergreen Hotel. It was a city landmark for many years, but its early history is obscure. One clue could be the odd shape outlined on the side of this building. It appears as if a shack had originally been attached to the building but had been removed, presumably to construct Indiana Ave. But we couldn't find any records of that either.

It seems like we are at a dead end with our dead horse. We have researched the buildings in the residential area in the distance on the north side of the bridge, hoping to find a building permit or a property deed with a date on it. We have also researched train schedules, hoping to discover a train that stopped at Sheboygan around 4:52 either May 2 or August 10 between 1865 and 1880. But we have turned up nothing. Nada!

We finally considered the possibility that the photo was taken on a Sunday. Even though the neighborhood was industrial, and the SHRC believes that the Evergreen Hotel probably had a saloon in it as far back as our earliest date

Table 1

1868 Sheboygan City Directory			
Saloon	Heyn	August	Griffith nwc Indiana ave.
Boots & Shoes	Heinecke	Gustav	Griffith nec Indiana ave.
Groceries	Heinecke	Gustav	Griffith nec Indiana ave.
Grain Elevator	Bertschy	John	Griffith nwc River

Table 2

1875 Sheboygan City Directory			
Dry Goods	Koehn	F	c Griffith and Indiana av
Grocer	Hobert	J	c Griffith and Indiana av
Hotel	Lakeview House John Messner Prop		c Indiana av and Griffith
Meat Mkt	Koll	C	c Griffith and Indiana av
Saloon	Oetking	F	c Indiana av and Griffith

of 1865, the street appears deserted. Perhaps the weekday crowd was absent because they were at church or they were spending time with their families on their day of rest. The perpetual calendar at www.wiskit.com/calendar.html tells us that there are only a few possible dates where May 2 or August 10 occurred on a Sunday during our time range of 1865 through 1880. May 2 was a Sunday only once, in 1869. August 10 was a Sunday in 1869, 1875, and 1880.

I'd vote for May 2 as the date, simply to put the mystery to rest, so that no one accuses me of beating a dead horse.

And who took the picture? The photographer must have been knowledgeable about the latest photographic equipment, and must have had the means to purchase a very expensive lens. He must also have had the know-how to use it. The historical finger points to either Wolfgang Morganeier, a German photographer who lived in Sheboygan in the 1870s, or to his two apprentices, George and Edward Groh. But we may never know.

So after looking at shadows, historical documents, maps, city directories, and pictures of old locomotives, there are only two questions that remain: Who is the man and why was he photographed in top hat and tails sitting on a dead horse in the middle of 8th Avenue in Sheboygan, Wisconsin? ☐

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the Sheboygan Historical Research Center for allowing the use of the Dead Horse photo for this article.