

Picture Organization

1. Take or acquire pictures. You can't organize what you don't have. It is usually impossible to go back and get a picture later. Make a reminder list of photos to take. Talk to other family members about family photos. Make sure that the pictures don't fall into the hands of someone who doesn't care about them. Don't assume someone else "will take care of them".
2. Gather all pictures and negatives in a central location. Try to find a place where you can leave this project out, but make sure it is out of the reach of small children.
3. Divide the pictures into manageable chunks. Divide into several main chunks and then work on each of these batches one at a time. Below are suggestions for possible categories to use in dividing the pictures.

Side of the family	House lived in	Individual family unit
Decade Year	Generation ie: Grandparents, parents, children	Period of life ie.: Baby, preschool, school years, college, marriage, family, career, retirement years
Themes: ie: Christmas or vacations	Individual person	

4. Continue sub dividing batches until they are in small groups.
5. Label all photographs with the proper pen or pencil. **NEVER LABEL PHOTOS WITH A BALLPOINT PEN OR FELT TIP MARKER.** Some detective work may be needed at this point. Do your best to label every picture, even if it is only a name or an approximate year. For today's resin coated photos, I prefer the **Photo-graphic permanent marker by Illustrator or the Film/Print Marking Pen (lightimpressionsdirect.com)**. Graphite pencils (Schwan All-Stabilo) are also available for labeling photos with a paper back. These pens and pencils are inexpensive, do not cut corners by using something else. Another option is to put the photographs in sleeves and label the sleeves. I would use this method for all one of a kind, irreplaceable pictures for which you have no negative.
6. **Set up a system for storing your pictures.** Store your photos in a safe environment. Use acid-free products. Store the photos away from heat, light and moisture. Ideally the photos will go into some kind of album at this point so that you can enjoy them. There are many styles of albums and pages available on the market. There are also many types of storage files and boxes. Note: Magnetic albums, even those that say they are acid free, are not a good archival choice.
7. **Organize negatives by date, label and store them in a safe environment.** The sleeves you got your negatives back from the processor in are possibly NOT acid free. Find out or move them to negative pages. Store negatives in a fireproof safe or another location if possible. For best fire protection, negatives should be "packed" tightly with no air spaces.
8. **Keep CURRENT with the photos you take from this point on!!**

Organizing Digital Photo Files

FIRST THE SOAPBOX: The most archival way of preserving your digital photos is to have them printed on good quality photo paper by a company using high quality processes. Photos printed on any kind of a “jet” printer are NOT archival. Some home printers use much better quality ink and processes than others. Research this if you are going to print your photos at home. FYI: It is far cheaper to have them printed by someone else.

The steps for organizing digital files are basically the same as for photo prints...just translated to the computer.

1. **Take or acquire pictures.**
2. **Gather=** Create a folder on your desktop or in my documents to “gather” files into. I call mine the **SORT folder**. I do not use “My Pictures” for photos that need to be sorted, organized and labeled.
3. **Divide= Create folders in the location where you want your photo files to be permanently organized.** It is important with jpeg images not to keep shuffling them around as they will degrade. This is not true of other file formats. An external hard drive is my choice for a final destination for these files. For digital photos, I use the year taken as my category for the main file folder. If you are scanning older photos, you may want to pick different categories for your main folders such as the ones suggested for printed photos.
4. **Continue Sub-dividing= Create sub-folders** inside your main folder to further separate your photos into logical groups.
5. **Label all photos=** If you do not plan to print your photos, it is especially important to label each individual digital file by renaming the file or adding to the existing file name. I recommend you **be consistent** in how you label your photo files. Decide what format you want to use for labeling the files BEFORE you download the next batch of photos from your camera.
6. **Set up a system for storing your pictures=** Be consistent in how you follow steps 3-5 above. It is estimated that up to 75% of digital photos files are lost or corrupted over time. Printing your best photos insures that they will not be lost. Store them in as archival of conditions as possible.
7. **Organize negatives=** Back-up, **Back-up, BACK-UP!** Your digital photo files. Consider backing them up to DVD's or other digital storage media and storing them in a fire-proof safe or at another location. Make sure that you keep your backed-up files current with current technology so that you can retrieve them if necessary.
8. **Keep Current= KEEP CURRENT.** Because we take so many more photos with digital cameras than we did with film cameras, this becomes the most important point I could make. Set up your organization system and then follow through and organize your photos each and every time you download from your camera.
9. Final note: There is **no sin in throwing away photos that are bad**, that you have no idea who or what is in them or that have no meaning to you—whether they are from film or a digital camera. One caution however—I would not throw away old photos that may have genealogical value to someone else. Even unlabeled old photos can hold a wealth of clues for the genealogist.