



CARING FOR YOUR FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS

If you are like most people, your family photographs are some of your most treasured possessions. Here are some suggestions on how to preserve these images for future generations.

1. **Always identify and date every photograph.** You may be able to remember all the details of each photo but those who inherit them probably will not! Write the information on the back of the photo using a soft lead pencil and a light hand. Some surfaces will not take pencil markings - in these cases, use a permanent ink marker made especially for photographic materials. These are available from local photo supply businesses or can be ordered through the mail. Do not use Sharpies or ball-point pens. Make sure that the ink is dry before stacking the photos.
2. **Temperature, humidity, and light are the three greatest enemies of photographic materials.** Keep photos in an area that you are comfortable in – not too hot, cold, wet, or dry. Most importantly, keep them in locations where changes in temperature and humidity are not severe or rapid. For these reasons, attics, basements, garages or sheds are *not* good places to store photographs. Ultraviolet radiation from sunlight and some fluorescent lights can rapidly fade photos, so keep photos in the dark as much as possible. Color photographs fade much faster than black and white photos. If you want to frame and display old family photos, you may want to make a copy to display in order to keep the original in good condition.
3. **When handling photos, never touch the image side.** Even clean hands leave oils that attract dirt and mold spores. Use light cotton gloves if possible to minimize contact with the emulsion. Support photographs well during handling. Older or heavier photos can break easily and all photographs suffer structurally over time with uneven support.
4. **Never use glue, tape, staples, rubber bands, or paper clips on photos.** These can cause stains, scratches, and dents to the photo. Wood and wood products (paper and cardboard) are harmful to photographic material.
5. **Never store photos and negatives in “magnetic” photo pages, and try to avoid storage in paper or glassine envelopes.** “Magnetic” pages are actually adhesive-covered cardboard with a plastic cover and are dangerous to your photographs in these three ways:
 - a) the cardboard is acidic and causes deterioration of the photo paper
 - b) the adhesive is also acidic and can take the backs off the photos over time (along with the information written on the back)
 - c) the plastic contains polyvinyl chloride (PVC) which releases chloride gas causing photos to wrinkle and stick to the plastic.

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6. **For mounting photos, use acid-free paper and corner mounts.** If you frame your photos, be sure to use an acid-free mat to keep the photos from touching the glass and an acid-free backboard to prevent deterioration of the image.
7. **The best way to store photos is in PVC-free polyester or polypropylene sleeves inside acid-free cardboard boxes.** Plastic sandwich bags (like Ziplock) are PVC-free and can protect photos temporarily. A fairly inexpensive way to store a large number of photographs is to layer them between sheets of 100% cotton bond acid-free typing paper in a metal or acid-free cardboard box. Metal boxes offer a certain amount of fire and insect protection but acid-free cardboard boxes prevent condensation of moisture due to changes in temperature and humidity. Avoid using regular cardboard or wooden drawers and boxes to store photographs – these create a harmful acidic environment.
8. **Use archival quality supplies whenever possible.** The following companies sell archival-quality supplies to the public through catalogs. Look for the words “acid-free” and “lignin-free” for paper and cardboard products, polyester or polypropylene type plastics, or the label “passed P.A.T.” for any photo storage product.

Gaylord Bros.
P.O. Box 4901
Syracuse, NY 13221-4901
1-800-448-6160
www.gaylord.com

University Products
517 Main Street
Holyoke, MA 01041-0101
1-800-628-1912
www.universityproducts.com

Light Impressions
2340 Brighton Henrietta Town Line Road
Rochester, NY 14623
1-800-975-6429
www.lightimpressionsdirect.com

Hollinger Metal Edge
6340 Bandini Blvd.
Commerce, CA 90040
1-800-862-2228
www.hollingermetaledge.com

Other resources and guides:

- **Caring for Your Family Archives** – website with instructions for preservation from the National Archives <http://www.archives.gov/preservation/family-archives/>
- **Care, Handling and Storage of Photographs** – website from the Library of Congress with guidelines for preserving photographs <http://www.loc.gov/preservation/care/photo.html>
- **Preserving Your Family Photographs** – a PDF brochure from Cornell University Library with instructions on caring for photos <https://www.library.cornell.edu/preservation/brochure/Family%20Photos%20Text%2001.pdf>

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