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COLLECTIONS

Advisor



Martin Collection, Indiana Historical Society, cropped from original

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Photo Digitization

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Today's society lives in a digital world. We get our news from computers, read our books on e-readers and submit homework online. In order to keep up with the times, the modern museum must become more reliant on digital technology. But unlike the ordinary person who can easily transition to the digital world, the museum must always be concerned with traditional methods.

A museum archive is the keeper of the papers of the past; from calendars to scrapbooks, political pamphlets to presidential papers and, of course, photos. Many museum employees can tell you that one of the most sentimental objects that a person can donate is a picture. People come from all over the globe just to look a photo, to gather research or to remember the old days. But this love of photos can lead to problems.

Two main problems are related to photos. The first problem started when photos became readily available to the general public. When people could easily take and share photos, they also started taking less care of them. They got placed in attics or in basements. They ended up sitting in the elements for years, waiting to be picked up again, many times without any identification. Many museum employees can tell you about donations of photos that came with information such as "Oh, this was my great uncle, I think."



Docent Peggy Andert scans photo for ongoing digitization project, Center for History



Unidentified house, Southern Indiana

The second problem faced by museum employees is the way a photo is handled. They can be folded, torn and worn so much that they become fragile in even the most dedicated and loving hands. Almost everyone you encounter has these photos, the ones you've placed into your wallet or the baby pictures you pass around to all your friends and family. But no one really thinks that someday these photos might become so worn that they might not survive to the next generation.

Because of these problems, digitization has become an ever increasing need in museums. Scanning photographs has become beneficial to museums in terms of preservation and accessibility. Digitization provides employees with the knowledge that they no longer have to worry about further damaging photographs every time they bring material out for viewing. Employees will be able to show patrons digital versions of a photo, without fear of further damaging the photo.

Accessibility is becoming a growing concern in museums. By allowing images to be digitized, employees can now tell people, "Come see our collection." It also allows smaller institutions to promote themselves to a wider audience. A description of a document or image may not capture the attention of a possible patron as much as seeing a high-quality image.

Digitization, though, does not require a museum to spend its entire budget on costly high powered scanners. When scanning, the average dpi for a digital photo is 300, which the average scanner is capable of producing. It is also possible to use a good digital camera. A person with a steady hand or with a tripod can produce high quality digital images without much cost or hassle.

Although a museum will always be concerned with physical documentation, digital technology has allowed museums a way to keep up with society. Museums must always remember that keeping up the times does not mean breaking the bank. Budget-friendly, low-cost alternatives are available.

Resources:

- www.photographytalk.com/photography-articles/524-photography-tip-how-to-digitize-your-old-pictures
- *Digitizing your family history: easy methods for preserving your heirloom documents, photos, home movies, and more in digital format* by Rhonda R. McClure
www.books.google.com
- *Digital Imaging: A Practical Approach* by Jill Marie Koelling available from the Indiana Historical Society



Water damaged photo, Montgomery County Historical Society

Lending Resource Center <http://www.indianahistory.org/our-services/local-history-services/lending-resources/>

- National Archives website www.archives.gov/preservation/technical/guidelines.html
- Connecting to Collections Online community www.connectingtocollections.org
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Contributed by the Center for History, South Bend

On-site collections care training opportunity:

During a free one-day visit, participating sites receive in-depth, specialized training on collections care and fundraising for collections. The training is designed to fit the specific needs of each site based on a pre-visit survey. Only 100 site visit appointments are available and will be scheduled on a first-come, first-served basis. To receive information about on-site collections care training, email themmerlein@indianahistory.org.

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