

Tracing **PASTS**

# Preserve heirloom photographs

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Do you want your old photographs to last? They won't last forever because of the chemicals involved in making and printing of photos, but family historians want to preserve them.

There are five big destroyers of photographs:

1. Photos like to be cool; heat speeds up their destruction.
2. Light will cause photos to fade.
3. High humidity will cause photos to become soft and sticky and will cause microscopic mold spores to infest.
4. Low humidity will cause the binder to shrink and crack and

the secondary support to curl.

5. Changing humidity causes photos to become brittle and crack.

In addition, the air might have damaging gases that are harmful to your photos. Some common cause of these gases in our homes are furnaces or fireplaces that burn fossil fuels, copiers and printers that produce ozone, grease from the kitchen, bug sprays, untreated wood paints and varnishes, and fumes from cleaning solvents. Also, insects and rodents love to eat photos and leave their droppings.

To handle a photo, wash your hands and touch only on the edge. Using white, soft, cotton, lint-free gloves are best when working with old photos.

Beware of frames bought at discount stores. To frame a picture, make sure you have a negative, or frame a duplicate and store the original safely. Make sure to use professional archival-safe materials, a thick enough mat so the photo won't touch glass and UV-filtering glass.

Paper is mainly made from wood, so it would naturally have acid and lignin, both of which are harmful to photos. Any paper touching or in the vicinity of your photo needs to be acid-free and lignin-free.

Plastic is safe, except for one type: polyvinyl chloride (PVC or vinyl). When you enclose your photographs in safe plastic, it protects it from fingerprints, and

the photo is visible.

Proper, safe albums are the ideal storage method, but the pages, not the covers, have the most influence. Also, use safe adhesive or photo corners to adhere your picture to paper sheets.

Create and maintain a system for organizing photos. Caption your photo by writing on the back with a soft lead pencil or a felt tip film-marking pen. Place the photo on a clean, hard surface to prevent embossing. Allow the ink to dry before stacking. Remember to notate the who, what, when, where and how.

In regard to digital storage, make sure it is backed up frequently on high-grade

recordable media such as CDs, DVDs or stick drives. Have several copies of each set. Share your pictures. Keep up to date with technology.

Printers are improving every day, but beware of unsafe ink and printable paper. Ask your manufacturer for their Material Safety Data Sheets for your particular computer cartridge. Another resource is Wilhelm Research ([wilhelm-research.com](http://wilhelm-research.com)). They conduct research on the stability and preservation of traditional and digital color photographs and tests printer inks.

Preserve your photographs. They are priceless but can be destroyed through our carelessness.