Photo Organizing and Preservation

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One the biggest challenges when it comes to family history projects is how to handle years of photos, slides, negatives. These are valuable assets for genealogy research and preserving family stories. Many of us find organizing and preserving family photos so daunting that we throw up our hands and tell ourselves we'll get to it "sometime." That sometime is NOW and this is the year you finally get this monster tamed!

Creating a Photo Digitization and Preservation Plan

Ever hear the phrase "Make No Small Plans?" I this was the motto of my ancestors, but it can be one you also use when starting a photo organizing and preservation project. The ideal plan allows you to make real progress and continue working on organizing and preserving images going forward. Here are the basic elements of a solid plan:

- **Take Inventory**. Create a list of items that need to be scanned. Include all photos, slides, negatives, movies etc. Also list photo sizes as well as media formats; remember that negatives can be 110 and other sizes! The same goes for slides . . . you don't want to purchase the wrong type of slide scanner, right?

- **Evaluate Equipment**. For those taking the DIY approach, research available technology in terms of types of scanners, storage media, etc. Collect information and determine which device is best for your project.

- **Set Standards**. Research the minimum standards for each media type and list them. Use these to set preferences for equipment such as a flatbed scanner. As well as which outsourcing company to use if that is your preference.

- **Create a Tracking Mechanism**. One you've done your inventory, it should be simple to track digitization projects from start to finish, whether you scan them yourself or send them out to a service. Also track costs of equipment, cost of outsourcing projects and even time spent scanning items.

- **Data Management and Backup**. Once items are scanned, you'll need to focus on file naming standards, keeping items organized and backing up your data!

In terms of what you should use to create a plan? I recommend using the platform you most feel comfortable with. These include paper and pen, a project management program such as Trello, a virtual assistant such as Evernote or OneNote, etc.

Taking Inventory, Sorting and Organizing Photos and Media

Organizing is not a fun task for most of us. Yes, we may get the "bug" every January or perhaps during Spring Cleaning, but for this is the area of the overall project that causes people to lose interest and lose sight of the end goal. Here are my tips and tricks:

- **Prepare your workspace**. Remember to wash your hands, prepare a clean area on a table to work, and have any supplies available. These could include file folders, envelopes, storage containers, archival gloves, etc.

- **Respect the order of the original collection**. Archivists know the value of keeping a collection in its original order. The person who created the photo album or placed the photos in a box had a reason for such an arrangement. The goal is to keep the collection as you found it, if possible. This could mean NOT removing photos from the album, but scanning whole pages instead.

- **Check the condition**. This is one of the few reasons to disregard the order of the collection. If an album is deteriorating or doing actual harm to photos, then you need to place them in an archive-safe container. Try to retain the original order. A tip: use your smart phone to photograph the album pages first. After digitizing, you can remount the originals in an album that has acid-free pages.

- **Sort and organize in like groups**. Group albums with albums, oversized portraits together etc. Don't overcrowd your workspace. Use 3x5 index cards or sheets of paper folded in half to write down the group name. Be careful when using rubber bands or paper clips (plastic) to not damage items.

- **Deal with duplicates and bad photos**. Frequently you'll find two or more of the same image. Set aside to send to a relative who might want the item. Don't waste time processing images out of focus or with damage that can't be corrected physically or digitally.

- **Use a slide or negative viewer**. It can be difficult to determine what you have and how to group it when working with slides and negatives. Save your eyes and invest in a cheap viewer for these items.

- **Inventory and store grouped items for processing**. Use an inventory sheet to detail the items in each group. Select a proper storage device for each group. Again, don't squeeze or overcrowd items and do damage.

A Crucial Decision: Do-It-Yourself (DIY)? or Send It Out?

Everyone has a different approach not just to scanning photos and documents, but also opinions on how to best use their time for these projects. If you feel overwhelmed by the scanning technology and spend too much time just choosing the right scanner, then sending your items out to be scanned might be a better choice. However, if you want more control over how items are scanned and you want to save money, the "do it yourself" route is likely your best bet.

Take time to determine the overall cost of a digitization project including money spent on technology, time spent just researching technology, and time spent actually scanning and organizing digital files. Personally, **Larsen Digital** in the Salt Lake City, Utah area is the BEST place to outsource your valuable photos, slides and more. They even convert audio tapes and vinyl records!

Tips for Outsourcing Digitization Projects

If you opt for outsourcing, make sure you research the service provider you select.

- **What equipment is being used for scanning?** The company should be using professional quality scanners.

- **What resolution is used for scanning items?** A quality company will list their minimum resolution for scanning. Beware of companies that aren't up front about their scanning resolution. They may be using high-speed scanners that focus on rapid scanning of large amounts of photos, saving the company time and money.

- **Is there an additional charge for large photos?** Some companies will have a standard price per photo up to a specific size, such as 5" x 7".

- **Do you offer free shipping?** Most companies charge you for the return of the photos unless you have an order totaling $50 or $100 or more.

- **What happens if my photos are lost in the mail?** Make sure you read the Terms of Service for the company and purchase insurance if available.

- **Do you offer standard features such as color correction?** Some companies will "nickel and dime" you for services that are standard such as color correction.

- **Do you offer a free sample scan?** Many companies will allow you to send a photo for a free sample scan. You'll receive the original photos returned in the mail and the digital files sent via e-mail. You can then judge the quality of the scan, the scan resolution and the file format used.

- **What about customer service?** How accessible is the company when you have a question or want to track the status of a scan job? Is the customer service based in the United States or handled overseas?

- **Where is the digitization work performed?** Is it done in-house by the company or is it further outsourced? Many companies send materials overseas for scanning, so make sure you understand where your items will be scanned.

Tips for DIY Digitization Projects

- **Don't get overwhelmed!** Some projects can be so overwhelming that you don't know where to start. Remember that the best way to "eat an elephant" is "one bite at a time." Start small, start with what you can do in one hour.

- **Are you sure you're doing it right?** With all the new technology available, how do you know if you are using the right tools or scanning at the correct DPI? Join the **Technology for Genealogy group on Facebook**.

- **Triage your scanning**. Prioritize items to be scanned into three groups: **URGENT** for items that are deteriorating and fragile, **MEDIUM** for most items, and **LOW** for items that may or may not get scanned and aren't important. Also group items into those for flatbed scanning vs. smartphone or tablet app.

- **Clean your scanner.** Follow the manufacturer's directions . . . don't use alcohol or window cleaner. Clean the scanner with a microfiber cleaning cloth. Remove dust, lint and fingerprints so you can achieve the clearest possible scans.

- **Use archival gloves**. The oils on your fingers can damage the coating on many photos, slides and negatives. Invest in a pair of cotton archival gloves used by professionals when handling these items.

- **Use dark fabric as a background for uneven items**. Sometimes you'll encounter photos that have warped. Don't press down with the flatbed scanner door. Use a piece of dark fabric to block out light while scanning.

- **Line it up!** Keep photos lined up with the edge of the scanner to reduce editing.

- **Scan multiple items in one pass**. Become efficient and more productive by placing four or five small photos on the flatbed scanner and scan in one pass. Use photo editing software later to split the digital file into individual files.

- **Don't tamper with magnetic albums!** Unless you think there is valuable information on the back of the photos, don't remove them from magnetic albums. Scan the entire page and then split the digital image into individual files.

- **Scan both sides of a photo!** Don't forget there is often valuable information on the reserve side of photographs!

- **Go for high resolution scans.** Scan in TIFF format at a 300 dpi ("dots per inch") minimum if possible. A lossless JPG format (used by the Flip-Pal) will work too.

- **Rename the digital file**. Most scanners will name your scan IMG001 or some variation. As soon as possible use a file naming convention and a name that

makes sense. Your goal is to know about the image file BEFORE you click it. Example: **AUSTIN John Ralph b1896 Coney Island, NY Summer 1917**.

- **Create a master image and a working image**. Very often I edit an image file only to regret cropping and color adjustments. Create a separate digital folder for all your TIFF image files. Make sure the word MASTER is at the beginning of the file name. Then use this image to create a working copy in JPG format with the same name, substituting WORKING for the MASTER file name prefix.

- **Annotate your scans**. Of course we don't want to write on the photos who is in the photo or the date. Use a piece of clear acetate plastic and a dry-erase marker to circle faces, add names and notes. Place the sheet down then the photo.

- **Use photo editing tools**. Consider using Adobe PhotoShop or PhotoShop elements to address known issues with scanned photos:

  - **Check the contrast and correct colors**. Many programs have an "auto fix" feature available.

  - **Image rotation**. Some scans will appear sideways and should be rotated.

  - **Image cropping**. Crop out borders or areas that are not needed.

- **Consider using metadata**. Metadata is digital information such as names of people in a photo, location, date, etc. that can be added for purposes of organizing image files. It can also be used for copyright and source citations.

- **Invest in specialized editing tools**. Don't be afraid to spend money on quality editing tools to restore faded photos (**VividPix**) or to name and add metadata to files (**Qroma**). Always factor in the time it takes to do these operations manually.

- **Backup your scans!** This should be obvious, but you will want to make sure you use the 3-2-1 Data Backup rule:

  - **3 different backups**. Always have a backup of a backup of a backup.

  - **2 different media.** Don't place all your eggs in one basket. Make sure you are using a cloud service PLUS an external hard drive OR a USB flash drive.

  - **1 backup offsite.** What's the use of backing up only to an external hard drive if it too is damaged in a flood or fire along with your computer?

Storing Digital Image Files

There are many different online cloud platforms for storing digital images. Some are free or free up to a certain point. Besides having your images stored on my computer and an external hard drive, I always use at least one online digital storage site.

- **Review the Terms and Conditions**. It is your responsibility to understand
  a) what is the platform doing with your images (like using it in marketing

campaigns or selling it to stock photography companies?) and b) what you can and can't do once your images are stored on the platform.

- **How Do They Handle Metadata?** Many platforms will strip out metadata that you worked hard to add to files. As a test, upload a digital image with metadata, then download it and review the results. Is your metadata still there?

- **Facebook and Ancestry are NOT Storage Platforms!** Facebook compresses images and degrades the image quality PLUS they strip out metadata when you upload an image. Ancestry makes it fun and easy to add your scanned images to a tree but it is not the ideal storage platform.

- **Have an Exit Strategy.** For any platform that you use to store digital images, know how to export all your images. Some platforms give 30 days or less notice when they are shutting down or merging with another platform.

Technology Review: What's New and What's a "Must Have"

Here is my curated list of recommended products based on my own personal experience in digitizing a MASSIVE collection of items dating back to the 1870s.

- **Develop a Multi-Device Approach to Scanning**. There is not one device or one approach that will do everything. With so many different types of media to be scanned, you simply can't rely on just a flatbed scanner or a scanning app. Consider four different scanners to cover different situations:

    - A **flatbed scanner** for photos and documents up to 8.5 x 11 inches in size.

    - A **portable scanner**, such as the **Flip-Pal mobile scanner**, for research trips and scanning photos when visiting relatives.

    - A **scanning app**, such as **CamScanner**, for times when a repository won't allow the use of my Flip-Pal or using my mobile device is more convenient.

    - A **multi-media scanner**, such as the **Jumbl**, to scan negatives, slides, film and more.

- **Purchase a cheap slide and negative viewer**. Save your eyes! If you aren't sure whether you want to scan certain slides or negatives, purchase a cheap handheld scanner at Amazon or Best Buy.

- **Build a Scanning Toolbox**. My toolbox has the following physical items:

    - Archival gloves

    - Acid-free envelopes, folders, photo holders

    - An archival spatula (to remove staples)

    - Dental floss (to remove photos from magnetic albums)

    - Plastic paper clips

- Microfiber cleaning cloth

- 3x5 index cards

- Rechargeable batteries (for my Flip-Pal mobile scanner)

- SD cards (for storing scanned images)

- USB flash drive

Consult the **Resource List** at the end of this handout for an EXTENSIVE list of items.

Miscellaneous Tips and Tricks

- **Digitizing can bring up lots of emotions**. Yes, there will be tears and memories involved. But that's why you want these images for years to come, right? With a **Photo Digitization and Preservation Plan**, you can manage your scanning project in such a way that you stay "on track" and not get distracted.

- **Donate Your Photos**. Some genealogists, once they have digital images of their family photos, will print their own copy and frame them, then donate the originals to a genealogical or historical society. If you aren't attached sentimentally to the photos, this is a great way to ensure a legacy.

- **Recycle your equipment**. What do you do with a specialized item such as a slide scanner once you've scanned all your slides? **Donate the equipment** to your local genealogical society or public library. Many organizations are willing to set up "do it yourself" scanning stations for patrons. And you could get a tax deduction!

Conclusion

There have been so many advances in technology used to scan and digitize family photos and documents that there are no more excuses to put off those important projects. Whether you take your items to a scanning service or embark on a DIY project, it all comes down to making smart choices. If you do decide to scan items yourself, make sure you have the proper equipment and use the best standards to ensure quality scans and the need for "do-overs."

Resource List

Below is an extensive list* of resources mention for the webinar *You Can Do This: Photo Organizing and Preservation*. There are also special exclusive deals I've negotiated with vendors as well as money saving tips. Need help decided on which link is best in its group? Items in **RED** are my preferred products or services due to ratings and reviews.

*DISCLOSURE: This list contains affiliates links. This means if you click a link and purchase an item, I make a small commission which makes my family happy and keeps me off the streets. These links DO NOT increase the price you would otherwise pay for these items! You can read the full disclosure statement for my website GenealogyBargains.com **HERE***.*

Exclusive Offers
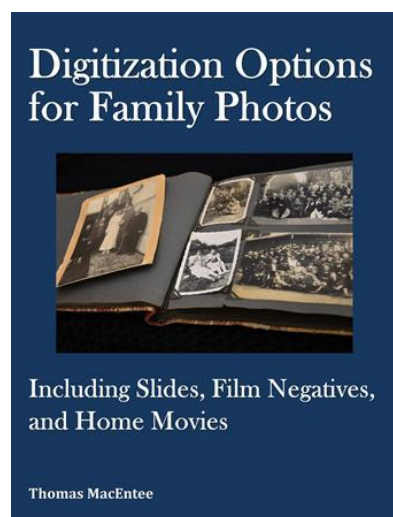
FREE EBOOK! Get the PDF version of *Digitization Options for Family Photos Including Slides, Film Negatives, and Home Movies* by Thomas MacEntee for free – CLICK **HERE**

Save 20% on VividPix RESTORE! Restore scanned prints, slides, documents, and digital camera images in seconds. You can even use **VividPix RESTORE** in scanned documents . . . Allen County Public Library does! Sale valid through March 31st. Use promo code **3GBargainsSAVEBT** at checkout – CLICK **HERE** to get started

Outsourcing Services

- **Larsen Digital**
  https://m.slidescanning.com/genealogybargains.html

Scanners and Equipment

Flatbed Scanners

- **Epson Perfection V600 Scanner**
  https://amzn.to/2WrxMRc

- **Canon LiDE220 Scanner**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-canon-LiDE220

- **HP OfficeJet Pro 8710 All-in-One Wireless Printer**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-HPOfficeJetPro8710

Mobile Scanners

- **Flip-Pal Mobile Scanner - Genealogy Bargains Value Pack**
  https://www.genealogybargains.com/flip-pal-GB-value-pack
  Save $34! Includes Flip-Pal mobile scanner, deluxe carry case, Flip-Pal Sketch kit, StoryScans™, and *Preserving Your Family's Oral History and Stories* e-book by Thomas MacEntee

- **Flip-Pal Mobile Scanner – Save Your Photos Value Pack**
  https://www.genealogybargains.com/saveyourphotos-flippal
  Save $25! Includes Flip-Pal mobile scanner, deluxe carry case, charger with 4 rechargeable batteries, and cleaning cloth

- **Flip-Pal Sketch Kit**
  http://genealogybargains.com/flip-pal-sketch

Multimedia Scanners (negatives, slides, etc.)

- **Epson Perfection V600 Multimedia Scanner**
  https://amzn.to/2WrxMRc

- **Jumbl High-Resolution Photo Media Scanner**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-jumbl

- **Kodak SCANZA – Digital Film Scanner**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-kodakscanza

- **Magnasonic All-In-One 22MP Film Scanner**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-magnasonic

- **Wolverine Titan 8-in-1 High Resolution Film to Digital Converter**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-wolverine

Scanning Apps

- **Adobe Scan**
  https://acrobat.adobe.com/us/en/mobile/scanner-app.html

- **CamScanner**
  http://genealogybargains.com/camscanner

- **Handy Scanner**
  https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=net.halfmobile.scannerfree

- **Microsoft Office Lens**
  https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/p/office-lens/9wzdncrfj3t8?activetab=pivot:overviewtab

- **ScanBot**
  https://scanbot.io/en/features.html

Photo Editing Tools

- **Adobe PhotoShop Elements 2019**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-adobe-photoshop

- **GIMP** (GNU Image Manipulation Program)
  https://www.gimp.org/

- **InfranView**
  https://www.irfanview.com/

- **Pixlr**
  http://pixlr.com

- **QromaScan**
  http://genealogybargains.com/qroma-offer

- **Ribbet**
  http://www.ribbet.com

- **Vivid Pix Restore**
  http://genealogybargains.com/vividpix-restore

- **WebInPaint**
  http://www.webinpaint.com

Photo Storage and Organization - Digital

- **Amazon Prime Photos**
http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-primephotos
FREE Unlimited high-resolution photo storage

- **DropBox**
https://www.dropbox.com/

- **Evernote**
http://genealogybargains.com/evernote

- **Flickr**
https://www.flickr.com/

- **FamilySearch Memories**
https://www.familysearch.org/photos/

- **Google Photos**
https://photos.google.com/

- **iCloud**
https://www.icloud.com/

- **Imgur**
https://imgur.com/

- **Microsoft One Drive**
https://onedrive.live.com

- **OneNote**
http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-onenote

- **PhotoBucket**
https://photobucket.com/

- **Trello**
http://genealogybargains.com/trello

Books, Facebook Groups, Webinars

- ***Interview with Larsen Digital – Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Scanning . . . but Were Afraid to Ask!*** by Thomas MacEntee
https://genealogybargains.com/interview-with-larsen-digital-everything-you-ever-wanted-to-know-about-scanning-but-were-afraid-to-ask/

- ***Metadata for Digital Images*** **Webinar** by Thomas MacEntee
http://genealogybargains.com/flip-pal-metadata

- **Technology for Genealogy Facebook Group**
https://www.facebook.com/groups/techgen/

- **The Organized Genealogist Facebook Group**
  https://www.facebook.com/groups/organizedgenealogist/

Photo Scanning Toolbox Equipment

- **Archival Gloves**
  http://genealogybargains.com/archivalgloves

- **Archival Spatulas**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-archivalspatulas

- **Avery Photo Page Holders**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-avery-photopageholders

- **Index Cards - 3x5" 300 Count**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-indexcards

- **Iris Storage Solutions** – Plastic Photo Boxes
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-iris-storage

- **Gaylord Archival Supplies**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-gaylord

- **MagicFiber Microfiber Cleaning Cloths**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-magicfiber

- **Eneloop AA Battery Chargers**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-eneloop-charger

- **Eneloop AA Rechargeable Batteries**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-eneloop

- **Pioneer Photo Albums Photo Storage Box**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-pioneer-photobox

- **Plastic Paper Clips**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-plastic-paperclips

- **SanDisk Storage Solutions** – USB Flash Drives, SD Cards
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-sandisk