

MSU Extension Publication Archive

Archive copy of publication, do not use for current recommendations. Up-to-date information about many topics can be obtained from your local Extension office.

Family Folklore – Family History vs. Family Mystery or How to Label and Store Photographs

Michigan State University Cooperative Extension Service

4-H Club Bulletin

Nancy Rosen, History Sharing Through Our Photographs

Issued N.D.

2 pages

The PDF file was provided courtesy of the Michigan State University Library

Scroll down to view the publication.

Family History vs. Family Mystery

(or How to Label and Store Photographs)



PURPOSE: To improve the way your family photographs tell family stories

YOU'LL NEED: A collection of your photographs or your family's photographs. (Make sure you have permission to use your family's photos.)

A photo album (with pages you can write on) or notebook

Pencil

Gummed photo mounting corners

TIME: Varies

HOW TO DO IT: If you do nothing else to preserve your old photos, at least identify the people in them by writing lightly in pencil on the back: **WHO** (full names), **WHEN** (approximate date if you are not sure), **WHERE** (city and state; county is also helpful to future generations in looking up records).

As for storage and handling of your photos, here are the most important "crisis intervention" points:

1. Keep all photos out of damp places, strong light, and severely fluctuating temperatures. The core of your house is best.
2. The best storage containers for photos are any kinds of metal boxes.
3. Use corner mounts for your photos; sticky-page albums and adhesive tape are bad news! You can make your own album by punching holes in white bond paper to fit a ring binder.
4. Teach children to handle photos by the edges and not to touch the image side.
5. Always wash your hands before handling photos.
6. Use only a pencil for marking. Write only on reverse side of image where margin is located.

If you have lots of color photos taken during the last two decades, chances are they will fade a lot. Those special to you should be kept out of sunlight and direct artificial light. Black and white film is your best bet for longevity. Try to take at least one photo in black and white on special occasions such as a wedding or anniversary party.

There's no need to feel overwhelmed by the hundreds of photos you may have. Ease your mind by setting priorities; that is, deal with your oldest and/or most fragile photos first. Label them and have duplicates made of those most precious to you. Duplicates are a great way to preserve the image for posterity—but make sure they are labeled too!

Remember, if you don't label your photographs, they could become what is known in the antique trade as "orphans"!

WHAT ELSE?

1. Sort your photos into topics (such as "Our Vacations," "Me and My Friends," "School," "Special Occasions," or "4-H") or into years. Now write a brief true story (or caption) next to or under each photograph. Note any special, funny, or sad memories.
2. If you want to learn more about photo preservation, refer to *Collection, Use and Care of Historical Photographs*, by Robert Weinstein and Larry Booth, Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1977. Your local historical society might have a copy.

This information was adapted from material provided by Nancy Rosen, director of HISTOP (History Sharing Through Our Photographs).