

Digitization Options for Family Photos



Including Slides, Film Negatives,
and Home Movies

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Introduction

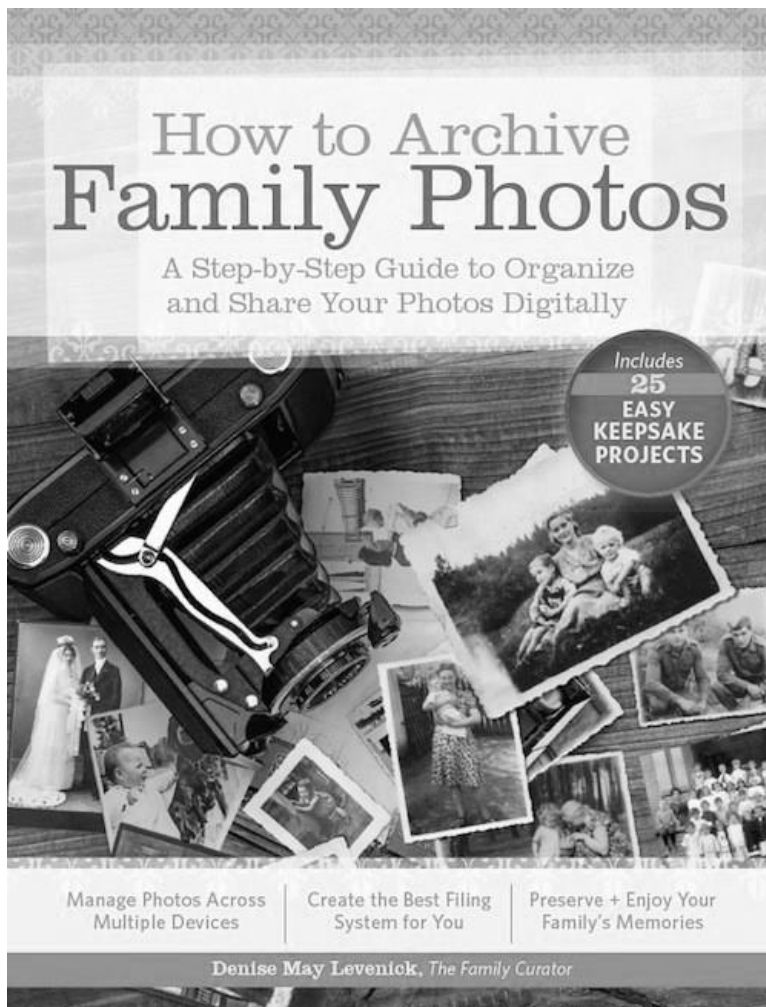
Are you sitting on a pile of old family photographs and wondering what is the best way to preserve them? What about boxes of family vacation slides, photo negatives or home movies? As more and more Baby Boomers take on the task of organizing family history materials, we're uncertain about the best way to preserve these memories. And an over-abundance of technology doesn't help! This short guide, *Digitization Options for Family Photos: Including Slides, Film Negatives, and Home Movies*, offers various ways to map out a plan and process for family media preservation.

There are various approaches you can take to scanning and digitizing these materials: send them out to a service or scan them yourself. Many of us don't feel comfortable sending our precious photos out so we take the "do it yourself" route. However, the DIY approach requires making the right choices when it comes to purchasing equipment and actually scanning items so that the resulting digital files are useful for genealogy research.

The process becomes more complicated once you discover that you need to digitize items such as film negatives, slides, oversized photos, home movie film and more. Do you purchase one scanner to handle all of these items? Or must you spend money for specialized scanners that you'll only use a few times?

Here are some tips regarding digitizing items, with some sound advice on developing a comprehensive scanning program for items in your family archives.

Tip: *How to Archive Family Photos*



Even for a tech guy like me, it isn't easy to stay on top of the latest strategies for digitizing various types of items. I can spend hours searching the Internet for articles that may have tips and tricks or I can simply go to an authoritative source such as the new book [*How to Archive Family Photos: A Step-by-Step Guide to Organize and Share Your Photos Digitally*](#) by Denise Levenick which is available in [paperback](#) as well as [e-book](#) format.

The author provides a basic outline of digitization strategy and also reviews terminology such as TIFF vs. JPG file formats and 300 dpi vs. 600 dpi. The most valuable chapters give a step-by-step approach to digitizing and archiving specific types of media including photos, slides and more.

Tip: Create a Digitization Strategy Plan

Most readers know I am big on plans. I believe that my ancestors had a motto: “Make no small plans.” I carry this thinking through to everything I do in terms of my genealogy. I figure that I should take time to do something the right way the first time, rather than redo it years later.

As genealogists many of us make research plans, so why not create a **Digitization Strategy Plan**. Here are the basic elements and you can create this on paper, in a digital file, on a spreadsheet or even in Evernote to track your progress:

- **Take Inventory.** Create a list, either simple or detailed, of items needing to be scanned. Include all photos, slides, negatives, movies etc. Also list photo sizes as well as media formats; remember that negatives can be 110 and other sizes! The same goes for slides and you don't want to purchase the wrong type of slide scanner, right?
- **Evaluate Equipment.** For those taking the DIY approach, research available technology in terms of types of scanners, storage media, etc. Collect information and determine which device is best for your project.
- **Set Standards.** Research the base minimum standards for each media type and list them. Use these to set standards and preferences for equipment such as a flatbed scanner.
- **Create a Tracking Mechanism.** Once you've done your inventory, it should be simple to track digitization projects from start to finish, whether you scan them yourself or send them out to a service. Also tracks costs of equipment, cost of outsourcing projects and even time spent scanning items.
- **Data Management and Backup.** Once items are scanned, you'll need to focus on file naming standards, keeping items organized and, of course, backing up your data!

Tip: DIY or Send It Out? How to Decide on a Scanning Approach

Everyone has a different approach not just to scanning photos and documents, but also opinions on how to best use their time for these projects.

If you feel overwhelmed by the scanning technology and spend too much time just choosing the right scanner, sending your items out to be scanned might be a better choice. However, if you want more control over how items are scanned and you want to save money, the “do it yourself” route is likely your best bet.

Take time to determine the overall cost of a digitization project including money spent on technology, time spent just researching technology, and time spent actually scanning and organizing digital files.

Tip: Selecting a Scanning Service

If you do opt for outsourcing your scanning, either for every project or a specialized project involving slides or film, make sure you thoroughly research the service provider you select.

Here are some of the questions you should be asking or research on the company’s website:

- **What equipment is being used for scanning?** The company should be using professional quality scanners.
- **What resolution is used for scanning items?** A quality company will list their minimum resolution for scanning. Beware of companies that aren’t up front about their scanning resolution. They may be using high-speed scanners that focus on rapid scanning of large amounts of photos, saving the company time and money.
- **Is there an additional charge for large photos?** Some companies will have a standard price per photo up to a specific size, such as 5x7”.
- **Do you offer free shipping?** Most companies charge you for the return of the photos unless you have an order totaling \$50 or \$100 or more.
- **What happens if my photos are lost in the mail?** Make sure you read the Terms of Service for the company and purchase insurance if available.
- **Do you offer standard features such as color correction?** Some companies will “nickel and dime” you for services that are standard such color correction.

- **Do you offer a free sample scan?** Many companies will allow you to send one or two photos for a free sample scan. You'll receive the original photos returned in the mail and the digital files sent via e-mail or accessed via a download service. You can then judge the quality of the scan, the scan resolution and the file format used.
- **What about customer service?** How accessible is the company when you have a question or want to track the status of a scan job? Is the customer service based in the United States or handled overseas?
- **Where is the digitization work performed?** Is it done in-house by the company or is it further outsourced? Many companies send materials overseas for scanning, so make sure you understand where your items will be scanned.

TIP: Money Saving Resources for Preserving Family Photos, Slides and Home Movies

So what is it about taking on a HUGE PROJECT like scanning family photos and slides, that makes us constantly procrastinate and put it off? Here are few reasons that I've come up with:

- **The project is so overwhelming that you don't know where to start.** You are not alone! Remember that the best way to "eat an elephant" is "one bite at a time." Start small, start with what you can do in one hour.
- **You're not sure you are "doing it right."** Again, with all the new technology available, how do you know if you are using the right tools? And should you do it yourself or send it out for scanning? And if you take the DIY approach, which is the best method, the best file format for saving?
- **You're afraid of what you'll find.** This is a tough one that we all face. Yes, there will be tears and memories involved. But that's why you want these images available for years to come, right? You can manage your photo scanning project in such a way that you stay "on track" and not get distracted by BSOs ("bright and shiny objects").

Whether you decide on the "do-it-yourself" route or select a scanning service, click [HERE](#) for an updated list of various resources including scanners for photos, negatives, slides and more!

Tip: Develop a Multi-Device Approach to Scanning

In over 20 years of using various types of scanning technology, I've come to the conclusion that there is not one device or one approach that will do everything. Especially so many different types of media to be scanned, you simply can't rely on just a flatbed scanner or a scanning app.

For me, I need four different scanners to cover different situations;

- A **flatbed scanner** in my home office for photos and documents up to 8.5 x 11 inches in size.
- A **portable scanner**, such as the [Flip-Pal mobile scanner](#), for research trips and scanning photos when visiting relatives.
- One or more **scanning apps**, such as [CamScanner](#), for times when a repository won't allow the use of my Flip-Pal OR using my iPhone is just more convenient.
- A **multi-media scanner**, such as the [Jumbl](#), to scan negatives, slides, film and more.

Tip: Why the Flip-Pal Mobile Scanner is a Valuable Tool



I've been a fan of the [Flip-Pal mobile scanner](#) for years now. I own one and travel with it all the time, from genealogy conferences to family visits. I never know when I'll need to scan something!

Some would argue that the Smart Phone and scanning apps are soon to render items like the Flip-Pal obsolete, but I don't agree. Here's why:

- Using a hand held device to take a photo of a photo or document can be tricky due to overhead lighting. Many times I get a glare on glossy images.
- As I get older, my hands are not as steady as they used to be. I've had scans from a Smart Phone that are blurry.
- For larger items, I usually have to scan in sections anyway, so why not just use my Flip-Pal and then stitch the sections together with the free stitching software?
- When I am at home watching television or listening to music, I can sit on my sofa and scan 100 photos an hour using my Flip-Pal. I even have a wireless SD card which lets me scan the image then sends it to my desktop computer automatically – no need to take the SD card out and transfer photos manually!
- And finally, the Flip-Pal is easy to use. Recently at a family reunion, I managed to convince some of my younger cousins to sit and scan photos while the adults talked and swapped family history stories!

Tip: Scanning Apps Can Save the Day!



Yes, I prefer my Flip-Pal for mobile scanning, but there are times when I need a backup scanner for road trips. Not every librarian or archivist can be convinced as to the merits of the Flip-Pal; often, they are concerned about possible damage to the item being scanned. Or I have even had situations where I'm encouraged to use the photo copiers instead, since the library makes money from those copiers.

For times when a portable scanner just won't do, I make sure I have a scanning app on my Smart Phone. For me, the choice is **CamScanner**.

- **CamScanner**: A scanning app for smart phones is [CamScanner](#) offering basic scanning capabilities. A big plus is the ability to scan a document of typed text and then convert the text via OCR (optical character reading) to a text file.

Tip: Is a Multi-Media Scanner Worth the Price?

There is a growing awareness in the genealogy community as to the immediate need to scan and digitize items such as negatives, slides, and film. Each week, genealogists discover that these items don't last forever and that the materials actually degrade over time. Colors fade, coatings disintegrate and even entire images disappear.

Outsourcing various types of media can be expensive since most companies use specialized scanners for each type of item. In addition, these items cannot be "rapid scanned" and require quite a deal of manual handling. And one down side of sending items out to be scanned: you're not sure what images are on the media and whether you really want to keep them. So you pay for unwanted scans . . .

Taking the DIY approach does offer more control over the process but digitizing these types of media on your own can be even more challenging than scanning photos and documents. Should you purchase a different scanner for each type of media? Are the scanning standards for film different than those used for photos?

Lately, more and more "multi-purpose" media scanners are appearing in the marketplace. One exceptional item is the [Jumbl All-In-1 Film & Slide Scanner](#) available at Amazon.

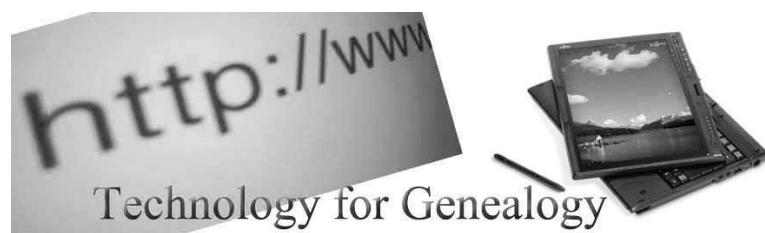


The Jumbl allows you to scan 33mm slides and negatives, 110 and 126 film as well as Super 8 slides and negatives. Scan resolution is amazing with a base of 14 megapixels and with the Jumbl software you can even scan up to 22 megapixels. In addition,

everything you need to scan is in this device meaning there is no need to connect it to a computer. You can view images once they are scanned and then save scans to a SD card (not included).

Right now the Jumbl is on sale for [50% off](#) at Amazon – just \$89.99 USD and free shipping for Amazon Prime members. Click [here](#) for more information.

Tip: Spend Time Learning How Your Flatbed Scanner Works



I spend quite a bit of time reading posts over at the [Technology for Genealogy group on Facebook](#) and many of them involve scanning and scanners. I've come to the conclusion that most genealogists have some type of flatbed scanner, whether it is a stand-alone scanner or part of an all-in-one device such as a printer/scanner combination.

Most users don't spend time reviewing the settings for their scanner or scanning software. They simply accept the factory defaults and start scanning. Then after several weeks or months they realize that they've been scanning hundreds of photos at a low resolution and/or using a non-standard photo format.

Once you have a **Digitization Strategy Plan** (see above), note that standards you've developed – such as 300dpi and TIFF file format – and then set those standards on your scanner under Preferences. This way you won't have to check the settings each time you embark on a scanning project!

Tip: Recycling Old Scanning Equipment

One of the frequent questions I receive via email is this: “What do I do with a specialized piece of scanning equipment once I’m done using it?” For example, if you purchased a slide scanner and you’ve completed your digitization project with over 1,000 slides, what should you do with that scanner for which you’ve paid good money? It is unlikely that you’ll come into possession of more slides, right?

One option is to donate the equipment to your local genealogical society or public library. Many organizations are willing to set up “do it yourself” scanning stations for patrons. And you could get a tax deduction!

Electronics Trade-In BETA

Find calculators, cell phones, digital cameras, MP3 players, and more to trade in. Beta ([What's this?](#))

		
1. Select Items	2. Send Items FREE	3. Get a Gift Card
Search for items to trade in. Your trade-in items must meet the product eligibility criteria .	Print a shipping label and packing slip, package your items, and ship them for FREE.	An Amazon.com Gift Card will be deposited into your account upon receipt of items.

Another option: trade in the equipment for Amazon.com credit. Click [here](#) to learn how you can mail in your equipment (Amazon even pays the postage!), and get a credit to use on any Amazon.com purchase including genealogy books. Visit <https://www.genealogybargains.com/amazon-tradein> to learn more on how you can trade in almost any piece of technology – even if you didn’t purchase it at Amazon!

Digitizing Photos and Documents Is Easier Than Ever

There have been so many advances in technology used to scan and digitize family photos and documents that there are no more excuses to put off those important projects. Whether you take your items to a scanning service or embark on a DIY project, it all comes down to making smart choices. If you do decide to scan items yourself, make sure you have the proper equipment and use the best standards to ensure quality scans and the need for “do-overs.”

Resources

Articles and Books

How to Archive Family Photos

<http://www.thefamilycurator.com/archivephotos/>

Apps and Websites

CamScanner

<http://www.camscanner.com/>

Larsen Digital

<https://www.genealogybargains.com/larsendigital>

Organize Your Family History

<http://organizeyourfamilyhistory.com>

Technology for Genealogy Facebook Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/techgen/>

The Organized Genealogist Facebook Group

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/organizedgenealogist/>

Equipment and Gadgets

Amazon Trade-In Program: Electronics

<https://www.genealogybargains.com/amazon-tradein>

Flip Pal mobile scanner

<https://www.genealogybargains.com/flip-pal>

Jumbl High-Resolution Photo Media Scanner

<https://www.genealogybargains.com/amazon-jumbl>

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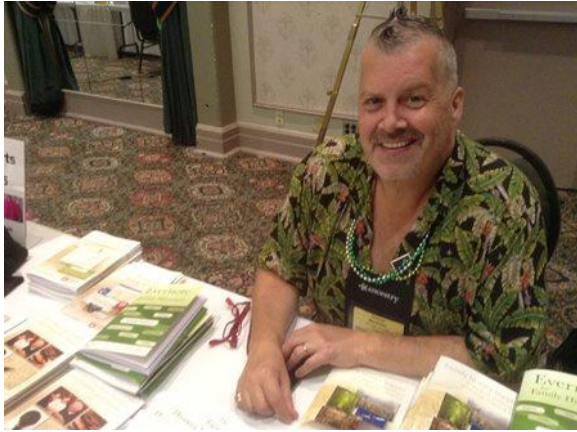
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About The Author



What happens when a “tech guy” with a love for history gets laid off during The Great Recession of 2008? You get Thomas MacEntee, a genealogy professional based in the United States who is also a blogger, educator, author, social media connector, online community builder and more.

Thomas was laid off after a 25-year career in the information technology field, so he started his own genealogy-related business called [High Definition Genealogy](#). Currently Thomas shares many of his articles and videos for free at [Abundant Genealogy](#) and also runs the popular [Genealogy Bargains](#) and [DNA Bargains](#) websites!

Thomas describes himself as a lifelong learner with a background in a multitude of topics who has finally figured out what he does best: teach, inspire, instigate, and serve as a curator and go-to-guy for concept nurturing and inspiration. Thomas is a big believer in success, and that we all succeed when we help each other find success.

Check out Thomas’ author page at <http://geneaguides.com>