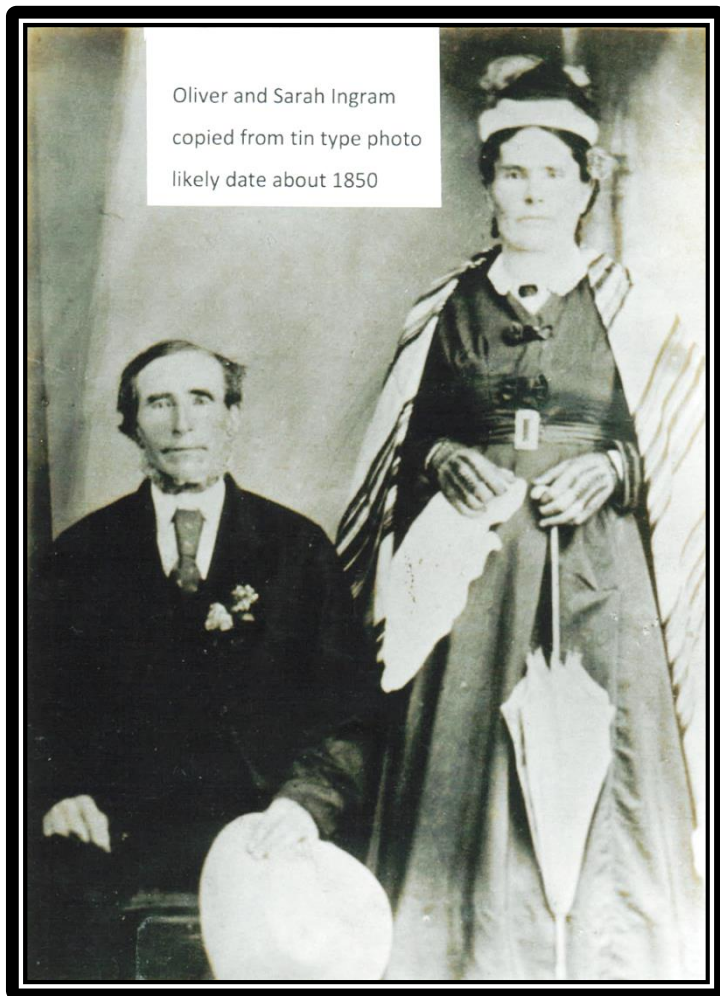


## Photo Analysis—Oliver and Sarah Ingram

It is captivating how men and women's fashions have changed over the centuries, just as photo technology has advanced. Fashion during the 1860s might have been expected to stand still, or disregarded in face of the American Civil War and Fenian Raids. But with the invention of the sewing machine in the late 1850s, and Butterick patterns in the early 1860s, women could now shape a dress in three-days or less instead of six by hand stitch.



Photographs have an aesthetic and historical value, especially when they picture family, along with nostalgic and sentimental appeal. Pictures always have a story behind them, but at times it can be arduous in creating the narrative. One step to properly identifying photographs is to establish the date, and sometimes

### Oliver Ingram (c1814-1892)

- **Hair:** Straight dark, slightly peppered short hair, parted, and oiled, from left to right
- **Face:** Oval face, heavy brows, possibly brown eyes, slim aquiline nose (symbolizing a tactician), light complexion but darker than Sarah's; possibly due to studio shadowing or exposure to sun
- **Chin curtain beard:** Grayish facial hair trimmed under jawline, similar to poet Henry David Thoreau
- **Collar and shirt:** A Salisbury white turndown collar, with tipped ends pointed downwards. (Vests were worn all the time, even by farmers wearing shirtsleeves and jeans. Collars and cuffs of heavy, starched linen were sold separately so the shirt did not need as much laundering.)<sup>1</sup> Shirts were commonly white
- **Tie:** White or pink-speck patterned, possibly silk, wrapped in a 'four-in-hand' style, no apparent tie pin. (The "four-in-hand" was born, paired with the starched detachable upturn collars that appeared in the 1860's. The English called it the four-in-hand because its knot, with two long trailing ends, resembled the reins of the four-horse carriages used by British aristocracy.)<sup>1</sup>
- **Suit:** Overlarge cut, dropped-shoulder and wide-lapel likely black sack suit were common in the late 1850s through the 1860s. By the mid-60s, the cut was shorter and more closely fitted through the body; it was accompanied by a high-cut single breasted vest, buttoned quite high. Trousers were of a wide, tubular form during this decade, often cut longer at the heel with no cuff
- **Ornate:** lapel flower (possible baby's breath) and light coloured folded handkerchief in pocket
- **Hat:** White or light-yellow wide-brimmed straw hat draping in left hand
- **Hands:** no gloves or apparent wedding ring; right hand on right thigh
- **Pose:** sitting on black chair or black box

fashion can be the only key to unlocking this evidence. The photo of Oliver Ingram and wife Sarah Somerville is a tintype believed to have been taken between 1860 and 1870, in Shawville, Québec. Let me explain why.

Tintypes exist from their development in 1856 to 1900, although enjoyed their widest popularity between the 1860s and 1880s. They were a photograph produced on a thin metal plate of iron, coated with a dark lacquer, and can be the hardest pictures to assign a date to. Most tintypes from the 1860s have black backs, while those produced after 1870 are generally brown. Like the daguerreotype and ambrotype, the emulsion was directly exposed in the camera, without a need for a negative. Beyond the lacquering, researchers need to rely on clothing styles, photographer imprints, stamps, embossments on card stock, etc. to determine the date.

At first photo entrepreneurs posed their clients formally in the studio, but later commonly travelled, working in booths at open-air fairs and carnivals. Because the lacquered iron was resilient, and did not need drying, a tintype could be developed and handed to a customer within minutes after the picture was taken.<sup>30</sup>

In the picture, notice that Oliver and Sarah are in front of a plain light-coloured canvas—not a floral or scenic backdrop as in a photographer’s studio. Notice the canvas’ pleat and seam behind Oliver’s right shoulder, and the tent pole behind Sarah’s left. The contrast: being the couple’s dark clothing and Sarah’s somewhat native looking blanket shawl. It is highly probable the couple had their picture taken by a travelling photographer. Also observe the black box Oliver is sitting on. Could the box been used to stock the photographer’s equipment for transportation?

<sup>30</sup> “Tintype,” database, *Wikipedia* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tintype> : accessed 30 August 2013), last date modified 31 December 2013.

## Sarah Somerville-Ingram (c1827-1913)

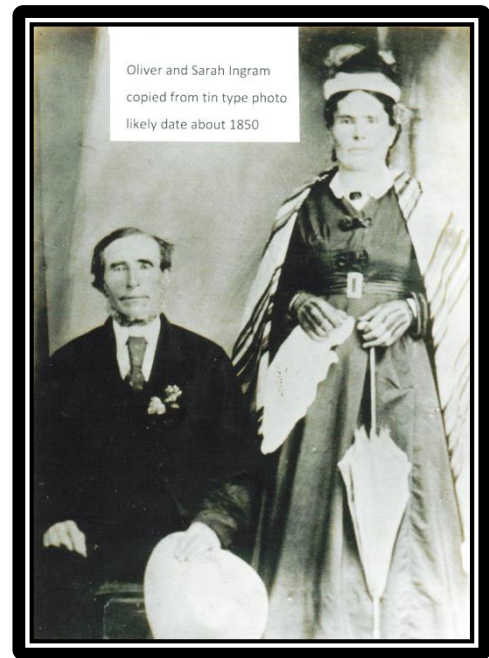
### Continue...

- o **NOTE:** It is felt Sarah does not have a bustle, yet it is uncertain because of the camera angle and cape over her shoulders; although definitely the bottom of the dress is full and under hoop. The front of her dress is not smooth and narrow, and the material is not gathered at the sides and pulled back for a narrower front. By 1874, the waistlines became longer, and the two-piece dress gained popularity. A skirt with a very long jacket bodice (called a tunic, sacque, or cuirass) was fashionable during the latter half of the decade. The bodice, which buttoned up the front, was often a different material from the skirt and the sleeves. Sleeves were straight or an open bell form. By 1877, the long bodice fit more snugly to the hips. With this added information, it is felt the picture could have been taken between 1865 and 1875.

- **Shawl / Wrap:** White with multi-coloured stripes (almost native appearing) blanket shawl placed over Sarah’s shoulders possibly to contrast the dark clothing both individuals were wearing. Notice her shawl was not a cashmere, black lace mantillas, or the richly woven “Indias” shawl that were fashionable in the Victorian era. Sarah’s was most likely practical. Towards the end of the 1860s, shawls were considered “absurd”.
- **Gloves:** Dark fingerless black laced mitts, ribbing at wrist; with a single row of soutache braid from mid-hand along the the spine of her fingers until it stops between the first and middle knuckle
- **No apparent ring**, though married
- Open white **handkerchief** in right hand possibly made of cotton or linen
- **Parasol:** White closed long one-piece parasol in left hand, tip to the floor, were very much in fashion during the 1860s
- **Pose:** standing

There was an opinion that Oliver and Sarah's picture was taken in Detroit when the couple's youngest daughter, Catherine Maryann Burke lived there. The location is unlikely, or the time frame. Catherine and husband George Henry Burke were married in 1895, Great Falls, Montana. The newlyweds did not reside in Michigan until about 1898-9; both events were too late for Oliver Ingram to attend, who died at Pine Creek, (Alberta), NWT in 1892.

Since the ownership of the original tintype is unknown and the lacquer colouring cannot be examined, then dating the picture and its origin must rely on Oliver and Sarah's clothing. Commentaries about the couple's attire in sidebars and below are based on several authoritative online and print resources mentioned in the bibliography. The certainty of where the photograph was taken remains mysterious.



### Sarah Somerville-Ingram (c1827-1913)

- **Bonnet:** 1.5 inch white rimmed bonnet, with dark soft cap-like crowns were popular in the 1864, with possible yellow coloured flowers in the back.
  - o **Note:** During the early 1870s, small bonnets without strings or curtains were popular. Hats were often perched high on the head. By 1877, bonnets became noticeably narrower, closer fitting that adorned the woman's head.
- **Hair:** Dark wavy hair parted in the center, draping down close to the sides of Sarah's forehead and tucked behind ears. The remaining hair is either crimped ringlets or tucked up into a conservative arrangement low on the back of the head, and probably held in a net, hanging at chin level. Hair-nets were particularly important in the 1860s; Flower tucked above her left ear
- **Face:** Dark eyes, moderate lips, square face, light complexion, no makeup as Victorian ladies did not wear any except perhaps powder
- **White 1-inch collar,** white collars were still fashionable. Sarah's is closed at the throat, with small with square tips and ruffled or laced edging, a rectangular dark brooch possibly onyx or enamel centered the neckline and accented the dress
- **Dress:** long solid brown or "cuir," or leather coloured v-cut dress, with long coat-sleeved cut sleeves with black soutache braid trim at the cuffs, shortwaisted fitted-bodice with darts (characteristic of the 1860s) possibly known as "the gored dress" or 'Gabrielle', wide waist belt with a colossal mother-of-pearl, enamel, steel or gilt buckle centered below her bosoms (when magnified the buckle shows little rings), two fabricated bows centered; dress has flat front with most likely extra material gathered in the back. This was a characteristic of the Victoria era. Notice the bodice boasting of two bows, and ribbing in the waist band. **The Bustle:** was introduced in the early 1870s, It changed the shape of the entire dress, not just the back, but the sides of the skirt were drawn further back, creating a narrower front. By 1873, bustles were set quite high. Mid-1870s, bustles were lower; and by 1877 the bustle disappeared

Although, it is believed the photograph was not taken in Detroit. Possibly theories as to where the Ingram's picture was taken:

1. Documented by local newspapers and others writing about the region, Pontiac County had an annual fair held in Shawville.<sup>31</sup> The backdrop in the photograph was probably a canvas tent owned by a travelling Ontario or Québec photographer with Oliver sitting on a trunk. And by the couple's own initiative, or persuasion from their children, Oliver and Sarah had their photo taken at one of the many open fairs or carnivals.
2. Another probability, perhaps the Burke family had their picture taken in Michigan, framed in card stock stamped "Detroit". The tintype was a keepsake, obviously passed down from generation to generation. Catherine Maryann Ingram-Burke was the closest girl-child living near home to inherit Sarah Somerville-Ingram's possessions. At a later date, maybe the original Burke picture was removed from the "Detroit" card stock by a family member and replaced with Oliver and Sarah's tintype.
3. Another point of view, what about the native-looking blanket? Could Oliver and Sarah had their photo taken in Alberta? But this would have been between 1888 and 1892, unless the blanket was a gift from an older son travelling westward in the early 1880s. The only drawback is their stature, and their age. How old do think Oliver and Sarah are in the picture?

YEAR	OLIVER	SARAH
	APPROX. AGES	
1860	46	33
1865	51	38
1870	56	43
1875	61	48
1880	66	53
1885	71	58
1890	76	63

The couple's birth dates are unknown; however judging posture, signs of facial aging and lack of grey hair, Oliver is probably between 46 and 61; Sarah between 33 and 48, which dates the photo from 1860 to 1875. Between 1873 and 1879 Canada experienced her worst depression, more so than what was felt during North America's "Great Depression" in the 1930s. Some economic historians suggest causes of the crisis were the: Franco-Prussian post-war inflation, rampant speculative investments especially in railroads, a large trade deficit, and other factors placed a massive strain on bank reserves that plummeted in Europe and North America.<sup>32</sup> It was a time when money was an almost unknown article. Beef was unsaleable, young pigs were driven into the bush. There were no welfare cheques and soup kitchens were funded by the municipality and government. Times were challenging, and it is felt Oliver and Sarah would not have the money to pay for a photograph.<sup>33</sup>

Calculating all the information: facial appearance, economy and evidence about historical fashion, it is estimated the photo was taken between 1862 to 1870, making Oliver between 48 and 56; Sarah between 35 and 43.

<sup>31</sup> John Lloyd Armstrong, *Clarendon and Shawville* (Shawville, Québec: Dickson Enterprises, 1980), p. 211.

<sup>32</sup> "Long Depression," website, *Wikipedia* ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long\\_Depression](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Long_Depression) : accessed 29 January 2014), last update 20 January 2014.

<sup>33</sup> John Lloyd Armstrong, *Clarendon and Shawville* (Shawville, Québec: Dickson Enterprises, 1980), p.88.