

Personal Archiving HANDBOOK

2024



BUNCOMBE COUNTY
PUBLIC LIBRARIES



BUNCOMBE COUNTY
SPECIAL
COLLECTIONS

Introduction

**"OF ALL OUR
NATIONAL
ASSETS,
ARCHIVES ARE
THE MOST
PRECIOUS;
THEY ARE THE
GIFT OF ONE
GENERATION TO
ANOTHER"**

**-ARTHUR G.
DOUGHTY**

Our understanding of the past is based on archives, the records that are left over as evidence of human activity. Photographs, letters, diaries, drawings, and other creations shape what we know.

The people who gather those records together, who decide what is worthy of protection, have often been governments, institutions, and "Very Important People" with the means to do so. That means that our view of the past is sometimes skewed towards those perspectives.

But history also lives in homes, among families and individuals. Stories and items are passed down generation to generation, filling in gaps in the historical record and allowing stories to endure through time. Over time, they shape our communal and personal memories, identities, and sense of meaning.

Whether you are preserving a family archive, your personal legacy, or an organization's history, we thank you for taking this step!

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Backpack Inventory

This backpack contains everything you need to start protecting your historic treasures.



Digitization supplies:

- Epson Perfection V39 II for scanning photos + documents up to 8.5 x 11.7 in.
- USB flash drive for temporary file storage



In folder: This manual; Epson Perfection V39 II manual & Quick Start Guide



Front pocket:

Index cards, pencils, nitrile gloves



Storage supplies:

- Photo/document sleeves (various sizes)
- Archival folders (legal size)
- 1 acid-free clamshell preservation box (10.25 x 15.25 inches)

These supplies are meant to get you started on your preservation journey.

Please feel free to use what is included in this backpack, and refer to page 6 for information on what to look for when you need to purchase more.

Getting Started

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- **What kinds of materials am I dealing with?** (For example, photographs, documents, clothing, digital copies of these.)
- **What will I do with the materials I collect?** (For example, sharing with friends and family; preserving for future generations.)
- **What comes next, long term?** (For example, will you donate the collection to an archival repository, or pass it on to descendants or other family members?)

Donating collections

Archives at public libraries, universities, museums, and other organizations are interested not only in the “official” record, but also in “peoples’ history”—the behind-the-scenes view of how historic events and periods are lived and documented

Skip to page 22 to learn more about donating collections (or digital copies of collections) to archives that will hold them in the public trust for years to come.



Selection

SELECTING ITEMS TO PRESERVE

Rather than trying to save everything forever, it is best to **prioritize which material is the most important to organize, describe, and preserve**. This will ensure that your most important items (physical or digital) can be cared for properly.

Remember: When you decide to preserve physical items, you are committing to a certain period of time that you'll be maintaining them, dedicating space in your home, maybe dedicating money and effort when you move.

Digital items (including scans) also carry costs, such as paying for storage hardware, cloud storage subscriptions, and the labor of regularly backing up and migrating files in case of hardware failure every few years.

What types of things are important to you?

- How unique is it?
- How meaningful is it?
- How much would it cost to replace?
- How much time would it take to replace?
- Who else has copies?
- Which copy is the best one to keep?
- How long should it be kept?

These are questions only you can answer. For things you consider important, it is worth taking the time to care for them.

Caring for Archives

ENVIRONMENT

Stable environmental conditions are important for all types of items! This means somewhere that you can control the **temperature, humidity, and light levels**, and where you can **avoid mold, dust, and water**. An interior room of your house is best, where the climate won't fluctuate. Avoid basements and attics, if you can.

HANDLING & PREPARING FOR STORAGE



All types of materials should be handled with care.

Nitrile gloves are recommended for handling photographs, film, or metal objects.

Materials that are easily torn or brittle (like paper) can require a sensitivity of handling that is difficult to get with gloves on. **Clean, dry hands are preferred in most cases.** (No lotion!)

If you can, **remove things like paper clips, rubber bands, staples, tape** and other adhesives (like Post-It notes) before rehousing.

Newspaper is highly acidic and breaks down fast. As it breaks down, it will stain and damage other items. **Make photocopies of newspaper clippings and discard the originals** if you can, or store newspaper clippings separately from other items, so that they do not touch anything else.

Caring for Archives

STORAGE

All materials will benefit from being in acid-free boxes. Acid-free sleeves, folders, and tissue provide extra levels of protection.

This backpack includes acid-free, archival-quality supplies for you to get started. When purchasing your own supplies, look for the terms **“acid-free,” “inert,”** and **“passed PAT (Photographic Activity Test)”** for photograph storage. Reputable archival suppliers include:

- Gaylord Archival
- Hollinger Metal Edge
- Talas

Commercially available plastic boxes and bins may work well for storing holiday decorations, but they are **not** ideal for long-term preservation. They often contain additives that can damage materials over time, and their sealed microclimate can speed up deterioration.

Safe plastics for enclosures (like the **polyester** sleeves we have provided) are chemically stable and free of harmful additives. **Uncoated polypropylene** and **polyethylene** are also acceptable, but avoid PVC/vinyl or cellulose triacetate enclosures.

And never laminate your photos or documents! Lamination is irreversible. It will accelerate chemical reactions, causing items inside the sealed plastic to deteriorate faster.

Caring for Photos

PRESERVING PHOTOGRAPHS

Here are some tips from Heather South, Lead Archivist at the Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC:

DO:

- Keep in climate-controlled environment.
- Store in acid-free folders of sleeves and acid-free boxes.
- Keep away from sunlight and other UV sources.
- Remove paper clips, rubber bands, staples, and wrappings before placing in acid-free housing.
- Label folders and boxes in pencil only.
- Remove photos from letters or envelopes.
- Place badly damaged photos in a separate folder and seek professional assistance from a conservator.
- Remove photos from “magnetic” albums or adhesive paged scrapbooks if you can. Glue will deteriorate your photos!
- Handle with care. Make sure your hands are clean & you only touch the edges of the photograph.

DO NOT:

- Write notes on the photographs. Instead, make a copy & use that copy for notes.
- Use Post-Its or other adhesives like tape.
- It leaves residue behind.
- Alter the size of the photo by cutting or folding to fit into a folder. Various sizes
- are available to accommodate your image!
- Laminate your photos. Lamination is irreversible!

Got negatives?

The plastic sleeves they come in from the photo studio might not be inert!

Remove and store in acid-free paper or polypropylene sleeves.

Caring for Paper

PRESERVING PAPER

Here are some tips from Heather South, Lead Archivist at the Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC:

DO:

- Keep in climate-controlled environment.
- Store in acid-free folders or sleeves and acid-free boxes.
- Keep away from sunlight and other UV sources.
- Remove paper clips, rubber bands, staples, and wrappings before placing in acid-free housing.
- Label folders and boxes in pencil. (You can't erase stray ink!)
- Gently unfold documents when possible (without causing damage to folds). If paper is inflexible or brittle, don't unfold--seek help from a professional conservator instead.
- Photocopy newspaper articles onto acid-free paper for long-term storage. Discard originals or store them separately.
- Place badly damaged items in a separate folder and seek professional assistance from a conservator. The problems of one item can spread to others if housed together.

DO NOT:

- Write notes on historic documents. Instead, make a copy & use that copy for writing notes.
- Use Post-Its or other adhesives like tape. It leaves residue behind.
- Keep newspaper articles next to historical documents; it will stain and damage your documents.
- Laminate your records. Lamination is irreversible!

Caring for Textiles

PRESERVING TEXTILES (QUILTS, CLOTHING, ETC.)

Here are some tips from Heather South, Lead Archivist at the Western Regional Archives, Asheville, NC:

DO:

- Handle with care! Presume that the textile is unique, fragile, and irreplaceable. Larger doesn't mean stronger, it is often just more cumbersome, so handle with care.
- Wash hands before touching textiles. Natural oils, lotions, and hand creams can cause damage.
- Keep in climate-controlled environment.
- Store in acid-free folders of sleeves and acid-free boxes.
- Keep away from sunlight and other UV sources.
- Remove any straight pins or safety pins before storing. With garments, use tissue paper around metal fasteners to prevent rust stains on the surrounding fabric.
- Gently unfold fabric when possible (without causing damage to folds). If paper is inflexible or brittle, don't unfold, but seek help from a professional conservator. When possible, store flat or rolled to avoid creasing. If folding, use loose folds & change often.
- Check your textiles regularly. Look for infestations, mold, and change folds every six months.

DO NOT:

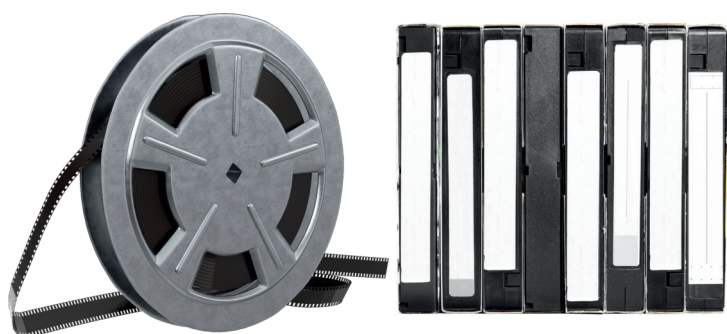
- Wash or bathe textiles without investigating first. Antique or fragile textiles do not react the same way as modern textiles do. Fiber processing, dyes, and finishes are different so can react poorly to modern cleaning agents and techniques. Seek professional conservator help for washing.

Caring for Archives

AUDIOVISUAL AND DIGITAL MATERIALS

You may also encounter things like film reels, records, magnetic tape, and other types of audiovisual materials in your collections.

It is important to digitize these materials before the physical media degrades to the point that the information can no longer be copied, or the equipment needed to play them becomes harder to find. VHS tapes, for instance, have a life expectancy of 10-30 years.



As with other types of materials, the life span of AV and digital media can be extended if they are handled carefully and kept in a cool, dry, acid-free environment away from sunlight and UV light.

You probably have digital storage devices holding anything from photos and documents to audiovisual content--for instance, floppy disks, flash drives, or hard drives. Digital hardware breaks down over time, and digital file formats may not be accessible (for instance, if the software required to open the file is no longer supported or accessible to you).

You might be able to access certain types of audiovisual or digital content with the help of library staff. There are also other professionals that can help you with audiovisual digitization or digital data recovery. Be aware that these services can get pricey.

Caring for Archives

LABELING

Regardless of the type of item, take time to **write down the names, places, dates, and other information** that will help you and others understand why this material is important. Don't trust that you will remember everything: over time even the sharpest minds forget details!

Instead of writing on original photos or documents, consider making a photocopy, writing notes on the copy, and keeping it with the original. You can also use the index cards provided in this backpack. Labeling the folders and boxes in which items are stored will make it easier to find things in the future.

Use a pencil! Many inks are acidic and bleed through paper over time. A slightly dull pencil is better than a very sharp one, so that you don't leave an irreversible indentation.

Remember, adhesives can harm items, so don't use Post-It notes or tape to create your labels.

MAKING COPIES

Photocopies are great for writing notes and labels.

For display, consider creating and displaying **good quality copies, or "surrogates,"** so that the original can be protected and kept away from harmful UV light.

Highly acidic materials, like newspaper clippings, should generally be photocopied and discarded so that they don't damage other items.

Digitization

INTRODUCTION

Like physical copies, digital copies help protect originals by serving as a “surrogate” for the item. While the original is safely stored in its layers of protection, the digital surrogate can be easily accessed, shared, and used for making more copies to display. Sharing digital copies with family members can also help with identifying and labeling details!

99% of the time, you will keep the original after scanning or copying. However, you may choose to discard items that are in an advanced stage of decay and unlikely to last much longer (like fading fax pages), dangerous to your health (like moldy paper), or potentially harmful to other items if stored with them (like brittle newspaper clippings).

EPSON PERFECTION V39 II SCANNER

We have provided you with a portable flatbed scanner to borrow. Of course, you can also use your own, or a scanner at the library.

You will need to download some software to your computer in order to use the Epson V39 II scanner. You can find the required software and additional instructions by visiting

<https://epson.com/Support> and searching for “Epson Perfection V39 II”

Once you have followed the instructions to download the software, plug the **Epson Perfection V39 II flatbed scanner** into your computer via USB. Open **Epson Scan** software.

Digitization

EPSON PERFECTION V 39 II SCANNER SETTINGS

A full manual is included in this backpack.

Here are some basic settings that we recommend and use at BCSC:

- Main Settings tab
 - Mode: Photo Mode
 - Image Type: Color
 - Resolution: 300 dpi or 600 dpi depending on size of original
- Advanced Settings tab
 - Everything at 0/off (image should be scanned as true-to-life as possible; adjustments can be made later on)
- Bottom of settings screen:
 - Image format: TIF (for photographs or mixed materials, like scrapbook pages) or PDF (for documents)

Size and image resolution

The file formats and resolution you choose depends on your goals for your archive and your storage capacity. Here are the settings we usually use for archives housed at the library:

Documents: PDF format, 300dpi

Photos (8x10 or larger): TIF format, 300 dpi

Photos (smaller than 8x10): TIF format, 600 dpi

PDF and TIF are lossless formats, meaning they won't lose information from compression when saving and sharing. However, JPEG or PNG are smaller file sizes, thus easier to store and share.

Digitization

SAMPLE SETTINGS

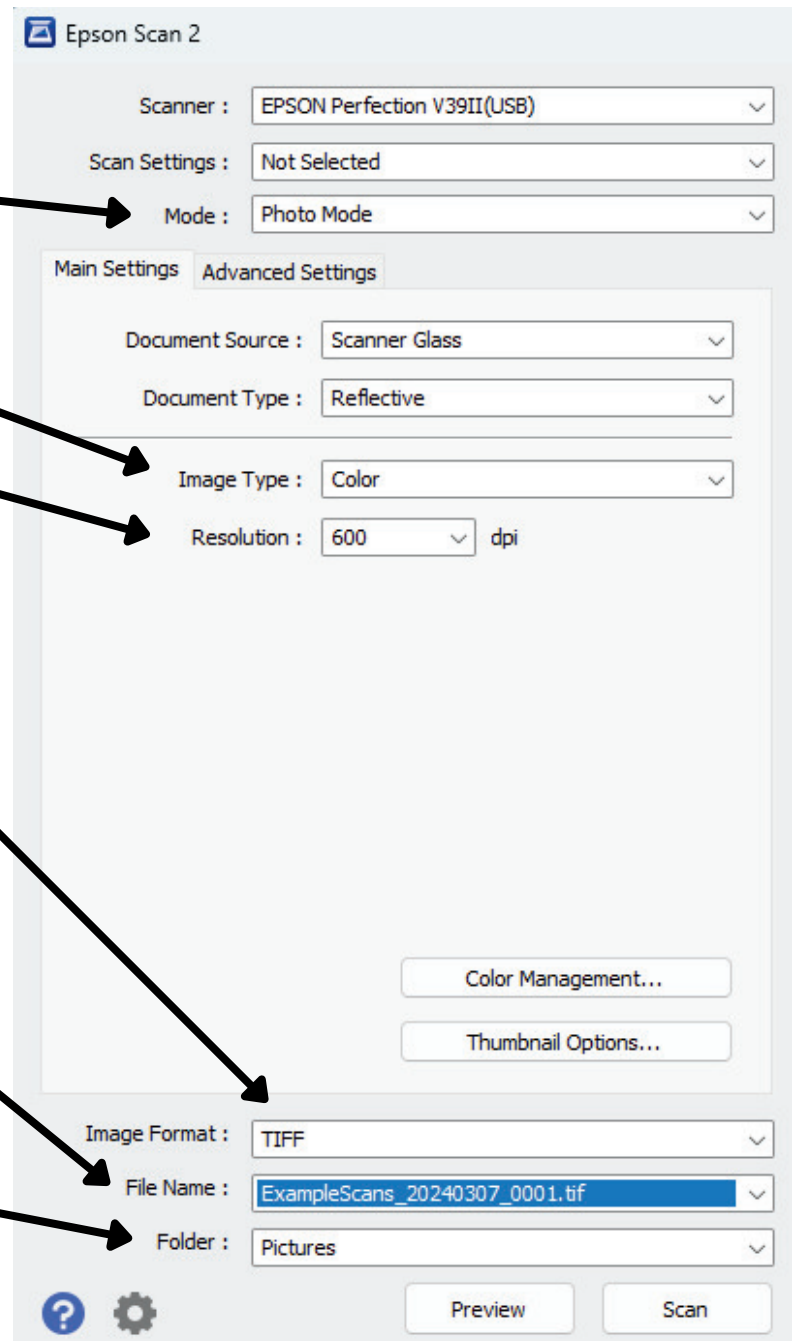
In this example, we are scanning small **photographs**. (The originals are about 3.5 x 3.5 inches).

We will scan them in **color** at **600 dpi** so that we capture all the detail.

We are saving them in the **TIF file format** since it is a high-quality preservation format.

We have set the **file name** to “ExampleScans_” followed by the scan date and a number counter,

and we are saving them to the “Pictures” **folder** on our computer.



(More on file naming on the next page!)

Digitization

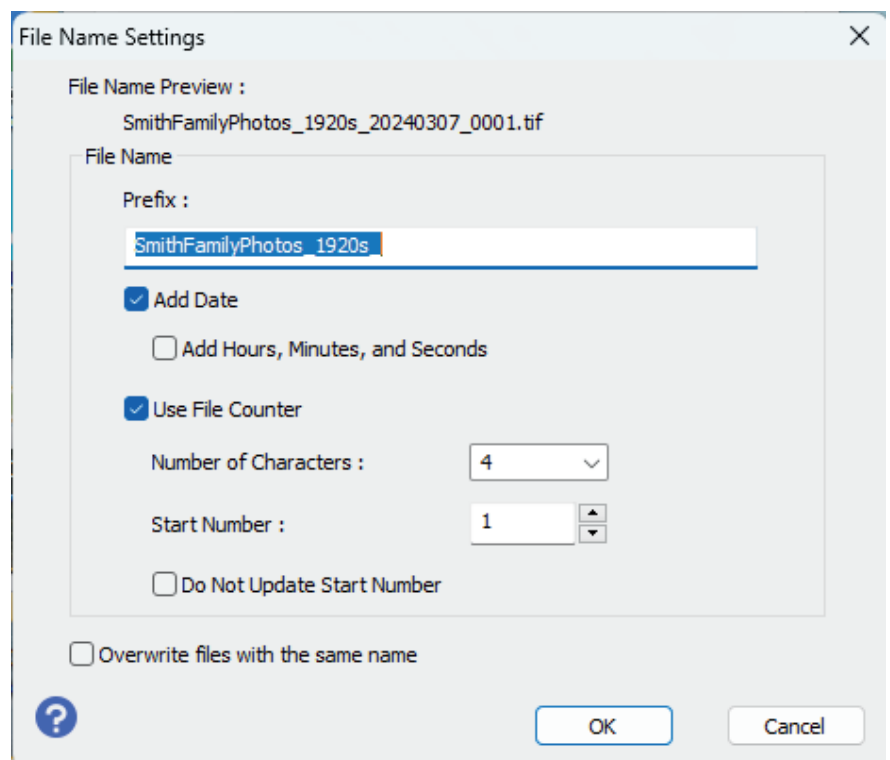
FILE NAMING

You can set rules for how file names are assigned to your scans. Again, this will depend on your goals, and you might also choose to change the file names later on.

Here is an example of settings you may choose:

- Prefix: Something descriptive that applies to all items scanned in the batch, e.g. **SmithFamilyPhotos_** or **Scrapbook1972_** If you have an idea of the dates of the original photos, this is also useful to include.
- ☒ Add Date [Optional: This will put the date you are scanning into your file name. It can be helpful to separate your scan batches by date.]
- ☐ Add Hours, Minutes, Seconds
- ☒ Use File Counter
 - Number of Characters: 4 [e.g., 0001, 0002, 0003, etc.]



This will be applied to all the scans in the batch. Afterwards, you can also add more descriptive file names or other metadata.



Digitization

FILE NAMING

This will result in file names that look like this after scanning:

 ExampleScans_20240307_0001		3/7/2024 11:11 AM	TIF File	11,911 KB
 ExampleScans_20240307_0002		3/7/2024 11:12 AM	TIF File	12,082 KB
 ExampleScans_20240307_0003		3/7/2024 11:22 AM	TIF File	11,911 KB
 ExampleScans_20240307_0004		3/7/2024 11:22 AM	TIF File	12,082 KB

You can also designate a folder (or create a new folder) for your digital files to be saved to. Creating a special folder for your scans can really help with organization, especially if your default “Pictures” or “Documents” folders are full of other files!

File naming tips

Ideally, your file names should be:

- Meaningful & descriptive, even outside of the context of folder organization.
 - For instance, instead of grandma.tif, consider something like SmithCatherine_1940s.tif.
- Consistent
- Short & to the point

Avoid special characters & spaces. Use hyphens or underscores, or case (capital vs. lowercase letters) instead.

Digitization

PLACING ITEMS ON THE SCANNER

Make sure your hands are clean and dry. If you are scanning photographic material or negatives, you may also wish to use nitrile gloves to avoid fingerprints. For all other types of materials, clean, bare hands are preferred so that you retain tactile sensitivity.

Gently lift the scanner's lid and make sure the scanning surface is clean. You can use an anti-static cloth & air puffer to wipe off any residual dust particles.

Place your photographs or documents face down on the scanning bed, and close the lid. Make sure photo surfaces are also clean and free of dust. Be careful not to scratch the scanning bed when placing things on it.

Scanning tips

Placing photos and documents a few millimeters away from the edge of the scanning bed will help prevent the edges from being cropped.

If you are scanning small photographs or documents, you can place several items on the scanning bed and scan them all at once. Make sure the edges do not overlap!

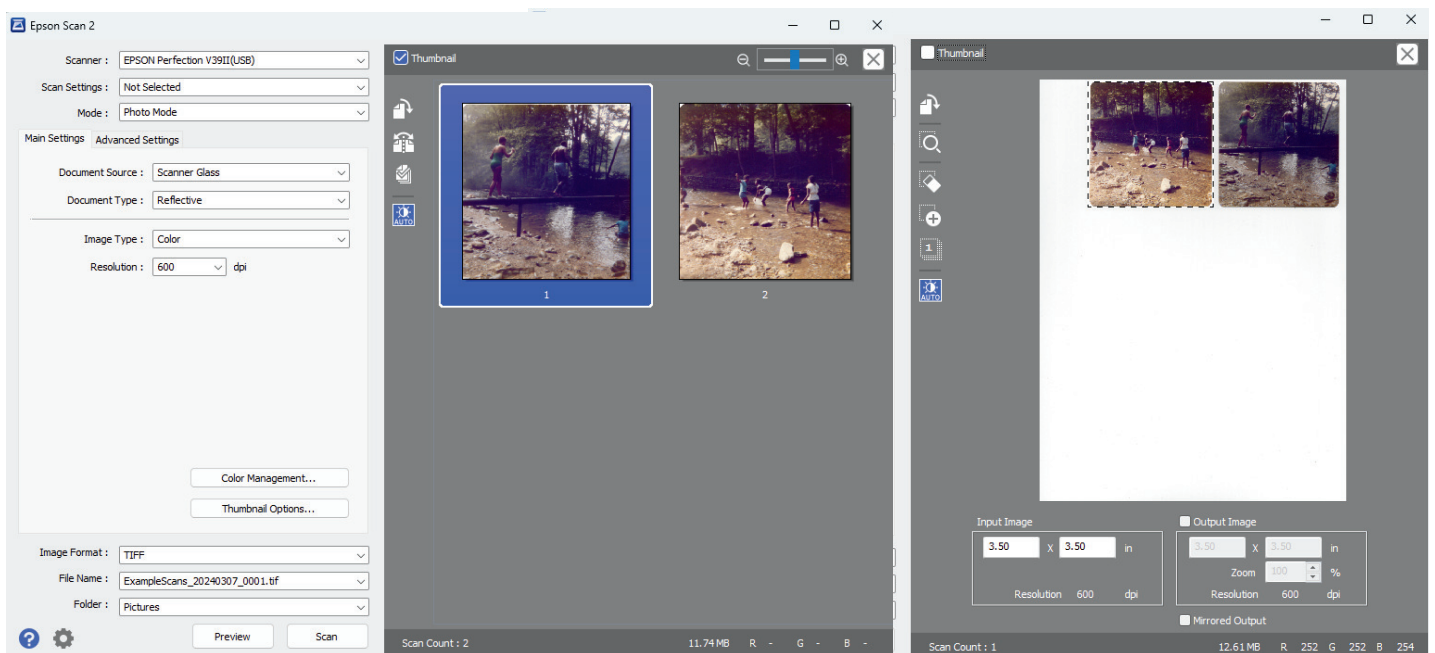
Digitization

PREVIEWING AND SCANNING ITEMS

Now, click on “Preview” to see your scanned image (or images, if scanning multiples at once) in the preview screen at the left side. In the below example, I have 2 photos on the scan bed.

If you have “Thumbnail” checked, the scanner software will identify and crop your images into separate files for you.

If you uncheck the “Thumbnail” option you will see the entire scanning bed, and you will need to click and drag your cursor to select the image you want to scan.



When you are happy with the preview image(s), click “Scan”!

Digitization

DIGITAL PRESERVATION

Scanning is only the first step in digitization! To make sure that your files are preserved long-term, these steps are helpful:

Organize your photos

- Give individual files descriptive file names.
- Tag photos with names of people and descriptive subjects.
- Write a brief description of the folder/directory structure on your computer and which files are in which folders.

Make copies and store them in different places

- Make at least two copies of your selected photos—more copies are better. **LOCKSS: Lots Of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe!**
- One copy can stay on your computer or laptop. Put other copies on separate media such as DVDs, CDs, portable hard drives, thumb drives or Internet storage.
- Store copies in different locations that are as physically far apart as practical. If disaster strikes one location, your files in the other place should be safe.
- Place a copy of the file inventory with your important papers in a secure location.
- Check files once a year to make sure you can read them.
- Create new copies every five years or when necessary to avoid data loss.
- If you have a will or estate plan, include your digital legacy. Who will need access to your files and online accounts?

Digitization

SHARING

Last but not least: you probably scanned these items because you want to be able to share them, right?

Online cloud storage or social media platforms are great for sharing photos. Just don't use them as your only storage solution! Many web-based services compress files to make storage and sharing faster and easier. This means, for instance, that the copies of your files on Facebook are likely going to be lower quality than the originals that you have saved and backed up for long-term preservation.

You should also be aware that some commercial digital storage vendors or social media platforms may delete your content if your account is inactive over time.

(For instance, see support.google.com/photos/answer/6220791 regarding storage options & file deletion policies in Google Photos.)

You can also share high-quality copies by copying files to separate media such as DVDs, CDs, portable hard drives, thumb drives or Internet storage that saves files at their original quality without compression.

Donating Collections

WHY DONATE?

Now that your collections are well-organized and protected, what is the long-term plan?

Donating to the public library is one option to ensure that the information you've collected will be accessible to the public for generations to come, helping us all better understand our shared history.

Buncombe County Special Collections accepts donations at the discretion of our Collections Manager.

Donations must align with our collection policies and include a completed deed of gift form. (If we aren't the right place for your collection, we can also help you identify another repository where your materials can best serve researchers.)

We gladly accept digital donations of high-quality scans, if you would like for the originals to remain with you, your family members, or your organization.

Digitized historic materials will be made available to the public through the Buncombe County Special Collections website at **specialcollections.buncombecounty.org** (Search our Collections)

Potential donors should contact
packnc@buncombecounty.org

Acknowledgments



The direct inspiration for this project is "Archivist in a Backpack," a program of the Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Special Collections Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Backpack contents have been purchased based on the supplies list published by UNC-CH. Pages 6 through 9 are used with permission of Heather South, Lead Archivist, Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina

Finally, this would not be possible without the enthusiasm of community members like you. Thank you so much again for joining us!

Image credits:

- Cover: Photo by Lydia See (Engaging Collections), 2021, for the Carolina Record Shop at Buncombe County Special Collections.
- Page 3: Patrons at tables in the Sondley Reference Library, December 1950. A864-8, Buncombe County Special Collections.
- Page 18: Screenshots depict photographs of unidentified family members, Virginia Bosman Photograph Album, circa early 1990s. MS357, Buncombe County Special Collections.
- Page 22: Archives storage at Buncombe County Special Collections, March 2024.