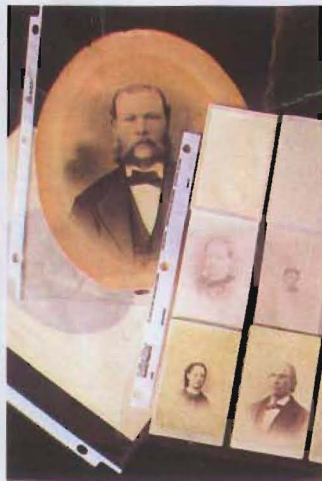
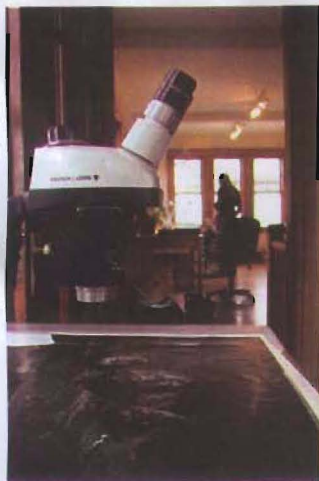


MAINTENANCE PHOTOGRAPHS/EVE M. KAHN

You've let those precious family photos get faded and tattered, but you just didn't know any better. Let conservator Paul Messier help you out PHOTOGRAPHS BY LIZZIE HIMMEL



Paul Messier, at right, uses a microscope to determine the age of a photo and what repairs he'll need to do. He recommends using acid-free archival sleeves to protect against dust and moisture.

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an you fix a badly damaged photo?

I can make sure the damage won't get any worse. I can make paper inserts for missing corners, straighten a bent print, and compensate for a scratch with minor retouching. And any photo you own can be copied. But the original—that's what your ancestors held in their hands and took home that day. The original is so precious, the material link between the present and the past.

You'd be horrified to see my mom's attic. She's got the photos all loose in boxes, even going back to tintypes.

Can I give you a storage lecture, just a little one? There are two major forms of deterioration to watch for: physical and chemical. Physical manifests itself as tears, creases, and bulges, and is typically caused by careless handling. Chemical deterioration manifests itself as fading and staining. One major agent of chemical deterioration is the enclosure—the box, envelope, sleeve, album—and well-meaning repairs like self-adhesive tape, which you should never use on photographs. Laminating at best doesn't preserve the image, and at worst the adhesives actively foster deterioration. And those so-called 'magnetic albums' that are all sticky inside are a disaster. Another major agent of chemical deterioration is the environment: the temperature, relative humidity, and light. Basically, keep your photos out of the basement, the attic, and the bathroom, away from heaters, and away from exterior walls

exposed to temperature and humidity extremes. Store your negatives and prints separately, too, in case of disaster, even if it's just in separate parts of your house. I've volunteered to work with a few collections devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The people there tell me that what they miss most as they put their lives back together, what they'll never see again, are the family photographs.

What are the right kind of enclosures to buy?

Look for products that have passed what the industry calls the Photographic Activity Test, to insure compatibility with prints and negatives. Three of the big suppliers are Light Impressions (www.lightimpressionsdirect.com), University Products (www.archivalsuppliers.com), and Gaylord Brothers (www.gaylord.com). They also sell frames, mats, and glazing that filters out UV rays.

What would you charge for advice on the care and feeding of photos, or for repairs?

Conservators like me charge anywhere from \$100 to over \$200 an hour, and I tend to work with leading dealers and collectors. If you go to www.aic-faic.org and click on 'Guide to Conservation Services,' you'll get to a geographic list of conservators around the country. ●

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YOU CAN REACH PHOTO CONSERVATOR PAUL MESSIER AT 103 BROOKS ST., BOSTON, MA 02135; 617-782-7110. OR VISIT HIS WEBSITE, WWW.PAULMESSIER.COM