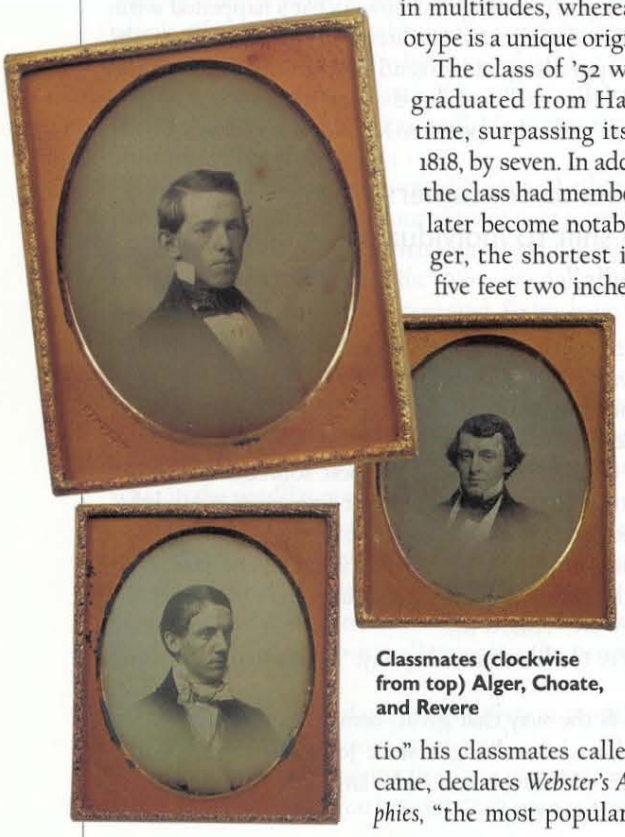
Class Act

The pioneers of '52 make an album.

AT A MEETING OF THE ENTIRE HARVARD COLLEGE CLASS OF 1852 IN March of their senior year, Charles Upham suggested to his fellows that they go to the Boston daguerreotype studio of John Adams Whipple to have their likenesses captured on silver-plated copper. The class was said to be suffused with brotherly affection, which may be why 85 of its 88 members did indeed go into town to be "taken."

They placed their portraits, in alphabetical order, in a finely crafted, 10-drawer, wooden cabinet and presented the first Harvard class album to the College Library. It resides today in a vault in the University Archives. It was the first and last album to employ the imaging process introduced by commercial artist Louis Daguerre in 1839. In 1853 Whipple produced "crystallotypes" —paper prints made from glass negatives. They were not as marvelous looking, but had the advantage of being readily furnished in multitudes, whereas a daguerreotype is a unique original.

The class of '52 was the largest graduated from Harvard to that time, surpassing its closest rival, 1818, by seven. In addition to spirit, the class had members who would later become notable. Horatio Alger, the shortest in the class at five feet two inches, had a domineering Unitarian minister for a father and was probably a prig, writes Harold Pfister '69, J.D. '92, in *Facing the Light: Historic American Portrait Daguerreotypes.* "Holy Horatio" his classmates called him. He became, declares *Webster's American Biographies,* "the most popular author of his generation with a series of books whose literary quality was consistently and outrageously bad." Juvenile fiction was his line, and he had a single story idea—virtue triumphs (and brings material rewards). Before the literary life, he graduated from the Divinity School in 1860, had a bohemian year in Paris, and was minister of a Unitarian church, resigning after four years as homosexual experiences with some of the congregation's boys became known. His later social ministry and benefactions to boys adrift in New York may have had an expiatory motivation.



Classmates (clockwise from top) Alger, Choate, and Revere

Paul Joseph Revere, grandson of the craftsman who took to horse, had a six-month rustication from the College for a sophomoric misdeed, Pfister reports, and appears not to have been a capital scholar. Incensed by slavery, as a major in the Civil War he repeatedly survived menacing dangers—with "moral grandeur," said one of his men—but was killed at last at Gettysburg.

Joseph Hodges Choate, LL.B. '54, LL.D. '88, distinguished lawyer, establishment pillar, ambassador to Great Britain, and a famous after-dinner speaker, as an old man wrote, "No friendships of after-life begin to equal in ardor and intensity those of college days....I have in my bedroom the photographs of 85 of our members...in all the beauty and freshness of youth, just as they appeared on Commencement Day." (These were probably crystallotype copies of the originals collected by the sentimental Choate.) "I often put myself to sleep," he continued, "by calling the roll of my classmates, whose names are as familiar now as then." ▽

Photographs by Jim Harrison