



Fairfield Genealogical Society NEWSLETTER

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FINDING AND PRESERVING FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS



On many occasions the search for family heirloom photographs has actually begun in my office after I have encouraged my clients to try to find additional copies. Recently, a local lady received a Xerox copy of her grandmother's portrait from a cousin in Utah. All the images of this individual had been lost by the eastern branch of the family and my client was excited to locate a portrait. The owner of the portrait had only furnished my client with a Xerox copy, which my client wanted reproduced, retouched and hand-colored. I encouraged her to try to get a better copy from the relative. A month later I received a call from her saying she had a color snapshot. We took the color snapshot, blew it up and had an 8" X 10" archival black and white print made which was then hand-colored. The results were lovely! This was a far better and less costly alternative than working from a Xerox. She was thrilled with the results.

In the case of a young man from Edgefield County, detective work to find other copies of a "scarce" family image paid off. At first, he had only a damaged photos of an ancestor. After searching he found not only an undamaged copy, but a third copy of the identical image. He had phoned and visited all the elders in the family line and their closest family friends

to look through collections of photos. In the process, he discovered many more than the first two copies of the damaged pose.

Throughout years of photo restoration, I have never seen an individual fail when detective work was pursued. In some cases, similar photos are discovered that the individual never knew existed and in one instance the searcher was given twenty five, or more, family images simply because of their expressed interest. Recently, a family friend forwarded an albumen print of my great-grandfather to me knowing I value and preserve family photos. I always encourage the researcher to turn a few more unturned stones to find the treasure of other family images.

Often the researcher can be of assistance to their relatives and friends in preserving photos that may be in danger, especially if they are storing their photos in an attic, basement or garage. A convenient was to point out storage techniques would be to give them a copy of the conservation brochure from the S.C. State Archives on how to store photos. With regard to temperature, heat and extreme cold are destructive to photographs. The optimum temperatures are the same ones at which we are comfortable. Homes with heat pumps provide a particularly good atmosphere.

Excessive humidity is destructive to photographs. Humidity not only encourages mold growth, but condensation causes spotting. Several solutions are recommended for display of photographs to help avoid this: 1) In framed photos put a spacer, such as a mat, between the glass and the print. When condensation takes

place inside the frame, the air space between the glass and print will prevent miniature terrariums from developing. 2) Avoid the common plastic overlays in albums for photos and avoid plastic sleeves for transparencies. In high humidity areas these plastic sleeves encourage pockets of condensation. I have just discarded over four hundred slides that were damaged by spotting from the condensation trapped inside the plastic sleeves. Plus, plastic is almost always too chemically active to place directly on the surface of a photo. I recommend acid-free slide boxes which can be had from sources such as Conservation Resources. 3) Acid-free storage boxes are the best alternatives to wooden drawers or raw-pulp boxes, both of which have high acid content. Conservation Resources has quite a selection.

To insure longevity, avoid all acidic enclosures. In framing, use only museum quality board. The South Carolina Archives can provide you with the names and address of suppliers for museum quality mat boards. Never use glue to attach a photo to a backer. Glues actually eat the photograph. A photograph was brought to me that had several brown spots on the front. On examination, I learned that when the photo was framed in the 1950's the framer had used an extraordinarily strong adhesive which appeared to be similar to a linoleum adhesive. It had permeated the paper fibers and come through the front of the photo. Extensive retouching had to be done to salvage the image.

Dry mounting (as it is called) of any type is not recommended. Photo albums that have glue strips on the pages to hold the photos in place are especially detrimental to the photo. For photo albums, choose archival ones. Ask for them at photo supply stores (rather than at discount stores or the general department stores) or order them from the list of suppliers at the end of this article.

Handling of photos is another crucial consideration. One photo of a family group that was brought to me to make archival copies had a perfect FBI-like fingerprint over the face of a

child. A previous viewer had picked up the photo, innocently planting their thumb two and a half inches inside the image and right on top of the child's head. Eighty years later, the oils from the viewer's skin had caused the emulsion to fade drastically, creating a permanent fingerprint. Photos should be handled by the edges only. Avoid putting fingertips on the image and, even better, use gloves when sorting through a collection. Light-weight cotton gloves designed for just such activity can be purchased at any photo supply for \$1.50.

Beyond how we handle our collections, we need to consider other environmental factors. Be on guard against roaches, crickets and silverfish. They all love to make meals of the photographs, causing white spots where they consumed the image and brown ones from their discharge. A regular visit from the exterminator will control the pests. Rats also can destroy a collection.

In considering what a modern-day photo is, a layer of paper coated with a micro thin layer of silver, one can logically see how delicate it truly is. A bend, an abrasion, a fingerprint, or droplets of water can ruin the thin skin-like image. Don't succumb to the temptation to use an eraser on the emulsion to remove spots. A man brought me a carte-de-vistes of his great-grandfather where he had attempted to erase a spot and he had accidentally erased the entire left side of the face. Besides deliberately abrading, as with an eraser, dust and dirt can abrade a surface, too. Recently, retouched a portion of a man's face that had been abraded by storing it horizontally in a dusty garage. Through time, the grit in the garage had gotten between the photos and had rubbed off a portion of the delicate emulsion as the stack of photos was moved about. Storage of valuable photos should always be vertical, not horizontal. If your photos do get dusty, clean them by using a very soft artist's brush.

Most of the problems on photos that I repair are due to human neglect. I'll hear such examples as: "I stepped on the photo after it slid

out from under the bed;" "We had this stored in the garage and the roof leaked;" "It stuck to the glass;" "Mother had this in sunny spot." All of these damaging situations could have been avoided.

Precautionary efforts can save an entire collection, not only in training yourselves and family in care handling, but also in the area of forecasting future ownership. A wise local matriarch stipulated in her will that fifteen images, deemed most important, were to be archivally reproduced and divided among the three children on her death. How thoughtful! The transfer of old family photos to appropriate owners prior to your demise is the only way to guarantee they will get into the hands of the persons you want to receive them. I have seen entire family collection on the curbside following death. Plan ahead--who gets what--or have archival copies made for gifts to share with family members and share information regarding the life span of the print. It's a true gift to the family.

This article was written in 1992 by:

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Maybe Your Ancestor Was A Redcoat

About two years ago we had a long article in the Fairfield Newsletter on a Fairfield man who served with the British army and who went to England after the war. At that time it was noted that about one third of the families in South Carolina supported the British cause. Many of these Tory families left the area due to hard feelings (it was a bitter civil war) and it may just be the ancestor you can't seem to locate may have either died during the war or he may have moved after the war. British sources are certainly worth checking. Below is an outline of some material that appeared in the Chester Genealogical Society Newsletter that may give a clue to some of the men from this area.

Return of the Property both Rail and Personal of those persons who have gone over or died in British Service with a designation of the Dead and Gone off.

John HutchinsonGone with the Enemy
Robert McCownDitto
John HalseyDied in British service
William McCallister ..Gone with the Enemy
Robert Lanc.....Killed in British Service
John Sadlergone off with the British
James Dohorritygone off with B.
Luke VickeryDitto
John MoberleyDied in British service
Joseph FergusonKilled in B.
James FletchallGone off
James MoreKilled in B.
John JohnsGone off
Henry Johns.Ditto
Joseph BusbyDied in British service
Samuel Gregorygone off
John AustinDitto
John MathewsDitto
William BartonDied in British Service
Thomas SmithGone off
John PhillipsGone off
George RogersDitto
William YoungDitto
Hugh CampbellDead
Thomas RobertsonGone off
Doctor TurnerDitto
James MillerDitto
Joseph AustinDitto
John LemrnonDitto
John AgnewGone off
Thomas PhillipsDitto
Benj. Austin, Sr.....Died in British Service
Steven TerryDitto
James MartinDitto
Francis NielDied in British Service
John AgnewKilled
Henry HardinDied in British service

Reference: S. C. Archives, Forfeited Estates, List
of Enemies in the State, Col. Richard Winn's
List.

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