SCANTACULAR!
Best Family Photo Scanning Tips

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One the biggest challenges when it comes to family history projects is how to handle years of photos, slides, negatives. These are valuable assets for genealogy research and preserving family stories. Many of us find organizing and preserving family photos so daunting that we throw up our hands and tell ourselves we will get to it "sometime." That sometime is NOW, and this is the year you finally get this monster tamed!

Creating a Photo Digitization and Preservation Plan

Ever hear the phrase "Make No Small Plans?" This was the motto of my ancestors, but it can be one you also use when starting a photo organizing and preservation project. The ideal plan allows you to make real progress and continue working on organizing and preserving images going forward. Here are the basic elements of a solid plan:

- **Take Inventory**. Create a list of items that need to be scanned. Include all photos, slides, negatives, movies etc. Also list photo sizes as well as media formats; remember that negatives can be 110 and other sizes! The same goes for slides . . . you do not want to purchase the wrong type of slide scanner, right?

- **Evaluate Equipment**. For those taking the DIY approach, research available technology in terms of types of scanners, storage media, etc. Collect information and determine which device is best for your project.

- **Set Standards**. Research the minimum standards for each media type and list them. Use these to set preferences for equipment such as a flatbed scanner. As well as which outsourcing company to use if that is your preference.

- **Create a Tracking Mechanism**. One done with your inventory, it should be simple to track digitization projects from start to finish, whether you scan them yourself or send them out to a service. Also track costs of equipment, cost of outsourcing projects and even time spent scanning items.

- **Data Management and Backup**. Once items are scanned, you need to focus on file naming standards, keeping items organized and backing up your data!

In terms of what you should use to create a plan? I recommend using the platform you most feel comfortable with. These include paper and pen, a project management program such as Trello, a virtual assistant such as Evernote or OneNote, etc.

Taking Inventory, Sorting and Organizing Photos and Media

Organizing is not a fun task for most of us. Yes, we may get the "bug" every January or perhaps during Spring Cleaning, but for this is the area of the overall project that causes people to lose interest and lose sight of the end goal. Here are my tips and tricks:

- **Prepare your workspace**. Remember to wash your hands, prepare a clean area on a table to work, and have any supplies available. These could include file folders, envelopes, storage containers, archival gloves, etc.

- **Respect the order of the original collection**. Archivists know the value of keeping a collection in its original order. The person who created the photo album or placed the photos in a box had a reason for such an arrangement. The goal is to keep the collection as you found it, if possible. This could mean NOT removing photos from the album but scanning whole pages instead.

- **Check the condition**. This is one of the few reasons to disregard the order of the collection. If an album is deteriorating or doing actual harm to photos, then you need to place them in an archive-safe container. Try to retain the original order. A tip: use your smart phone to photograph the album pages first. After digitizing, you can remount the originals in an album that has acid-free pages.

- **Sort and organize in like groups**. Group albums with albums, oversized portraits together etc. Do not overcrowd your workspace. Use 3x5 index cards or sheets of paper folded in half to write down the group name. Be careful when using rubber bands or paper clips (plastic) to not damage items.

- **Deal with duplicates and bad photos**. Frequently you will find two or more of the same image. Set aside to send to a relative who might want the item. Don't waste time processing images out of focus or with damage that can't be corrected physically or digitally.

- **Use a slide or negative viewer**. It can be difficult to determine what you have and how to group it when working with slides and negatives. Save your eyes and invest in a cheap viewer for these items.

- **Inventory and store grouped items for processing**. Use an inventory sheet to detail the items in each group. Select a proper storage device for each group. Again, don't squeeze or overcrowd items and do damage.

Tips for DIY Digitization Projects

- **Don't get overwhelmed!** Some projects can be so overwhelming that you don't know where to start. Remember that the best way to "eat an elephant" is "one bite at a time." Start small, start with what you can do in one hour.

- **Are you sure you're doing it right?** With all the new technology available, how do you know if you are using the right tools or scanning at the correct DPI? Join the **Technology for Genealogy group on Facebook**.

- **Triage your scanning**. Prioritize items to be scanned into three groups: **URGENT** for items that are deteriorating and fragile, **MEDIUM** for most items, and **LOW** for items that may or may not get scanned and aren't important. Also, group items into those for flatbed scanning vs. smartphone or tablet app.

- **Clean your scanner.** Follow the manufacturer's directions . . . don't use alcohol or window cleaner. Clean the scanner with a microfiber cleaning cloth. Remove dust, lint and fingerprints so you can achieve the clearest possible scans.

- **Use archival gloves**. The oils on your fingers can damage the coating on many photos, slides and negatives. Invest in a pair of cotton archival gloves used by professionals when handling these items.

- **Use dark fabric as a background for uneven items**. Sometimes you'll encounter photos that have warped. Don't press down with the flatbed scanner door. Use a piece of dark fabric to block out light while scanning.

- **Line it up!** Keep photos lined up with the edge of the scanner to reduce editing.

- **Scan multiple items in one pass**. Become efficient and more productive by placing four or five small photos on the flatbed scanner and scan in one pass. Use photo editing software later to split the digital file into individual files.

- **Don't tamper with magnetic albums!** Unless you think there is valuable information on the back of the photos, don't remove them from magnetic albums. Scan the entire page and then split the digital image into individual files.

- **Scan both sides of a photo!** Don't forget there is often valuable information on the reserve side of photographs!

- **Go for high resolution scans.** Scan in TIFF format at a 300 dpi ("dots per inch") minimum if possible. A lossless JPG format (used by the Flip-Pal) will work too.

- **Rename the digital file**. Most scanners will name your scan IMG001 or some variation. As soon as possible use a file naming convention and a name that makes sense. Your goal is to know about the image file BEFORE you click it. Example: **AUSTIN John Ralph b1896 Coney Island, NY Summer 1917**.

- **Create a master image and a working image**. Very often I edit an image file only to regret cropping and color adjustments. Create a separate digital folder for all your TIFF image files. Make sure the word MASTER is at the beginning of the file name. Then use this image to create a working copy in JPG format with the same name, substituting WORKING for the MASTER file name prefix.

- **Annotate your scans**. Of course, we don't want to write on the photos who is in the photo or the date. Use a piece of clear acetate plastic and a dry-erase marker to circle faces, add names and notes. Place the sheet down then the photo.

- **Use MyHeritage photo editing tools**. There are AMAZING photo tools on MyHeritage including:

  - **Photo Enhancer:** greatly improves details. Use on BOTH sides of your scanned image … you never know what might be hiding on the back of the scanned photo!

  - **MyHeritage in Color®:** convert a black and white photo to color OR improve the color of a scanned image. The results are INCREDIBLE!

- **Consider using metadata**. Metadata is digital information such as names of people in a photo, location, date, etc. that can be added for purposes of organizing image files. It can also be used for copyright and source citations.

- **Use the MyHeritage Mobile App**. Did you know that the MyHeritage mobile app has a photo scanner feature? Instantly scan a photo and upload it to your photo album at MyHeritage. In addition, you can access the MyHeritage photo editing tools right on your mobile device!

- **Backup your scans!** This should be obvious, but you will want to make sure you use the 3-2-1 Data Backup rule:

  - **3 different backups**. Always have a backup of a backup of a backup.

  - **2 different media.** Don't place all your eggs in one basket. Make sure you are using a cloud service PLUS an external hard drive OR a USB flash drive.

  - **1 backup offsite.** What is the use of backing up only to an external hard drive if it too is damaged in a flood or fire along with your computer?

Storing Digital Image Files

There are many different online cloud platforms for storing digital images. Some are free or free up to a certain point. Besides having your images stored on my computer and an external hard drive, I always use at least one online digital storage site.

- **Store your family photos on MyHeritage**: You can upload your scanned family photos, use the MyHeritage photo tools, and even order a set of Mixtiles to share your photos with family and friends.

- **How Do They Handle Metadata?** Many platforms will strip out metadata that you worked hard to add to files. As a test, upload a digital image with metadata, then download it and review the results. Is your metadata still there?

- **Facebook and Ancestry are NOT Storage Platforms!** Facebook compresses images and degrades the image quality PLUS they strip out metadata when you upload an image. Ancestry makes it fun and easy to add your scanned images to a tree but it is not the ideal storage platform.

- **Have an Exit Strategy.** For any platform that you use to store digital images, know how to export all your images. Some platforms give 30 days or less notice when they are shutting down or merging with another platform.

Technology Review: What's New and What's a "Must Have"

Here is my curated list of recommended products based on my own personal experience in digitizing a MASSIVE collection of items dating back to the 1870s.

- **Develop a Multi-Device Approach to Scanning**. There is not one device or one approach that will do everything. With so many different types of media to be scanned, you simply can't rely on just a flatbed scanner or a scanning app. Consider four different scanners to cover different situations:

  - A **flatbed scanner** for photos and documents up to 8.5 x 11 inches in size.

  - A **portable scanner**, for research trips when visiting archives and scanning photos when visiting relatives.

- A **scanning app**, such as **MyHeritage Mobile App**, for times when a repository won't allow the use of my portable scanner or using my mobile device is more convenient.

  - A **multi-media scanner** to scan negatives, slides, film and more.

- **Purchase a cheap slide and negative viewer**. Save your eyes! If you aren't sure whether you want to scan certain slides or negatives, purchase a cheap handheld scanner at Amazon or Best Buy.

- **Build a Scanning Toolbox**. My toolbox has the following physical items:

  - Archival gloves

  - Acid-free envelopes, folders, photo holders

  - An archival spatula (to remove staples)

  - Dental floss (to remove photos from magnetic albums)

  - Plastic paper clips

  - Microfiber cleaning cloth

  - 3x5 index cards

  - Rechargeable batteries (for my Flip-Pal mobile scanner)

  - SD cards (for storing scanned images)

  - USB flash drive

Consult the **Resource List** at the end of this handout for an EXTENSIVE list of items.

Miscellaneous Tips and Tricks

- **Digitizing can bring up many emotions**. Yes, there will be tears and memories involved. But that is why you want these images for years to come, right? With a **Photo Digitization and Preservation Plan**, you can manage your scanning project in such a way that you stay "on track" and not get distracted.

- **Donate Your Photos**. Some genealogists, once they have digital images of their family photos, will print their own copy and frame them, then donate the originals to a genealogical or historical society. If you are not sentimentally attached to the photos, this is a great way to ensure a legacy.

- **Recycle your equipment**. What do you do with a specialized item such as a slide scanner once have scanned all your slides? **Donate the equipment** to your local genealogical society or public library. Many organizations are willing to set up "do it yourself" scanning stations for patrons. And you could get a tax deduction!

Conclusion

There have been so many advances in technology used to scan and digitize family photos and documents that there are no more excuses to put off those important projects. Whether you take your items to a scanning service or embark on a DIY project, it all comes down to making smart choices. If you do decide to scan items yourself, make sure you have the proper equipment and use the best standards to ensure quality scans and the need for "do-overs."

Resource List

Below is an extensive list* of resources for the webinar **SCANTACULAR! Best Family Photo Scanning Tips**. Need help decided on which link is best in its group? Items in **RED** are my preferred products or services based on ratings & reviews.

*DISCLOSURE: This list contains affiliates links. This means if you click a link and purchase an item, I make a small commission which makes my family happy and keeps me off the streets. These links DO NOT increase the price you would otherwise pay for these items! You can read the full disclosure statement for my website GenealogyBargains.com **HERE**.*

Scanners and Equipment

Flatbed Scanners

- **Epson Perfection V600 Scanner**
  https://genealogybargains.com/amazon-epson-perfectionv600

- **Canon LiDE220 Scanner**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-canon-LiDE220

- **HP OfficeJet Pro 8710 All-in-One Wireless Printer**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-HPOfficeJetPro8710

Multimedia Scanners (negatives, slides, etc.)

- **Epson Perfection V600 Scanner**
  https://genealogybargains.com/amazon-epson-perfectionv600

- **Kodak Mobile Film Scanner**
  https://genealogybargains.com/amazon-kodak-scanner

- **Kodak SCANZA – Digital Film Scanner**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-kodakscanza

- **Magnasonic All-In-One 22MP Film Scanner**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-magnasonic

- **Wolverine Titan 8-in-1 High Resolution Film to Digital Converter**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-wolverine

Scanning Apps

- **MyHeritage Mobile App**
  https://www.myheritage.com/mobile

- **Adobe Scan**
  https://acrobat.adobe.com/us/en/mobile/scanner-app.html

- **CamScanner**
  http://genealogybargains.com/camscanner

- **Google PhotoScan**
  https://www.google.com/photos/scan/

Photo Editing Tools

- **MyHeritage Photo Enhancer**
  https://www.myheritage.com/photo-enhancer

- **MyHeritage in Color®**
  https://www.myheritage.com/incolor

- **Adobe PhotoShop Elements 2020**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-adobe-photoshop

- **GIMP** (GNU Image Manipulation Program)
  https://www.gimp.org/

- **InfranView**
  https://www.irfanview.com/

- **Pixlr**
  http://pixlr.com

- **QromaScan**
  http://genealogybargains.com/qroma-offer

- **Vivid Pix Restore**
  http://genealogybargains.com/vividpix-restore

Photo Storage and Organization - Digital

- **MyHeritage Photos**
  https://myheritage.com

- **Amazon Photos**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-primephotos

- **DropBox**
  https://www.dropbox.com/

- **Google Photos**
  https://photos.google.com/

Books, Facebook Groups, Webinars

- **Technology for Genealogy Facebook Group**
  https://www.facebook.com/groups/techgen/

- **The Organized Genealogist Facebook Group**
  https://www.facebook.com/groups/organizedgenealogist/

Photo Scanning Toolbox Equipment

- **Archival Gloves**
  http://genealogybargains.com/archivalgloves

- **Archival Spatulas**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-archivalspatulas

- **Avery Photo Page Holders**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-avery-photopageholders

- **Index Cards - 3x5" 300 Count**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-indexcards

- **Iris Storage Solutions** – Plastic Photo Boxes
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-iris-storage

- **Gaylord Archival Supplies**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-gaylord

- **MagicFiber Microfiber Cleaning Cloths**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-magicfiber

- **Eneloop AA Battery Chargers**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-eneloop-charger

- **Eneloop AA Rechargeable Batteries**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-eneloop

- **Pioneer Photo Albums Photo Storage Box**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-pioneer-photobox

- **Plastic Paper Clips**
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-plastic-paperclips

- **SanDisk Storage Solutions** – USB Flash Drives, SD Cards
  http://genealogybargains.com/amazon-sandisk