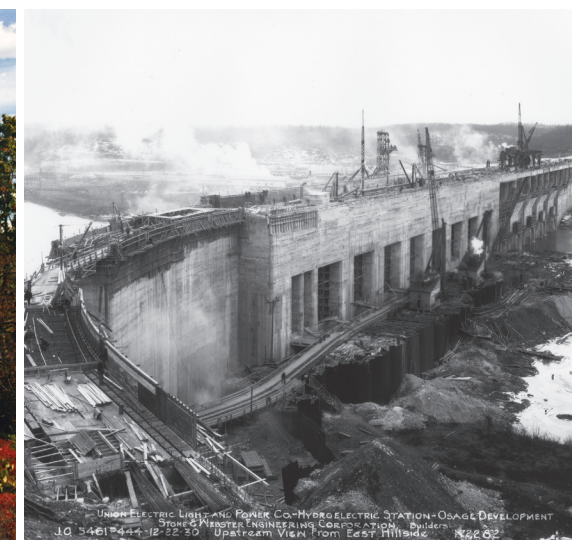







# PHOTOGRAPH PRESERVATION

## — BEST PRACTICES —



### DOs



-  Do wear cotton gloves when handling photographs.
-  Do clean surface debris from photographs using an air blower.
-  Do write in pencil on photographic envelopes. Identify people, places, dates, etc.
-  Do store photographs in archival-quality sleeves, envelopes, sheets and boxes.
-  Do consider donating historically significant photographs to an archive or similar institution with a climate-controlled storage facility and access to proper preservation supplies.

### DON'Ts



-  Don't touch prints, slides, negatives, etc. without gloves. Acid and oil from fingers damage the emulsion.
-  Don't clean photographs with a brush. Debris causes scratching when wiped across a surface.
-  Don't write or use rubber stamps on photographs. Ink can bleed through and writing instruments of all sorts cause indentations when pressed too hard.
-  Don't fasten together or mount photographs using paperclips, staples, tape, rubber bands, rubber cement or glue. Also, avoid sticky notes and flags. All metals and adhesives leave lasting stains.
-  Don't roll photographs when storing. This cracks the emulsion.
-  Don't store photographs in extreme heat/cold, flood-prone areas or anywhere with excessive light and/or humidity. Avoid basements, attics, garages, storage buildings and closet top shelves.
-  Don't place photographs in non-archival sleeves, envelopes, sheets and/or boxes. Lower-quality supplies can fail to protect against temperature, humidity, light pollution and pests. Acid found in these products also leaches into photographs, causing permanent damage.

### Protect Against the Elements



**FIRE** - Confirm the presence of functioning smoke alarms and fire extinguishers.



**HEAT AND COLD** - Store photographs in a climate-controlled environment.



**WATER** - Avoid storing photographs in flood-prone and/or humid areas.



**LIGHT** - Avoid prolonged exposure to sunlight and artificial light.



**PESTS** - Prevent insect and rodent damage through proper storage and by prohibiting food and drink in storage and handling areas.

 Missouri Secretary of State  
**State Archives**

  
NATIONAL ARCHIVES

NATIONAL HISTORICAL  
PUBLICATIONS  
& RECORDS COMMISSION

### Preserve with Proper Storage and Supplies

#### Photographic Prints:

- Mylar sleeves
- Acid-free envelopes and boxes



#### Larger Negatives:

- Mylar sleeves
- Acid-free envelopes and boxes



#### 35mm Slides and Negatives:

- Acid-free boxes and sheets



#### Glass Plates and Cased Photographs:

- Acid-free four-flap enclosures and boxes designed for vertical storage
- Rigid inert polyethylene foam planks



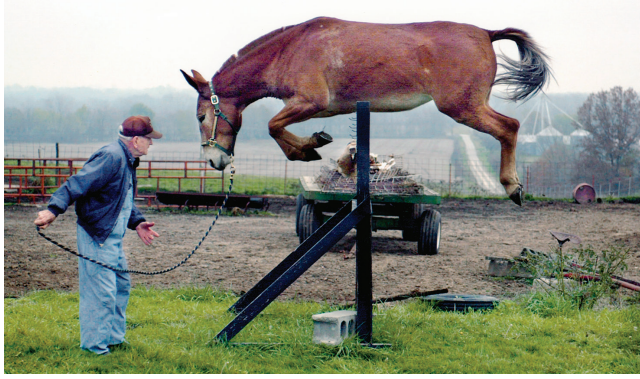


# PHOTOGRAPH PRESERVATION

## BEST PRACTICES

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

#### Photograph Metadata



Structured information about information is known as "metadata." So, while a photograph captures pieces of information at a specific moment in time, its metadata describes it: where and when taken, the photographer, the format, a description, subjects, etc. Using this photograph from the Missouri State Archives, the table below provides a few examples of common metadata fields, but others can also be used.

The "Identifier" field is a unique name assigned to the photograph, such as "Image0001.tif," or, if not digital, "Box 1 Folder 1" and the box's shelf location. The "Description" field is just that: a description of what the photograph captures. "Date," "Coverage" and "Photographer" speak for themselves, while the "Subject.LCSH" field is for "controlled vocabulary" from the Library of Congress (think key words in a Google search). Thesaurus for Graphic Materials, or "Subject.TGM," is an alternative controlled vocabulary field. The "Subject.Local" field, meanwhile, is not controlled, so it is used as a catch-all for other descriptors, such as a subject's full name and dates of birth and death. "Format" is where a photograph's dimensions and type are entered. If a photograph's specific identity is unknown, simply enter "black & white print," "color print," etc. The Image Permanence Institute's Graphics Atlas is a great online resource for identifying photochemical processes (see *Additional Resources*).

#### Digital Storage (Back It Up!)

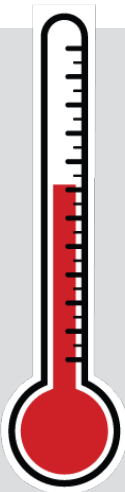


Always back up digital photographs and other electronic data and store a duplicate offsite. This protects against calamity should disaster affect your home, records facility or server. The stability of solid state hard drives makes them the preferred storage method.

Tip: Save all digital photographs using stable file formats, such as TIF or JPG2000.

Identifier	Description	Date	Coverage	Subject.LCSH	Subject.TGM	Subject.Local	Photographer	Format
RG005-033_MOPat_24_013A.tif	Eighty-five-year-old farmer Guy Griffin helps his mule Missy practice a high jump on his farm.	10/31/2000	United States - Missouri - Grundy County	Farmers; Mules; Draft animals;	Farmers; Mules; Animal training; Older people;	Griffin, Guy Robert (1915-2001); Missouri mule; State symbols;	Lawhon, Ival Jr. (St. Joseph, MO)	11" x 8.5" color dye coupler print

#### Climate Control Standards



**Black and white prints:** 60.8° F max at 30–50% RH

**Color prints:** 35.6–41° F at 30–50% RH

**Color slides and negatives:** 14–35.6° F at 20–40% RH

**Glass plates and tintypes:** 64.4° F max at 30–40% RH

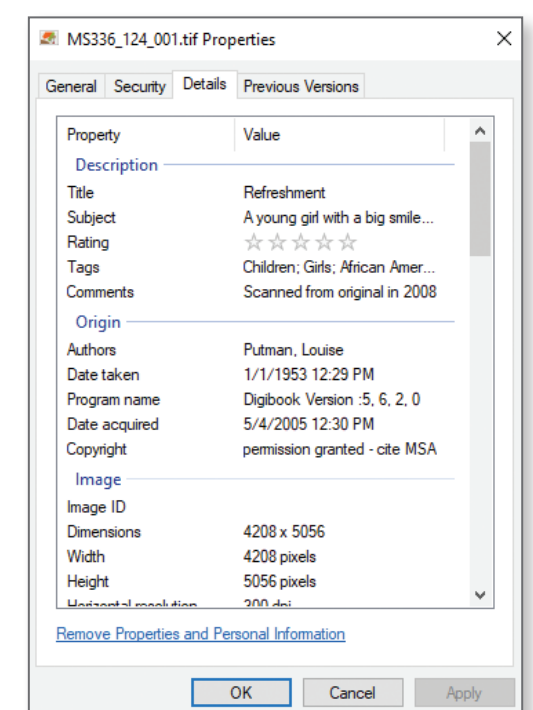
**NOTE:** RH refers to relative humidity, or the amount of water vapor present in air expressed as a percentage of the amount needed for saturation at the same temperature.

Remember that abrupt temperature and/or humidity changes can damage photographs. This is especially true for color, which should always be stored in the coldest conditions. Acclimatize photographs slowly, with no more than 5% RH change per 24 hours.

#### Digital Photograph Metadata

Photographs created digitally have their own set of metadata fields found in the "Details" tab of each image file. The "Subject" field here is equivalent to the "Description" field above and is where descriptive text is entered. The "Tags" field is equivalent to the above "Subject" fields and is where keywords are entered. "Author" is the photographer, and, of course, "Date Taken" refers to when a photograph was taken.

Unfortunately, this last field does not accommodate for images when only a year is known because photograph management software expects images to be born digital rather than be scans of prints, slides or some other format. Take this Missouri State Archives photograph, for example. Staff are only confident that it was taken sometime in 1953, but are required to also enter an arbitrary month, day and time. The same problem applies with the "Date Acquired" field. Though not perfect, the "Details" tab is useful for recording information, especially if it is not available elsewhere.



On a PC, right click on an image, then select Properties.



#### Archival Supplies

"Archival" doesn't always mean archival when it comes to photograph preservation supplies. To determine if a product is truly safe to use, look for a statement verifying that it has passed the *Photo Activity Test* or *PAT*.

The Missouri State Archives Local Records Preservation Program maintains a list of archival supply vendors (see *Additional Resources*).

#### Contact the Missouri State Archives

600 W. Main St. Jefferson City, MO 65101  
(573) 751-3280 archives@sos.mo.gov

www.sos.mo.gov/archives

www.facebook.com/missouristatearchives

www.flickr.com/photos/missouristatearchives

www.youtube.com/c/missouristatearchives

www.instagram.com/missouristatearchives

Missouri Secretary of State  
**State Archives**



#### Additional Resources

**Image Permanence Institute:** [www.imagepermanenceinstitute.org](http://www.imagepermanenceinstitute.org)

**Graphics Atlas:** [www.graphicsatlas.org](http://www.graphicsatlas.org)

**Library of Congress Subject Headings:** [id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects.html](http://id.loc.gov/authorities/subjects.html)

**Thesaurus for Graphic Materials:** [www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/tgm](http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/tgm)

**Canadian Conservation Institute:** [www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute.html)

**Northeast Document Conservation Center:** [www.nedcc.org](http://www.nedcc.org)

**American Institute for Conservation:** [www.culturalheritage.org](http://www.culturalheritage.org)

**Missouri Local Records Program supply vendor list:**

[www.sos.mo.gov/CMSImages/LocalRecords/Vendors\\_Information.pdf](http://www.sos.mo.gov/CMSImages/LocalRecords/Vendors_Information.pdf)

#### PRINT

Ritzenthaler, Mary Lynn et al. *Photographs: Archival Care and Management*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006.