



Caring for Taonga - Photographs

Āta Tiakina Ngā Whakaahua Māori





Women performing waiata to welcome home the Māori Battalion after World War II
1945
1/4-001650-F
John Pascoe Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library



Caring for Photographs

Āta tiakina ngā whakaahua Māori

Photographs are the visual memories of our past. They depict our ancestors, landscape and memories. Many of our photographs are taonga.

Photographs are vulnerable to damage. However, there are many things we can do to ensure they last for the longest possible time. The way we handle, store, and display photographs will have a big impact on how long they last and what condition they remain in.

This booklet is for those who are kaitiaki of, or responsible for, collections of photographs whether they are kept in a home, marae, museum or archive. It gives commonsense tips on how to care for photographs.

Handle photographs with care



Unidentified Māori boy, Rotorua
1940s
1/4-000849-F
John Pascoe Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library

Āta whāwhāhia ngā whakaahua.

Handling Photographs

Āta whāwhā i ngā whakaahua

Handle photographs with care.

Poor handling is responsible for a lot of damage to photographs such as marks, tears and creases.

Always handle photographs by their edges to avoid leaving fingerprints. There are oils and salts on our fingertips that leave permanent marks on photographs and contribute to fading of the image.

It is easy to accidentally tear or crease a photograph but difficult to repair the damage. If a photograph is torn or in pieces keep it in a folder or sleeve by itself rather than trying to repair it. Materials such as sticky tape and masking tape cause fading and staining of photographs. Over time the adhesive will dry up so the sticky tape will not keep the pieces of the photograph together anyway.



*Store photographs carefully, away
from light, heat and water*



Takurua Tamarau sharing a hongi with his grandson Leo Tamarau, as he sits with his other grandchildren Alfred Tamarau and Lorna Tamarau, Ruatoki

MNZ-2659-1/2-F

Making New Zealand Collection

Alexander Turnbull Library

*Āta tiakina, kia pōuri, kia maroke,
kia kawa e pāwera*

Storing photographs

Āta tiaki i ngā whakaahua

Photographs can be damaged by light, heat, water, pollution, and insects. Many of these factors can be avoided through commonsense storage techniques.

The best place to store your photographs is somewhere clean, cool, dark, dry and well ventilated. Keep photographs somewhere where they will not constantly be moved or disturbed.

Places to avoid storing photographs:

- garages or sheds: they are often damp, have insects and can get very hot in summer
- on the floor: this will put them at risk of water damage if there is a flood
- hot water cupboards: the combination of heat and moisture causes mould on photographs

Storage Materials

Storage materials for photographs include boxes, folders, albums and sleeves. Storage materials can be made out of either paper or plastic. Where possible use conservation quality materials to store photographs.

There are companies that specialise in conservation quality materials suitable for storing photographs. *Some of these companies are listed at the end of this booklet.*

Some commercially available materials that are advertised as being suitable for the storage of photographs are actually damaging. In particular avoid anything made out of PVC (a low quality plastic) or anything that puts the photograph in direct contact with an adhesive like sticky tape or glue.

Lamination is not recommended for unique or valuable photographs as once photographs have been sealed in the plastic they cannot be removed. Over time the material used to laminate the photographs can damage them.

Suitable Materials

Acid free card and paper

Polyester (PET, recycle code 1)
e.g. Mylar

Polypropylene,
(PP, recycle code 5)

Polyethylene
(recycle code 2 or 4)

Damaging Materials

Low quality cardboard and paper

PVC (recycle code 3)

Metal Pins and Paper Clips

Spray Adhesive

Sticky tape, masking tape,
packing tape, mending tape etc

Rubber bands

Storage material can be expensive so it may not be possible for all of your photographs to be in conservation quality supplies. You will need to set priorities as to how to use the budget you have for supplies.

Store your most valuable or unique photographs in the best quality material. The storage materials that are in direct contact with photographs need to be of the best quality.

Some museums, archives and marae are eligible for funding for preservation of their photographs. *Information on funding agencies is at the end of this booklet.*

Photograph Albums

Good photograph albums provide excellent protection to photographs. However poor albums can cause a great deal of damage. Choose a photograph album where the photographs can be easily removed such as one with plastic sleeves or one that has corners for the photographs to be placed in.

Do not use magnetic albums

Albums that have sticky cardboard pages and plastic covers that cling to photographs are sometimes called magnetic albums. These albums are extremely damaging to photographs. The adhesive will damage photographs and once photographs have been placed in these albums it can be very difficult, if not impossible, to remove them.



If photographs are already in an album it is best to leave them as removing them may cause them to become more damaged and the original sequence of the photographs to become lost.

Storing Negatives

Negatives are very important and should be carefully looked after. If anything happens to the print you can always have another copy made from the negative. For this reason negatives should be stored separately from prints. It is best to store negatives in individual sleeves as they can easily become scratched by rubbing against each other.

Some older negatives are made from glass. Extra care must be taken with glass negatives, as they can be easily broken. If you have glass negatives in your collection they need to be stored upright in a sturdy box. Store them on their longest edge for added safety. Ensure that glass negatives are not in contact with each other by placing them in sleeves. This will prevent them scratching each other.

*Keep a record of information about
photographs, such as names
and dates*



Exterior of the whare belonging to King Tawhiao, King Country
1885
PA7-36-24
Burton Brothers Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library

*Tuhia ngā kōrero mō ia whakaahua,
ko ngā ingoa, ko ngā rangi.*

Recording Information

Tuhi kōrero mō ia whakaahua

It is important to keep any information about the photograph such as who the photograph is of, where it was taken, when it was taken and who the photographer was. This information can be written in the photograph album, on the backing board of the frame or in a separate ledger or computer spreadsheet.

It is not necessary to write on a photograph but if you do, write on the back of the photograph in the border area or near the edge. Use a soft pencil (e.g. 2B) and print softly. Writing with a pen or felt tip may cause marks that go all the way through the photograph and ruin the image. Some modern prints made from shiny, coated paper cannot be written on with pencil. In this case you must write on a separate piece of paper or in an album.



*Make sure the way you display
photographs does not cause
them any harm*



**Māori Battalion performing a haka, Egypt
24 June 1941
DA-01229-F
War History Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library**

*Āta whakaatuhia ngā whakaahua,
kia kore ai e whara.*

Displaying Photographs

Āta whakaatu i ngā whakaahua

When you are displaying photographs you need to make sure you are not causing them any harm. A sunny spot may show a photograph off but it will also make it fade more quickly. Likewise fireplaces with photographs and paintings hung over them may look good but the high temperatures and smoke will cause damage over time.

Having a copy of a photograph made is a good option if it is very special due to its age, rarity or value. This means the original can be stored safely somewhere else (in another building for example) and the copy placed on display. Ensure you use a reputable company that has experience in working with historic photographs.

Photographs in geothermal areas like Rotorua are at risk of fading and staining as the sulphur content in the air attacks the silver that makes up the image of many photographs. It is important to have photographs in geothermal areas well framed to protect them from these conditions.



Do not put pins directly through photographs or use any sort of self-adhesive tape, glue or paste in direct contact. These materials all cause lasting damage that can be impossible to repair.



Framing

A frame improves the appearance of a photograph and also helps to protect it.

If you are using a professional framer ask them to do it to “conservation standards”. This means material of the best quality (i.e. not harmful to the photograph) is used. If you do not ask for conservation quality materials to be used then it is likely that materials and techniques that will damage a photograph will be used. Conservation framing is more expensive but will give greater protection to the photograph.

It is important there is a gap between the glass of the frame and the photograph – otherwise the photograph may stick to the glass.

If a photograph does not fit in the frame you have, get a new frame rather than cutting the photograph to size.

Make sure photographs are hung securely on the wall with strong and secure hanging devices. Hanging devices should be in proportion to the size of the frame. Very heavy frames require cleats or extra-heavy D-rings. A good picture framer can help with this. Hang photographs in places where they will not be knocked or bumped.



Whina Cooper and her granddaughter set off on a dusty Far North Road for Parliament
1975
Michael Tubberty Neg# 1557c / 2
The NZ Herald / APN

*Have copies made if photographs
are special due to their age,
rarity or value*



Three Māori girls shelling toheroa on a beach, Northland
Ca 1910 - 1939
1/1-026522-G
Northwood Collection
Alexander Turnbull Library

*Tāruahia ngā tino whakaahua,
arā ngā whakaahua kōtuku
rerenga tahi*

Photographs in Marae

Ko ngā whakaahua i ngā marae

- make a list of all of the photographs in the marae
- record as much information about each photograph as possible – name of person, when taken, where taken
- if appropriate have high quality copies made so that these can be on display rather than the original
- make sure all photographs on display have a sturdy frame that has glazing (glass or Perspex)
- hanging devices on the back of the frame need to be strong and secure
- do not hang photographs in sunny places or in damp places
- keep any photographs that are in the wharekai as far from the kitchen as possible; running water and steam from boiling pots create a moist environment that may cause mould on photographs.
- check photographs regularly, perhaps every six months or so, looking for signs of mould or insects

*Digital photographs are vulnerable
to damage just like other
photographs*



Lisa Reihana (Nga Puhi)
Marakihau, 2001
Colour photograph, C-type print
Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa O.026797

*Ka whara hoki ngā whakaahua hiko,
pēnei anō ngā whakaahua
pepa.*

Digital Photographs

Ngā whakaahua hiko

Digital photographs are vulnerable to damage just like other photographs. It is very hard to say how long digital photographs will last. Technology changes rapidly and computers and files quickly become obsolete. The hard drive of your computer and computer disks are vulnerable to damage the same way that photographs are.

One problem with digital photographs is that they are so easy to produce it simply isn't possible to keep them all. The more digital photographs you have the more difficult they are to manage, as they require more space. As you can't keep every digital image you have to make decisions on which ones you want to keep and prioritise. Continually back up your precious digital photographs and keep several copies.

To manage the filing of your digital photos you need to give each one a simple and descriptive name. For example when digital files have names such as IMG_0617.JPG or IMG_0622.JPG how do you know which one is your wedding photograph and which one is of your pet?

Disks need to be labelled clearly and systematically. Have a dedicated space for the storage of your computer disks. Make sure this is away from light, heat, moisture and magnetic fields.

Get into a routine of checking files and disks. This is the best way to know if there are any problems with the technology.

Scanning photographs is a good way to make them available to more people as they can be e-mailed or put on a web site. However scanning is not a way of preserving photographs. The original photograph will probably still last a lot longer than the scanned copy. If you decide to scan photographs keep the original, otherwise you may find that in a few years you do not have a copy of the photograph at all.

*Preventing damage is better than
trying to fix it.*



Fiona Pardington (Kai Tahu, Kati Mamoe, Kati Waewae)
Tui, 2004
Colour photograph, C-type print
Courtesy of the artist

*Pai ake te whai tika i mua tēnā
i te whakaora i muri*

Preventing Damage from Disasters

Te whakaora whakaahua i te wera, i te wai

Disasters to photograph collections can include water damage and fire.

Taking small precautions such as keeping photographs off the floor and away from sources of water will help reduce the risk of damage caused by floods.

If photographs are damaged by water in an event like a flood they can usually be salvaged. Act as quickly as possible as mould can develop in a very short space of time. Wet photographs can be dried face up on a clean flat surface in a room with good air circulation – a cool fan can be used to promote air circulation. If photographs are covered with silt or debris from flood waters they can be rinsed gently in clean water.

One of the greatest risks to photographs is fire. Every year there are fires in marae around New Zealand that damage photographs and taonga. Having smoke alarms and sprinklers installed will reduce the risk of fire occurring. Contact the New Zealand Fire Service for guidance on fire safety issues.

Further Information

Whakamārama anō

The National Preservation Office Te Tari Tohu Taonga can:

- provide information on where to get conservation quality materials for the storage of photographs
- carry out an assessment of your museum, archive or marae and give advice on storing and displaying photographs
- give advice on funding that is available and support funding applications for conservation projects
- provide guidance on how to minimise the risk of disasters or how to respond afterwards

To contact the National Preservation Office:

National Preservation Office Te Tari Tohu Taonga
PO Box 1467, Wellington
Phone: 04 474 3066 or 04 474 3058
Fax: 04 474 3063
E-mail: preservation@natlib.govt.nz

Suppliers of Conservation Quality Materials

Conservation Supplies
PO Box 646
Warkworth
Phone: 09 425 7380
Fax: 09 425 7385
E-mail: info@conservationsupplies.co.nz
Web-site: www.conservationsupplies.co.nz
Suppliers of material for the storage of photographs



Port Nicholson Packaging
PO Box 38 133
Wellington Mail Centre
Phone: 04 568 5018
Fax: 09 568 5538
E-mail: sales@pnp.co.nz
Web-site: www.pnp.co.nz
Suppliers of material for the storage of photographs

Spiral Path Book Studio
7 Brussels Place
Birkenhead
Auckland
Phone: 09 480 3185
Fax: 09 480 3186
E-mail: spiralpath@xtra.co.nz
Custom made boxes and materials for protective enclosures

Triptych
PO Box 16 133
Wellington
Phone: 04 970 0228
Fax: 04 939 1228
E-mail triptych@paradise.net.nz
Web-site: www.triptych.info
Custom made boxes and materials for protective enclosures

Funding Agencies

Lottery Grants Board
Community Development Group
Department of Internal Affairs
PO Box 805
Wellington
Phone: 0800 824 824
Web-site: www.dia.govt.nz

Environment and Heritage grants to assist museums, galleries, archives and whare taonga. Marae Heritage and Facilities grants for the conservation of marae or taonga inside marae.

Funding Information Service
PO Box 1521
Wellington
Phone: 04 499 4090
Web-site: www.fis.org.nz

Advice and information on funding available to community groups in New Zealand



The National Preservation Office is an initiative of the
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