

LW6 Forensic Photo Analysis: Who, What, When, Where, Why?

Colleen M. Fitzpatrick, PhD*, Fountain Valley, CA 92708

Learning Overview: By attending this presentation, attendees will learn how multidisciplinary analysis can be applied to solve a mystery, based on the example of this picture of an old barroom, taken in the late 19th or early 20th century.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by illustrating the value of a multidisciplinary approach for extracting an assortment of details that can nevertheless be used in a coherent manner to solve a mystery based on the questions who, what, when, and why.



There was no *a priori* information about the photo except for an address on the back—805 Baronne Street, apparently a location in the New Orleans, LA, business district. Yet through careful observation, it has been possible to determine the Global Positioning System (GPS) coordinates of the photographer, the date the picture was snapped to within a few weeks, and the likely occasion for which it was taken.

Historically, the date of the picture must be prior to October 1919 or after April 1933—either before or after Prohibition. There are many items in the photograph, both obvious and not so obvious, that could assist in narrowing the date further. The Falstaff[®] beer sign, the Coors[®] beer pennant, the cash register, even the pictures on the wall behind the bar (actually advertisements for alcoholic drinks) are useful in indicating a date of about 1910 when all of those products were simultaneously on the market.

However, the most valuable items for dating the picture are not in the bar, but are seen outside the bar, specifically the car that is visible through the open door, parked under a sign on a shop across the side street. The car can be compared to vintage catalogs to identify it as a 1911–1912 Ford[®] Roadster[®], which provides an earliest date as October 1, 1910, the date the first Roadster[®] rolled off the production line.

The sign is more difficult to analyze, as only parts of the lettering are visible. However, using old city directories, the mystery of the sign and the identity of the bar's owner can be solved. Beginning in 1912, the bar belonged to Paul Dimaggio, the great-grandfather of the picture's owner. He is listed at that address until 1919, when he probably closed the bar because of the ban on alcohol sales. With the assistance of modern image processing, the writing on the sign can be deciphered to read "Goreau Plumbing."

The only problem with this is that, according to the city directories, the Goreau Plumbing Company moved from that location in 1909—at least that is the last year it is listed at that address. In 1910, the address is absent from the directory, and in the 1911 directory, the building across the street was occupied by the Southern Packing Manufacturing Co. So how is it possible that the Goreau sign appears in the background of a photograph of Paul Dimaggio, even though he does not appear in the directory on Baronne Street until 1912, long after the Goreau's were gone?

Using city directories and maps, it has been possible to determine eight events that had to happen in a specific order to create the scene in the picture with Paul DiMaggio standing in his bar with the sign for the Goreau Plumbing Company visible across the side street. There is only one place the photographer could have been standing, and there is likely only one occasion for the picture.

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