



Thomas Jackson Rodman's Mexican War Daguerreotype



You never know what you might find at the Detre Library & Archives. Tom Powers, president of the Lawrenceville Historical Society, came across an envelope of unidentified photos. One, a daguerreotype with some damage but still recognizable, looked familiar. The envelope, and image, is in the McClelland family files, along with Black family relatives.

Tom was researching his Scots-Irish ancestors, the Black family, one branch of which was well connected in 19th-century Pittsburgh society. In 1843, Martha Anne Black (a 1st cousin, four times removed) married recent West Point graduate Thomas Jackson Rodman, who later developed a revolutionary casting process for large artillery (see our Winter 2015-16 issue for the full story). The two met while Rodman was serving at Pittsburgh's Allegheny Arsenal in Lawrenceville.

Though Tom was familiar with extant photos of Rodman with a full beard, the facial features and the uniform suggested that the stocky, beardless soldier in the daguerreotype was most probably Rodman too. The daguerreotype also reveals a lieutenant's bar in the shoulder strap. Rodman was made a first lieutenant on March 3, 1847 and this helps date the photo. What is discernible of his uniform is consistent with Mexican War era uniforms.

The daguerreotype is small, but Rodman's innovation was big, not to mention the huge cannons that resulted from his work. On your next visit to the History Center, check out the Rodman Gun replica in the History Center's Great Hall.