**Conserving Your Family’s Photographs Source Sheet No. 41**

The City Archives carries out conservation treatments on records in its collections. This includes its various photographic collections which contain more than 15,000 images some of which date as far back as the mid nineteenth century. Some of the basic techniques and processes that the Archives’ conservators use to ensure preservation of photographic images can be carried out at home by anyone who is interested in ensuring the survival of their own family’s collections of old photographs. Here we provide some tips on how to care for and conserve your collections of family photographs.

**Caring for Old Photographs**

Your family photographs can often be considered an important part of your family’s treasures and history. Learning how to properly care for them can help extend their life to a long and happy one. Here are a few things that you can do to create a photograph album that will stand the test of time.

**Suitable Environment**

* Find a place that is cool and dry to store your photographs. Avoid your damp cellar or dusty attic. The surface layer of a photograph is very sensitive to its surroundings.

**Storage Enclosures**

* No dust, no light and a chemically stable environment – many photograph albums and picture frames are made from harmful materials.
* Contact with dust, light and acidic materials can cause damage to your collection.
* Substandard storage enclosures will cause your photographs to fade and become brittle over time.
* Separate your photographs from your negatives – negatives can emit harmful toxins that may damage your photographic prints.

**Reproduction as a Preservation Tool**

* Make a copy to handle and display – although there is nothing like the real thing, a digitized copy or a photographic reproduction can be just as effective.
* The technology available today can provide a very handsome copy to display while the original is safely stored.

**Care and Handling**

* Always wash your hands – the salts found in human perspiration can damage the fragile surface layer of a photograph.
* When you are handling old or especially delicate photographs, it is best to wear soft white cotton gloves.

**Recommendations and Solutions**

* Purchase only acid free storage materials for your photographic collection - these are commonly available in most photographic or archival product supply stores.
* A chest of drawers in your home can be the perfect place for that special photograph or paper-based document. First, place the item in an acid free enclosure and then simply tuck it away among your favourite socks or jumpers.
* Here, in the bottom of the drawer, your treasure will remain flat, stable and easy for you to access whenever you wish.
* Avoid writing on your photographs. Inks are often unstable and therefore can be harmful to your collection.
* If you do choose to label your photographs, use only a soft lead pencil (6B) to write lightly on the back

**Further Information**

**City Archives:** Topham Mall, off Currie and Waymouth Streets, Adelaide 5000

**Counter / telephone enquiries:** 9**.**00 am to 5.00 pm Monday to Friday

**Search Room open for public research:**10.00 am to 4.00 pm Tuesday to Thursday

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