Digitzing and
documenting
photos

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Introduction

- All societies have collections of photos and documents. These need to be digitized so that the items can be shared with people online.

- To do this, the items need to be scanned and cataloged so that it is easy to find and share them.

- ICBS started the scanning process back in 2013. To date, our inventory is over 18,000 photos and I am still scanning.

- I will share my workflow and what hardware and software I use to go from a physical picture to a digital file ready to share.

Hardware

- To scan items, you will need a computer and a scanner at a minimum.
  - Scanner should be a flat bed scanner and not one of the multi-function devices that include a printers and a fax machine.
  - Computer should have at least 8 gig memory. 16 gigs is better.
- You will also need various brushes and air bulbs to clean dust and hair off the scanning glass.
- Gloves are also recommended.
  - Either nitrile gloves (they are usually blue in color) or cotton gloves.
    - I prefer cotton gloves as you can feel things better in them.

Software

- There three kinds of software that I use:
  - Scanning software, cataloging software and photo editing software.
- Scanning software is what drives the scanner and allows you to save each digital scan.
- Cataloging software allows you to document information on each item and include a thumbnail picture. You can also generate a report cataloging what is in the collection.
- Photo editing software is used to clean up the scans once they are saved. Cropping, removing dust or bad spots from the scan or adjusting color will be needed on some scans.

My hardware

- I use a HP desktop computer that has 32 gigs RAM. When I purchased it, I wanted to make sure that it had multiple USB ports as I knew I would be attaching several external drives and various peripherals. This one has 6 USBs ports.
    - I also attached one USB hub that added 14 ports.
- The scanner I am currently running is an Epson Perfection V550 photo scanner. This has a high enough resolution that allows the photos to be used for publication.
- I also have 4 external hard drives that I use to store photos on.
    - This way I can store the ICBS scans on a separate drive from my personal photos.
    - I use an online backup service – BackBlaze.com – so I do not have to worry about having onsite backup drives.

Software – scanning software

- VueScan
    - VueScan replaces the software that comes with your scanner. It has a lot more features and it allows you to use older scanners that do not have a driver made for them anymore.
    - When new versions of Windows are rolled out, not all scanner drivers are kept current. With Windows 11, the driver for my Epson scanner was not updated nor kept. I would need to buy a new scanner if I had not used VueScan.
    - VueScan is good because it allows you to adjust resolution before you scan. You can preview scans before you save them.
    - Photo adjustments can also be done within VueScan, but I usually do not use them. I do them within Lightroom.
    - It can also revert negatives before you save the scan. I do not use this function as prefer to do it using Negative Lab Pro.

Software – cataloging

- I use Recollector software for cataloging all the photos that I scan in.

- It allows you to add fields to the database on the fly. There is no limit to the number of fields you have.

- You can have multiple collections.

- Reports are available.

- You can store one thumbnail picture for each record.
  - Using these, you can setup a simple website that allows you to share the documentation and a picture.

Software – Photo Editing

- I use the Adobe Creative Suite to edit my photos.
  - This includes Photoshop, Lightroom and Bridges.
    - Photoshop is used for any major editing like removing people.
    - Lightroom can do basic adjustments, cropping, spot removing and inverting negatives to positives with a add-on plug in.
    - Bridges is a photo file management program.
- You need editing software because even though VueScan can do some basic editing while scanning in pictures, it cannot do it all and you need to be able to clean up the scans.
- Lightroom has a learning curve to it, but once you are used to it, you will get quick with it.
- For negatives, I have found that Negative Lab Pro works the best. It is a plug-in for Lightroom. It allows you to have a lot of control over process negatives and you can process a lot at once.

Software – Photo Editing (continued)

- Nice thing about Lightroom is that you can purchase additional adjustments to use when processing photos.
  - I have bought some and find them useful.
  - There is even one that allows you to emulate film types.
- One thing with Lightroom is that you import each photo that you want to work on so that it is in your library. Then you can synch that folder to see all photos in it.
- You also export photos when you are done. There is no save function in Lightroom.

Scanning articles other than photos

- I have scanned articles other than photos:
  - Postcards
  - Newsletters
  - Correspondence
  - Tour books and guides
  - Meeting minutes
  - Drawings/art
  - Books
  - Membership lists

Verifying information on the photos

- Before I start discussing my workflow, I want to touch on the information written on the back of photos.

- It is important to record the information on the photos, but it is also important to update it if it is incorrect.

- I will make notes in the catalog entries on what the original site or source was, but then I also document what the correct information is.
  - This helps with searching and you still have a record of the original notations.

- I correct spellings without noting the misspelled words.

My workflow

- When I get a new collection or donation in, the first thing that I do is fill out a collection data sheet that records all the information on the collection. I started doing this because sometimes there is a long time from when I get the collection until I start scanning it in. I wanted a way to record information.

- Once I am ready to scan, I make sure the photos are ready.
  - This involve removing them from a photo album and putting them in order.
  - Record what page of the album each photo comes from.
  - If you have any issues removing a photo from a 'sticky' album, use floss of fishing line to work behind the photo to loosen it from the album.
  - Pay attention to what information you have on each photo and record that in the catalog.

- When these are done, I am ready to start scanning.

My workflow (continued)

- If I am scanning a photo, I update the catalog as I am scanning.

- Slides are the same way, but I scan 4 at a time so I have four updates to the catalog per scan.

- Negatives are more complicated since I scan up to 12 at a time.
    - I update them usually en mass using a form that records what information I have.

- I save all scans as tiff files with 800 dpi resolution.
    - They are scanned into one folder and then I process them from here.

- I scan a bunch of photos before I start processing them. I find this is easier than trying to clean them up one at a time.

My workflow

- Once the photos are processed, I save both a tiff and a high-resolution jpg file.
  - I also save a low-resolution jpg to be used as a thumbnail in the Recollector catalog.

Thoughts

- The scanning and cataloging process is very time consuming. I have been doing it for 9 years and I still have thousands of photos to go through. This is something to keep in mind as we all work toward doing this. It is NOT a quick process.

- One thing we are struggling with is how to get the archive information out on the web.
  - I have published the Recollector report with thumbnails on our website. While it is searchable, it is clunky. Plus, if the person finds a photo they want, they need to email us to get a copy of the photo.
  - I am exploring using the Recollector function to make a website, but so far not very happy with it.

- The storage of the physical photos after they are scanned is also something that I have not found a solution to. Currently they are just stored away in boxes.

Thoughts

- One last thought. We are all in this together and want a common goal – to preserve the photos that we have for future generations. We need to work together on solutions to scan photos, save them and present them to the interested party so that they can also use them. It is not a quick task and there are so many photos out there that need to be saved and preserved. We need to work together to accomplish this.