

Where to Find It | Terry Trucco

Refreshing the images of the past.

ONE picture can be worth much more than the proverbial thousand words, be it a vintage work by a noted photographer or the sole surviving likeness of a family ancestor. But it isn't worth much to anyone if it is faded, stained or crumbling beyond recognition.

"Typically, it's the family photographs that are not well maintained," said Mary Schobert, senior photography conservator at the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts, a nonprofit, 15-year-old conservation laboratory in Philadelphia.

Often it is obvious when a photograph needs the attention of a conservator or restorer. Mildew, discoloration, creases and tears are common problems. But early signs of deterioration can be as subtle as a yellowed back on a 1960's snapshot.

"If the photograph is of historic importance, you need to take it to a conservator," said Robin Siegel, an officer in the photography division of the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works, in Washington. "But if archival quality is not an issue, you can go to a good restorer," which usually costs less.

Conservators, by definition, can stabilize a photograph to prevent additional deterioration and improve the photograph's condition and appearance while doing as little as possible to alter the actual artifact. They use materials that can be removed, if necessary. The conservator also prepares a condition report.

Restorers, in contrast, can take drastic and often irreversible, steps to repair the image, including mounting and extensive retouching.

Most of the Conservation Center's jobs are for institutions. (Ms. Schobert spent months working on immigrant photos that are at Ellis Island.) But the center also accepts work from individuals, like a woman who recently brought in old photographs documenting her father's boxing career. It charges \$70 for a condition report and \$70 an hour for treatment.

CONSERVATION CENTER FOR ART AND HISTORIC ARTIFACTS, 264 South 3d Street, Philadelphia 19103; (215) 545-0613. By appointment.



Mary Schobert is a photography conservator at a specialized laboratory in Philadelphia. Sal DiMarco Jr. for The New York Times

Preserving the Image

Brittle mounting boards that crease or tear are a major source of trouble with old photographs, particularly those from the 19th century. "Often the photograph is in two pieces," said Peter Mustardo, a conservator for 11 years and a partner in the Better Image in Pittstown, N.J.

In such cases, Mr. Mustardo and his partner, Nora Kennedy, offer two

options. They can repair the actual photograph by removing it from the board, mending the tear and painting in lost areas. Or if the image is more important than the artifact, they can make a negative, retouch it and make a print, a less costly process.

The best way to preserve family photographs is to keep the negatives, Mr. Mustardo said. "A lot of treatment work is circumvented when we have the negative."

Condition reports cost \$45; conservation work is \$100 an hour.

THE BETTER IMAGE, P.O. Box 1, Pittstown, N.J. 08867; (908) 730-9. By appointment.

Before and After

Before and after photographs de-rate the showroom of Galowitz Photographics Inc., a 15-year-old restoration concern in Greenwich Village. One before shot showed a badly faded 1920's image of two little boys. After shot, clear and dark, was photograph of the original, taken high-contrast film with a blue filter.

"Ninety percent of the pictures that are 30 years old or older show signs of age," said the owner, A. Galowitz. Much of the company work is making copy negatives of originals, often after retouching, to preserve deteriorating images (from \$19.45). The concern also cleans photographs, makes images from glass negatives and does retouching. Enlargements are also done. A post-size image of the baseball great Lou Gehrig leaning against a wall starts as a much smaller photograph.

Cleaning mold, mildew and bacteria from photographs can be a challenge, Mr. Galowitz said. But often an extremely soft eraser, used with extreme care, is all that's necessary to remove a child's doodles, he added.



Photographs by Philip Greenberg for The New York Times

At Galowitz Photographics in New York, the concentration is on before and after photographs, and making copy negatives of originals to preserve deteriorating images. The concern also cleans photographs and does retouching.

GALOWITZ PHOTOGRAPHICS INC., East 13th Street, New York 10003; (212) 505-7190. Hours: Monday through Friday, 8:15 A.M. to 5: P.M., Saturday 10 A.M. to 4 P.M.