

# CONSERVATION LEAFLET

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## CARE AND HANDLING OF PHOTOGRAPHS

1. Always handle photographs by their edges and wear cotton gloves when handling them.
2. Never touch the image surface. Oil in the skin leaves stains.
3. Always use albums with acid-free paper or use photo sleeves made of polyester, tri-acetate or polyethylene. Never use self-adhesive or magnetic albums.
4. Always use acid-free photo corners to place photographs in albums. Use polyester sleeves to place photographs on bulletin boards.
5. Never use adhesive tape, glue, metal paper clips, thumb tacks, or rubber bands on photographs—all can cause damage.
6. Never display photographs in direct sunlight or fluorescent light—both cause fading and discoloration. Color photographs are especially susceptible to light damage, but they also fade in the dark.
7. Always identify your photographs: **who, where, and when**. Use a soft lead pencil and write on the back near the bottom of the photograph. For slick-backed photos, use a graphite pencil from an art supply store. Never label photographs with a pen—the ink will bleed through onto the image.
8. Never place glass directly on a photograph when framing it. Use a window mat of acid-free museum board to prevent the photo from sticking to the glass. Use acid-free backing materials for framing.
9. Always use care when photocopying a photograph. Never use the automatic sheet feeder when copying photographs.
10. Always store photographs in acid-free boxes in a safe, dark, and dry place. Never store photographs in wooden or metal boxes, or in areas (attics or out buildings) with extreme changes in temperature and humidity.

## Glossary of Photograph Types

The following information may be useful in identifying the types of historic photographs in your collection, but it can only be used to approximate the date of the photographs. The use of these processes varied by location and by the specific photographer. While some were eager to try new processes, others continued with the existing processes until a new process had fully proven itself. Other photographers were content to continue to use the process they were most familiar with even when a new process had proven itself. If a stock of materials for a particular process were on hand, these would generally be used before the photographer switched processes. For additional information, see the resources provided with this leaflet.

**Albumen Print** (1850-1895): An emulsion of egg white mixed with sodium or ammonium chloride coating on extremely thin paper which, after being sensitized in a solution of silver nitrate, exposed to light, and toned in gold chloride, produced a brown colored print. Early albumen prints have a dull sheen; after the 1880s the albumen print is likely to have a high gloss. Most commonly, however, the albumen print will have deteriorated, and have a yellowish tinge.

**Ambrotype** (1855-1860s): A wet collodion plate process in which the emulsion is coated on a glass plate. The negative image produced is visible as a positive image when the glass was backed with a dark material (paper, paint, cloth). Often put into cases like those used for daguerreotypes, each image is unique—that is, one-of-a-kind—because it is a negative. NOTE: Often an ambrotype is mistaken for a tintype or vice versa.

**Card Photographs** (1870s-ca.1905): When interest in the cartes-de-visite waned, studio photographers produced mounted photographs in larger sizes. Common were the cabinet (4 ½" x 6 ¼"), victoria (3 ¼" x 5"), promenade (4" x 7"), and boudoir (5 ¼" x 8 ½"), and larger. The cards were often decorated and contained the photographer's name and address.

**Cartes-de-Visite** (1860s): A small albumen portrait about the size of a calling or present day business card (4 ¼" x 2 ½"), and often collected in albums. They were very popular and inexpensive, and thousands were printed daily. Often the name of the photographer is printed on the card.

**Cyanotype** (salted paper) (ca. 1885-ca.1910): The cyanotype is characterized by its bright blue color. Its popularity was restricted because many people objected to the blue tones, particularly for portraits.

**Daguerreotype** (1839-ca. 1855): The first practical photographic process was invented in 1839 by a Frenchman named Louis J. M. Daguerre. The process produced a positive image formed by exposing a silver coated copper plate to iodine vapors and then to mercury vapors. Usually sealed with a pane of glass in a hinged case made of wood with a leather or paper covering, or in a case made of gutta percha, a substance that resembles modern day plastic. Each daguerreotype is a unique image, appearing either as a negative or a positive, depending on the light angle.

**Gelatin Silver Print** (1893 to present): The most common black and white photograph. During the 1890s it took the place of the albumen print. In 1910 the discovery that prints could be developed through a chemical process (rather than through exposure to light) launched black and white photography, and it soon came to dominate the photographic market.

**Snapshot** (1888 to present): Snapshot photography arrived with George Eastman's Kodak camera in 1888—"You press the button, we do the rest." For the first time a wide range of people could make their own pictures. In addition, the film was faster which allowed the camera to capture people in informal

poses.

**Stereograph** (1851-1935): Stereographs (or stereo cards) are a format, not a technical process. They are a pair of photographs of the same scene, placed side by side on cards measuring approximately 4 ½" x 7". When viewed through a stereoscope—a hand held device—the single picture looks three-dimensional.

**Tintype** (1856-ca.1900): Like the ambrotype, a collodion wet plate process in which the emulsion was coated onto a dark painted metal plate (usually black or dark brown). The direct positive image is laterally reversed. Durable and cheaper than glass photographs, they can be found in paper holders, in cases (often being mistaken for ambrotypes), or in photo albums. Sometimes they were hand colored.

For additional information concerning the preservation of photographs and family papers, see:

Baldwin, George. *Looking at Photographs: A Guide to Technical Terms*. Malibu, Calif.: J. Paul Getty Museum in association with the British Museum, 1991.

Reilly, James. M. *Photographic Prints of the Nineteenth Century: Care and Identification*. Rochester, N. Y.: Eastman Kodak Company, ca. 1986. [out-of-print]

Ritzenthaler, Mary Lynn. *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1993. (New edition forthcoming, Fall 2008.)

Ritzenthaler, Mary Lynn, and Diane Vogt-O'Connor. *Photographs: Archival Care and Management*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2006.

Weinstein, Robert A. and Larry Booth. *Collection, Use, and Care of Historical Photographs*. Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, ca. 1977. [out-of-print]

Web-sites:

Northeast Document Conservation Center at [www.nedcc.org](http://www.nedcc.org). Look at publications, conservation services, and their on-line course Preservation 101. Lesson 7 is on the care of photographs. [Currently being revamped – Oct. 2007]

Conservation On-line at <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu> provides information on a variety of conservation topics.

Suppliers of Archival Products:

[www.lightimpressionsdirect.com](http://www.lightimpressionsdirect.com)

[www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com)

[www.metaledgeinc.com](http://www.metaledgeinc.com)

For more information on this and other records conservation concerns, contact: **Linda Overman, ADAH conservation officer, (334) 353-4726; e-mail:Linda.Overman@archives.alabama.gov** ADAH web site: <http://www.archives.alabama.gov>