

An Illinois photographer's inscription provides unique historical context

Ock Tyner Leaves His Mark

BY PAUL RUSSINOFF, WITH IMAGES FROM THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

An inscription on a photograph can be of extraordinary value. In the case of this well-worn *carte de visite*, the ink provides a new detail—the name of the man who made it. On the front is written, “Father of Lt. Gen. U.S. Grant, Uncle Jesse Grant, Vicksburg 63 O.N.T.,” and, on the reverse, “Picture made by the undersigned in 63 at Vicksburg, O.N. Tyner, Operator for Barr & Young Army Photos.”

While most surviving *cartes* are stamped with the photographer's name and studio, few, such as this one, bear a mark with the name of the camera operator.

He is 20-year-old Oscar Newton Tyner of Illinois. Known as “Ock” to his pals, Tyner was one of four sons born to Harrison and Lavinia Tyner. In 1860, the Tyners lived in Mason, located in Effingham County about 100 miles east of St. Louis.

When the war came, Tyner's father, Harrison, a boot and shoemaker by trade, helped recruit Company B of the 38th Illinois Infantry. He joined the company as second lieutenant and rose in rank to captain. He left the regiment in 1863 and returned to the army in 1864 with the 143rd Illinois Infantry. He retired from the service as major.

Two of Ock's older brothers also served in uniform. William, a corporal in his father's first company, suffered a gunshot in the left arm at the battle of Liberty Gap, Tenn., on June 26, 1863. Evacuated to a hospital in Murfreesboro, he lingered with an infection, and succumbed exactly a month after he received the wound. George, a sergeant in the 57th Illinois Infantry, slipped and fell between two moving railroad cars

while his regiment traveled in the vicinity of Pocahontas, Tenn., in October 1863. The railcar's wheels severed his body and killed him instantly.

Though Ock followed a different path than his military-minded father and brothers, it led to the same place—south with the Union army.

It is unclear at what point Tyner joined the firm of Barr & Young. It is likely he became acquainted with the firm's principal, David Perry Barr, at home in Effingham County. Barr, a Pennsylvania native, had moved to the county and established a photography studio. One can easily surmise Barr training Tyner in the photographic arts before the war began.

Barr left Illinois in the early 1860s for Paducah, Ky., where he worked with another photographer named Rankin, under the name

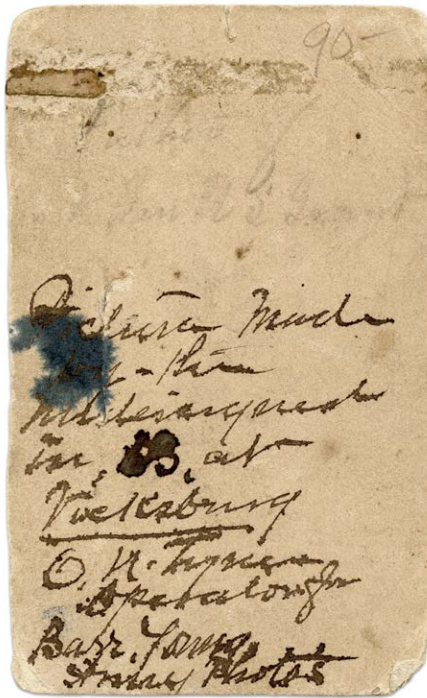
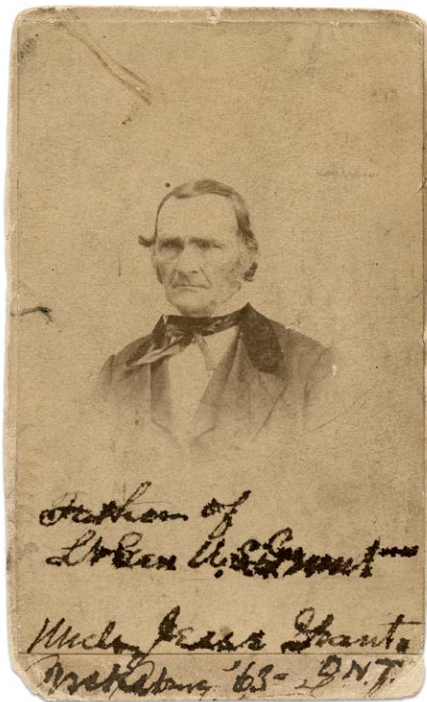
Barr & Rankin. As the Civil War escalated, Barr headed south to Memphis, Tenn., partnered with photographer J.W. Young, and focused the business on the increasing demand for portraits of Union soldiers. Barr & Young established a studio at Fort Pickering, a Memphis fort built by Confederates prior to Union occupation of the city.

Jesse Grant sits for his portrait

The Memphis studio is very likely where Gen. Grant's father sat for this portrait. And, because Jesse Root Grant made only one documented visit to his son in the field, an approximate date and context of the sitting is known.

By all accounts, the father-son visit was a disaster.

In mid-December 1862, Gen. Grant made his headquarters in Oxford, Miss. He had made significant progress toward his goal of capturing the rebel bastion of Vicksburg, some 200 miles to the south. As his army settled into winter quarters, Grant received instructions to facilitate the sale and market-



Carte de visite by Barr & Young of Vicksburg, Miss.

KEY INSCRIPTION: On the front, “Father of Lt. Gen. U.S. Grant, Uncle Jesse Grant, Vicksburg 63 O.N.T.,” and, on the reverse, “Picture made by the undersigned in 63 at Vicksburg, O.N. Tyner, Operator for Barr & Young Army Photos.”



TYNER AND HIS SOLDIER-BROTHER
 Oscar Newton “Ock” Tyner sits next to his brother, William, a corporal in Company B of the 38th Illinois Infantry. The author suggests this portrait was made upon William’s enlistment in 1861 due to the crisp overcoat (note the unusual and nonregulation placement of the chevrons). This image may have been taken by David P. Barr in his Illinois studio—prior to his travels to Memphis and Vicksburg.

Sixth-plate tintype attributed to David P. Barr of Effingham County, Ill.

ing of surplus cotton to a starving market in the north. The lure of huge profits had resulted in an army of speculators besieging Grant, who was personally repelled by profiteers and incensed by the fact that some of the monies spent for the cotton would go back into the Confederate war effort. Even more upsetting was the fact that his father Jesse, with whom Grant managed a difficult and deteriorating relationship, was now part of that army. Jesse had two business partners, Henry and Abraham Mack of

Cincinnati, who happened to be Jewish.

Jesse Grant and the Mack brothers arrived at the general’s Oxford headquarters about this time—though the exact dates are not known. Some accounts describe Grant extending a cordial welcome to his father. But once the reason for his father’s visit became clear, the younger Grant became consumed with rage and reportedly put his father and his partners on the next train to Cincinnati.

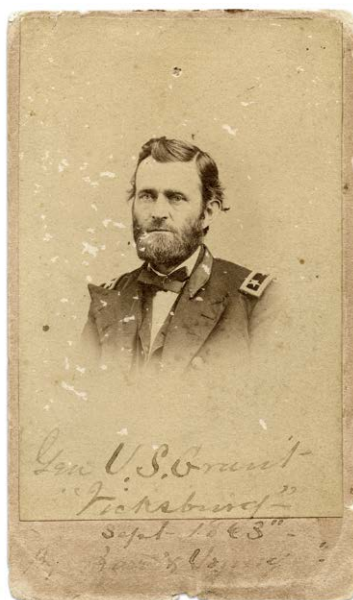
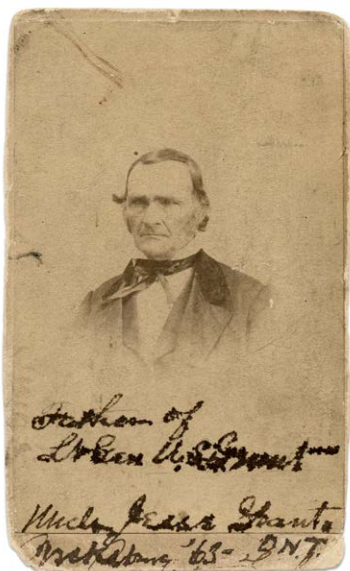
On Dec. 17, 1862, Grant issued his infamous anti-Semitic Order No. 11, expelling traders and “the Jews, as a class” from his department within 24 hours. The order sparked immediate controversy and condemnation, and President Abraham Lincoln moved quickly to rescind it. Whether Grant issued the order as a pre-emptive strike before or after his father’s visit is debated by historians. But all generally acknowledge a connection between the visit and the order.

On a side note, Gen. Grant did not mention this episode in his *Personal Memoirs*. It was, however, a cause of great personal pain and regret for him in later years, and an act he took steps to atone for after he became president.

On both legs of the Cincinnati to Oxford trip, Jesse Grant and the Mack brothers would have passed through Memphis. It is conceivable that Grant stopped at the Barr & Young gallery at Fort Pickering to have his likeness made.

Tyner’s print of the Jesse Grant portrait and the view of Gen. Grant

In his inscription on the back of the Jesse Grant portrait, Tyner states that he made the portrait in 1863 in Vicksburg. Considering the timing of Grant’s visit to his son in Oxford, and the fact that Barr & Young established a studio in Vicksburg after the city and its Confeder-



Cartes de visite by Barr & Young.

PRINTS MADE FROM SITTINGS MONTHS APART: The author purchased this pair of *cartes de visite* together. The consistency of the wear and tear suggests they have been together for many, many years. Both prints were made in September 1863—the *carte* of Gen. Grant from a negative made about this time in Vicksburg and that of his father from a negative from a sitting likely in Memphis the previous year.

ate forces surrendered to Gen. Grant on July 4, 1863, the origin of this print emerges. Tyner made it from the original negative produced in the Memphis gallery. Barr or Young must have carried the negative with them when they opened the Vicksburg establishment.

The photographer who produced the negative is not known. The obvious candidates are Barr or Young. It might have been Tyner; though the date he joined Barr is unknown. Support for Tyner as the maker of the negative is in the inscription, which refers to Grant’s father as “Uncle Jesse,” a nickname used in contemporary accounts during the Oxford visit.

The view of Gen. Grant by Barr & Young is one of several apparently taken during the same sitting in Vicksburg. Tyner inscribed this view as made in September 1863, but another example housed in the New York City Public Library and attributed to Barr & Young is dated August 1863, likely making this series one of the first produced of Grant after his successful capture of Vicksburg and his ascension onto the national stage.

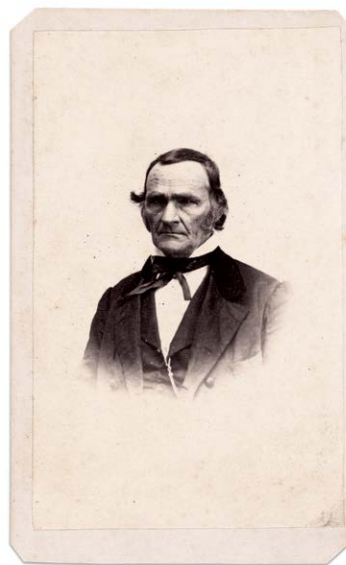
Barr & Young go their separate ways

The Barr & Young studio did not survive the war. Both photographers, however, continued to compete for business in Vicksburg. In June 1864, Barr purchased Young’s portion of the partnership and continued to make portraits under “D.P. Barr Army Photographer, at Palace of Art in Vicksburg Mississippi.” Around this time, Barr apparently opened a second studio in Paducah, Ky., as D.P. Barr Army Photographer.

Back in Vicksburg, J.W. Young opened his own studio, the “Washington Photograph and Ambrotype Gallery” on the third floor of the local Odd Fellows Hall. He took on a new partner in 1865, but had left town by 1866. Meanwhile, in October 1864, William K. French succeeded Barr as the photographer doing business at the Palace of Art.

By 1870, Barr relocated to Houston, Texas, where he opened a gallery with Charles J. Wright. This firm’s extensive collection of approximately two thousand negatives was acquired by the Smithsonian Institution, and

is now housed in the National Museum of American History. These images chronicle late 19th century vernacular portraiture, and offer a fascinating look into the history of Houston. Barr married twice, fathered two daughters and lived until 1925. He is buried in San Antonio.



*Cartes de visite by Barr & Young.
National Portrait Gallery.*

ANOTHER PRINT OF “UNCLE JESSE”: This undated *carte* with the Barr & Young backmark is part of the collection of the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C.

Ock’s postwar years

Exactly how long Ock Tyner remained in Vicksburg as a photographer is currently lost in time. He probably returned to Illinois at the close of the war, if not before. In 1867, he married Gertrude Amada Horton in Niles, Mich., and by 1876 he and his wife were living in Kinmundy, Ill., where they operated a “Photographic Parlor,” and also sold pianos and musical instruments. Beginning in the 1880’s, Tyner phased out the photography business to focus on musical instrument sales, and operated Tyner’s Music Store until his retirement. A prominent member of the Kinmundy community and active in the Odd Fellows and the Knights

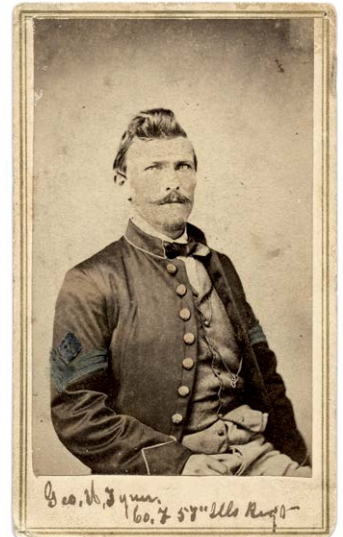
of Pythias, Tyner and Gertrude had one son, named after his father, who died before his 10th birthday in 1878.

Tyner outlived Gertrude, dying in 1926 at age 83. Both lie buried alongside their son in Mason, Ill.

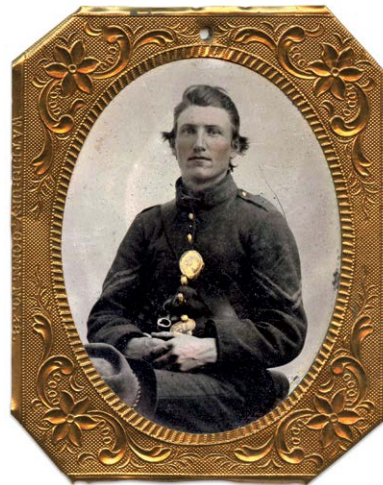
Tyner’s obituary summarized his life and character. “Few men in this part of Illinois (were) better known and loved. He had many friends in all parts of this nation, was a friend of everybody, always willing anxious and ready to help others. He loved his country, as few men loved it and one of the saddest events of his long life was when he was rejected for service



Ninth-plate tintype attributed to David P. Barr of Effingham County, Ill.



Cartes de visite by anonymous photographers.



THE TYNER MEN
Clockwise from far left:
Ock Tyner, his father,
Maj. Harrison Tyner
of the 38th and 143rd
Illinois Infantries, and his
older brothers, Sgt. George
H. Tyner of the 57th Il-
linois Infantry and William
Tyner, a corporal in his
father's first company.

*Ninth-plate tintype
by an anonymous photographer.*

“In his early manhood he was a photographer, one of the best. He was artistic, being able to bring out the best in every subject.”

in the Civil War. Ock never was a strong man physically, however he was always active in everything for the betterment of the community and was usually at the head in all such matters, but most of all he was an optimist.”

The obituary also referenced his contributions as a photographer. “In his early manhood he was a photographer, one of the best. He was artistic, being able to bring out the best in every subject. He left a valuable collection of photo plates covering the years sixty-seven, eighty and ninety.”

Post-script: Tyner’s relics surface

In May of 2015, I purchased a large archive of photos, letters and a combat diary relating to the Tyner family. Soon after this acquisition, I added a *carte de visite* of the family patriarch, Harrison, in uniform. In October 2018, a call from my friend and fellow *MI* Senior Editor, Dan Schwab who was attending the autumn Gettysburg Civil War & Military Show, resulted in the purchase of the two battered views here of Jesse and U.S. Grant. Only after getting the images in hand did I realize that these *cartes* were produced by Harrison Tyner’s son. I was immediately

intrigued. In all my years of collecting, I had never run across a group of images specifically tied to an actual photographer.

Research led me to the Kinmundy Historical Society in Kinmundy, Ill., where Tyner lived until his death. I was very surprised when my email asking for any information on Tyner yielded a scan of a tintype of Oscar and his brother William, then a corporal in the 38th Illinois Infantry. This view allowed me to identify a previously unknown tintype of Oscar in the initial archive of material I purchased. Most recently, I was amazed to locate a slightly different view of the Kinmundy Historical Society tintype in a Civil War relic shop in Fredericksburg, Va. Today, these artifacts reside together and tell a story of a large Midwestern family with a father who served with the Union and lost two sons, and a third son who recorded images of the war. One of those images, the inscribed photo of Jesse Grant, provides context for perhaps one of the most controversial military decisions and personally difficult periods in the life of Ulysses S. Grant.

References: Chernow, *Grant*; Williams, *Grant Rises in the West*; Miers, *The Web of Victory. Grant at Vicksburg*; Cadwallader, *Three Years with Grant*; Grant, *Personal Memoirs*; Perich, *The Changing Face of Portrait Photography: From Daguerreotype to Digital*; National Archives; Giambone, “To Catch the Shadow: Photographers in Occupied Vicksburg,” *Military Images*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (January/February 2002).

Paul Russinoff of Baltimore, Md., has been a passionate collector and researcher of photographs from the Civil War since elementary school. A subscriber to *MI* since its inception, representative images from his collection appeared in the Autumn 2014 issue. He is a senior editor of *MI*.