

# The Mystery Ervin Men



*The Mystery Men*

The image shown here is known among family historians as The Mystery Ervin Men. This image has appeared on the pages of leaves on branches for years and, to my knowledge, NO ONE has offered to even speculate about the identity of these figures from the past. Consequently, I will risk my own reputation as an objective researcher of the family history and offer my own suggestions. These suggestions can be taken as no better than an educated guess. I freely accept that I may be wrong and that others may have suggestions that are as equally valid as mine. Perhaps others will have the courage to offer their own speculations ce I have offered my own. Having said all that, here goes.

I first saw this image many years ago, long before it appeared on these pages.

The original image was a tintype from which many images have been scanned and digitized. This image was one of the many items and pieces of information gathered by the late researcher, Thomas N. Ervin. During his last few years, he was in constant contact with a woman who had renovated and lived in the lower level of Owen Ervin's original barn. The upper level was thought to be a treasure trove of historical items and she was vigorously pursued in this regard by Tom. She, however, was very apprehensive and distrustful of Tom and would not allow him to enter the upper levels of her dwelling. In the end, this tintype was the only tangible piece of history that she would allow Tom to take. We are left to guess whose image appears on this tintype, how this image came to be and to refer to this picture only as 'The Ervin Mystery Men'.

Firstly, how can we be so sure that these are Ervin men when we are so unsure of anything else? There are basic physical characteristics that have been part of this family for many generations. Ervin men generally, though not universally, have slender wrists and forearms, blue eyes and long noses. No one should take any offense at these observations since I myself, have these very same characteristics. Aside from that, as Ervin family historians we are well aware of these and other characteristics, i.e. we have come to know an Ervin when we see one.

Further, these portraits of the Mystery Men and of Owen himself, seem to be part of a 'shoot' in which the Ervin's were somehow involved. As can be seen in the portrait of the 'Mystery Men', the drape behind the subjects is a 'backdrop', a standard piece of photographic equipment. In the portrait of Owen himself, the object at his left is a reflector meant to cast ambient light into his face. Also, notice that the subjects are thoughtfully posed and placed. We don't know if these portraits were made on the same day though we do know that chemical photography was, at that time, in its infancy. It seems unlikely that the heavy equipment of the day would be transported more than necessary.



*Owen & Reflector*



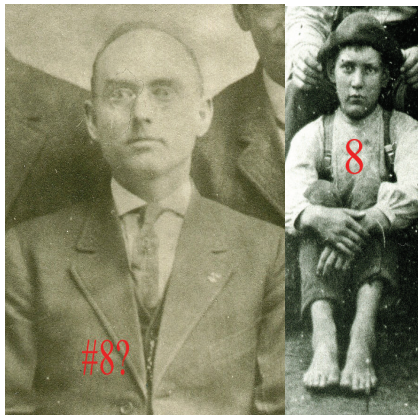
*The four sons of James Leamon Ervin*

Next, the image shown here is that of the four sons of James Leamon Ervin and the grandsons of Alexander Brandon Ervin. They are, from left, Oscar Bertram, many times a city councilman in Jackson, Ohio, Arthur, the owner/operator of the Ervin Hardware next to the County Courthouse, Edgar, a coal salesman and Charles, a local dentist in Jackson. All these men co-owned the Hardware and worked there at one time or another. In fact, they and their descendants kept this store open for nearly a century. Arthur's home was only recently condemned and razed as uninhabitable. I will speculate that this second image helps us to identify those in the first.

Here, the image of the Mystery Men appears with the subjects numbered for easy reference. Notice that slender forearms and long noses are a recurrent theme in this image. This is particularly true in Number #1,3,4,7 and 10. Number 2 is Vinton Ervin, Owen's son, whose image appears elsewhere in the photo gallery page. It is clear to even casual observation that these men are related. Number 5,6 and 9 may be unrelated to the rest.



The round-faced, round-eyed young boy seated in the front row of the Mystery Ervins is #8. Notice that number #4 who is sitting behind and above him, is holding the boy's hat brim with both hands in a way that only a father would do.



*Edgar*

*Edgar??*

Now look at the round-eyed, round-faced, son of James Leamon seated third from the left, the coal salesman, Edgar. Could he be an older and bespectacled version of the young boy #8 in the Mystery Men picture.

And if he is Edgar, is the man behind him holding his hat brim #4 actually his father, James Leamon? And if he is James, could #7, the elder man seated to his right – maybe – possibly – be Alexander himself. We will never know, but the possibilities are too tantalizing to resist.