

Digital Photography for the Genealogist

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The digital camera and / or your cell phone camera can be one of your most valued genealogical research tools.

Effectively acquire records and preserve documents

Cut your reproduction costs

Achieve more with your available time

Have more FUN!

TYPES OF CAMERAS

Everyone's needs are slightly different. Most of us do not have a lot of money; or the need for a camera wardrobe.

Some cameras are better at close work and some are better at the big picture.

Some are tiny and some are big and heavy. If it is too heavy you leave it home.

Some have many features and some are very simple.

TYPES OF CAMERA FEATURES

Flash that is optional – who is in charge here, anyway!

Sometimes you need to prevent the flash, such as taking a picture of a microfilm image

Sometimes you need to force the flash, as in a shady cemetery, also called “fill-flash” when doing portraits.

Using the macro feature depends on the camera (and the photographer)

Can enhance the clarity of a very close image

Timer function can be great in eliminating shaking hands – but you need a tripod and a cable release

Doc feature is black & white – it is like a copier – it loses clarity

SLR (Single Lens Reflex) gives greater control over what is actually going to appear in the image – but a LCD is usually sufficient

CEMETERY PHOTOGRAPHY

Talk to the sexton, or whoever you can. There might be records!

North, South, East, West: best time of day for photographing headstones.

Use a flash or a reflector on headstones covered by shade or on cloudy days.

Family grave plots require group and individual photos of each headstone.

Keep a written record. (small notebook)

Take time to clear grass and other foliage away from inscriptions

Spray a little water on the hard-to-read old headstones

Never use hard objects or stiff brushes to clean the stones.

Consider taking photos of all headstones in a small cemetery.

Post your photos of headstone on family websites or sites such as FindAGrave.or BillionGraves

PHOTOGRAPHY IN LIBRARIES & OTHER ARCHIVES

Know the library's policy about digital photography before you go.

No photos allowed of interior of building or people.

Only take photos of intended artifacts

Set up camera in corner away from other so as not to disturb them.

Set up near a window to gain most from natural light. Do not use flash

May need to sign an intended use statement.

May need to have their staff handle rare objects.

MICROFILM

The difference here is COLOR! By taking the picture with color we see highlights & shadows, shades and coloration that let us better make out the markings.

Make sure the flash is OFF

If using a SLR camera, bring the camera to your eye, then rest your head against the edge of the viewer.

If using a camera with only a LDC, you will need to find how you can see the screen to point the camera.

Adjust the focus to get the whole page, or just a part of the page.

If you are taking a picture of a part of the page, then also take a picture of the top of the page so you have the reference information.

Remember to get the title page, etc as if it were the actual record.

Take notes of what you are doing as you go.

Record your sources!

BOOKS

Books can be a problem because the pages seldom lay completely flat when the book is opened.

Shoot book pages with the cover held up at about an 80-degree angle.

Hold the cover and the pages preceding the one you are shooting so you can adjust for light & shadows.

Rotate the book so that the page you want has the best light.

Make sure that there are no shadows falling on the page.

If needed. Use plastic clips to hold the pages flat.

DOCUMENTS & PHOTOS

Loose documents are going to be a problem because the owners will be nervous about your handling them as well as their being fragile, odd sizes, textures, colors, etc.

Wear cotton gloves, if possible.

Mount your camera on its tripod, in shooting position if you have and can use a tripod.

Use a large sheet of white card stock as a base.

Place your document in position and anchor it as needed.

Zoom so that your document is properly framed.

If using a tripod, view the picture on the LCD and check for the proper focus, exposure, brightness and contrast.

For a document – can you almost read the text? Go for it!

Take pictures at the highest setting you can, format as TIFF, if possible. You want as much detail as you can to work with, later.