

Policy for Appraisal and Acquisition of Family Photos (Digital and Physical)

When my mom was young she had lost a lot of her family and childhood in an arson incident. Similarly, when I was little we lost a house in a fire. Many of our remaining family photos were lost. Right now, we have one big, plastic box of family memorabilia, and a few small photo albums. Despite knowing the fragility of physical photos and ephemera, we have yet to find time to scan, digitize and collect our remaining memories. Additionally, many of our recent photos are held on various social media platforms with no back-ups – going as far back as Myspace. This exercise will be a great step in formulating a plan to ensure my family's history is preserved for future generations.

When developing a personal digital archive, especially in the context of family photos that need to be scanned or pulled from social media, it's crucial to approach the process with structure and care. This policy sets out clear criteria for appraising and acquiring these materials, drawing from Ham's (1993) approach to selecting and appraising archives. The intention is to ensure that the collection is not just preserved, but organized in a way that reflects its true value—one that honors the memories contained within and keeps them accessible for future generations.

Statement of Purpose/Mission: The core purpose of this policy is to establish a clear framework for appraising and acquiring family photographs, both digital and physical, in a way that preserves familial memory, while ensuring long-term accessibility and relevance. This is about creating a personal archive that supports both current use and future generations' needs, protecting the integrity and value of the collection.

Scope and Focus: This policy applies to the collection of family photos, both physical (requiring scanning) and digital images stored on social media platforms (such as

Facebook, Instagram, and Myspace). It aims to preserve not just the major milestones—like weddings, birthdays, and cultural traditions—but also the everyday, casual moments that often reveal the true nature of our family life. While historical and emotional significance will be emphasized, my family believes in celebrating the mundane. So, this policy acknowledges the value of capturing the ordinary or the small, fleeting moments that add depth and authenticity to our family’s narrative over time.

Priorities and Limitations: In organizing this collection, the focus will be on maintaining a balanced archive that includes:

- Significant family events alongside candid, everyday moments that capture the rhythm of family life. This will provide a balanced and honest record.
- A broad representation of family members across multiple generations, ensuring that everyone’s presence is preserved.
- Photos of a quality suitable for long-term preservation, though the content and emotional significance will take precedence over technical perfection as this is a personal, family archive – not a professional one.

However, there are practical limitations, such as:

- Duplicate or near-identical photos will be limited, with the goal of keeping only the best representation of any given moment due to storage.
- While everyday moments will be celebrated, images that are entirely irrelevant, redundant, without clear narrative value, or unidentifiable by living family members may not be included.

Conditions of Retention: Photos will be retained if they:

- Provide insight—whether historical, emotional, or everyday—into our family’s life and relationships.

- Meet a basic standard of clarity and quality—especially after scanning—to ensure they can be preserved and accessed easily.
- Are saved in commonly accessible formats (i.e., JPEG, TIFF) to ensure future compatibility and preservation across devices.

Exclusions: Certain images will not be retained, including:

- Photos that are too blurry or damaged to be effectively saved.
- Images that are redundant or lack context, especially if they contribute nothing unique to the family’s story.

When are Exceptions Made? Exceptions to retention criteria may be made in cases where:

- The photo is the only known representation of a particular family member, event, or moment, even if its quality is below standards.
- A family member assigns special emotional significance to a photo that might otherwise fall outside the usual guidelines.

Cooperation with Other Individuals: Because family memories are shared, cooperation with other relatives is essential to fully understand the context and importance of certain photos. When sourcing images from social media, it will also be necessary to seek consent from the original uploader before including them in the archive. In seeking this consent, it’s also possible that family members might be able to send higher quality images as well.

Deaccessioning Policy: Photos may be removed from the archive if:

- A better-quality or more contextually significant version of the same image is found.
- They no longer fit within the scope of the archive, either because they are redundant or irrelevant to the family narrative.

- Privacy concerns arise, or a photo was mistakenly considered significant.

By combining both significant and everyday moments, this policy seeks to create a family archive that reflects the true nature of our lives. The goal is to celebrate not only the highlights but also the small, often overlooked moments that make up the real story of who we are, while ensuring that the collection remains organized, meaningful, and accessible for future generations.