

Here are some questions that can be asked of most streetscapes

1. For starters, do you know from an external source where or when this photograph was taken?
2. What can you tell from the photo itself about when it was taken? What year? What season of the year? What time of day?
3. What can you tell about the community in which this street is set? How large is it? How densely populated? Would you like to live there?
4. Can you tell anything about the economy of this community? Is there any hint in the photo about a local industry, for example? Do the people seem rich or poor?
5. Why was the photograph taken? For a newspaper? As a snapshot? Imagine that you are the photographer: what are you trying to show? (It might help to ask yourself, if you've ever taken a picture of a street in your community, why you did. If you haven't, why not?)
6. Are the people in the photograph posed? Why? Why not?
7. What was the state of photographic technology when this picture was taken? What did people have to go through to take a photograph? (Earlier cameras blurred people who were moving. Later cameras had faster shutter speeds and so were able to stop action. But even early cameras took only a matter of seconds to take a photograph. Just think of what happens in the space of a few seconds. For example, people move but buildings don't. But if photographers are mainly interested in buildings, they may not mind if some of the people are fuzzy.)
8. If the buildings in the photograph are still standing today, what sort of differences would be revealed by a photo taken today? For example, would there be differences in the physical objects around the buildings, in the way they're painted, etc.?
9. What can you tell about the key elements of urban landscape from examining this photo? What kinds of road surfaces are there? What kind of sidewalks, lighting, drainage, structures and spaces are there? What sort of mixture of function is there (in other words, are all the buildings used for the same general purpose or are they used for different purposes?)
10. What can you tell about the community from the way the buildings are used? For example, if there is a store that sells just organs, what does this tell you about the size of the community?
11. How do people advertize what they sell? Through signs? Through window displays? What might it be like to shop in one of these stores?
12. Is there a difference between the signs in this photo and the signs in a photo of another community at the same period, or the signs we might discover in your own community today?
13. What can you tell from the exterior of the buildings in this photograph about how the building was used? What are the exteriors designed to tell you?
14. Are the buildings in the photograph being used for their original purpose or have they been adapted to some new use?
15. Are there trees in this street scene? Why? Why not?
16. If the buildings are still standing today, what are they being used for now? What kind of buildings tend to survive?
17. Were the buildings along this street all built at the same time? Why? Why not?
18. What materials were used to build these buildings? Why were they chosen?
19. What can we learn from this photo about transportation? How did people get around? What are the vehicles in the photograph being used for?
20. If you were drawing or painting this scene would the result be the same? Would a drawing have more or less detail, for example? Might your drawing or painting have colour? (It's worth remembering that, although old photographs were always black and white, nineteenth-century people didn't live in a black and white world.)
21. Another difference between photographs and drawings is that photographs record accidents both in events and details while drawings include only what the artist decides should be there. What was purposeful about this photograph? What was accidental?
22. What would it have felt like to have been someone captured in this photograph at that time? Would you have been hot or cold? Does the dust from the street tickle your nose? Where are you going? How do you plan to spend your day? Where would you most like to be in this photograph? Where would you least like to be? Why?
23. How might you see this scene differently if you were standing inside it, rather than looking in on it from the outside?
24. Imagine what happened in the three minutes before and after this photograph was taken.
25. Write a playlet, poem or story based on the photograph.

# info

Nova Scotia Museum 1747 Summer Street Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3H 3A6, Phone ~~429-4616~~

*Take a closer look at....*

## PHOTOGRAPHS

Old photographs taken in Nova Scotian communities in times past are among the most useful and fascinating resources we have for the study of community history. There are certainly lots of them. If you are diligent and poke around long enough in attics, flea markets, archives and museums you're sure to turn up photographs of all sorts of aspects of the daily lives of the people who lived in your city, town or village in years gone by. You'll find posed portraits and family snapshots, photographs of churches, schools, factories, landscapes and streetscapes, group photos of work crews, dignitaries, Sunday-school picnics, bicycle clubs, secret societies and circus entertainers. If you learn to look carefully at these photographs and ask them penetrating questions, you'll find out things about the past of your community that you won't discover in any other way.

This INFO is about looking at old photographs and learning how to ask good questions of them. Getting the most out of photographs requires careful observation, a lively curiosity, thoughtful analysis, leaps of the imagination and a willingness to have fun.

The focus of this INFO is on streetscapes. In some ways this is an arbitrary choice, but streetscapes do have some advantages for people learning to look at photographs. Good nineteenth-century streetscapes of Nova Scotian communities are relatively common and most of them are filled with fascinating, thought-provoking details. And old streetscapes have an interesting relationship to the present-day communities in which we live --i.e. you can often still go today and stand where the photographer stood and see for yourself how things have changed or remained the same.

The back of this INFO have a list of general questions that you could ask of any photo of a streetscape. The centre fold focuses on a single example. As you'll see, there are lots of questions you can ask yourself about streetscapes.

Relax. These questions are not a test. For many of them there may be no single correct answer. They are designed to direct your attention to aspects of the photograph, to arouse your curiosity and to stimulate your imagination. If one question doesn't make sense to you or doesn't seem to lead anywhere, you could check your reaction with someone else or you could simply decide to skip it.



Main St. Bridgewater 1884

Here are some questions that you can ask of this Bridgewater streetscape.

1. Who in this photograph knows that their picture is being taken?

2. What were these buildings used for? Is each building used by only one occupant? Are there sometimes different businesses on separate floors of the same building?

3. What can you tell about the size and complexity of this community by what you see in this photograph?

4. Why are there only men in this photograph? Would you be likely at any time to see only men on the streets of your community?

5. What day do you think it was?

6. What time of day was the picture taken?

7. What was the weather like?

8. If you were standing in the photograph what kinds of sounds would you hear? What sort of smells might you smell?

9. Was the street dusty or muddy on the day the photograph was taken? What would this street be like in the spring of the year?

10. Do the streets of your community look like this on a Saturday afternoon? How are they the same or different?

11. Was there a proper side of the street to drive on when this photograph was taken? When did this change? Why did it change?

12. What materials were used to make the Bridgewater sidewalks?

13. What did J.T. Hayes do?

14. What do you think the little boy crossing the street with his father in the centre of the picture was thinking as this photograph was taken?

15. Why were the horseless carriages lined up along the right hand side of the street?

16. What is the significance of the pole in front of Wade's store?

17. How were the streets lit at night?

18. What were the long poles on the wagons in the foreground of the photograph used for?

19. What kind of animal was used to pull these wagons?

20. Can you find the shutters in this photograph?

21. What do you think might have been in the barrels in front of Wade's store?

22. What kind of containers can you find in this photograph? How is this different from the way we package things today? Why do you think things have changed?

23. What do you think life was like in Bridgewater at the time represented by this photograph? How would it have been the same as, or different from, life in your community at that time, or in Halifax, Sydney or Meteghan?

24. How do you think life in Bridgewater has changed today?

25. What are people wearing in this photograph? Do their clothes look comfortable? How do they compare with what people might wear today?

26. What materials did people in Bridgewater use to cover the outside of their buildings? Did everyone use the same materials? How do these compare with what might be used today?

27. What other materials were used to build these buildings? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of this?

28. What might happen if a fire broke out in J.T. Hayes' store?

29. What do you think the two boys in front of Wade's store are talking about?

30. Write a story that either begins or ends with what you see in this photograph.

31. Imagine this photograph in colour. Does this change your feelings about the street scene and what's going on in it? How?