PROBLEMS WITH PICTURES

A critical problem with all pictures is identification

By Marjorie D. Patterson

"I suppose I'll just throw this picture away."
"Why?"
"It's so faded; you can hardly recognize anyone in it. I do hate to throw it out because it is the only one I have of Grandpa Moses. It's no good like it is. My grandchildren won't even know how he looked."
"Who's that with him?"
"Don't you recognize me? Wasn't I a cute baby?"
"Well, I certainly wouldn't throw it away if it were mine. Have a copy made."
"No, it isn't. Cameras can see better than people."

Copies of old photographs are possible. Many times they will look even better than the original. Is the photograph important enough to you to spend about ten dollars, or even less?

There are a number of local photographic laboratories which do custom work. A negative can be made from the original picture, and as many copies can be printed as one wishes. Special film, coupled with the use of filters on the camera, will produce a new negative.

Much of the yellowing or fading in the original picture can be eliminated. The dark areas of the picture are made darker and the light are brighter. In photographic lingo, the better the contrast the better the copy will be. The type of paper on which the picture is printed can further enhance the contrast.

There is no retouching of the original picture or negative. That is an expensive hand operation. The "manipulation" is simply the result of juggling the film, filters, and development process.

The price for a print, made from the new negative, depends on the size one wants. The larger the print, the greater the cost. The advice of the laboratory should be sought before deciding on the print size. Sometimes the original picture is not sharp enough to make a satisfactory enlarge-

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This is Mrs. Stranahan's photograph after copying. A clear black and white copy will remain usable long after the original has faded away.
Another possibility for doing this type of work is the camera-buff friend who has a darkroom. Some photographers are eager to improve their techniques. They will gladly copy your picture, at cost, to gain experience working in this specialized field of photography.

Check with your favorite camera shop. They can have copies of old photographs made on a routine (non-custom) basis. In such instances, the cost of a new negative and print should be less than five dollars.

"That's an interesting picture. Who are those people?"

"Gee, I wish I could remember. The only one I recognize is Aunt Jennie. She is on the left. I wish I had written down the names when Mother told me about them. Give me that pen — I'll write Aunt Jennie's name on the picture right now!"

"Wait a minute! Don't write the name on the picture itself.

"O.K. I'll write it on the back. There are so many in this picture, I'll just put a number on her to show which one she is."

"I've a better idea than that. Let's take the picture with us when we go to lunch. We'll stop at the shopping center and make a copy on the copying machine there."

"Why?"

You can put numbers on each individual on the photo copy and then write the names opposite the numbers along the side. Isn't your mother coming next week?"

"Yes — why?"

"When she comes you can ask her to identify everyone in the picture and write them on the sheet. That way, the picture won't be all messed up if you decide you want to make a new negative and print before it fades any more."

"That's not a bad idea. Where did you get such an idea?"

"I was at the Fort Lauderdale Historical Society last week. When I was looking at some of the pictures there, I found out the way it is done there. The Society has thousands of pictures."

"I suppose they know who all the people are, too."

"Oh, no! Lots of people have given pictures to the Society over the years. Many times not a single person in the picture is identified. The people who work there now don't know the people, and the people who gave the pictures aren't around any more. They have group pictures in which not one person is identified. Sometimes the occasion when the picture was made is written on it, but many times not even that information is known, nor the date."

"That sounds like my pictures."

"It does. I looked at one picture. All it said was, 'Your loving niece.' "

"Since you learned so much up there, how should I keep my pictures?"

"Well, for one thing, I learned the kind of scrapbook not to use. Remember the scrapbooks with pages of black paper?"

"Yes, I do. In fact, I have a couple of them. What's wrong with them?"

"That type of black paper has a very, very high acid content. The acid in the paper will, in time, eat right into the picture itself. The glue causes as much of a problem as the paper."

"You bring all sorts of cheerful news!"

Pictures do create problems. The Fort Lauderdale Historical Society has one excellent collection of pictures of early farming activities in and around Fort Lauderdale, each one glued to black construction-type paper. The best method of preservation will be to have a new negative made from each picture. The negative will then be placed in an acid-free envelope.

This fine photograph has no identification, thus reducing its value to a researcher. The Indian at the far left is thought to be Shirt-tail Charlie.
Another type of envelope is available which offers protection, but not to the same degree. Local camera stores carry "glassine" envelopes for five or ten cents each. These are available in various sizes. Many photographs are being placed in glassine containers to keep the pictures from being scratched. When a copy of a picture is needed, a negative will be made then and given the protection of an acid-free envelope.

A critical problem on all pictures is identification — the names of the people, the date, the event, the place! Today, much is heard about the "need for identity." Certainly this applies to photographic records.

Recently a lady brought a photograph to the Historical Society. The comment was offered that it was good to receive one with each person's name shown. The lady replied: "I wouldn't dream of giving you a picture without telling you ALL about it."

Such attitudes lessen the problems with pictures!

Once in a great while a photograph is completely identified. This one has the names of all the Seminole women written on the back, as well as information about the time and place where it was taken.