



NNC RESTORE

Before It Fades

A short guide to saving old photographs



Public-domain archive photograph, restored in one pass.

Free. No email required.

What actually destroys a photograph

Prints do not fade at random. Almost all the damage that reaches us comes from the same handful of causes, and every one of them is slow enough to stop.

- Light. Daylight and fluorescent light bleach dyes. A photo on a sunny wall loses colour in years, not decades.
- Heat. Attics swing between freezing and roasting. Heat speeds up every chemical reaction in the emulsion.
- Damp. Humidity feeds mould and makes prints stick to each other and to glass.
- Tape and glue. Tape yellows, then bonds to the surface. Removing it later lifts the image with it.
- PVC sleeves and sticky-page albums. Soft plastic gives off acids as it ages; the old magnetic albums are the worst offenders.
- Rubber bands and paper clips. They cut, stain and rust.
- Fingers. Skin oils etch fingerprints into the emulsion permanently.

None of this is dramatic on any given day. That is exactly why it wins.

Five things never to do to an old print

- Do not tape a tear. Tape is the most common irreversible damage we see. A torn print is easy to repair digitally; a taped one is not.
- Do not iron a curled photo. Heat lifts the emulsion off the paper.
- Do not wash or wet it. Water swells the layers and they do not go back.
- Do not trim it to fit a frame. The border often carries dates, studio marks and processing codes that identify the photograph.
- Do not write on the back with a ballpoint. The pressure embosses through to the front. Use a soft pencil, lightly, in the margin.

The general rule: leave the object alone and work on a digital copy instead. A photograph you have copied is a photograph you can experiment with safely.

How to store what you have

You do not need archival equipment to make a real difference. You need to get the box out of the attic.

- Cool, dark and dry beats everything else. An interior cupboard on a living floor is better than any loft or basement.
- Conditions commonly recommended for photographs are roughly 15-20 C and 30-50% relative humidity, kept steady. Steady matters more than exact.
- Use acid-free paper envelopes or polyester sleeves. Avoid PVC. If a sleeve smells of plastic, it is the wrong sleeve.
- Store flat, not on edge. Weight on a corner becomes a crease.
- Keep them off the floor. Floods start low.
- Separate the ones that matter most and copy those first. If you only digitise ten photographs in your life, make them the right ten.

Photographing a print with a phone

This is the page most people came for. A phone is enough. A scanner is better, but a phone photo taken properly beats a scan you never make.

- Lay the print flat on a table, near a window, in daylight.
- Turn the flash off. Flash creates a hotspot and kills the texture.
- Shoot from directly above, phone parallel to the print. Leaning in from an angle is what produces skewed, trapezoid photographs.
- Fill the frame with the print but leave a small border. That border is what lets software find the edges and straighten it.
- Avoid shooting through glass. If the photo is framed, take it out when you safely can. If you cannot, shoot at a slight angle to move the reflection, then straighten afterwards.
- Take two or three. Storage is free; the afternoon light is not.

What a good copy looks like

A print that had gone brown edge to edge, and the same photograph after one restoration pass. Nothing here was redrawn: the damage was repaired and the colour returned.



BEFORE



AFTER

The face, the age, the expression and the glasses are unchanged. That is the line a restoration must not cross, and the one worth checking in any result you are given, ours included.

Scanning, if you have a scanner

- 300 dpi is enough to reprint a photograph at its original size. 600 dpi gives you room to crop and to print larger.
- Scanning far above 600 dpi rarely adds detail to a normal print. It mostly adds file size.
- Scan in colour even for black-and-white prints. The colour channels hold tone information that helps later.
- Save the original scan and never edit it. Work on copies.
- Clean the glass, not the photograph.

One more thing worth knowing: negatives and slides usually hold far more detail than the prints made from them. If a box of negatives survived, that box is the valuable one.

What restoration can and cannot do

It can repair cracks, tears, stains, missing corners and fading, and it can return colour to a black-and-white print.

It must not change the person. Not the face, not the age, not the expression, not the glasses, not who is in the picture. A result that makes someone prettier or younger is not a restoration, it is a different photograph.

Colour added to a black-and-white photograph is always an interpretation. The shapes are real; the exact shade of a dress from 1938 is an educated guess. Anyone who tells you otherwise is selling something.

If you use NNC Restore and a face has come back wrong, we re-run it free and refund it if it still fails. That guarantee exists because this is the one thing worth being strict about.

The whole guide, on one page

- ☐ Get the box out of the attic or basement today.
 - ☐ Cool, dark, dry, flat, off the floor.
 - ☐ Acid-free envelopes. No PVC, no sticky albums, no rubber bands.
 - ☐ Never tape, iron, wet or trim a print.
 - ☐ Photograph flat, in daylight, from directly above, flash off.
 - ☐ Or scan at 300-600 dpi, in colour, and keep the original file.
 - ☐ Digitise the ten that matter first.
 - ☐ Keep one copy somewhere that is not your house.
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When you are ready to repair one

restore.nncvision.com - one photo is \$5, the result comes back in about two minutes, and nothing you upload is ever used to train a model.

This guide is free and you are welcome to pass it on.