

Making a Digital Family Album

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Digital Albums

This album is not going to replace your research binders
You don't have to include all your reference notations

Goals of a Digital Album

- To engage others in being interested in family history
- To tell more of a story than just dry reporting of facts & dates
- To capture the personality of the people – something you can never get from documents
- Make the story more relatable & engaging by adding photos, maps & memorabilia; much easier to “read” than just straight text
- You have the ability to bring things together from different places to tell a story. This is where an album becomes magical!

Advantages of Digital

- Reproducibility
- You have the ability to include A LOT of things you may not possess – relatives may have them at their house
- You can google all kinds of images & include them as well (e.g., images of immigration ships & ports, military boot camp, newspapers, posters, towns/cities, candy, etc.)
- Depending on the program you use, you can email your project to others for their review, or a draft book can be printed & mailed (I use Artisan by Forever.com)
- Affordability – Look for the coupon code “unlimited free pages” & you only pay for 20 pages, but you get up to 100; for smaller albums a 50% off coupon code may be a better price
- Traditional albums can be made into digital

Remember you can always include a QR code on a page that would take a reader to another document / photo / website / video / etc.

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What to Photograph/ Include in Your Heritage Album

- Watches
- Old money
- Cancelled checks
- War ribbons
- Gloves
- Newspaper clippings & headlines
- Maps
- House floor plans
- Signatures
- Glasses
- Wills
- Deeds/ land records
- China silverware
- Everyday dishes
- Thimble
- Census data (not original docs)
- Hats
- Jewelry
- Diplomas
- Graduation gifts
- Anniversary gifts/plates
- Wedding invitation
- Wedding rings
- Recipes
- Needlework
- Quilts
- Old postcards
- Matchboxes
- Graveyards/ markers
- Toys/ dolls
- Lace/ doilies
- Purses
- War documents
- Birth certificates
- Death certificates & obituaries
- Marriage certificates
- Baby clothes/ blankets
- Baby mug/ plate
- Shoes
- Antique tools
- Furniture
- Swatches of hair
- Clocks
- War ration books/ coupons
- Dog tags
- Old or foreign coins
- Train station pictures
- Churches
- Receipts
- Spice rack/ cabinet
- Candy dish & favorite candy
- Hospital bills, receipts
- Cars
- Business cards
- Letters & cards
- Driver's license
- Club/membership cards
- Xmas ornaments
- School building pictures
- Aprons
- Office buildings
- Handwritten notes of any kind

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Photo Tips

Photos/Documents

- Take photos outdoors under a covered area on a cloudy day – you want bright natural light without causing glare on the photos
- DO NOT USE FLASH
- If scanning, don't scan photos more than once as the light from the scan can fade the original if repeated
- Old documents that have yellowed can be turned black & white and then lighten the highlights to make the paper look much whiter and then turn up the contrast to make the writing darker
- For faded photos, play with darkening the shadows & mid-tones to get better definition of faces
- For dark photos, lighten the shadows & slightly increase the contrast
- Turn old faded photos to black & white and then play with the contrast – it shows details better
- Old photos are actually different colors (brown, grey, patina, black) – make all the photos on one page the same (black & white or patina) for a more cohesive look
- Include the actual size measurements of photos or other things where appropriate in a note (e.g., marriage certificate is 14" x 20", or actual photo is 1 ½" x 1 ¾")
- Don't crop antique objects out of the background (e.g. old phones, washing machine, etc.)

Memorabilia

- Use high contrast background (normally black or white)
- Use flat fabric as background (NEVER a rug! – yep I learned the hard way)
- For jewelry use micro setting (close-up) on your camera
- NEVER use a colored background when photographing glassware – color will reflect in the glass
- Lay quilts out flat on the floor & photograph from the top of a chair or ladder
- Also photograph individual quilt blocks to show detailed design
- Photograph close details of embroidered designs/edges on clothing
- Photograph crocheted lace/edging (e.g., pillowcase edge) against a dark background & you can use it as a border on a page
- For photographing something clear/glass where you can't get rid of the background, put an old-fashioned dish towel/fabric/apron/tablecloth behind it
- Rings can be photographed sitting on a stuffed glove
- Engraving can be captured if jewelry is sitting on a white glove or cloth – the white reflects light up onto the engraving

Ideas for Heritage Book Themes:

- One Person's Story
- Married Couple
- One Surname, several generations
- All ancestors of one person/generation (multiple surnames)
- Recipe Book

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Starting Your Digital Photo Book

- Choose a size you want to create – 8x8, 8-1/2"x11", 12x12, 10x10; you can always change your mind later to a different size, so maybe start bigger than you think
- Create a project with lots of pages (40 – 80)
- Put labels on pages to set-up the basic order you think you want – this can be people's names, "family tree", years, decades, "school years", whatever works for you
- *Note: If you have created a Timeline for a person or family, it can be very useful here*
- Leave some blank pages in between these labeled pages; most likely, your info is NOT already in chronological order (understatement!). By starting off with lots of room it is easier to add things in between other dates/events/people that you already have on pages
- Start adding photos and stories to specific pages
- As you begin to finalize things, you can easily "copy & paste" photos & stories from one page to another – thus tightening-up the material and ultimately reducing the number of pages
- Consider making the very first page an introduction/explanation of what the book is about / who created the book / thanks to other contributing people / etc.
- Next, possibly include some general information why people left their homeland
- I opened my book with a family tree from my mother going backwards 12 generations – then I ended the book with my mother going forward 3 generations
- Books should contain a copyright section at the beginning or end, for example:

Copyright 2021 by __ (name) __

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Time Saving Tips

- Don't spend a lot of time early in your project working with making great backgrounds & perfect spacing of photos on the pages – before you're done you'll end up moving some photos to other pages and you'll add/subtract/move pages around
- Take pictures of your photos (& documents if necessary) – you can take your camera to relatives' houses where you can't always take a scanner
- When adding photos to your project, only add about 25 at a time – get those put on appropriate pages – and then go back to add more. You don't want to waste time scrolling through photos looking for the one you want to put on a page
- Old yellowy-colored photos generally look best on a blue background; red & green papers make the pictures look worse
- Don't put the same/similar color in the background as those that are prominent in your photos (e.g. a green forest) – the photos will sort of blend in & disappear. It's better to find something small in the photo & make the background match that color
- Don't number your pages until near the end of your project