

### Is this Frank? Or Frank?

This time, instead of working on an unknown picture puzzle, I am using a picture to resolve a question from my own family. We have a carte de visite portrait labeled Frank Vivell. The question? Is this Frank Vivell, born 1830 or his son Frank Vivell, born 1858?

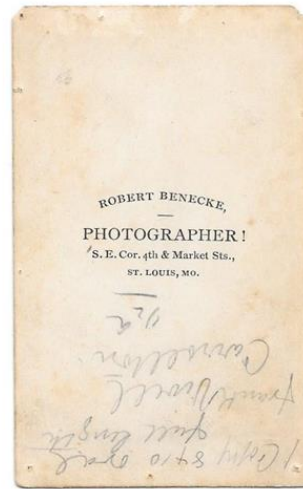
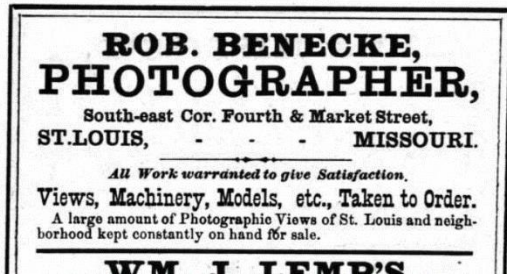


Frank Xavier Vivell was the first of that family to immigrate to the United States. According to a rather colorful account of his life that he provided for the 1879 History of Green County, Illinois, Frank came to the U.S. via Philadelphia in 1852 and came to the Midwest via the Erie Canal. Based on the description of the locations he visited, this is almost certainly the Wabash and Erie Canal across Indiana and not the more well-known Erie Canal across the state of New York. He was naturalized as a U.S. citizen in 1857 in St Louis, Missouri and opened business as a Baker and dealer in Fine Confections in Carrollton, Greene County, Illinois. Frank married LiBertha Shubert in Jacksonville, Morgan County, Illinois in 1857. Living in Carrollton, Frank and LiBertha had four sons and one daughter. The oldest, Frank, was born May 12, 1858.

In 1881, Frank (b.1830) was seeing a variety of doctors in Carrollton, Jacksonville and St Louis for a persistent abnormal growth in his throat. A final consultation was documented in the St Louis Medical and Surgical Journal, June 11, 1881. At the time of that exam, he was described as a German baker, his weight was reduced to 183 pounds from his normal 215 pounds, and he suffered from headaches and difficulty swallowing. He stated there was no noticeable swelling of his throat or neck prior to 1881. Frank X. Vivell died shortly after the examination. On June 22, 1881, he choked to death from an abnormal formation in this throat. At that time, his son Frank was 23 years old.

So, let's return to the picture and see how the family timeline fits with the photograph clues.

Robert Benecke was a rather well known photographer in St Louis. Mo. In 1865 worked for Hoelke and Benecke on Market Street. In 1865, he had top billing at Benecke and Hoelke. By 1870, Benecke was proprietor of his own studio and remained in business on Market Street in St. Louis for the next 20 years.<sup>1</sup> A logo of simple script generally indicates an earlier photo, with large elaborate graphic logos seen on later photographs.



The corners of the carte de visite are slightly rounded by age, but a close examination shows the corners were originally square cut. The diagonal crop of the top corners seem to support this conclusion; rounded corners would not have required a crop to allow the photo to slip into an album. Rounded corners would place the carte de visite after 1870, but the square corners common in the 1860s may also be seen in the early 1870s. The double border of one thick, one thin line was most common in 1864-1869. Note that on the right side, the picture is pasted over the thin line, making it appear to be a single line. Careful examination of the entire border is always important.<sup>2</sup>



The draped column is real, while the balustrade is a simple painted backdrop indicating an early photograph. Later photographs used more elaborate props and painted backdrops.

Closer examination of the clothing and accessories are next.<sup>3</sup> The trousers and coat seem to match clothing trends from the 1860's. The coat has a generous oversized cut with the sleeves set low on the shoulders. The trousers are full cut, not fitted. Notice that the shoes are well worn and scuffed. On the other hand, the shirt collar and wide tie with loose knot more closely match the clothing fashions of the 1870s. Fur hats and coats were used as accessories in the 1870s. The hair is cut fairly short, the face is clean shaven with prominent sideburns. The subject in the photo seems to be wearing an older style suit but has purchased (or borrowed) a new style shirt, tie and hat, an economical way to appear stylish for his portrait.

The combination of clues gives us an estimate of late 1860s to early 1870s for this carte de visite. Frank X. Vivell was aged 40 years in 1870. The description from his medical exam tells us there were no outward signs of disease until 1880 and describes a normal weight of 215 pounds which matches the photograph. During this same time frame, his son Frank (born 1858) was still a child. I think we are safe to declare this a portrait of Frank Xavier Vivell (1830-1881), and not his son. The handwriting on the reverse seems to be an order for an 8x10 oval portrait enlargement. We have not yet found this portrait, but the search is on!

Resources:

1. City Directory, St Louis Mo., 1870. Record online at Ancestry.com
2. [www.phototree.com](http://www.phototree.com)
3. Taylor, Maureen. *Family Photo Detective* Family Tree Books, Cincinnati, Ohio.