BERKS HISTORY CENTER

HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM • HENRY JANSSEN LIBRARY

Create a Shoebox Archive

An Archivist is an information professional who assesses, collects, organizes, preserves, maintains control over, and provides access to records and archives determined to have long-term value. The records maintained by an archivist can consist of a variety of forms, including letters, diaries, logs, other personal documents, government documents, sound and/or picture recordings, digital files, or other physical objects.

Consider what materials you have that have lasting value for you and your family. What items do you want to preserve for future generations -your children or your grandchildren? Do you have photos, letters, personal documents, or videos? What important memories do you want to share with your family years from now?

The Berks History Center's Henry Janssen Library is a hub for genealogical research. Many people visit the library to learn about family members who lived years, decades, even centuries ago. In the same way that researchers piece together histories using the materials preserved in our archives, children and young adults alike can become family historians by putting together a shareholding of photographs and family treasures. Build your own shoebox archive and start preserving your family history for generations to come!

Curate Your Materials

Flip through old photo albums and scrapbooks, and pick out your favorite photographs These might be photos of your grandparents, your parents, your siblings, friends or yourself! While you are selecting the items you would like to safekeep, discuss the "why" surrounding your decisions:

- Why did you choose that photo?
- What memory do you have that the photo makes you think of?
- Why do you feel the desire to preserve it for the future?

Identify Your Materials

In the Berks History Center research library, we write identifying numbers and names on the back of photographs. We do this so that anyone can easily identify, who is pictured in the photograph.

- Use pencil. Don't use pen or Sharpie – these materials can damage your photographs, quickening their decay!
- Write down the information you know about the photo: where it was taken, what year, and who is pictured. This way when you look at it later you know the details!

Organize Your Archive

There are a number of ways you can choose to organize your archive. You can decide how you'd like to organize your chosen materials, in a way that makes the most sense to you:

- Organize by Subject (These photos are of Grandpa, These photos are of Mother, ect.)
- Organize by Date (You can create separate sections for each year)
- Organize by Location (Home photos, Vacation photos, etc.)

Categorize your archive in a way that makes sense to you. It's up to you – you are the archivist!

Store & Preserve Your Collection

Now that you have all of your photos selected and organized, you will need a place to store them. Find a container – it could be a shoebox, a wooden box from the craft store, or maybe a container you have that also has a fond memory attached to it.

Decorate and label your shoebox! You can write things like "The ____ Family Archives," (inserting your family's name), "Property of Head Archivist," or simply "Memories." Have fun and decorate it how you like best! Place your photos in the shoebox using the category system that you chose. If you have it available, you can layer some tissue paper between the photos to help protect them from sticking together.

And there you have it! Your own personal archive. Make sure to share it with your family and friends – telling stories about the past is always a fun activity!