

Tips on How to Care For and Store Photographs

Photographs are like windows to the past. Almost everyone has treasured photos of family and friends and enjoy looking at and sharing them and the memories they elicit. They are a great way to explore family history.

Here are some tips on how to preserve and store photos so they will last as long as possible.

1. Gather your photos and sort. Be careful to handle them by the edges or wear cotton gloves, body oils can cause damage.
2. Identify what the pictures show; who's in it, where it was taken and date. Write the information on the back near the edge with a soft 6B drawing pencil available at art/supply stores. Be sure to use real names not just "mother" or "grandfather". Never use a ball point pen.
3. Use archival photo storage boxes or albums to store your photos. They should be labeled non-PVC, non-magnetic, or non-acidic. Do not use old shoe boxes or cardboard boxes or put in a raw wood drawer. Acids in paper products can be harmful to photos.
4. Seek out acid-free papers and notebooks made from archival board or buy clear plastic pages made from polypropylene and insert photos. Do not use vinyl pages or notebooks; they emit harmful vapors and shorten the life of photos.
5. If you need to mount photos use special tape, mounting tabs, or acid free glue made especially for photos. Regular clear tape, regular school or stick glue can cause chemical instability in photographs.
6. Store in a cool, dark, dry area away from moisture, humidity, and temperature fluctuations. Do not store in an attic, basement or garage. Don't overcrowd, leave room for air to circulate around albums or boxes.
7. Exposure to light can hurt photos. Locate framed pictures away from windows and lamps or make a copy and keep the original in dark storage. Metal frames are preferable to wood. Use 100% rag matte board and remove any wooden backing, it can emit harmful chemicals.

Dark storage is also important for children's school portraits; some studios do not process them properly, making them susceptible to color changes. Display one and keep one in storage.

8. Save your negatives, they are the originals and will allow you to make new prints if a print is destroyed. Store negatives in the plastic envelopes they come in or buy plastic pages.
9. Make digital copies of photos using a scanner, burn a copy of the photo collection on a CD or thumb drive, store in a safe place and print copies for display or to share. Keep originals in an archival box. Note: Each time a photo is scanned it is slightly damaged.
10. Be sure that digital files have been saved to archival CDs, which allow images to stand-up to long term storage. And remember to always backup digital photos on your computer's hard drive or save online.