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Images in this article courtesy of Stampin' Up!®

by Connie Myers

## THE LEGACY OF HERITAGE Scrapbooks

Our grandmothers kept memory books, heavy albums with black pages covered with mementos of events, newspaper clippings, and pictures of movie stars. Our grandmothers' photo albums looked much the same, with wavy-edged photographs placed carefully between photo corners on those ever-present black pages.

We've come a long way since Grandma's day. Today we're keeping our mementos and photos together in modern-day scrapbooks. Scrapbooking has become an industry unto itself. Paper companies, scrapbook stores, and conventions have grown up to serve this hobby. Our children will grow up with fully chronicled lives, from first tooth to first date. The myriad of products available at specialty, craft, and discount stores serve these scrapbooks well.

But what about Grandma's mementos? Her historical documents and pictures deserve special attention.

### Why Scrapbooks?

Heritage scrapbooks bring together the visual images of photo albums with the stories of family history research. Heritage scrapbooks are intended to preserve family pictures, documents, and mementos in a way that is archivally safe yet accessible, so children can learn about Grandma without getting fingerprints on her wedding picture. The best heritage scrapbooks tell the story of a person or a family with photos,



documents, family trees, and journaling that bring our ancestors to life. Heritage scrapbooks make our ancestors interesting and accessible, honoring their lives and experiences.

Terry Chevako Bava's heritage scrapbook album grew out of her love of family history research. "I started scrapbooking purely to present my mountain of genealogical material in a viewer-friendly way," she says. "I was tired of seeing eyes glaze over as I excitedly told people I finally found Great-grandmother Decil Fields in the 1910 census or that Great-grandmother Rose Chevako is listed in the Ellis Island records as Hrisula Vozi." Terry's scrapbooks have made their ancestors more interesting to her family. "Now that I have scrapbook pages with photos, copies of census pages, pictures of ships, old maps and much more, it's a different story," she says. "Even distant family members are clamoring for more scrapbooked pages and are eager to share old letters, photos, and information."

Tenna Perry's heritage album began as a way to honor and understand her mother. After her mother's death, Tenna spent the days preceding the funeral sorting through endless boxes and drawers of unlabeled photos. "My goal was to produce a photo journal of her life," says Tenna. "I found old daguerreotypes and tintypes of her grand- and great-grandparents and cardboard-backed photos of her parents. I had a treasure trove of photos that covered Mother's life—from infancy, to photos of the pretty woman my father fell in love with at first sight in 1930, to family travels, to my parents' silver and golden anniversaries." As Tenna assembled the album of her mother's life, the family

stories she'd always heard became real to her, gaining "a greater understanding of who and what my mother was as well as why she became the woman she did. During the two days of visitation and the funeral itself, that little project of mine made a great deal of difference in the thoughts of so many people. I don't know how many times a family member or friend would say, 'I remember this.'"

## Safe and Secure

Archivists might say that the only way to fully preserve a document is to keep it filed away, dust-free, between sheets of archival paper, never to see the light of day. Practically speaking, this kind of preservation is rarely possible at home. And what good is Grandma's picture if her grandchildren never see it?

Archivists' main concerns are with exposure to temperature, light, dust, and the acid contained in many modern products. Glues, plastics, and newsprint contain acid that may spread to surrounding papers over time, weakening and destroying them. The worst culprit may be the magnetic photo albums so popular in the 1970s and 1980s. The adhesive in these albums can destroy photographs in a matter of a few years, causing discoloration, tearing, and separation of the layers of the photograph.

Many archivally safe products are available today to both safeguard and display mementos. Photos, postcards, and other paper items can be mounted with photo corners on acid-free cardstock, placed in dust-protecting acid-free sheet protectors, and stored away from sunlight in acid-free binders. All these products are designed with long-term safety in mind to help preserve mementos while keeping them accessible. If you're not sure of the safety of a product, use a pH pen to test for acidity. Acidic documents, such as newspaper clippings, may be best displayed as color copies. Even printer ink, computer paper, and the color ink used to print digital photographs may not be acid-free. Read the labels and test the products before using any of these items in your heritage scrapbook.

## Journaling

Have you ever gone through Grandma's photo album and wondered who all those people were? Part of the family historian's job is to make that question easier for future generations to answer. Label every photograph with the answers to those old journalism questions: who, what, when, where, why, and how. Write around the borders of the reverse of the photograph, or write on a label and adhere it to the back of the picture.

But don't stop there. Scrapbookers know that the best scrapbooks include stories—lots of them. Next to that photograph, write up the story of Grandma's wedding. Copy







## Archival Quality Materials

While the scrapbooker's artist side is happy to cut and paste and decorate, the scrapbooker's historian side wants to make sure the creation will last. A little attention to storage and materials will go a long way towards guaranteeing preservation.

"My greatest concern is the environment the artifact is in: stable temperature and humidity, limited light exposure, and proper handling," says Sarah Stauderman, preservation manager at the Smithsonian Institution Archives.

While temperature- and humidity-controlled museum environments are ideal for irreplaceable documents, such locales are not available to the average home historian. But don't despair. "For most of us, the places where we are comfortable—such as our living areas, as opposed to the attic or basement—are appropriate spaces for documents," Sarah says. "The most climate-controlled part of the house is the best space for your nineteenth-century letters."

As an archivist, Sarah is pleased with the scrapbooker's use of acid-free page protectors to protect memorabilia from the environment. "Enclosures will go a long way toward keeping something preserved by forming a micro-environment to buffer it from the outside environment," she says.

Sarah also warns of another environmental problem: exposure to dust. "Dust is acidic and also absorbs moisture from the air," she says. "Dust can be food for molds. We want to keep pages dust free." Sarah recommends placing scrapbooks

inside slipcovers to protect the pages from dust.

Even though many products are labeled as acid-free, they may not be safe for your documents over the long term, Sarah cautions. "Avoid pressure-sensitive adhesives," she says. "Even if they're called acid-free, they don't stand the test of time and they're very difficult to reverse. Avoid any kind of tape. They tend to fail. Don't add anything to the artifact. Don't tape it. Anything you put on an older artifact should be passive. Photo corners are very useful." Sarah recommends testing products for acidity with a pH pen. Acidic papers can be neutralized with deacidification sprays.

Sarah recognizes that there may be a conflict between the need for acid-free materials and the need for the scrapbook creator's artistic expression. "I know people are incredibly creative and it becomes a collage," she says. "You want the album to last forever—that's the heritage part—but you also want to give a part of yourself." Sarah sees the myriad opportunities for self-expression in the scrapbooking trend and welcomes the creativity and art that will follow. "You clearly don't want to be using an inappropriate glue on an early twentieth-century photograph, because that's going to damage it," she says. "But I wouldn't tell someone not to include an award ribbon in the book along with the certificate just because the ribbon is three-dimensional. I'd never tell an artist that they can't use something if they have a vision."



lines from her diary. Include the receipt for her wedding dress. Tell where they went on their honeymoon and how they fixed a flat tire on the way. Details add more worth to both the photograph and to Grandma.

Sarah Stauderman, preservations manager at the Smithsonian Institution Archives, encourages home archivists to be just as careful to label their documents as she is at the Smithsonian. "People tend not to care for things if they are not identified," she says. "Things are more valuable if someone's gone to the trouble of identifying them."

## Selecting a Format

Modern scrapbook albums are available in both bound and binder formats. Bound albums keep pages secure. Binder albums allow pages to be added or rearranged.

Scrapbooks generally come in two sizes: 12" x 12" or the

standard 8 1/2" x 11". Each has its merits and proponents. "I chose to use a 12" x 12" album because I wanted to be able to put memorabilia on the pages as well as the photos," says Judith Perry, of Union City, California. A 12" x 12" album page allows for both the flat display of a large photograph or an 8 1/2" x 11" document as well as accompanying journaling to relate family stories.

Lorraine Hanley, of Jersey City, New Jersey, chose the 8 1/2" x 11" format for her grandmother's heritage album because she thought the smaller size would be easier for her aging grandmother to hold. But Lorraine found the smaller size offers another benefit: easy album duplication. "With the pages in the 8 1/2" x 11" format, I can scan them and reproduce them in my own home for other family members," Lorraine says. Page protectors and binders are also easier to find and less expensive in the standard 8 1/2" x 11" size.

Lorraine has gleaned a bonus from her scrapbook efforts. As she puts together pages and pictures, she asks her grandmother about the people and stories behind them. She's learning all kinds of new information about her family. "If I wasn't making this scrapbook, I would've never known that her Polish parish priest asked her why she wasn't marrying her 'own kind' when she and my Irish grandfather went to the church to announce their marital plans!" Lorraine says.

## Magnetic Photo Albums: Undoing the Damage

Those magnetic photo albums so popular in the 1970s and 1980s are among the worst places to keep cherished photographs. Magnetic or "self-stick" pages cause photos to yellow, fade, and separate, often irretrievably.

Removing photos from magnetic albums can be very difficult, but there are several tricks available to retrieve those pictures before it's too late.

Some pictures don't remove easily, so begin by making a color copy of the page. If the photos are damaged during removal, at least a copy will remain.

Joanna Campbell Slan, author of *Scrapbook Storytelling*, suggests using a hairdryer on a low setting to warm the self-stick page. "After a few minutes, test an edge of the plastic sheet or the photo to see if you have loosened the waxy film," she writes.

If that doesn't work, homemade tools may be in order. "Slide a piece of dental floss or the edge of an index card under the photos to lift them off the page," Joanna suggests.

Another option in using photos placed in magnetic albums is to have the negatives reprinted. The unstable color dyes used in the 1970s may have yellowed no matter how the picture was stored. Negative colors often remain true. Reprinting the pictures with modern processing and color dyes may reveal a whole new rainbow of 1970s colors.

## Putting It All Together

Shelli Gardner, president of arts and crafts company Stampin' Up!, decided to put together a heritage scrapbook after viewing an aunt's family history files. Shelli wanted to present her aunt's research in a way that would interest her own children in the lives of their ancestors.

Shelli made color copies of her aunt's documents and photographs. She chose the 12" x 12" format to take advantage of the extra room for journaling and some decorative embellishments. Shelli didn't want to have busy background paper or accessories compete with the simple black-and-white photos, so she kept to a simple color scheme. She used plain burgundy cardstock with accents of black ribbon and rubber-stamped images of black lace.

Like many scrapbook enthusiasts, Shelli loves sharing her newfound passion. She took her passion to work. Stampin' Up! added a line of archival-quality heritage paper and vellum to its scrapbook line.

Along with Stampin' Up!, many craft companies offer paper and accessories designed specifically for heritage scrapbooks. Colors and prints reflect specific eras such as Victorian or Civil War. Rubber stamps, stickers, buttons, lace, clip art—the variety is limitless.



## Tricks of the Trade

Heritage scrapbooks can be not only practical but also beautiful. Old black and white photographs come to life when they are artistically arranged on pages of muted color and soft design. Creating a heritage scrapbook can bring out the hidden artist in even the most sedate family historian.

Many scrapbookers prefer to do their journaling by computer. But don't settle for Times New Roman. Choose a font to match the era of your scrapbook.

Some memorabilia are too large to fit on a scrapbook page. Consider photographing the item and scrapbooking the photograph instead of the original. Or scan the item and reduce the image to a usable size before printing.

What about "bumpy" mementos—the lock of Grandma's hair or the seashells she collected on her honeymoon? Clear memorabilia pockets mount right on the scrapbook page and will hold those unusual foreign coins or that beaded baby bracelet. But beware of the imprint these items may leave on a facing photograph. You may want to design a frame around either the pocket or the picture to protect the photo from damage. The same goes for many of the embellishments used in today's cute scrapbooks, such as eyelets, ribbons, twine, tags, and brads. Always be aware of the effect one page may have on the neighboring page.

Georgia Fleming, of Enterprise, Alabama, says she thinks of heritage scrapbooks as "art galleries on paper." Her album combines photographs with three-dimensional items such as her father's World War II ribbons and her great-grandmother's lace collar.

## Filling in the Blanks

Some heritage scrapbookers find that their photo file is a bit scanty to document the lives of their ancestors. Consider adding song lyrics from popular tunes of the day; family recipes, especially if they're in Grandma's handwriting; pictures of family homes then and now, complete with addresses; records of military service or occupation and pay rates; and favorite pastimes.

Sherry Harris of Granada Hills, California, is creating a heritage album of her mother's life that goes well beyond photographs. "I'm also including information about the socio-economic world she lived in, such as toys she would have played with, the cost of things at various times, the music and news of the different decades," she says. "I

believe all these things are important to who she was and how she lived."

As Peggy Santana, from Redding, California, began putting together her heritage albums, she found that photographs were scarce. She compensated by taking advantage of other resources. "I scan in graphics from old books and the Internet and print them on coordinated papers," she says. Peggy used handwritten memorabilia, such as a list of items purchased to set up housekeeping prior to her great-grandparents' wedding. "The list includes beautiful handwriting and the store heading," she says. The original list was disintegrating; Peggy's scan should preserve the document for another hundred years.

"Heritage scrapbooks are a great legacy to leave for my family," Peggy says. "I have done genealogy for twenty-five years and collect photos, documents, tapes and treasures. Memory books stir up past memories. I want my children to know where they came from." ♪

*Connie Myers is a freelance writer. Her feature writing has led to several guest spots on radio talk shows. Connie enjoys writing about her interests, which include family history, travel, cooking, and quilting.*

