



Chicago Historical Society, "The Big Camera" 1900 (adjusting the bellows) George Lawrence. photo. ICHI-11029

Renewed interest in the value of old photographs is forcing many archivists, curators and librarians to confront important issues related to the preservation and management of their collections. For example, how do the storage requirements for photographs differ from those for paper materials? When and how should photographic prints be copied or restored, and what results can be expected? How can one tell the difference between a carbon and an albumen print, or between a nitrate negative and early safety film? Answers to these and many other questions concerning the preservation of old photographs can be obtained from the Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC).

Many collections of early photographs have unfortunately suffered deterioration due to some combination of improper storage, careless handling or chemical instability. Even under the best conditions, some damage is inevitable over a period of time. Individual needs and priorities vary widely, but a basic knowledge of photographic conservation — ranging from the restoration of a valuable print to the conversion to safety film of unstable nitrate negatives — is essential to the sound management of photographic collections. Curators and librarians must be sufficiently familiar with photographic processes and storage requirements to provide basic care for their collections. They must also be able to recognize problems which require professional assistance. Professional services available from NEDCC include conservation treatment and duplication of photographic materials, consultation, workshops and seminars.



Underwood and Underwood-stereo view-circa 1900

ABOUT NEDCC

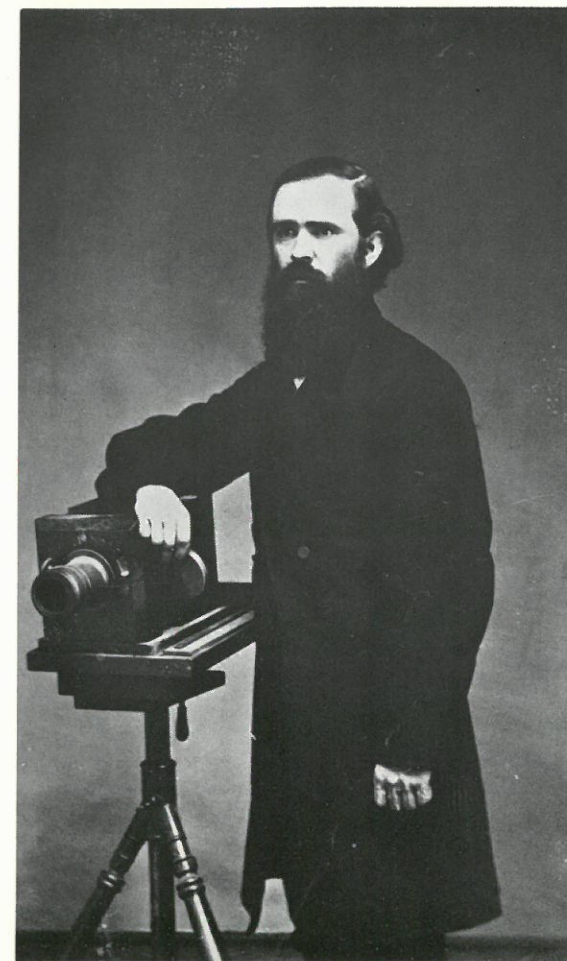
The Northeast Document Conservation Center is a non-profit, regional conservation facility, specializing in conservation of library and archival material and art on paper. Its purpose is to provide the highest quality paper conservation services to institutions that do not have in-house conservation facilities or have only limited ones. It has a highly trained staff of professional conservators who perform treatment on a great range of materials: books, manuscripts, maps, printed records, photographs, and art on paper. In its ten-year history, the Center has performed work for more than 800 museums, historical organizations, libraries and archives.

Gary Albright, Photographic Conservator, is a specialist in photographic conservation. He holds a Master of Science Degree from the University of Delaware/Winterthur Museum Art Conservation Program and has studied conservation of photographs with Jose Orraca under a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

Robert Alter, Technical Photographer, is responsible for all reproduction photography at the Center. He holds a Bachelors Degree in Visual Arts from Georgia State University and a Masters Degree in Visual Studies from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In addition to his work at NEDCC, Mr. Alter teaches photography at the DeCordova Museum in Lincoln, Massachusetts.

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Cover — Photographer E.V. Doughty with photographer's imprint T.M.V. Doughty, Winstead, CT. circa 1865 Camera Lewis bellows daguerrean camera with daguerrean tripod. — courtesy Henry Deeks



PRESERVATION
OF PHOTOGRAPHIC
PRINTS AND NEGATIVES

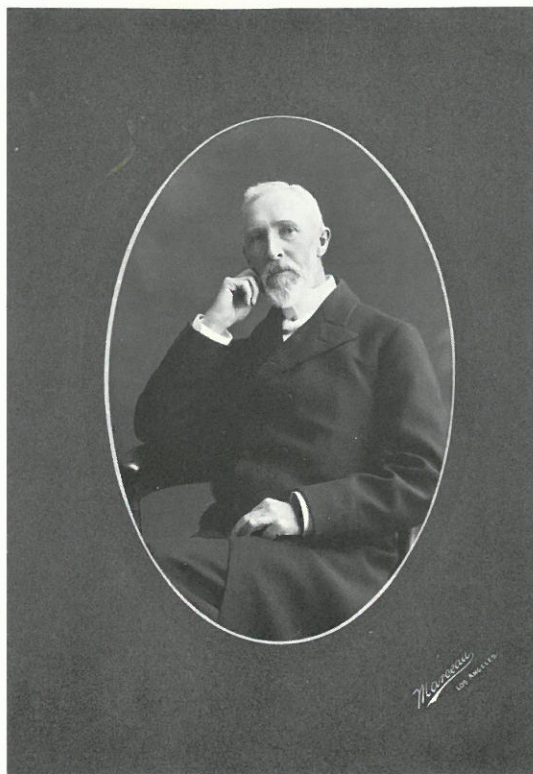
THE NORTHEAST
DOCUMENT CONSERVATION
CENTER



gelatin silver, postcard-circa 1910

PHOTOGRAPHIC CONSERVATION

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, dozens of processes have been used to form the photographic image, each having its own unique characteristics and patterns of deterioration. For this reason, possible treatments and likely results vary widely. The deterioration in certain instances is irreversible, but in others the techniques of stain removal, cleaning, mending or inpainting can produce a striking restoration of the original image. Within the field of conservation, photographs represent a relatively new area of specialization requiring treatments which are often quite different from those for paper artifacts. There are only a handful of professionally trained conservators with specialized expertise in treating photographic materials. Gary Albright, NEDCC's Photographic Conservator, has restored thousands of original photographs ranging from little-known family portraits to the nationally recognized works of such photographers as Carleton Watkins, Louis Hine, and Alfred Stieglitz.



gelatin silver-circa 1910

PHOTOGRAPHIC COPYING

NEDCC has extensive experience in the duplication of historical photographic materials, especially large collections of nitrate and glass plate negatives. Major projects have included duplication of collections from Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site in Brookline, Massachusetts, American Museum of Natural History in New York City, and United Technologies Corporation in Hartford, Connecticut. When same-size copies are required, the Center can use either a two-step, interpositive process or a direct duplication process depending on needs and priorities for individual collections. Especially large collections might require a comprehensive record copy on microform, supplemented by full-size prints or enlargements for purposes of sale or publication. NEDCC's experienced staff can assist the archivist, librarian or curator in evaluating the relative cost and quality of various copy methods. Such informal consultation and the production of sample copies are usually helpful at the early stages of most projects.



Cabinet Photograph-circa 1880

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS/ CONSULTATION

NEDCC occasionally sponsors workshops and seminars on photographic conservation. Identification of early processes, proper storage and care of collections, conservation vs. copying, and duplication of negatives are among the topics covered in recent programs. The Center can also provide speakers or arrange programs for institutions that wish to sponsor workshops or seminars.

Surveys, including a review of storage conditions and an evaluation of treatment and reproduction needs, are available to individual institutions. Survey reports can be of value in planning and budgeting for long-term conservation programs.