

## Resources

Resource 1: Northeast Document Conservation Center. 5.2.1 Types of Photographs, part 1: 19th and Early 20th Century. <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/5.-photographs/5.2-types-of-photographs>.

Resource 2: Northeast Document Conservation Center. 5.2.2 Types of Photographs, part 2: Color. <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/5.-photographs/5.2.2-types-of-photographs,-part-2-color-new>.

Resource 3: Victoria and Albert Museum. Photographic processes. <https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/photographic-processes>.

Example: Sensei Bulb Air-Blower. [https://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/838819-REG/sensei\\_bl\\_012\\_bulb\\_air\\_blower\\_cleaning\\_system.html](https://www.bhphotovideo.com/c/product/838819-REG/sensei_bl_012_bulb_air_blower_cleaning_system.html).

## References

Library of Congress. Care, Handling, and Storage of Photographs. <https://www.loc.gov/preservation/care/photo.html>.

Northeast Document Conservation Center. 2.1 Temperature, Relative Humidity, Light, and Air Quality: Basic Guidelines for Preservation. <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/2.-the-environment/2.1-temperature,-relative-humidity,-light,-and-air-quality-basic-guidelines-for-preservation>.

Northeast Document Conservation Center. 5.1 A Short Guide to Film Base Photographic Materials: Identification, Care, and Duplication. <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/5.-photographs/5.1-a-short-guide-to-film-base-photographic-materials-identification,-care,-and-duplication>.

Northeast Document Conservation Center. 5.3 Care of Photographs. <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/5.-photographs/5.3-care-of-photographs>.

All resources and references accessed 2023-09-21



"Alonso S. Perales and Marta," 1921. Alonso S. Perales Papers. Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.



[houstonarchivists.org](https://houstonarchivists.org)

Created by Archivists of the Houston Area

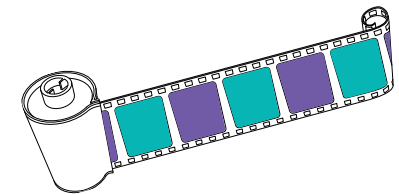
CC BY-NC-SA  
October 2023

# Preserving Family Photographs

a guide to safeguarding your personal history



KUHT-TV (Television station). "Woman reads on set of children's show," 1950s-1970s. KUHT Records. Special Collections, University of Houston Libraries.



ARCHIVISTS  
OF THE  
HOUSTON AREA

We at **Archivists of the Houston Area!** hope that this quick tip guide will help you preserve and store your photographs so that they can have a long life. Remember, if you have very old photographs, these may be made of special materials with special care needs. Some additional research on your part may be necessary to increase longevity of your photographs. This resource is focused on preservation for **photographic prints** and **negatives**, not for digital images.

---

## Section 1: Identify Your Photographs

What are your photographs' **materials**? Consider support (paper type, wood, glass, iron, gelatin, or plastic), image material, coatings, etc. This will help you select the best housing materials and methods.

★ See Resources 1 & 2 : Types of Photographs, 19th and Early 20th Century <https://bit.ly/3PX8ZT3> or Types of Photographs, Color <https://bit.ly/3PM5qi9>

What **process** was used to create the photograph? Consider albumen, autochrome, C-type print (most common for color), daguerreotype, or gelatin-silver (most common for black and white), etc.

★ See Resource 3 : Photographic processes <https://bit.ly/465vR8j>

## Section 2: Care, Handling, & Organizing

Use **clean hands**, free of oils and dirt, or use clean nitrile gloves. Gloves are recommended for metal, glass, and plastic materials (negatives, daguerrotypes, tintypes).

Handle the photo by its edges or housing materials.

Do not touch the image area.

**Keep photos clean and dry.**

Avoid eating or drinking near the photos.

Avoid marking the photos. If labeling is needed, use a graphite/lead pencil on the back and near the edge of the photo. Be gentle when writing.

Do not use rubber bands, paper clips, staples, or other materials that may scratch or damage the photograph.

Do not use sticky notes, glue, self-adhesive tape, or other adhesives on your photos.

Use a blower, not canned air or soft brushes (may damage photos), to remove loose dust and debris. See example: <https://bit.ly/3ELsNSM>

---

## Section 3: Storage & Environment

It is extremely important for your photos to stay dry, cool, and in a stable environment.

**Recommended relative humidity is 30-50%.**

Recommended temperature is **70°F or below.**

Avoid fluctuations of 5% or more in relative humidity for a stable environment.

**Cold storage (40°F or below)** is best for color photos, nitrate film (cellulose nitrate), or safety film (acetate cellulose). !!! **Cellulose nitrate** is extremely **flammable**, isolate and store these negatives separately!!!

You can store photos in an interior room or closet.

Store your photographs in folders, boxes, and cabinets to avoid humidity fluctuations.

Do not store photos in attics (too hot/humid), or basements and restrooms (too damp). Keep away from exterior walls, heating vents, radiators, or fireplaces (too hot).

Avoid setting photos on the floor, they might get damaged by insects.

---

## Section 4: Housing & Enclosures

To protect your photographs from dust, light, and handling:

Use enclosures that are made from paper (folders or sleeves), or plastic (sleeves or album pages, etc.) that are **Photographic Activity Test (PAT) compliant**.

**Paper enclosures** should be free of colorants, use alkaline buffered (pH 8.5) paper or unbuffered (pH 7 or neutral) paper. Search for acid-free paper and folders.

Buffered enclosures are not recommended for dye transfer prints, cyanotypes or some architectural reproductions (see Section 1 resources).

Avoid Kraft or glassine paper that have high acidic levels.

**Plastic enclosures** should be made of uncoated polyester, polyethylene, or polypropylene; other types could damage the photos.

**Warning:** Some photographic emulsions could stick to plastic enclosures, do not use in high relative humidity (above 70%) environments.

Avoid using polyvinylchloride (PVC), it is very unstable.

Do not use plastic housing for nitrate or acetate-based negatives.

Use **(PAT) compliant** (or at best acid-free) **boxes** for outer housing.

**Horizontal storage** is good for prints on brittle mounts and oversize/large photographs.

**Vertical storage** can keep your glass materials from breaking.

Consider storing negatives separately from prints. Especially if warping, odorous, or bubbling, place negatives in cold storage.