

Introduction to Preserving Family Photos & Scrapbooks



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Importance of Family Photos & Scrapbooks



- ❖ Most everyone has a family archive.
- ❖ Family archives contain sentimental, legal and financial value
- ❖ Family photos and memorabilia keep a record for future generations and tell the story of who we are and where we came from.
- ❖ Family archives are also the story of our communities – often family treasures can become local or even national treasures.

Why does Preservation Matter?



“Just deciding to keep something long-term is the beginning of preservation but without physical preservation eventually the most fragile and most vulnerable items in your collections will disintegrate.”

- Sharon Perry, University Archivist and Special Collections Librarian

- ❖ It is less expensive to prevent harm to your collection and properly care for your collection than it is to restore or repair damage.
- ❖ Every small change you make can have a big impact.
- ❖ Preservation is a step towards “ensuring that the people, events and stories behind someone’s photos would not be lost over time for lack of documentation.”

Preserving Family Photos



We all have photos we value greatly and want to take care of.

Photo Collections are Varied



- ❖ Salted Paper Prints – An early form of photography
- ❖ Daguerreotypes – Popular from the late 1830s -1860s
- ❖ Tintypes – Popular from 1850s – 1890s
- ❖ Cyanotype – Popular at the turn of the century
- ❖ “Black & White” developed out paper – 1905 -1960s
- ❖ Chromogenic Color Paper – Color photos seen from 1960s to the Present
- ❖ Digital – Primary format today



Varying types of photos age differently.

Best Practices of Photo Preservation



Collections deteriorate over time, but making small changes in storage and handling can have a huge impact on the lifespan of the materials.

❖ Organize

- Sorting and labeling are so important. Just knowing what is in a collection is a great first step in getting started.

❖ Environment

- Proper care and storage are critical for preservation and are one of the more effective, cost-efficient, and easily achieved preservation measures.

❖ Digital Preservation

Organize!



- ❖ Organizing keeps your photo collection from getting scattered and misidentified.
- ❖ Both print and digital photos benefit from being organized.
- ❖ Identifying, labeling and organizing your photos is one of the most important things you can do for your collection. Write the following information on a high quality piece of paper and store it with the photograph.
 - **Who is in the photo?**
 - **When was it taken?**
 - **Where was it taken?**
- ❖ Avoid post-it notes – They can become difficult or impossible to remove over time.
- ❖ Avoid adhesive stickers as they glue can damage the photo over time.

Proper Storage Environment



- ❖ Get your photos out of the attic, basement or garage!
- ❖ Photos benefit from a cool, dry, well-ventilated environment free from dirt and dust.
- ❖ High humidity promotes mold growth, corrosion and degradation, while excessive dryness can cause flaking and cracking. Fluctuations between extremes can cause warping, buckling and flaking.
- ❖ **For every 10 degrees in temperature the rate of deterioration and decay is doubled!!**

Where Should My Photos Be Stored?



❖ Get your items out of the basement, attic, or garage.

- Store photos in an internal closet, dresser or room.
- Don't store items against outer walls with greater temperature fluctuation.
- Always store items at least 6 inches off the ground.

❖ Use paper or plastic good quality enclosures.

- Photos have a tendency to stick together over time
- Storing photos individually is a good idea.
- Another option is to store the photos together but to put a thin sheet of acid-free paper between each photograph.

Properly Displaying Photos



- ❖ Beware of displaying precious framed photographs or artwork above your fireplace, heating vent or bright window.
- ❖ Beware of light damage! All types of light cause damage. Light damage is permanent and irreversible.
- ❖ Avoid fluorescent lighting in spaces where valuable items are displayed. Even small lights in a china cabinet can cause damage.
- ❖ Strongly consider making a digital copy and properly storing the original and displaying the copy.

Challenges to Photo Storage & Display



❖ Space Issues

- Space issues are one of the primary issues faced by even professional archivists managing at large institutions. Space will always be an issue.
- Do the best you can with what you have.

❖ Improper Framing

- People often believe that by framing something they are preserving it. This is untrue. .
- Using cheap framing materials and exposing photos to too much light causes damage.
- Do not laminate.
- Use 100% cotton mats and mounting boards. Use acid-free backing boards.
- No cheap cardboard!

❖ Money

- Money is another issue faced by every archivist and special collections.
- Use the highest quality materials you can afford.
- Prioritize what should be stored in an enclosure, separate box.
- Work in stages. Start small with the most important photos.

Digital Photo Preservation



- ❖ It is strongly recommended that you make a digital copy of treasured family photos and handle the copies rather than the original.
- ❖ Save the digital images in multiple places
- ❖ Organize the digital images just as you would the originals.
 - Identify
 - Organize
 - Copy & Store
 - Create new media copies as needed
- ❖ It is important to think about how these digital photos will be preserved in the future.

Digital photos and scanning are huge topics and could have their own presentations. There are many books, articles and resources available if you would like more information.

Preserving Family Scrapbooks

What is a Scrapbook?



Scrapbook Preservation



Key Rules of Preserving Scrapbooks

- Preserve albums intact whenever possible.
- Respect the intent of the original creator.
- Always avoid disassembling.
- Once you disassemble a scrapbook it no longer has any value as an artifact.

When & How to Disassemble



- ❖ Always avoid disassembling
- ❖ If you do disassemble -
 - ❖ Take photos of the scrapbook first
 - ❖ Digital preservation of scrapbooks is recommended
 - ❖ Once you disassemble. A file cabinet and acid-free hanging file folders are a good way to store the disassembled scrapbook.

Loose or Unattached Items



- ❖ Even professional institutions don't frequently reattach materials that have come loose from scrapbooks.
- ❖ In an interest of respecting the original format, only reattach if you are absolutely certain of the original placement of the item.
- ❖ Most institutions say they will place the unattached item in its own paper sleeve or enclosure and store it either on the page they think it belongs or with the box with the scrapbook.

Mixed Materials



❖ Scrapbooks are challenging to preserve because they contain many types of materials.

❖ Inherent Vice

❖ Interleaving

Storage



❖ Rolled or Folded Items

❖ Limit light exposure

❖ Proper Storage

Making New Scrapbooks



- ❖ It can take a lot of time, love, effort and even money to make a scrapbook. Make one that will last a long time by using good quality materials.
- ❖ Carefully consider the items used in the scrapbook
- ❖ Modern/New scrapbooks should be stored in the same way as old historic scrapbooks.

Low-Cost & No Cost Preservation Tips



- ❖ Proper storage environment
- ❖ Organize your collection
- ❖ Handle your collection carefully
- ❖ Regular housekeeping
- ❖ Avoid acidic products and commercial adhesives
- ❖ Prepare for Emergencies

What Products Do I Use?



❖ “Archival” is not a regulated term.

- Look for “Acid-Free” AND “Lignin-Free”

❖ Consider purchasing an Abbey pH Pen

- Test items by drawing a small dot or line in an unobtrusive place. Purple indicates neutral or alkaline pH (ideal) and yellow indicates acidic pH (bad).

Good Choices	Avoid
Acid-Free	Solvent based adhesives (rubber cement)
Cotton Rag Papers	Tape (scotch tape, masking tape, duck tape)
Lignin-Free	Adhesives
Mylar/Melinex Film	PVC (polyvinyl chloride) plastics
Paper or Mylar “photo corners”	Metal clips and adhesive dots

Resources



❖ Preservation Websites & Organizations

American Library Association - <http://www.ala.org/alcts/preservationweek/howto>
Library of Congress - <http://www.loc.gov/preservation/care/scrapbk.html>
National Archives - <https://www.archives.gov/preservation/family-archives>

❖ Books

Landry "The Winterthur Guide to Caring for Your Collection"

Lavndrine "A Guide to Preventative Conservation of Photograph Collections"

Long, J. "Caring for Your Family Treasures"

ALA Preservation Week Bookmarks -

<http://www.loc.gov/preservation/resources/educational/bookmarks/preserveyour/images/BookPaperPhotoDigital.pdf>

<http://www.loc.gov/preservation/resources/educational/bookmarks/preserveyour/images/ArtHeirloomsWaterAV.pdf>

❖ Products

Archival Products

Gaylord

University Products

Archivart

Permalife Paper

Works Cited



- American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works
- American Library Association Preservation Week Website
- ALA Webinar “How to Host a Preservation Week Event”
- ALA Webinar “Low Cost Ways to Preserve Family Archives”
- ALA Webinar “Preservation of Family Photographs”
- ALA Webinar “Preserving Scrapbooks”
- Association for Library Collections & Technical Services
- Library of Congress Website
- Northeast Document Conservation Center Website
- Sharon Perry, University Archivist and Special Collections Librarian, Pollak Library, Cal State Fullerton



Questions?

THE END



Preserving family photos, family archives and scrapbooks can be a “unique, rewarding and emotional task. It keeps the meaning of family treasures for generations to come.”

-American Library Association