

## Preserving Your Photographs

Since the invention of photography (in the 1830s), there have been several different photographic processes and materials used to create the actual print.

As time passes, photographs begin to show signs of deterioration. This is more apparent in older photographs such as the one inherited from our parents and grandparents. However, time is not the only cause of deterioration. Our mere handling of photographs causes damage, due to natural oils in our fingertips. Other factors such as dust, pollution, improper storage, high or fluctuating temperature, the photographic process that was used, and the materials used to create print are the real culprits in deterioration. The key to preserving your precious photographs for as long a possible is to handle them as little as possible, place them in non-damaging containers and store them in the coolest environment you can with as little fluctuation in the temperature as possible.

### Storage

The ideal place for storing both negatives and photographs is a fireproof, heat-resistant container or in a safety deposit box at the bank. While this might be possible for negatives, photographs are made to be displayed either in frames or in photo albums (or that box in the back of the closet).

In choosing materials to use for storage of your photographs, it is essential that all materials are of archival or preservation quality. However, be suspicious when manufacturers use these terms as they are often used for products that aren't really archival or of preservation quality. Instead items such as the following should be used:

- Plastics that are made of polyester film (most commonly called by brand name "Mylar®"), polypropylene or polyethylene
- Papers that are made from durable & chemically stable materials, lignin-free ("acid-free"): pH = 7.5/8.5 range.

- Look for "glue-sticks" or other adhesives that are made from paste (non-animal products) and that are acid-free and washable. Glues made from animal parts don't age well and damage your photos.

Don't use items that have one or more of the following:

- polyvinyl chloride (PVC)
- unidentified plastics (such as grocery and dry cleaning bags or storage containers such as Tupperware® or Rubbermaid® products)
- Papers, folders, boxes, etc. with high acid content (acid content can be checked by using a pH pen<sup>1</sup>)
- Glassine envelopes (A nearly transparent, resilient glazed paper)
- Brown kraft paper envelopes
- Newsprint and other low-quality, wood pulp products
- Pressure-sensitive tape (such as Scotch tape and similar products)
- Rubberbands or paperclips

When you have placed the photographs or negatives in their archival sleeves, envelopes or albums, make sure that the following is done in order to store them properly:

- Store upright and not flat.
- This will prevent photographs from sticking to each other as they would if they lay on top of each other.
- Store color photographs separately from the black and white photographs.  
This will prevent any further deterioration that may be caused by the mixture of the different chemicals used in developing color and black and white photographs.
- Keep negatives stored separately from photographs, not only will this assure that at least one form of the image will survive an emergency, it also will help prevent the mixing of the different chemicals used during the development procedure.

### Climate

Once the negatives and photographs are stored properly, it is important that they are kept in an environment that is cool and dry away from sunlight. The cooler the temperature the longer the photo will last. Ideally the temperature should never exceed an average 75 degrees Fahrenheit (24 degrees Celsius) and relative humidity of 20 - 50%. If the humidity is over 70% for several days, the photos may become distorted and mold may form especially in warm weather.

For an eye-opening look of the effect of temperature and humidity on longevity see the Image Permanence Institute's Photograph Preservation Calculator under *Online Resources* on the next page.

### In the Event of an Emergency:

If you need to evacuate your home it is best to keep all your family photographs in one place so that they can be located quickly and removed.

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<sup>1</sup> A Ph pen contains a chemical that reacts to the acid in paper by changing color. The color roughly indicates the amount of acid in the piece.

## Suppliers

PH pens, archival paper and safe polyester film can be ordered from the following suppliers:

Creative Memories  
800-341-5275  
[www.creative-memories.com](http://www.creative-memories.com)

Light Impressions  
800-828-6216  
[www.lightimpressionsdirect.com](http://www.lightimpressionsdirect.com)

Gaylord Bros.  
800-634-6307  
[www.gaylordmart.com](http://www.gaylordmart.com)

Talas  
212-219-0770  
[www.talasonline.com](http://www.talasonline.com)

Get Smart Products  
800-827-0673  
[www.pfile.com](http://www.pfile.com)

University Products  
800-628-1912  
[www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com)

The Hollinger Corporation  
800-634-0491  
[www.hollingercorp.com](http://www.hollingercorp.com)

Metal Edge, Inc.  
800-862-2228  
<http://metaledgeinc.com>

Webway Photograph Albums  
<http://os.shopwebway.com>

## Online Resources

Early Photographic Processes  
[http://www.edinphoto.org.uk/1/1\\_early\\_photography\\_-\\_processes.htm](http://www.edinphoto.org.uk/1/1_early_photography_-_processes.htm)

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Your Family Photographs  
<http://genealogy.about.com/library/authors/ucmishkin1a.htm>

Image Permanence Institute  
Photograph Preservation Calculator  
[http://www.rit.edu/~661www/1/sub\\_pages/scrapbookcalc.htm](http://www.rit.edu/~661www/1/sub_pages/scrapbookcalc.htm)

Photograph and Digital Imaging: Questions and Answers  
<http://www.introphotodigital.com/questions.html#Anchor-49575>

Photographs and Other Visual Records: Selected Photographic Processes  
[http://aabc.bc.ca/aabc/msa/8\\_selected\\_photographic\\_processe.htm](http://aabc.bc.ca/aabc/msa/8_selected_photographic_processe.htm)

## Further Reading

Albright, Gary *Storage Enclosures for Photographic Materials*. Technical Leaflet: Storage and Handling. Andover, Mass.: Northeast Document Conservation Center, 1992.

Eaton, George T. *Conservation of Photographs*. Kodak Publication, no. F-40. Rochester, NY: Eastman Kodak Co., 1985.

Keefe, Laurence E., Jr. and Dennis Inch. *The Life of a Photograph: Archival Processing, Mating, Framing and Storage*. Boston: Focal Press, c1984.

Reilly, James M. *Care and Identification of 19th-Century Photographic Prints*. Rochester, NY: Eastman Kodak Co., 1986.

*Storing, Handling, and Preserving Polaroid Photographs: A Guide*. Cambridge, MA: Polaroid Corp.; Boston: Focal Press, 1983.

The Editors of Time-Life Books. *Caring for Photographs: Preserving Photographs, Old and New*. Alexandria, VA: Time-Life Books, 1982.

Vance, Mary A. *Conservation and Restoration of Photographs*. Monticello, IL: Vance Bibliographies, 1983.

Wilhelm, Henry and Carol Brower. *The Permanence and Care of Color Photographs: Traditional and Digital Color Prints, Color Negatives, Slides, and Motion Pictures*. Grinnell, IA: Preservation Pub Co., 1993.

Preservation leaflets are available on the IELDRN website:

<http://www.IELDRN.org> and the California Preservation Clearinghouse:  
<http://cpc.stanford.edu>

### IELDRN

The Inland Empire Libraries Disaster Response Network (IELDRN) is a non-profit consortium of libraries in the Inland Empire. The group's primary mission is assisting libraries to be prepared for, able to respond to and recover from disasters that affect collections. "Hold on to the Memories" leaflets are provided as a service to libraries to assist in answering the public's question on preservation of personal possessions. Preservation leaflets are available on the IELDRN website:  
<http://www.IELDRN.org> and the California Preservation

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## Hold on to the Memories

Preservation Information  
From IELDRN

Leaflet no. 2



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