



At-Home History

Digitizing Family Photos

Technology has changed how we organize our photographs. These days our smartphones have such amazing image quality that we use them instead of film to capture all of our favorite memories. But just a decade or so ago most of us were still snapping photos on cameras and sending off film to be processed onto 5x7 prints. Unfortunately, many family photos are stuck in boxes in our grandparents' attics or in photo albums on shelves in our parents' houses. In many cases, those photos only have one copy and if something happened to them they'd be lost forever!

Below is a simple step-by-step process to get you started on digitizing your family photos so you can share them online!

Step 1 – Find your images

This is especially important if you want to gather more than just the photos your mom and dad have in photo books in the attic. Call your grandparents, email your aunts, text your cousins! For your tech-savvy family members you can set up Dropbox, Apple Photo Shared Albums, or even a Google doc to collect already digitized images. For the hard-copy images you'll need to go a step further. Put out the call to your family members to mail you (old fashioned snail-mail style!) old family photos and/or albums.

This is a great time to start your trip down memory lane, but don't get too distracted! Looking through old family albums can be fun! Take your time and gather all the images you can find and once you have them, you can move on to Step 2!

Step 2 – Curate your images

Organize before you begin. Now that you've gathered all your family photos it is tempting to jump right in and start scanning! Slow down! Take some time to sort out your photos first. If you start digitizing before organizing, you'll end up with a disorganized

mess. Gather all your photographs on a large, flat surface like a dining room table or home office desk. Even the floor will work if you have no other options! Make sure it's a space you don't mind leaving messy for a while.

- **Organize photos by events and/or people/families.** Weddings, vacations, birthday parties, family reunions, etc. If a picture doesn't have a specific event it can be associated with, you can group those with a specific person (Aunt Edith) or family (The Propst family)
- **Separate out the duplicates.** You don't want to scan the same image twice!
- **Sort each pile by date.** It's okay to guess! Sometimes photos don't have the date stamped on them, but if you can determine a year or even a decade, you can organize them that way.

Step 3 – Start Scanning

They

Technology has improved immensely in the past decade alone! Here are some ideas to get your started on scanning your family photos.

Smartphone Scanning:

Not the best option, but probably one of the easiest! Find a well-lit spot in your home and get to photographing your photos! Natural light is the best option, but be sure to avoid direct sunlight. You can use your smartphone, or if you have a digital camera you can use that too!

An App A Day:

Below are some options for apps you can download to your smartphone and use to help scan your family photos!

- [Pic Scanner](#)
- [Google Photo Scan](#)
- [Photomyne](#)
- [iPhone Native Notes App](#)

The Ol' Fashioned Way:

The old fashioned scanner still reigns supreme when it comes to digitizing photos. Phones and DSLR cameras work in a pinch, but if you can afford a good quality scanner that will handle up to 1200 DPI (dots per inch), it'll provide the highest quality images and prints.

- **Pro tip:** Start by increasing the resolution in your scanner settings. Most likely your scanner won't be set to 1200 DPI automatically. If

your scanner software gives you the option, save scanned photos in an uncompressed file format, such as TIFF, for the highest image quality.

Step 4 – Label your photos and share your work!

If you're very lucky, your photos will have information included with them. Names and dates written on the back, or if they're in an album, they may have the information included on album sleeves. Sometimes though, you have to dig a little harder to find the information you're looking for.

Sharing digital photos with your family is a great way to get more information. Once your images are scanned you can share them via Dropbox, on sites such as Flickr or Shutterfly, or through Google Drive. Use whatever option is best for you. Gather information on the photos from family members and then use that to better label your photos. Now all these family photos that used to be stuck in dusty boxes in Grandma's attic or in albums sitting on shelves are online and available for your entire family to enjoy!