

Pulling Together Pieces of Family Stories

A few thoughts on research, organization and presentation.

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Handling paper and related items: photographs, letters, diaries, albums, newspaper clippings, periodicals

Every batch of family treasures calls for a unique research path. One thing that you can count on in your box(es) of photos and ephemera is that it will hold clues to places to look for answers to fill in your story.

The following is a short list of places for doing research and a few idea of what to do with your treasures. There are a few *Suggested Reading* items listed through this pdf, which are representative of huge amount of publications available. The titles listed are just the ones I keep at arms reach.

Purpose

First, why keep old things? Magic. The magic of bringing back memories, reconnecting us to people, places and experiences. They capture a point in time which would otherwise be lost. If we were there or knew the people involved, there are memories to have and share. If we were not there, they illuminate history that brought us to where we are now and give us insight into the people who formed the world we live in. The mementos and photographs of the past took time to acquire, which informs us as to the scale and pace of life in the not so distant past.

Handling the physical items:

Photographs

Scanning and creating a digital archive, matting and framing with archival materials, storing in archival containers (boxes, sleeves, etc.)

Letters

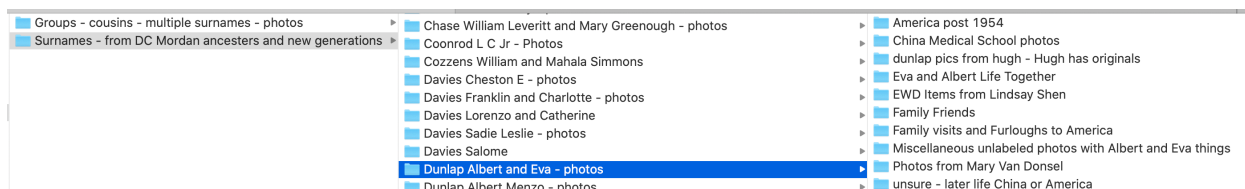
Store in sleeves inside archival binders

Diaries and other bound items (e.g. albums)

Archival boxes remade or custom sized

Digital items

Scanning to create a digital archive is the most efficient way to have a comprehensive set of photos, letters, articles, etc. You can start with a selection, prepare file organization strategy and add to it as time and opportunity allow. Family collections are not always available at one time, so a well planned digital archive allows for adding files and folders without putting the previous work into disarray.



I use a simple method of two main categories for groups and individuals.

Individuals are listed as Surnames. Every name is the given name and surname at birth. This is a typical way the genealogy applications handle surnames for consistency. Each person has a folder of images from birth to marriage at which point the couple has their own “family folder”. A married couple along with their children would be in subfolders as needed. All other groupings go into the main category of “Groups”.

This method is really easy to build on, and customizing the subfolders doesn’t break the main two category set up.

Presentation

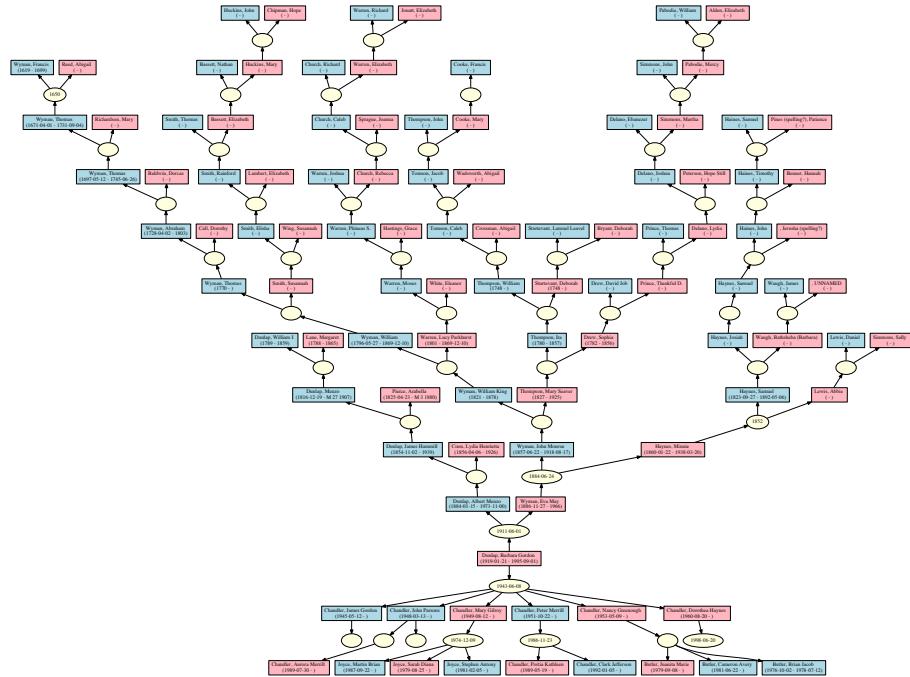
So how do you get from *this*



To *this*



When you pull together a focal point for you family story it becomes much easier to plan a presentation to display in your home. Typically a family tree is presented as a scholarly connection of biological relatives . That's great, and accurate but it's not always what makes a story.



Focus on a few branches in your family tree and build on the stories of people you know, or people you want to learn about.

Research Sources

Frederick County Public Library History & Genealogy

Online resources through the library system, such as Ancestry Library Edition and Fold3 (Military related records)

Maryland Genealogy & LDS Family History Centers

The link is for statewide offices. Here is our local Center:

Frederick Maryland Family History Center

199 North Pl

Frederick, Maryland 21701

(301) 698-0406

Mon - Sat Hours Vary

Suggested Reading

The Invisible History of the Human Race Christine Kenneally

Guide to Genealogical Research in the National Archives of the United States 3rd Edition

Information & methods of storing & preserving old photographs and ephemera.

General information:

Pigments fade and paper fibers deteriorate. Photographs are composed of both and have a few ways they can be damaged or disappear over time. You cannot save everything forever but you can put off the inevitable. All works on paper benefit from storage in an acid free, low humidity, ph neutral environment.

Items should be clean, dust free, covered when in storage.

Gloves should be used when handling to avoid scratches and transfer of oils which occur naturally in/on our skin.

The surface of a photograph should never be touched.

Primary enemies of photography:

Light – fading

Plastics – most outgas over time causing damage to the emulsion

Acid and other chemical additives in the production of paper

Storage containers and materials:

Boxes and fold-over enclosures

Pre-made or Custom cut

Albums with slipcovers to protect photos from dust

Archival sleeves and corners retail-labeled safe/archival type of plastic – polypropylene, polyester Mylar

ph neutral papers and boards for various uses:

mat board made of 100% cotton rag

Archival box making materials – all manufacturers will provide specifications and MSDS sheets.

Suggested Reading

Conservation of Photographs. Eastman Kodak Company, 1985.

Bajac, Quentin. *The Invention of Photography*. English translation. Harry N. Abrams Inc., 2002.

Lavédrine, Bertrand. *A Guide to the Preventative Conservation of Photographic Collections*. J. Paul Getty Trust, 2002.

Lavédrine, Bertrand. *Photographs of the Past: Process and Preservation*. English translation. J. Paul Getty Trust, 2009.

Norris, Debra Hess and Gutierrez, Jennifer Jae. *Issues in the Conservation of Photographs*. J. Paul Getty Trust 2010.

Wilhelm, Henry. *The Permanence and Care of Color Photographs: Traditional and Digital Color Prints, Color Negatives, Slides, and Motion Pictures*. Preservation Publishing Company 1993

Suppliers

Most vendors of archiving supplies have a good range of choices of storage materials. The following two are the ones I use regularly and can recommend for particular items.

Archival Products: Best binders with slipcases, specializes in library collections. Top quality and good selection of other archival storage supplies. I check here first for supplies I need for a project.

archival.com

Talas: Full range of bookbinding supplies, archival storage (pre-made and supplies to make your own), some gilding, fine papers and rag mat boards. If Archival Products doesn't have it, Talas will.

talasonline.com

Other Resources:

American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works: Vast array of archiving resources, in particular “Find a Conservator”, a tool for finding an accredited conservator for specific media. conservation-us.org/

Frederick Book Arts Center

301-228-9816

217 West Patrick St., Frederick, MD 21701

<https://www.frederickbookarts.org/>

Here you can learn about anything related to the art and fine craft of making a book.