

THE SILVER PLATES

MARTIN'S COMPANY

EVERY once in a while a photograph emerges from the misty past that captures the interest of historians, collectors, photographers, and, if published, eventually people at large. This new SUNSTONE feature hosts photographs that have been either unpublished or little published, at least in modern times.

To inaugurate the series, we've chosen two related images found last winter in Yuma, Arizona. After Leland Martin Thorup died in 1991, his widow Dorothy moved to a condominium in Yuma. While going through her husband's belongings, she found two rare nineteenth-century cartes de visites ("visiting cards"). CDVs are photos mounted on small, 2½ x 4 inch cards. They were used similar to today's business cards and were often collected in albums for display in the parlor. These two CDVs are fairly well-preserved, gold-toned, albumen prints, one of Mormon photographer Edward Martin's Salt Lake City gallery and another of his family. Leland was a descendant of Edward, whose photographs are among the earliest taken in the frontier settlement of Great Salt Lake City. Edward is the very same Martin who in 1856 led the ill-fated handcart company from Iowa City to Utah that was caught in an early winter storm in Wyoming and nearly perished. Volunteers heroically rescued them, but of the 575 original members, 162 were left in trailside graves, most in Wyoming.

After recovering from his ordeal, Martin started in business in Salt Lake, opening his first gallery in the late 1850s or early 1860s on the west side of East Temple Street (now Main Street), between First and Second South. Actually, Martin's business was more than a photographic establishment; he sold confectioneries, groceries, and music supplies on the side.

The adjacent photograph shows the store and gallery around 1865, next to T. & W. Taylor's dry goods store. On the left is the Tin Shop Hardware Store and the One Price Furnishing Store which sold







books, stationery, notions, and general merchandise. The heads of the horses hitched to the wagon are blurred, as is that of the little boy beneath the "Photograph Gallery" sign. This is because in the era of wet-plate photography, film exposures were relatively long and those subjects moved. In the doorway of Martin's gallery, just to the right of the boy, is some of the merchandise, including two pitchforks and two scoop shovels. Edward's descendants say he was a journeyman house and interior painter in Scotland, but that in Utah he was unable to make a living painting and branched out in photography and general store merchandising. Note that the street and sidewalks are not paved or cobbled, which made for dusty travel in the summer and rutted quagmires in winter and spring. Although the photograph is not clear on this point, it's possible the sidewalk, which looks hardpan from heavy foot traffic, was actually a boardwalk of wooden planks.

The second photograph is of Martin's family. Taken by competitor Charles W. Carter around 1870, it shows Martin, his wife, Eliza Salmon, and their seven children, left to right, Charlotte, Edward Thomas, Emma, Brigham, Eliza (holding doll), Napoleon and Martha, posing in Carter's gallery, diagonally across the street from Martin's. Typically, such family portraits have a stoic, sober appearance because of long exposures up to twenty seconds, depending on the brightness of the sun shining through the slanted

overhead window panes. Edward, Eliza, and the older children are fairly sharp because they could discipline themselves to hold still during the exposure. But Charlotte and the smaller children, Eliza and little Napoleon on his mother's lap, are slightly blurred. The doll being held by Eliza is particularly unclear because it was moved abruptly while the lens was open. Thus, the doll's features did not register on the glass negative.

During his life, Edward Martin kept carefully written journals, but the one recorded during the arduous handcart trek has not been found. Descendants say Eliza Salmon burned this volume because she did not want others to read what her husband had to say about Brigham Young, who was critical of the leadership on the ill-fated Martin Handcart Company.

Dorothy Thorp has donated the original Martin CDVs to the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers Museum in Salt Lake City, where they have been preserved in the photo archives. Copy negatives have been made for Martin descendants who want prints.

Edward Martin died in 1882, leaving behind a rich progeny but little of his photographic output. Now and then, though, some of his artistry emerges from the dusty trunks of more than a century into the light.

—NELSON B. WADSWORTH