Cataloging Digital Family Photographs and Records

©Nancy E. Loe, MA, MLS
www.sassyjanegenealogy.com

Tame your digital family photographs by adding names, dates, and other information to images to make them searchable. This presentation outlines a simple and effective process – from scanning, tagging, and saving images to organizing and backing up these image files – so you can do it once and do it right.

1. Tech Terms

- Pixel – very tiny elements
- PPI – pixels per inch, a measurement of a digital image's size, aka DPI
- Resolution – a measure of a digital image's density
- File format — the container for pixels, usually .tif or .jpg
- Metadata – data about data, or the way to embed information into a digital file

2. Scanning and/or Downloading Master Images

The first of five tips in this presentation is to scan a photo or document once at a high resolution, then saving it in TIFF format. Store that high-resolution file as your **master image**. Reduce the size and resolution of the master image to create **lower-resolution surrogate images** for emailing or uploading. Note: image files cannot be increased beyond the original scanned or downloaded image resolution parameters.

3. Organizing Family Image Files

Create a filing hierarchy, so scans of photographs are found in one folder on your hard drive. Add as many surname folders as needed. For group photos, use the predominant surname of

those in the photograph.

Gathering your image files in this way simplifies your storage, makes digital files more accessible, and prepares them for import into image management software. Individual file names for each scanned image are not as important because you can search and find individual photographs using metadata.

4. Adding Information Inside Images

Just as compartments in those long-ago TV dinners held different types of food, virtual compartments in digital image files hold several types of data. From the tiny pixels that form the image to text you add that identifies and describes the image, digital files contain embedded information.

This embedded information is called **metadata**, or data about data. Metadata is powerful, simple to use, and hidden inside your photo editing software, waiting for you to use it. Metadata is like a digital version of the back of a photograph, where you are free to write whatever you like. Add multiple forenames and surnames, event names, dates, locations, captions, and any other descriptive terms as tags using IPTC (International Press Telecommunications Council) metadata fields.

Photo-editing software usually offers both folders and albums. Folders mimic your hard drive: image files are imported into photo-editing software using the same organization found on your hard drive. Albums are a feature that creates specific collections, according to user's needs.

Tags, however, are persistent ways to identify and retrieve digital images. Photo-editing software examples include **Adobe Photoshop Elements**, **GraphicConverter**, **Adobe Bridge**. Names of other software with IPTC support are available **here**.

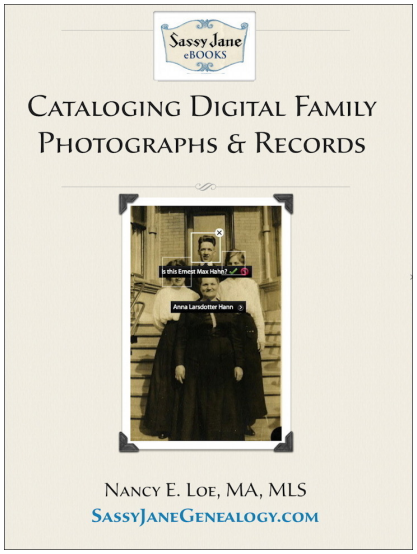
5. Data Security

There are two essential elements to any effective backup system. The first is that it is automatic. "Set it and forget" it is an essential component. Manual backups seldom happen consistently because you're busy. The second principal is that you use a hybrid approach – both a local external hard drive and a cloud account – because you can never predict what kind of disaster may happen.

Additional Resources

eBook:
Cataloging Digital Family Photographs & Records

www.sassyjanegenealogy.com/product/cataloging-digital-family-photographs

Blog post:
Scanners for Genealogy Research https://bit.ly/38ZYPZy

Free Monthly Newsletter:
www.sassyjanegenealogy.com/newsletter