

Disaster Proofing Your Genealogy Research

Sara Cochran www.theskeletonwhisperer.com
s.cochran@theskeletonwhisperer.com (951) 269 - 5460

Organizing Your Physical Records

- Streamline your paper files by tossing duplicates and copies of readily accessible records such as Federal Census pages.
- Keep a list of “digital only” records with your paper files so that these items aren’t forgotten about and can be easily located online or in your computer files.
- Write out your filing system and file all items consistently. This applies to digital files, too.
- Separate and identify items which belong solely to your FAN club. (Friends, extended family, associates, and neighbors).
 - Consider making a list of these FANs and how they connect to you or your family.
- Separate and identify items which have no known connection to your family.
- Label photographs to the best of your ability, and add source citations to records.

Protecting Your Physical Records

- Rule # 1 of Archivists is “never do anything you can’t undo.”
 - Never laminate photos or documents.
 - Do not use adhesive on photos or documents—this includes document repair tape.
- Unfold documents if you can do so without damaging them, and keep original envelopes with their letters.
- Highly acidic documents, such as newspaper clippings, will damage other documents.
 - Consider scanning these items and printing copies onto acid-free paper.
 - Place originals into mylar sleeves or archival quality sheet protectors.
 - Or interleaf with cotton bond to protect surrounding documents.
- Ripped, torn, and water or fire damaged records should be placed in mylar L-sleeves or archival quality sheet protectors.
- Mold requires special care. You can locate a preservationist through the American Institute for Conservation, Washington D.C. <http://www.conservation-us.org/membership/find-a-conservator>
- Remove paperclips, staples, and other fasteners. These may rust or damage other documents by scratching or tearing them. Micro spatulas are your friend for this task! Remove rubber bands as these can harden and adhere to documents.
- Your records will be happiest in a dark environment which is 65° F at 35% humidity. This is not realistic for most home archives; therefore, the best location for your collection is a space with minimal lighting and temperature fluctuation. If possible, a closet or inside wall away from windows and other drafts is best. Do not store your collection in a basement, garage, or attic, because of potential water damage, and temperature and humidity fluctuations.



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Archival Storage and Supplies:

- Storing and preserving your genealogical records doesn't have to bust your budget. Organize your collection and make a list of the types and amounts of supplies you will need before ordering so that you don't over or under buy items.
- Use archival quality sheet protectors instead of mylar sleeves. Carefully cut off the hole punch strip and turn the protector into an L-shape to place documents inside the sleeve.
- You can use regular manila folders for storage by placing cotton bond paper between the folder and the first document inside.
- Paper products, such as interleaving paper and storage boxes, should be acid-free and low-lignin.
- Plastic items, such as boxes and mylar sleeves, made of polypropylene or polyethylene which are PVC free and have no smell.
- Adorama Camera, <https://www.adorama.com/>
- Gaylord, <http://www.gaylord.com/>
- Hollinger Metal Edge, <http://www.hollingermetaledge.com/>

Digitizing Your Photos

Resolution is the number of Dots Per Inch "DPI" in a photo. Higher resolutions result in sharper images. The smaller the original photograph is, the higher the resolution should be to ensure a beautiful enlargement. Scan damaged photos at a higher resolution for more effective restoration.

Suggested DPI for Printed Photos:

3x5 or larger: 300DPI min, 600 DPI is better

3x4 or smaller, 600DPI or higher

Suggested DPI for Photographic Film:

Large format: 400DPI to 600 DPI

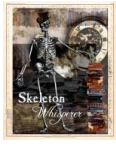
Medium format: 600 to 800 DPI

135/35, 126 mm: 1200 DPI.

126mm: 1600DPI. 110mm: 2400 DPI.

Choosing a Format:

The JPG format creates a smaller file than TIFF, however, is subject to data loss when editing and saving it. JPG images are easier to share and many websites do not accept uploads of the larger TIFF files. The TIFF format is most useful when scanning very important images, very damaged images, or images which you are unlikely to have access to again. TIFF Files can be copied and then converted into JPG files.



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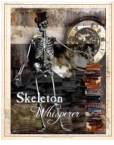
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Digitizing Your Documents

- As a best practice, scan documents individually, and do not scan with a document feeder.
- Most documents do not need to be scanned at a high resolution; 300 DPI is sufficient. Damaged documents, documents with very faint writing, or small documents will benefit from the higher resolution of 600 DPI.
- Many flatbed scanners will create a multi-page PDF or TIFF file for you, if you are scanning a multi-page document, such as a letter.

Preserving and Sharing Your Digital Collection

- Regular backups of your digital files, following the “Rule of 3” is recommended.
 - Have 3 copies of your files, using 2 different formats, 1 of which should be an off-site backup.
 - Example: A copy on your computer, a copy on an external hard drive, and a cloud account.
- Cloud storage companies with excellent features and reputations include Carbonite.com, iDrive.com, and Backblaze.com. Subscription prices vary based on how many devices you want to back up and how much space you need.
- Sharing your collection of photos and records with family members and your ancestors’ FAN club can increase interest in your research as well as create extra backups. There are many companies which provide an option for users to upload *and* share their files with others.
- If you have a Family Tree online at a website such as Ancestry.com, MyHeritage.com, FindMyPast.com or Geni.com, upload your photos and documents there for other users to find. If your tree is private, you can invite others to see the information. Consider leaving a directive to your heirs the change the settings after you’re gone.
- Family Search <https://www.familysearch.org/en/> You can upload your photos and documents to the “Memories” section of the family tree for free.
- Forever <https://www.forever.com/> Storage space for your photos, documents, and videos, with an option to share with friends and family. You can create scrapbooks and other digital gifts, as well as print photographs on their website. Forever also offers digitization of older media such as videotape, slides, and pictures. There is a free account option, but paid accounts include a guarantee to keep your digital files in the most current format for your lifetime plus 100 years.



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Donation:

Many Genealogical and Historical Societies, Libraries, Archives, and some Museums will accept genealogical collections as a donation.

Do:

- Contact the organization before making your donation.
- Have your records in order; the organization will want your collection to be reasonably organized before they accept them. Some organizations will assist you with this step.
- Be aware that they may request a monetary gift to help the organization care for your records—even if it's not, consider leaving a bequest in your will.
- Tell your family, especially anyone you have assigned to be Executor of your estate, of your wishes.

Don't:

- Drop your collection off on their doorstep or mail it to them without warning.
- Assume the organization will want every item in your collection.
- Assume your heirs will realize you want your items donated before they have thrown them out.
- Be afraid to split up your collection based on regional affiliation.
- Be afraid to donate the items while you are still living.

Resources and References:

Carol Smallwood and Elaine Williams, eds, *Preserving Local Writers, Genealogy, Photographs, Newspapers, and Related Materials* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, Inc), 2012.

Denise May Levenick, *How to Archive Family Keepsakes* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Family Tree Books), 2015.

Denise May Levenick, *How to Archive Family Photos* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Family Tree Books), 2012.

Maureen A. Taylor, *Preserving Your Family Photographs* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Betterway Books), 2001.

Melissa Mannon, *The Unofficial Family Archivist: A Guide to Creating and Maintaining Family Papers, Photographs, and Memorabilia* (San Bernardino: ArchivesInfo), 2011.