

# Using Portable Digital Imaging in Family History Work

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Note: Because of ever changing technology this handout may be updated before the class.

## Using Digital Imaging

Challenge: once you have found a document, how do you add it to your collection?

In days gone by (and even today) one used

- Transcription
  - Takes time
  - You might make a mistake
- Photocopy (books, physical document)
  - Takes time
  - Usually a cost per copy
  - May have to make more than one copy to “get it right”
- Print an image (microfilm, microfiche)
  - Need appropriate equipment
  - Image quality may not be the best
  - Usually a cost per copy
  - May have to make more than one copy to “get it right”

One alternative: use a digital imaging device such as a camera, cell phone, tablet or portable scanner.

## Advantages

- Digital cameras (and other devices) come with many features that make taking a picture easy
- Pictures can be taken of different forms (original documents or images)
- See the results right away
- No cost (once past the initial investment)
- Portable
- Pictures can be taken in almost any light
- Image can be edited
- Easily shared with family
- Images can easily be copied to a computer or flash drive
- Storage/retrieval

## Considerations

- **Lighting**
  - Use indirect light, preferably day light
  - Avoid using the flash (you may not be able to anyway)
  - Position object to avoid glare
  - Use a piece of white paper or cardboard on shiny surfaces to cut glare
  - Be aware of potential shadows
  - Try to make sure there is a minimum of camera shake. You can use your device's remote or self-timer to take a "hands off" picture (since pressing the shutter can induce camera shake).
  - Special table top photo stands are available. Do a Google search for "table top photo stand" or "copy stand".
  - If you can't use a tripod, try holding the device with your elbows on the table or held firmly at your sides.
  - Use the image stabilization feature, if your device has it.
- **Parallelism**
  - The camera lens should be exactly parallel to the document being photographed. If practical, use a small level to make sure it is level (first make sure the object is level, then level the camera.)
  - Lay photos or historical documents flat.
  - Do not force books or bound documents to lie flat, instead use a book cradle or prop up the covers
- **Edge distortion**
  - Most wide angle lenses have some distortion. This is usually in the form of bowing of the edges. Since most digital cameras have zoom lenses, try to take photos with your camera lens at 10 mm or greater (35mm camera equivalent of 49 mm or greater). Distortion can also be minimized by keeping the camera lens exactly parallel to the work.
- **Image Size**
  - Cameras: Ideally you would want to set the image size (megapixels) to the highest available. Realistically to save space on the card 3-4 megapixels is more than sufficient.
  - Scanners: 300 dpi is sufficient for most documents. Higher dpi will allow you to expand the image to focus in on a particular section without loss of quality.
- **Quality**
  - Make sure your device, if possible, is set to either a lossless format (RAW or TIF) or if using JPEG, make sure it is on the best quality or superfine setting.

- **RAW** – Minimally processed data from image sensor
  - Not yet processed for printing or editing
  - Image must be processed by a raw converter
  - Huge file
- **TIFF** – Tagged Image File Format
  - Standard for commercial & professional printing
  - No data compression means no lost image data
  - Very large files
- **JPEG** – Joint Photographic Experts Group
  - Standard image compression format
  - Compression results in lost image quality
  - Smaller file size
- **PDF** – Portable Document Format
  - Captures all the elements of a printed document regardless of source program
  - Used on documents (except hand written) it may be possible to perform key-word searches
  - Can also create multipage files
- **Reference/Context**
  - When taking photos of old objects such as photo albums and family bibles be sure to take a picture of each full page in addition to detailed pictures of each photo on the page. The full page picture will put the photos in context. Have they been grouped in a certain way? How were they fastened to the page? Even seeing the edge tears can add character and give the viewer a sense that they are seeing something old and valuable.
  - Keep a log of citation information for each picture
  - Records and Documents Shot List
    - Title page of film roll or book
    - Full record (be sure to get each page)
    - Close-up of hard-to-read areas

#### **After you have taken your image:**

- Transfer them as soon as you can to your computer.
- Rename each file to something that is short but descriptive.
- Add text or labels to the picture.
- Save the pictures to a CD or DVD.
- Share them with others.

#### **Choosing a digital device**

- **Camera**
  - Criteria to consider:
    - Type of camera
      - Point & shoot
      - Digital Single Lens Reflex
      - Cell phone
    - Lens
    - Battery
      - Proprietary
      - Regular
      - Rechargeable
    - Storage (memory card)
      - Proprietary
      - Compact flash
      - SD
      - Size
    - Display vs view finder
    - Flash
    - Megapixels
    - Remote control
    - Cost
- **Mobile Scanner**
  - Criteria to consider
    - Document size that can be scanned
    - Software ease of use
    - Scan resolution
- **Research**
  - Find other sources on what to look for in a digital device.
  - Determine what features are the most important to you.
  - Establish how much you want to spend.
  - Look online
  - Go to a store and talk to the sales people.
    - Do what they tell you match what you know?
- **Make your decision**