

## Photograph Collection Survey: Care and Handling of Photographs

### Workspace

- No food or drinks in work areas
  - Covered drinks may be kept on floor or in designated areas.
  - The basement breakroom features a microwave, refrigerator and eating spaces.
- Clean up after yourself
  - Workspace are used by different staff and volunteers on different days
  - At the end of your shift, return your project to assigned storage area.
  - Use a can of air to clean scanner beds.
  - Dust spaces as needed.
  - Return supplies to designated areas.
  - Never store collection materials on the floor
- Use headphones if you listen to music, podcasts, audiobooks, etc.
- The DI Lab and stacks are usually cold, please dress accordingly.
  - There is a coat rack behind the door if you would like to leave a sweater, hoodie, or jacket.

### Handling Photos

- Always wear gloves!
  - Nitrile or cotton gloves
  - Nitrile works best for glass negatives, damaged or very small prints
  - Let Karen know when supplies are running low
- Use both hands when handling photographs
- Never pick up or hold photographs by corners
- Avoid touching the surface of the photograph or negative
- If a photograph must be moved a short distance or turned over during examination, use an auxiliary support (such as 2- or 4-ply rag board, or folder stock) to protect the item from damage caused by unnecessary touching, bending, and flexing.
- Work over an uncluttered, clean, and padded surface.
- Always use a cart when transporting photographs.
  - Never hand carry photographs or boxes containing photographs from the stacks to your workspace.
  - Use the elevator when transporting photographs and artifacts.
- Light damage is cumulative and permanent. Try to limit the amount of time a photograph is exposed to light.

## Labeling Photographs

- Always use a pencil
  - Either No. 2 or mechanical
  - Use woodless graphite pencils for photos with slick or coated backs
  - Do not use pens or markers even on envelopes or boxes
- Write along the edge on the back of the photograph
  - Object ID numbers are typically placed in the upper left corner
  - If there is not space, write the number along an alternative edge
  - Do not write over information written on the back of photos
- When renumber or updating a collection, cross out old object number with a single line so that it can still be read if necessary.
  - Write corrected RG number under or next to old ID number
- Label copies and identify original when possible.
  - For example: “Copy print of glass plate negative RGxxxx.PHX-x”
- Write Object ID number on the upper left corner of paper enclosures
  - Do not write on envelop while the photograph is inside it

## Choosing Photograph Enclosures

- Choose the size closest to what you are storing
  - Too small of an enclosure could cause damage when the photo is removed
  - Too large or loose of an enclosure will allow the photo to slide around and damage corners.
- Use plastic enclosures for:
  - Damaged, weak or brittle photographs
  - Thin prints
  - Cyanotypes
  - Often handled or looked at images
- Use paper enclosures
  - All negatives
  - Poorly processed prints
- Broken glass plate negatives and items with flaking emulsions should be placed in custom sink mats.
- Custom phase boxes should be made for albums and cased photographs
- Oversized prints (prints over 11” x 14”) should be moved to flat storage in the first floor West room.
  - Place in archival file folder of appropriate size
  - Label file folder
  - Update Location Register

## Cleaning Photographs

- Check with Photograph Curator or Assistant Curator first
- Use a soft brush to gently remove dust particles
  - Use long, gentle sweeping motions
  - Go slow. You want the brush to pick-up and trap dust particles, not drag them along the surface of the emulsion.
- For glass plate negatives, refer to “Cleaning Guidelines for Dry Plate Glass Plate Negatives”

## Refining Collections:

- **Accessioning:** the process of creating a permanent record of an object or collection from a source at one time which the Museum has custody, right or title, and assigning a unique control number to said object or collection.
  - The process of how we make an object or collection History Nebraska’s
- **Deaccessioning:** the formal process of removing an object or collection from a Museum’s permanent collection.
  - Important to maintaining a healthy, sustainable collection
    - Artifacts that tell stories
    - Best use of our resources
    - Deaccessioning allows us to make the best use of our resources
    - Focusing staff time, storage, and research on the artifacts most relevant to Nebraska history.
  - Collection Policy sets Deaccessioning criteria and procedure
  - The Photograph Curator makes the decisions about deaccessioning.
    - Research history, title, and relevance
    - Taken to Collection Committee for discussion and approval
    - Approved by the History Nebraska Board of Trustees
  - Ask these questions if you think the Photograph Curator should consider deaccessioning an item or collection
    - Does it advance the mission of History Nebraska?
    - Do we have similar examples that tell a better story?
    - What condition is it in?
    - Lacks physical integrity
    - Deteriorating photos, water damaged artifacts, etc.
    - Can we properly care for the artifacts?
    - Can we legally have the item?
    - NEGPRA, unethical or illegal provenance
    - Does it exist elsewhere?
    - Publications, photos, manuscripts, audiovisual

- **Why is this artifact in our collection?**
- What happens to deaccessioned items?
  - New life in the Use Collection
  - Touchable artifacts for students, visitors, or researchers
  - Transferred to a more appropriate museum, library, archives or public educational institutions
  - Exchanged with individuals, organizations, institutions, or other sources for objects appropriate to History Nebraska Collection
  - Donated to a charitable institution if its intrinsic or monetary value is so low as to make burdensome the effort of finding an institutional home or offering it for sale
  - Sold at public auction or sale (not archeological material)
  - Destroyed
- **Weeding or Culling Materials from Archival Collections**
  - In some cases, individual archival collections may be **culled** of superfluous materials contained therein as part of the practice of **archival processing**.
  - While the disposition of such culled materials are not subject to the same formal process of deaccessioning as other collection items, the same deaccessioning criteria (see section 5c of History Nebraska Collection Policy) and methods of disposition (see section 5f of History Nebraska Collection Policy) are employed.
  - Duplicate copy prints or copy negatives can be weeded.
  - Consult photograph curator or assistant curator before weeding original prints or negatives.