

Personal and Family Archives: A Simplified Approach to Collecting, Organizing, and Preserving Analog and Digital Photographs, Movies, Videos, Letters, and Other Documents

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The Center for the Image.org with Wilhelm Imaging Research, Inc. (USA)

Abstract

In the digital age, for the first time in human history, most images and textual information are no longer being preserved as physical objects. Instead, digital images and other records are stored as coded electronic files using the ever-changing technology of hard drives, servers, solid-state flash memory, CD's and DVD's, and cloud storage.

Archivists refer to such text records and images as "machine-readable records," which require very specific software and electronic hardware preserved with the digital records to enable future retrieval, viewing, printing, and other uses utilizing both current and as yet unknown future technologies. In contrast, photographic prints and photobooks are physical objects that require neither special hardware nor software to be viewed. Archivists call these "human-readable records." We are living in a very exciting age where most people have a rich mix of both analog and digital records in their personal and family archives.

This paper proposes a simplified, comprehensive approach to preserving analog photographs, movies, letters, and other documents in their original form, digitizing these records for posting on personal and family websites, Facebook, Flickr, and other online modes of sharing, and using these digital files for assembling photobooks, making prints of significant images, and for other purposes. At the same time, it is equally important to preserve these digital files of original analog materials together with more recent digitally-captured still photographs, videos, MP3 and other audio files – all in a simple but coordinated manner.

One of the great benefits of digital technology is that for the first time in human history, it is now possible to produce "perfect" bit-replicated duplicates of images and videos and, at very low cost, to disperse them in multiple locations to greatly increase the likelihood of their long-term survival. Archivists refer to this as "redundant geographic separation."

Throughout the history of traditional analog photography – going back to the 1839 introduction of the Daguerreotype – the single "unique copy" nature of negatives, transparencies, and prints has always rendered them extremely vulnerable to damage or loss because of poor storage conditions (hot attics and damp basements), fires, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, theft, war, cultural cleansing, and other calamities.

Also discussed is a philosophical approach to collecting, managing, and preserving personal and family records – and organizing and making them accessible in a way that can be passed on to future generations.

Authors' Biographies

Henry Wilhelm is the founder and director of research at Wilhelm Imaging Research, Inc. Through its website, the company publishes print permanence data for desktop and large-format inkjet printers, silver-halide color papers, and digital presses. WIR test methods have become the worldwide *de facto* standard for print permanence evaluation and are currently being used by HP, Canon, Epson, and other OEMs. Wilhelm Imaging Research also provides consulting services to museums, archives, and commercial collections on sub-zero cold storage for the very long-term preservation of still photographs and motion pictures.

Wilhelm has authored or co-authored more than 25 technical papers that were presented at conferences sponsored by the Society for Imaging Science and Technology (IS&T) and the Imaging Society of Japan (ISJ) in the United States, Europe, and Japan. With contributing author Carol Brower Wilhelm, he wrote "The Permanence and Care of Color Photographs: Traditional and Digital Color Prints, Color Negatives, Slides, and Motion Pictures," published in 1993. The complete 758-page book is available in PDF/A format at no cost from <www.wilhelm-research.com>. Since the book was posted on the WIR website in 2003, more than one-half million copies have been downloaded worldwide.

Wilhelm is the recipient of the Photoimaging Manufacturers and Distributors Association (PMDA) "2007 Lifetime Achievement Award" for his work on the evaluation of the permanence of traditional and digital color photographs. In 2011 he received an honorary Doctor of Science Degree from Grinnell College.

Harold W. "Hal" Fuson is the board chair of San Diego's Tony-winning Old Globe Theatre. He also serves as the custodian of an accumulation of family photos and other documentary artifacts that have found their way to his home office from relatives living and dead.

Hal concluded more than 40 years as a newspaperman after negotiating the 2009 sale of one of the nation's 25 largest dailies, The San Diego Union-Tribune. For more than two decades, Hal was chief legal advisor of the newspaper's owner, The Copley Press, Inc., and in 2007 he became its chief operating officer. Hal continues to serve on the Copley board as it unwinds its remaining assets. Previously, he was legal advisor to The Los Angeles Times news department, and had an 11-year career as a college journalism teacher.

His book, "Telling It All: A Legal Guide to the Exercise of Free Speech," was described by Publishers Weekly as an "admirable easy-to-read handbook on how to avoid the legal pitfalls that can accompany free expression." His work to protect First Amendment rights has been recognized nationally by the Media Law Resource Center and by state associations in California and Illinois. In 2006 the California Press Association named him California Newspaper Executive of the Year.

Hal is a trustee of his alma mater, Grinnell College and serves as a director of the First Amendment Coalition and CNPA Services, Inc., an affiliate of the California newspaper publishers association.