

## Cleaning & Repair

Photographs are very fragile and can be easily scratched by dust and dirt.

Dust can be removed with a soft-bristled brush. Natural bristles work best.

Never repair tears with sticky tape. The tape will turn yellow and become increasingly difficult to remove safely over time.

It's best to reach out to a conservator for guidance on cleaning or repairing photographs if necessary.



## Emergencies

Even a minor water accident, such as a leaky pipe, can result in extensive damage.

Tend to wet items right away, before mold begins to grow. If you need time to act, wet photos can be safely frozen in a ziplock bag until you're ready.

Wet photos will stick together or to other surfaces if allowed to dry. They should be air dried individually, face up on paper towels.

If you have any questions, contact a conservator for guidance.



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# Preserving Old Photographs

Photographs can be damaged if they are not stored in the right conditions. This pamphlet provides guidelines on safely caring for your family photographs for generations to come.

For questions about preserving your family photographs, contact [conservationhelp@mnhs.org](mailto:conservationhelp@mnhs.org).



Scan this QR code with your smartphone camera to find more information on selecting storage supplies or go to:

[mnhs.org/conservationresources](https://mnhs.org/conservationresources)



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White Earth Reservation, approximately 1895. E97.1 p34

## Storage

Photographs can be safely stored flat inside of acid-free cardboard boxes or inside archival photo albums.

Ideally, each photograph should have its own sleeve to protect it and provide physical support. These can be made of either paper or plastic.

When purchasing storage supplies for your photographs, look for key terms such as acid-free and lignin-free for paper and cardboard. When selecting plastic sleeves or albums, make sure the manufacturer states what type of plastic it is.

All plastics used for photo storage should be polyester, polypropylene, or polyethylene, which are chemically stable. Avoid polyvinyl chloride (PVC) at all times.

Non-archival materials can release acidic vapors over time, which can cause problems such as yellowing and embrittlement of your photographs.

You can use a pH pen to identify whether paper-based storage materials are acid-free.



## Environment

Cool, dry conditions are best for preservation.

High humidity (over 70%) can cause photos to become moldy, while high heat and humidity can cause them to stick together or to their enclosures.

Fluctuating temperature and humidity can cause loose photographs to curl.

Storing photos in a sleeve, box or album can help protect them from non-ideal environmental conditions.

Damp or hot spaces in buildings should be avoided for photo storage, such as: near cold walls, windows, basements, bathrooms, attics, or over heat sources such as fireplaces, radiators, or heating vents.

If your photographs become moldy or stick together, contact a conservator for advice. Mold is a health hazard and should be taken seriously.



## Handling

The natural oils on our hands can mark photos. It's best to either wear gloves or to only handle photographs by the edges.

If you have the photo stored in a clear plastic sleeve, then you can handle the sleeve rather than the photo itself.

Some common ways to accidentally damage photographs at home include eating or drinking while handling items; and scratching or catching on dangling jewelry or large rings.

## Light

All photographs (especially color photographs) will fade when exposed to light. Light damage is irreversible.

Although all light is harmful, ultraviolet (UV) light is particularly damaging. UV can be found in light produced by the sun and by incandescent and fluorescent lights. The ideal light source is LED.

Keep photos away from sunlight when possible. For example, if they are on display in a house, put them somewhere sheltered from a window.

## Display

Consider displaying copies of photographs rather than originals.

Frames should be preservation quality. For example, the backing board and mat board should be acid-free rather than using cardboard or wood.

Avoid hanging framed photographs over radiators, fireplaces, in direct sunlight, or in kitchens and bathrooms. These are all damaging due to temperature, relative humidity, and light exposure.

Make sure the photo is not in direct contact with the glass or acrylic glazing in the frame, because humidity can cause the photograph to stick to the surface.

