

## Archiving 101: Organizing & Caring for Family Photographs

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### **Part 2: Prioritizing photo projects & organizing your collection**

In *Part One of Archiving 101*, I discussed how to complete a basic survey of your family photographs. Next, you will want to look at your survey to determine what your next steps are in organizing your family photos. Keep in mind that family photo collections come in all formats and sizes. Some families will have a multi-box collection, where others may only have a few treasured photos. No matter how big or small your collection is, your next step is to create a mini project based on your own needs. Maybe you want to create a family photo book, finally sort through all those slides, or you are looking for visual clues in an ancestor mystery. Creating smaller projects makes photo organization less daunting, allowing you to enjoy your family photos. Do not start with sorting 2,000 slides as your first project. Tackle something simple first so you can feel confident about your next project. Remember project planning is your friend.

#### Organization

Once you have determined your organization project, you will start by taking out that group of photographs and re-examine them. Spread them out on a table and really look through all of them. You will slowly start grouping photos into piles or in folders. Some common groupings include date, year range, location, events/activities, or by family surnames. Keep an eye out for photographs that appear to be from a set of photographs, such as a run of holiday or travel photographs. Now is your time to look closely and reunite images that may have been pulled out of that original photo grouping. Use visual clues such as clothing, and backgrounds to help reunite photos that have been separated over time.



In the beginning you may create basic categories such as date range, decade, or place. For example:

- 2002
- October 2002-December 2002
- Louisville, KY, 2003

As you continue sorting materials you may then establish more specific categories. If you notice a group of images that are clearly part of a set, make sure to keep them together or re-unite them. After establishing some basic order, you can create larger groups and sub-groups as needed. For example:

- 2002

- January 2002
  - Christmas
  - Florida Vacation
  - Birthdays
  - Miscellaneous

The goal is to create a system so you can easily go back and find what you are looking for in the future.

Minimize / downsize

Another thing you want to do while sorting and organizing your family photos is to seriously consider minimizing some of the photos you have. This is specifically suggested for late 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century materials. One misconception about family photographs is that you need to save everything. While getting rid of family photos may seem hard there are a few ways to get started.

- **Get rid of duplicate photos**—this applies to multiple copies of contemporary prints (such as 4” x 6” and 5” x 7” prints etc.) How many duplicates do you need of the photo of you blowing out candles on your birthday? Keep only the best representations of those special memories.
- **Get rid of poorly developed photos**—no need to keep the photos that didn’t develop correctly.
- **Select the best**—go through all your family snapshots and weed out the bad photos and keep the best.



While thinning out your photos is very subjective, this step will allow you to keep your memories, while minimizing the number of photos you will need to store. Not all photos are worth preserving, especially when dealing with slides, and contemporary prints.

Remember duplicates can be given to family members to fill out their family photo collection, they can be used for art projects, or tossed in the trash. This rule applies to more contemporary snap shots, not 19<sup>th</sup> century family materials.

Make sure to check out Part 3 of *Archiving 101: Organizing and Caring for Family Photographs* to learn about appropriate storage for your family photo collection.

\*Have additional questions on preserving your family photo collection? Feel free to contact me at [hpotter@filsonhistorical.org](mailto:hpotter@filsonhistorical.org) \*