



Hello everyone!

First I'd like to thank the folks at ArLA for having me. I'm Heather Register Zbinden, the Programs and Website Coordinator for the Central Arkansas Library System's Bobby L. Roberts Library of Arkansas History and Art. I'm a public historian working in the public library space - developing programs and other resources about Arkansas history.

Today I'm going to talk about how we developed our personal archiving program and our DIY Memory Lab.

I have provided a single-page PDF handout that gives links to all the information I'm going to reference today.

But first a bit about our library system.

The Central Arkansas Library System is a 15-branch system serving the people of Pulaski and Perry counties Arkansas. We serve over 400,000 people and had a total circulation of over 2.2 million in 2022. The Roberts Library of Arkansas History & Art (where I work) houses the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies (which is our archives and special collections division) as well as the offices of the online Encyclopedia of Arkansas. So Personal Archiving and Memory Lab fit right in with our mission and was a great way to let people know who we are and what we do.



In 2019 the Central Arkansas Library System was awarded a grant through the DC Public Library to be part of their national Memory Lab Network. The grant was funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

My colleague Anna Lancaster and I attended Memory Lab boot camp in late January 2020 in Washington DC. And we planned to open our Memory Lab in the summer of 2020.

Boot Camp trained us on setting up a Memory Lab, some basic preservation techniques, and ideas for developing programming around the Memory Lab.



Within 6 weeks of returning from DC, the world shut down and the Memory Lab project was put on indefinite hold.

I took this time to develop a personal archiving program - teaching patrons how to organize their family photos, documents, and other papers. Because we were home for a while, I created my own personal archive to make sure I could teach others how to.

Without organizing everything first, you can't make the most of your Memory Lab time.



So let's start with the WHY? Why personal archiving? Why create a Memory Lab for patrons?

For historians, the personal papers of everyday people are the great discoveries of the work we do. I would argue that personal archives – personal papers of everyday people – are more important and more significant to the study of human history than the papers of the great, the famous, or the infamous.

The papers, photographs, and letters we've got stored in our basements, attics, and closets can show us how things used to be done and how things in our world have changed.



The importance of digitizing family papers and photos hit home on Friday, March 31st, 2023. An EF3 tornado tore through Little Rock and surrounding communities. The tornado was on the ground for 34 miles with a maximum width of 600 yards. The vast majority of this area was residential and highly populated.

The tornado's path passed through my neighborhood and many of our friends and neighbors have severe structural damage or lost their houses completely. After being thankful that everyone is alive and safe, many have expressed that they are mourning the loss of treasured family memories.

So now I'll add natural disasters to the list of reasons people should get their papers organized and digitized. Losing the original would still be devastating but having a digital copy might lessen the pain.



Now that you know why, let's focus on the what! What does personal archiving look like? What does a memory lab look like?

A Memory Lab is a space in your library with equipment for patrons to scan and digitize their personal photos, letters, and audio-video items.

The Memory Lab is completely do-it-yourself from start to finish. Patrons make their appointment using the scheduling app through our website. And after a brief 30 min (at most) hands-on training when they arrived, the staff only helps with troubleshooting and tech issues.

Our Memory Lab has two stations - the flatbed scanner station and the AV station. The two Memory Lab stations allow for scanning photos, negatives, and slides and digitizing VHS and Beta home movies as well as audio cassette recordings.

The two-station set up allows for more patrons to use the Memory Lab at one time. We can have two patrons - one at the flatbed station and one at the AV station - per 2-hour appointment block. This setup also allows one patron to book both stations at one time so they can multitask but more on that in a minute.

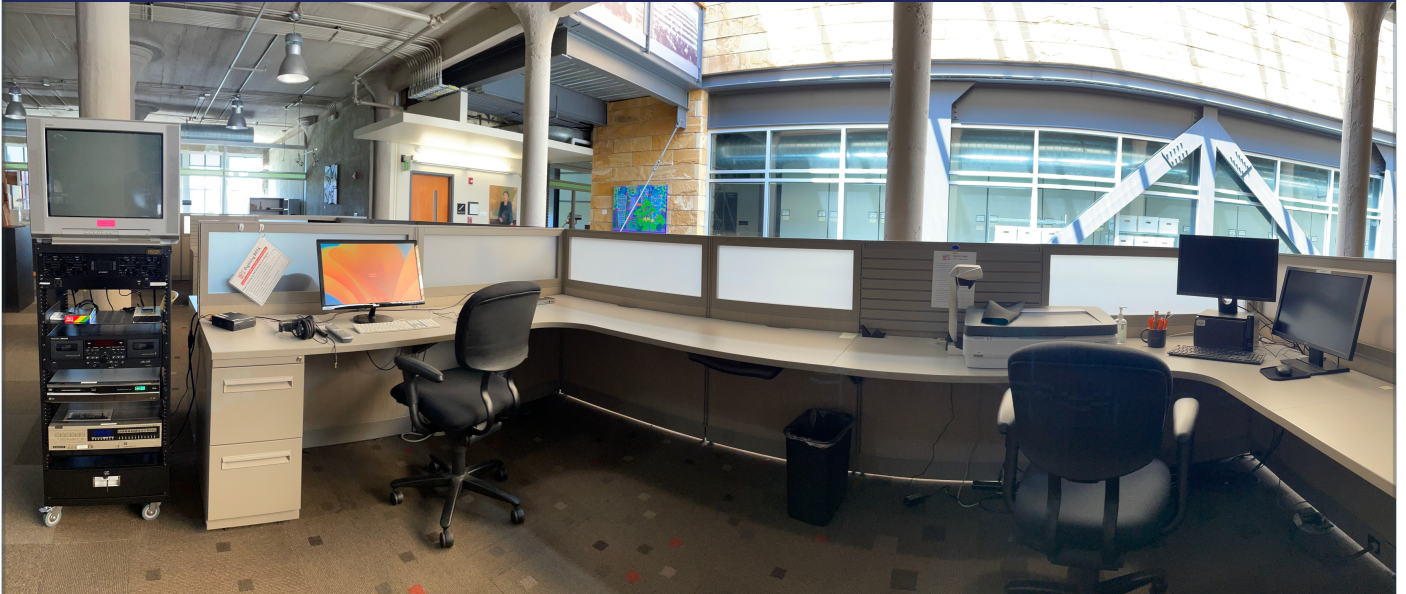
Patrons are not required to have a CALS library card to use the lab and they don't have to show any form of ID to use it. This is an important requirement for folks at DCPL. It removes a barrier to service for many patrons.



On to the where? Where should you put a Memory Lab?

It is important to have the lab in a public area so patrons can see it and be able to access it when they are ready to use it. This is also a way to promote the service. I think we all know that no matter how many signs or advertisements or social media posts we do to let the public know about what is going on in our libraries, there are always people who don't know.

Originally we planned to have our DIY Memory Lab on the 2nd floor of the Roberts Library as part of our genealogy research room. And it would be staffed by employees who worked on that floor.



But because of COVID delays and social distancing policies, we decided to move it to the 3rd floor of the Roberts Library and have other staff be in charge of helping patrons with troubleshooting.

The staff on the 2nd floor are already busy serving patrons with genealogy and manuscript research needs so we didn't want to add another task to their schedules.

So this is what we ended up with. The space is larger and more spread out - giving patrons the opportunity to spread out their collections if needed.

Lighting is also important. On a beautiful sunny day, our building has light streaming in from our atrium skylight. But on cloudy or overcast days, the space can be shadowed. The workspaces are ok but the back of the AV Tower can be dark. So we have a mini flashlight hanging on a hook for people to use when switching cables.



The flatbed scanner station was pretty straightforward to put together. It was pretty plug-and-play. We purchased the required scanner from an online vendor. Used an existing computer with a 2nd monitor.

The grant required that we purchase the Epson 12000XL scanner. It allows patrons to scan photos and documents up to 11x14. They can also scan mounted slides, 35mm negatives, medium format negatives, and 4x5 negatives. The great thing about this scanner is the larger scanning area. You can get 6 to 7 3x5 photos on the glass at one time which makes the scanning process go much faster.

With this scanner, patrons can scan at very high resolution and get a good clean scan of older photos and documents.

As an aside - this scanner is wonderful but it was very expensive. This is a \$4000 and if we weren't required to purchase it by the granting organization, I don't know that we would have purchased it. Most flatbed scanners in the \$300 to \$500 range will work just fine for a Memory Lab.



We added a small overhead book scanner to this station because we discovered that many patrons needed to be able to scan scrapbooks and other bound items that couldn't be inverted onto the flatbed scanner. We purchased the Fu-jitsu ScanSnap Contactless Scanner for this purpose.

This scanner is great for extra fragile items, scrapbooks and baby books.

We also have a larger book scanner in our Research Room on the 2nd floor that can scan up to full-spread newspapers but it can be difficult to use. It often doesn't do what we ask it to do. So the smaller version is great for the Memory Lab and was much less expensive.

An overhead book scanner was not part of the original specs provided by DCPL but we've found that our patrons use it as much as the flatbed scanner.



AV equipment (VHS, Beta, and audio cassette) for the Memory Lab was a combination of purchased items, stuff from our "technology graveyard," and items scavenged from eBay and other vintage repositories.

The Boot Camp training encouraged us to solicit equipment donations from local TV stations or TV studios. We tried but were unsuccessful in getting any donated equipment - aside from my personal VCR, I donated as a parts VCR. Other items like the high-quality audio deck we use were purchased for other archival projects and are now getting a 2nd life as part of the Memory Lab.

Also, many items in our technology graveyard were donated to us much earlier than 2019 so we were lucky in that regard.

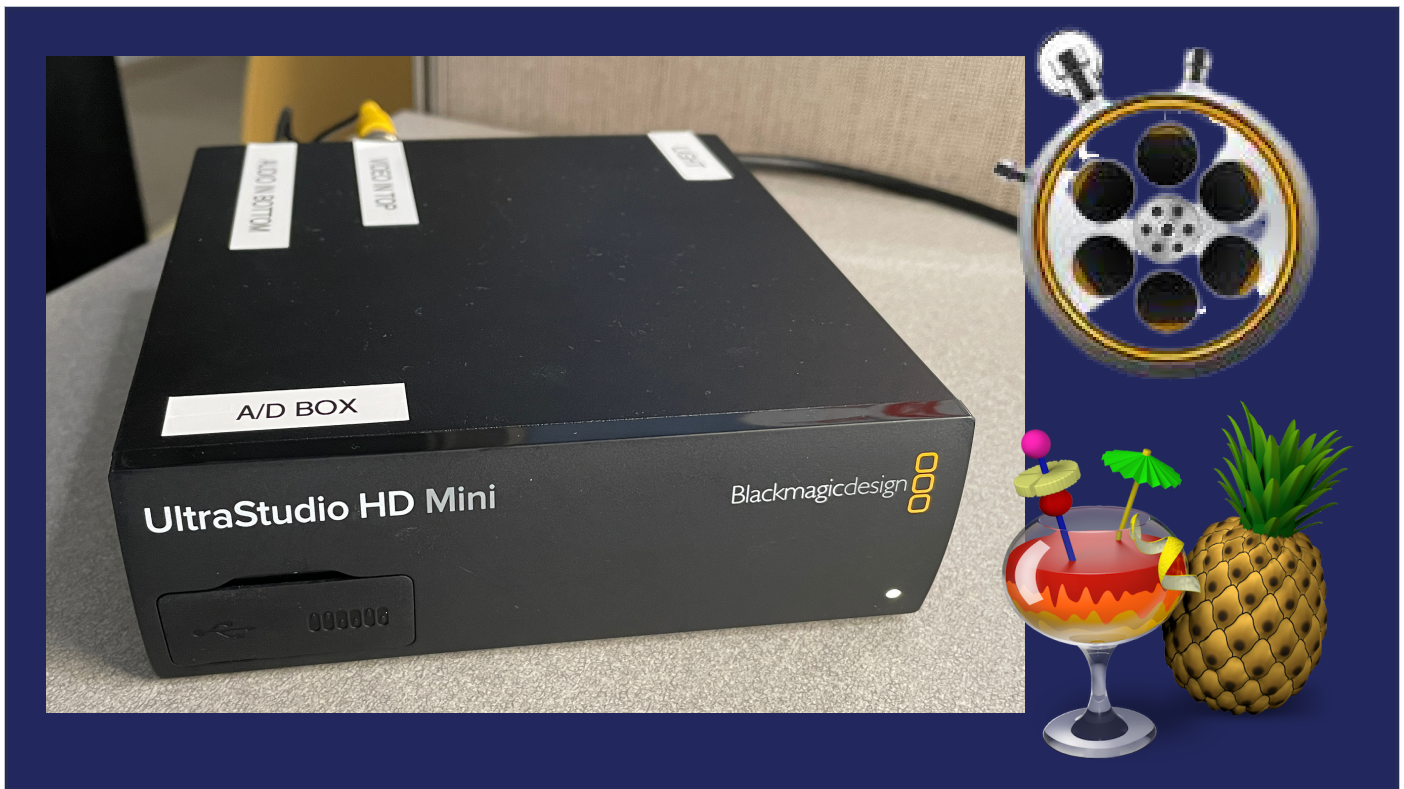
The AV station was a little more tricky to get set up.

But thankfully at CALS we have a secret weapon - our colleague Anna. She's been an AV archivist for over 10 years and her knowledge of how it all goes together is a thing of beauty to watch. She is a fixer and is able to solve most problems with the Memory Lab by finding a solution on YouTube. If you have a techy person on staff who is jazzed about a project like this we would recommend letting them go crazy creating a Memory Lab for your library.

Our current setup allows patrons to digitize VHS, Beta, and audio cassettes. Patrons can digitize one format at a time and cables need to be switched when switching formats. Most patrons are

digitizing VHS and so we leave the AV station set up for VHS. When patrons make an appointment to use the AV station, the intake form asks them what format they will be digitizing. If it is not VHS, we switch it over. Technically patrons can switch the cable themselves but we've found it is easier to just do it for them.

AV digitization happens in real-time so a 2-hour tape is going to take 2-hours to digitize. Remember a minute ago when I said that our set up for the Memory Lab allows patrons to use both stations at once? This is where that comes in. Patrons can reserve both the flatbed scanner station and the AV station. So, while their video is capturing, they can be scanning photographs on the flatbed scanner. It's a great multitasking moment.



In order to convert analog media (like VHS or Beta) to digital, you need to use a conversion box like BlackMagic. This will translate the video to MOV file on the Mac.

Once the VHS or Beta tape has been captured using the BlackMagic Express app (film reel stopwatch icon), then the patron renders the file to MP4 using the HandBrake app (that's the cocktail and pineapple icon). MP4 is a much smaller file size than a MOV file. With the MP4 format, patrons can share the video via email, social media, and other services.

The grant required we purchase a different BlackMagic conversion box but the ones we found on eBay were pricey and the one we purchased didn't work. So we use this BlackMagic Design UltraStudio HD Mini instead. Also, most newer VHS players (especially ones with a dual VHS/DVD) have the built-in time-correcting capability that the older VHS player don't have. Long story short - you can choose from a variety of different converters that are less expensive and just as good quality as the BlackMagic.

As I said a minute ago, AV digitization happens in real-time. There's no way to speed it up. But we've learned that it is best to digitize video in 20 to 30 min segments so the file size is manageable for rendering and file storage. So we discourage our patrons from digitizing the whole tape as one file.

Also we tell patrons they can't digitize copyrighted materials. So no bringing in your 1980s audio cassette collection.



Because it is do-it-yourself, we have labeled everything and provided detailed step-by-step instructions for all parts of both stations.

Don't assume that the patron knows the difference between VHS or BETA.

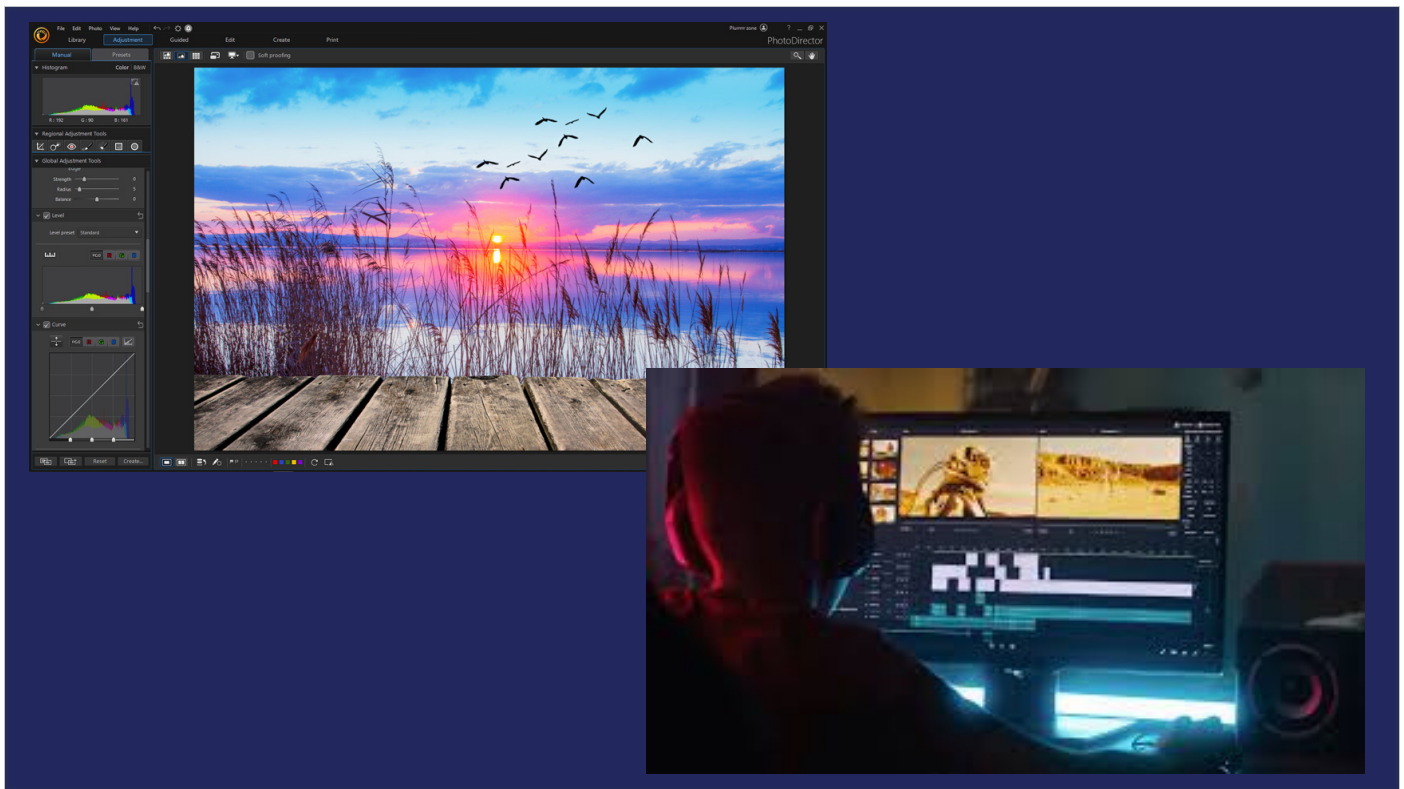
Or that they know what VHS is at all.

When the video is captured, BlackMagic also captures the audio but unfortunately, the technology doesn't allow patrons to listen to their videos. They just get to be surprised when they watch them at home.

FUTURE FORMATS

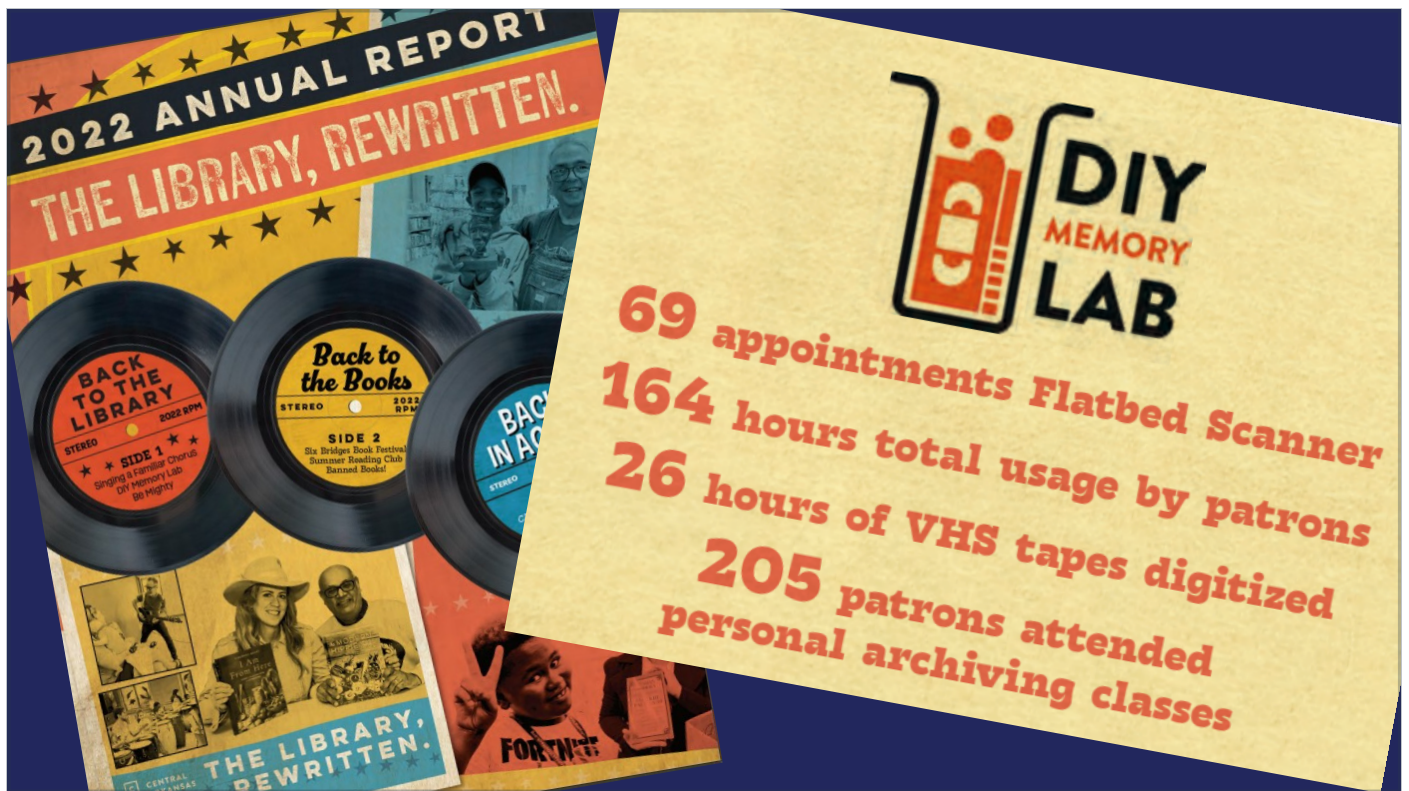


In the future, we hope to be able to add other formats to our AV station. We have plans for Mini-DV and Umatic. And we are exploring the possibility of having the ability to digitize Hi8 and Digital 8.



Our Memory Lab is only intended to be used for scanning and digitizing. Not editing.

But there are so many free or stock programs for editing, we suggest patrons go to a CALS branch and use the computers there for editing if they don't have the software to edit at home.



Here you can see the stats for our first year or rather for May through December 2022.

We booked 69 appointments with 7 patrons on the flatbed scanner.

And patrons digitized 26 hours of VHS tapes.

My personal archiving program continues to draw 25 to 30 patrons per month.



RobertsLibrary.org/PersonalArchiving/

The Personal Archiving class is offered once a month via Zoom. And the latest version of the program is available on YouTube.

The program covers organizing papers and photos in preparation for digitization - what to do about damaged stuff, how to store both physical and digital copies, naming and tagging files, and sharing digital versions with friends and family.

We strongly encourage patrons to take this class before making an appointment to use the Memory Lab. But we don't require them to attend.

The QR Code here will take you directly to the program on YouTube. Or you can go to RobertsLibrary.org/PersonalArchiving/ to access the recording.

A link is also provided in the PDF handout.

If you chose to create a Personal Archiving and Memory Lab program at your library, feel free to steal heavily from any and all of the information I've provided.



I encourage patrons to get organized before making an appointment to use the Memory Lab because most people's boxes look similar to mine before they get organized.

It saves them time once they get to the Memory Lab. It is easier to digitize lots of photos at once and lots of papers at once.

If they are able to view their tapes or cue up what they want to digitize before arriving, that is helpful too. But we're realistic, most people no longer have the equipment at home.

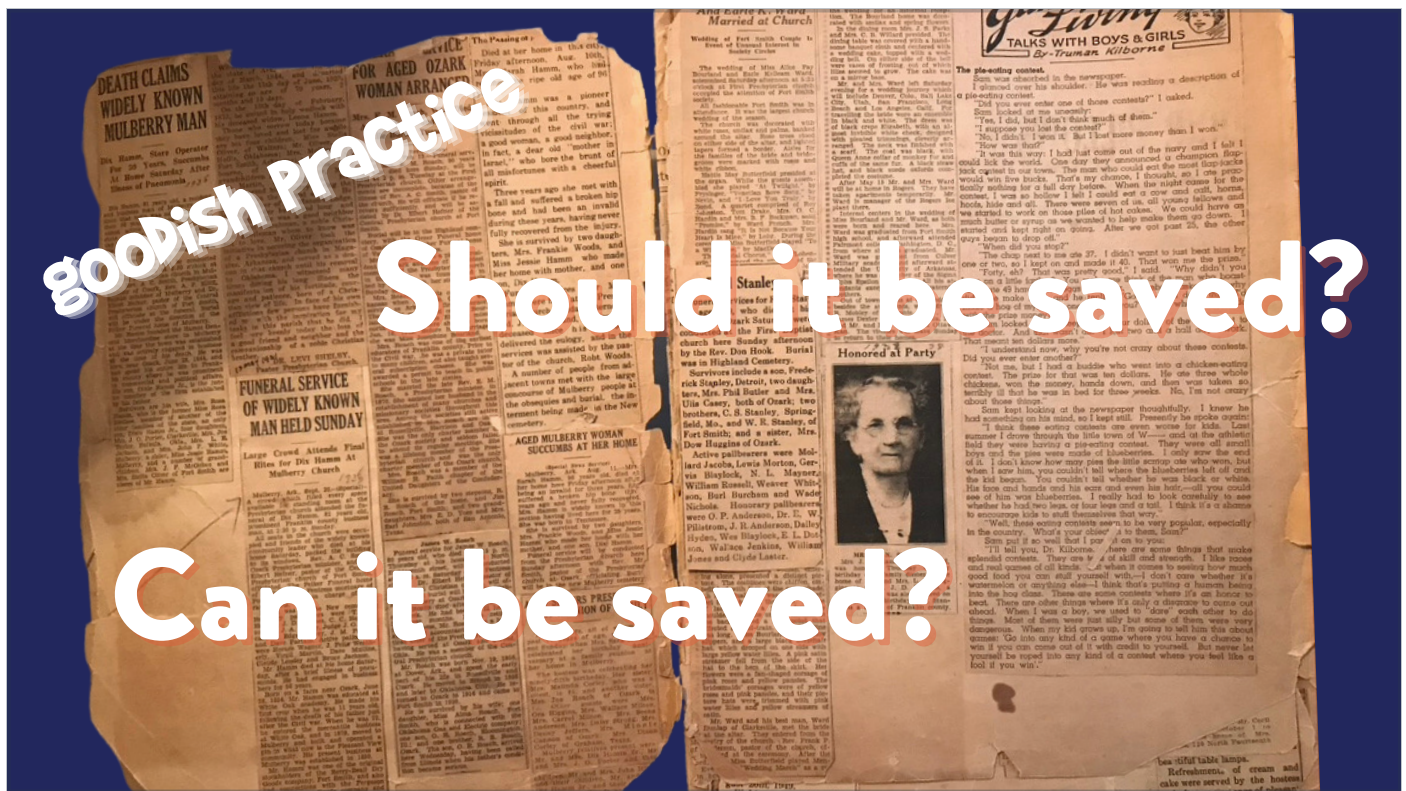


So, here are some of those goodish practices that I promised in the program description. And there are lots more in the recording of my Personal Archiving program.

Despite the Epson scanner's ability to scan at very high resolution, we recommend patrons scan their items as Jpeg and no more than 600 dpi. In most cases, 300 dpi is still a good quality scan.

That's unless they are scanning slides or film negative and then we recommend no more than 1200 dpi JPEGs. And in this case 600 dpi will usually do just fine.

Although Tiffs are the archival standard, most patrons don't have the digital storage capacity to store high-resolution (1200 dpi or higher) TIFFs.



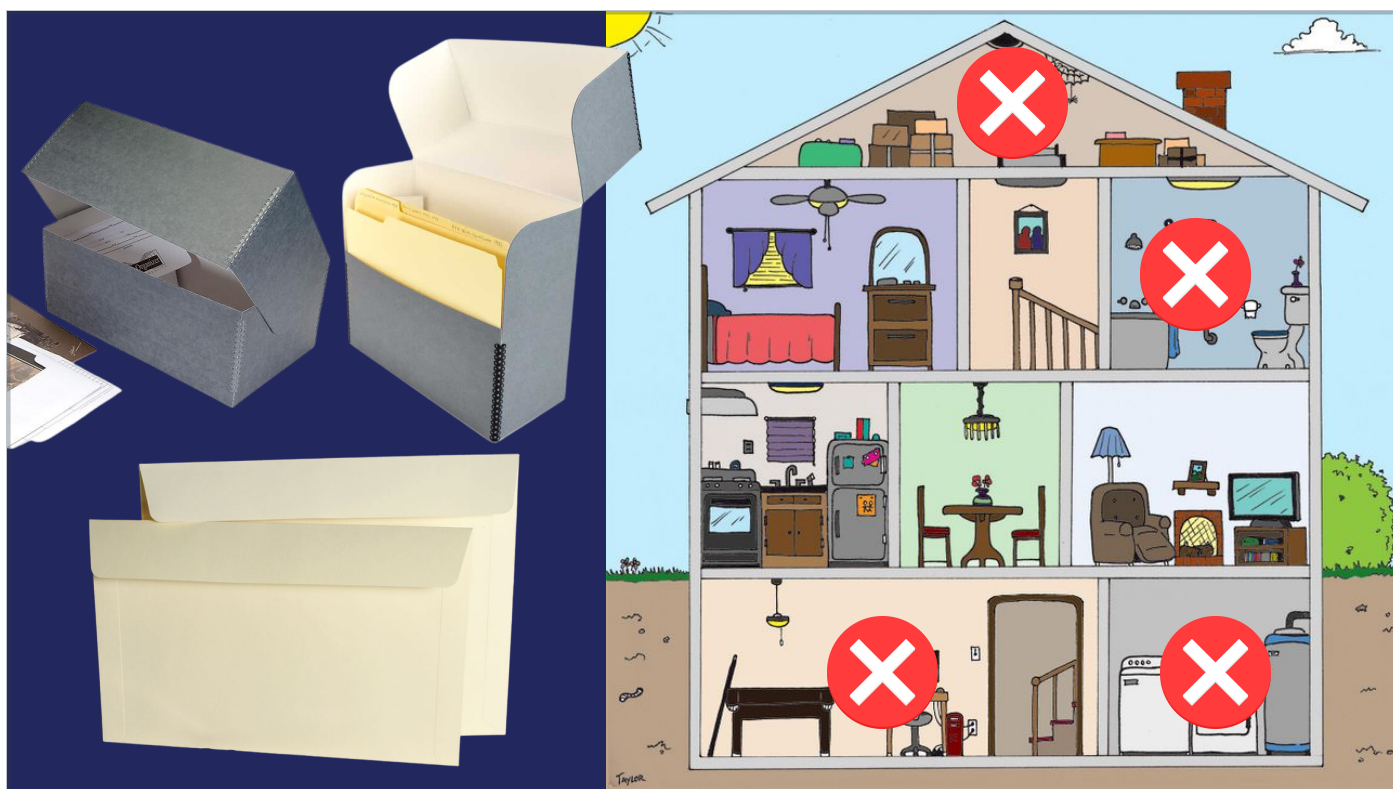
When patrons are organizing their personal papers, they have to make some hard decisions.

They have to ask themselves.

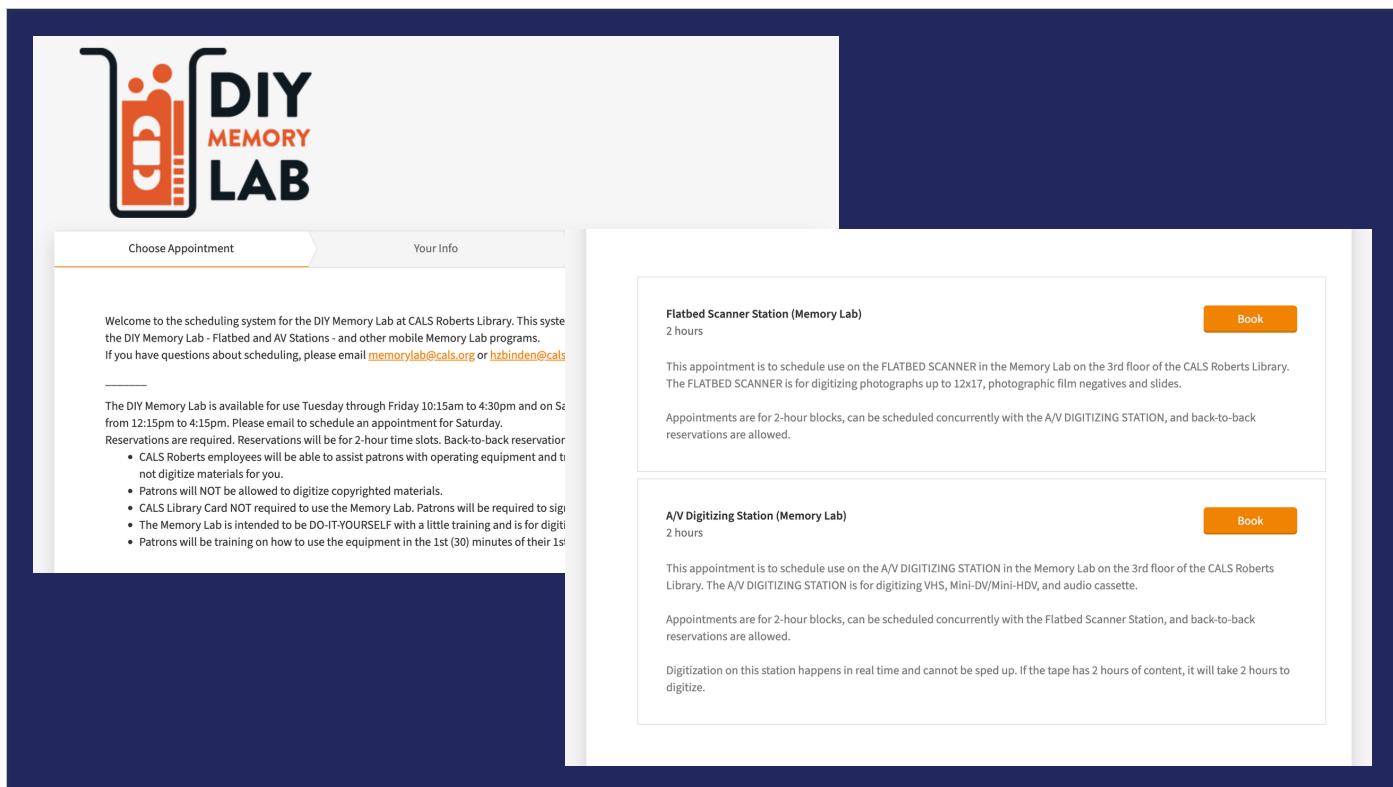
Should it be saved?

Can it be saved?

In many cases, it's the information that you want or need NOT the piece of paper. So scan it and toss it. You really don't have to save everything.



With all our goodish practices, the one place I really want patrons to invest in quality is in storing their originals. We talk about where and how to store the physical originals. We talk about archival-quality storage boxes, folders, and envelopes. And that your organized collection shouldn't be stored in an attic, basement (even a finished basement), laundry room, bathroom, or kitchen.



As I mentioned earlier, the Memory Lab is Do-It-Yourself from start to finish. This includes the patron making their own appointment.

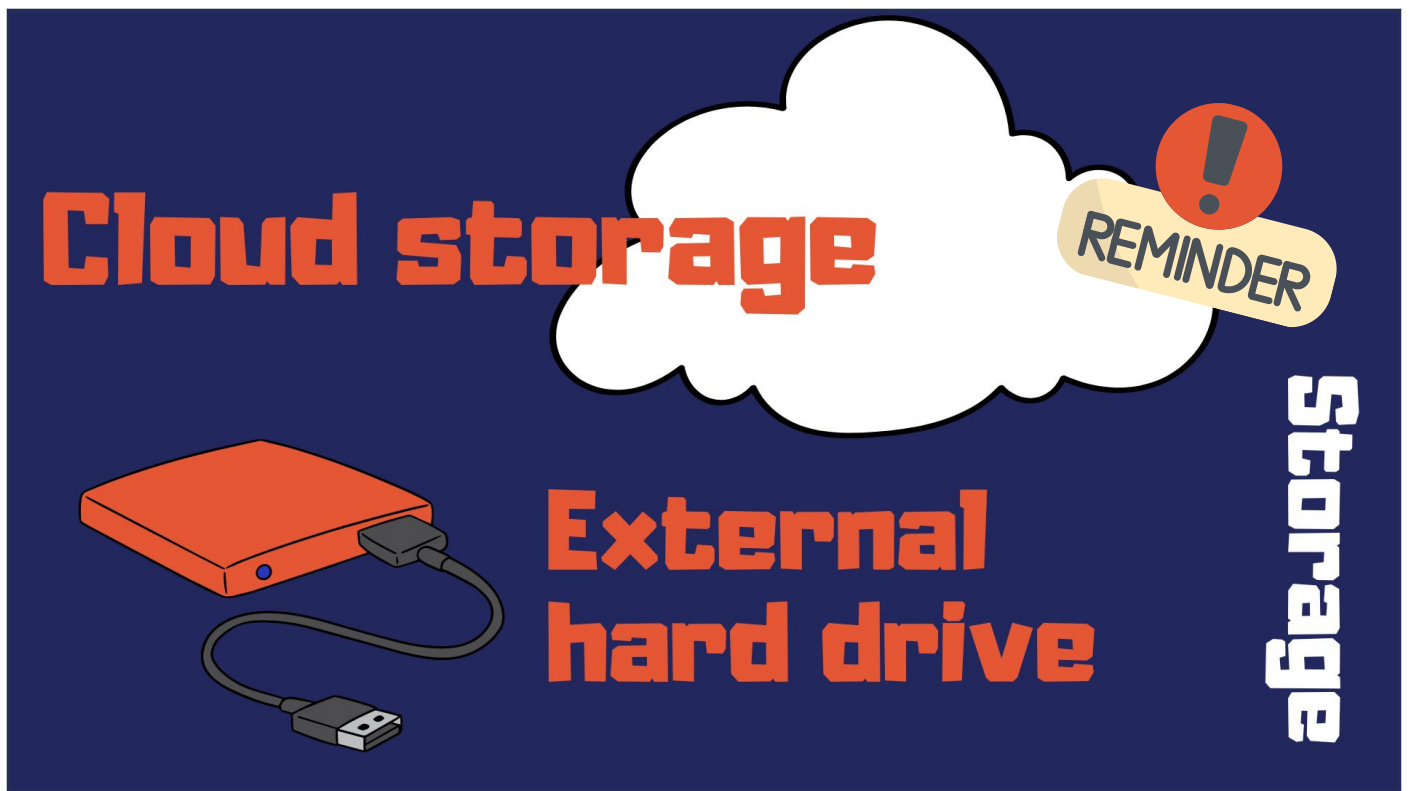
We use SquareSpace Scheduling and it cost about \$180 per year and that might be the non-profit discount rate.

When a patron makes an appointment, I get an email notification and they get a confirmation email automatically. They also get a reminder email the day before their appointment and are able to cancel the appointment if they need to for whatever reason.

We have it set up so that all Memory Lab appointments show up on our work calendars so we know when folks are coming. And patrons can't make appointments less than 24 hours before so there are no surprises to the schedule.

The Memory Lab is not currently staffed on Saturdays so we ask patrons to email us if they need a Saturday appointment and we negotiate a date and time with them.

We also block off appointments when I'm on vacation. So staffing the lab doesn't become an added job duty for anyone else.



We tell patrons to store their digital files in at least two different digital locations to safeguard against a massive data loss.

We recommend the two locations be cloud storage (such as iCloud, Google Drive, or Dropbox) and an external hard drive.

They also need to check in on their files at least once a year. This isn't a set-it-and-forget-it scenario. A repeatable calendar reminder is perfect for this!



I also cover in my Personal Archiving class, what should not be used for digital storage.

I get a lot of phones call (at least one per week) where a patron asks if they can burn their videos to disc. Most are shocked when I tell them we don't have that ability.

We tell patrons both in the personal archiving classes, in the information they are supposed to read when they make their appointment, and on the phone if they call that these are not storage solutions (long-term or short-term).

So floppy disc, CD-Rom, DVD are not long term or short term storage solutions.

Flash drives and jump drives are ok as short-term storage. And we will even give them a flash drive with the CALS logo on it if they don't have an external hard drive, or don't want to log in to their cloud storage on a public computer.

BUT I MAKE THEM PINKY PROMISE THAT AS SOON AS THEY GET HOME, THEY'RE GOING TO TRANSFER IT TO THE CLOUD.



Just like with the physical organization of the photos, papers, etc, patrons need to be shown an example of how to organize their digital files.

One of the surprising things I've learned from two years of teaching personal archiving - is that people don't know how to organize their digital files. In particular, they don't know that you can make folders inside of folders on the computer.

I show patrons my digital file structure (pictured here). Within iCloud I have a main folder called Clarendon Ozark (named for the places the two sides of my family are from) and within that folder are other folders with the actual files.

I explain that when I'm scanning files, the files initially go into the UNPROCESSED folder and then after they are renamed, I moved them to either the Clarendon or Ozark folder - depending on which side of the family the file goes with.

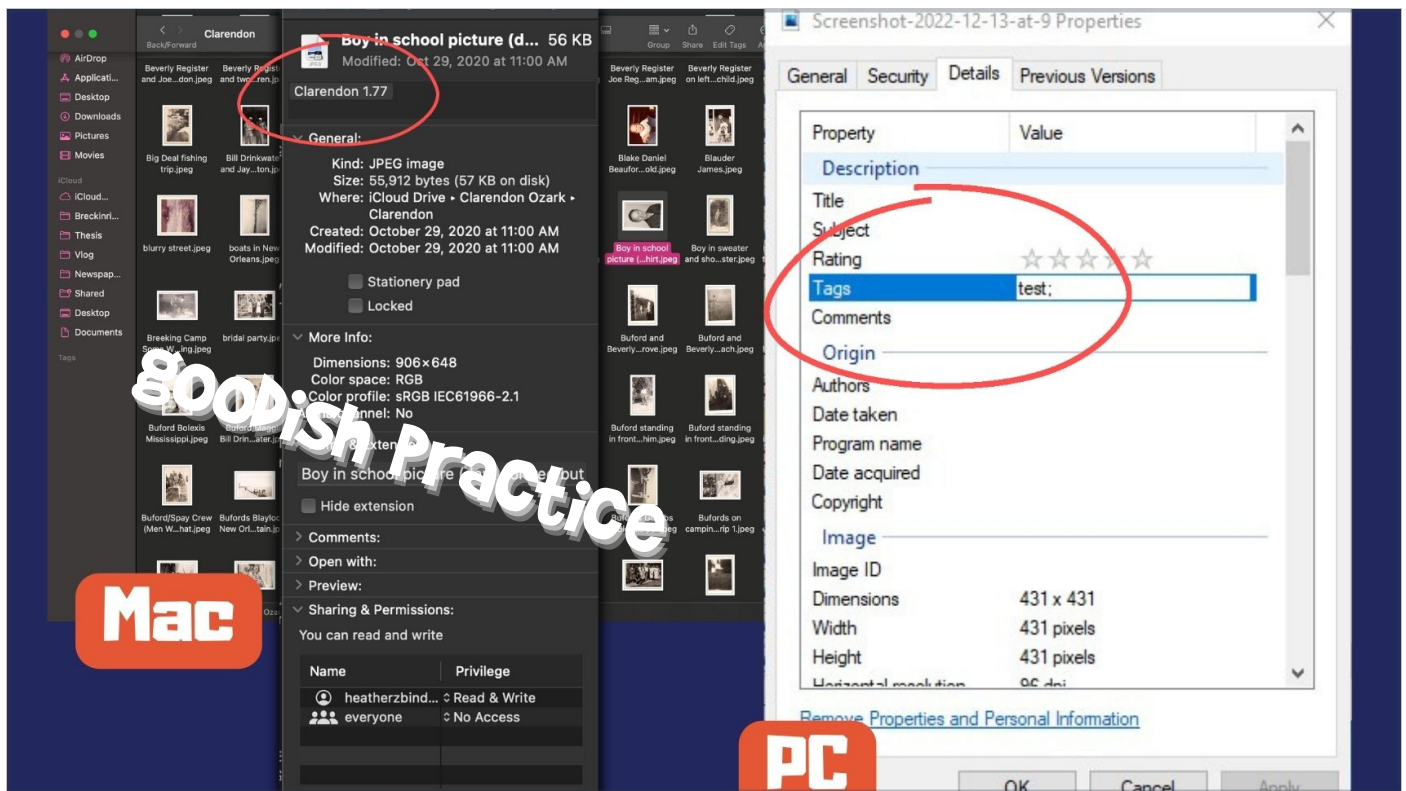


Naming digital files, especially photos, needs an example or several examples. Patrons seem to understand naming document files something other than Document but when it comes to photos, they are perfectly happy with letting the computer or their phone name it IMG_10000.jpg.

I tell them to be obvious and consistent with their file naming so that hopefully they know what the photo is without opening it completely. Also it helps others know what the photo is if they are looking at a bunch of file names.

You can see my example here with these school pictures. I have dozens of these from both sides of my family. And I don't know who any of these people are. So I've used facial features, hair attributes and clothes as a way to name them.

Computers want unique names for files so this also ensures no two names are alike.



I also teach patrons about tagging their scans so they can locate the paper original if needed. This is a new skill for most people and unlike the detailed metadata we attach to archival scans, this simple tagging method is a goodish practice.

You label your physical archival storage boxes each with a number and then you label each photo envelope or file folder with sequential numbers. That number set - for example 1.25 for box 1 envelope 25 - is added to the tag field of the digital file. File tagging can be done on both Macs and PCs.



I encourage patrons to share their digital archives with family and friends to create a more complete family and community history. In many cases (including my own) you don't know who all of the people in the photos are or where the photos were taken.

Google Photos allows people to comment on photos and Facebook Private Group allows patrons to share with a larger community group to get the context of people, places, and events.



In addition to the personal archiving classes and the Memory Lab itself, we also created oral history toolkits for patrons to borrow and use to record oral histories with their family members. The toolkit includes an Olympus digital mini recorder, a list of suggested questions to ask, and information on how to transfer the digital file from the recorder to a computer. These were created and launched at the beginning of the pandemic. After a year of promotion and availability, only one was checked out and was used.

So we updated all the materials to include information on how to conduct an oral history over Zoom or using a smartphone.

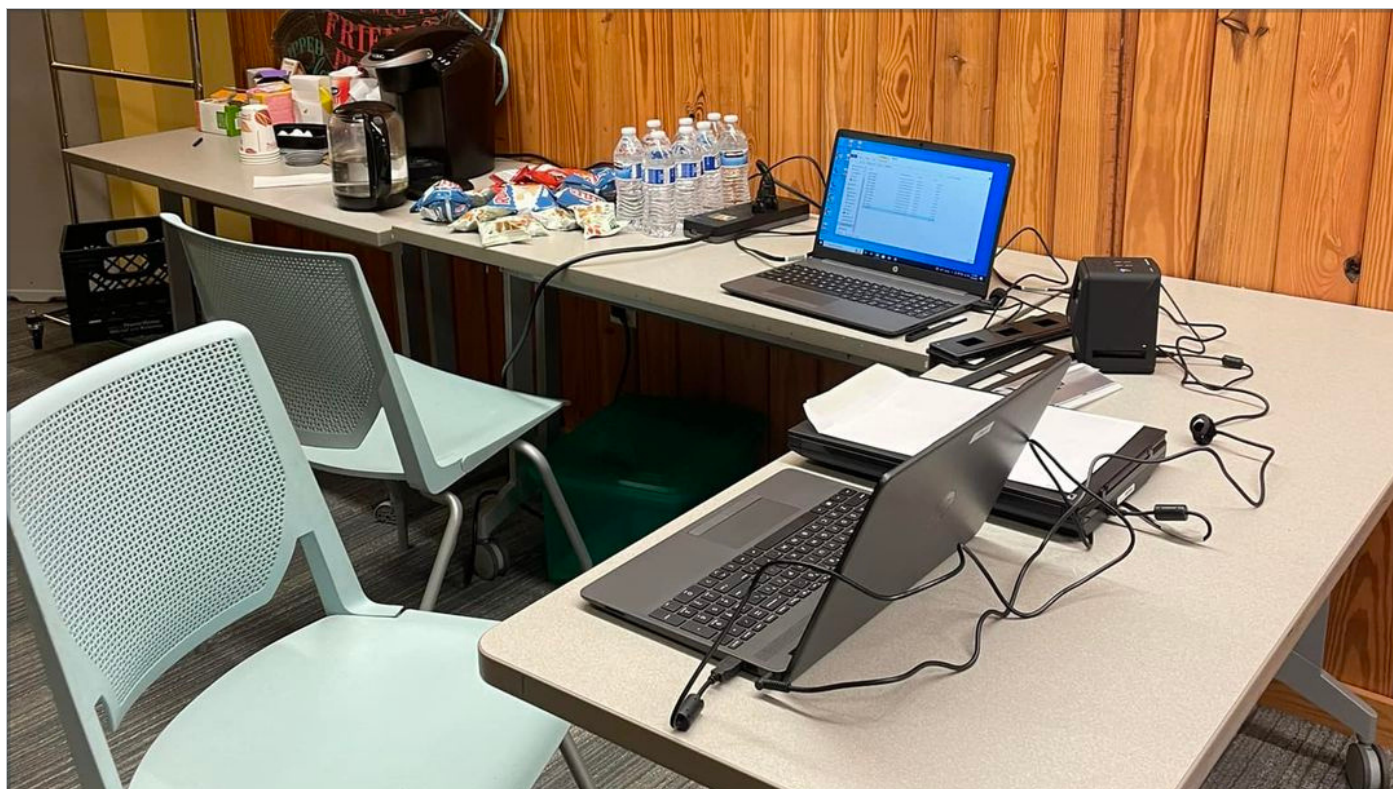
A link to information about these toolkits is on the handout.

We also have a recording room for patrons to use for oral histories or podcasts. It is equipped with a Marantz recorder, professional-quality microphones, and soundproofing. All patrons need to bring is their own SD card.



One of the tricks we learned while in DC at Bootcamp was audio cassette and VHS tape rehousing. This is for when a patron comes in with a damaged tape and it needs to be put into a new case so it can be digitized without messing up our equipment or damaging the physical tape inside the housing.

I came back ready to rehouse everything patrons brought in but what we've discovered is that if a tape was damaged, patrons just tossed them. So I haven't been able to use this new skill.



From the beginning, we knew we were going to create a mobile Memory Lab to take to our branches or other events.

Originally Anna and I thought the Mobile Lab would go and live at one of CALS's 15 branches for a month at a time to give patrons the opportunity to use the lab closer to home and not have to drive downtown.

But our Community Outreach Archivist Danielle Afsordeh suggested making the mobile lab a pop-up situation where we'd go to a branch or a community event for a few hours. Patrons can make appointments and we will scan up to 20 items for them. The Mobile Lab only scans photos, slides, and film negatives. Folks still have to come downtown to digitize VHS, Beta, and audio.



But the Mobile Memory Lab portable slide scanner can scan 110 film negatives which our other scanner can't.

110 was super popular in the 1980s and many slide and film scanners don't have the adapters to scan these thin film strips.

We purchased this slide scanner because it was small and portable and at the right price. Turns out it has 110 adapters. So it was win-win.



And finally - getting the word out!

We promoted the Memory Lab opening with a press release, social media posts, and an open house complete with donuts and breakfast pastries. We did training sessions (again complete with breakfast pastries) for other CALS staff members.

Our Executive Director also wrote a piece about the library system for the statewide newspaper and include information about the Memory Lab. This was about 4 months before we were going to open and that helped get people excited about what was coming.

I also advertise the Memory Lab at every Personal Archiving training (which I started doing about 15 months before the lab opened).

And I continue to mention it at every program we offer and continue to post to social media on both Roberts Library accounts and systemwide accounts.



So BOTTOM LINE

All in - we have spent about \$9000 on the equipment for the permanent Memory Lab and the mobile Memory Lab. We purchased one new computer - the iMac Mini - for the AV station and used an existing PC for the flatbed scanner. Quick note - If we had to go back and do it over again, we probably wouldn't use a Mac on the AV station. We'd get a really nice PC. Our IT department are not Mac folks so they'd have preferred a PC.

And the Epson 12000XL was purchased new. Other equipment like the BlackMagic Design Intensity Shuttle and Mitsubishi VCR S-VHS (that we didn't end up using) were purchased through eBay. And an assortment of connectors and cables which are more expensive than most of us imagine.

There is a link to the complete list of equipment required by DCPL on the supplied PDF handout.

Our ongoing costs are \$180 per year for the scheduling software (which might go away next year when the library system converts to a systemwide scheduling system for meeting rooms and the like). I spend a few hours a month of my time presenting Personal Archiving to patrons at the library and as outreach. And Anna and I spend maybe three hours per month training and troubleshooting with patrons on using the equipment.

One final note - I think we are all aware that technology is rapidly changing. By the time Anna and I returned to Little Rock from Boot Camp in 2020, many of the items on the equipment list for the

Memory Lab were out of date or difficult to find. As with all our goodish practices, take this basic concept and make it work for you. Use the technology available to you in the space you have. I think patrons will love you for it.

All in all the Memory Lab has been a great addition to our library of things and I encourage you to put one together for your patrons.



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501.320.5744

Here is my contact information. You can email me or call me with any questions you have as you work to get your Personal Archiving and Memory Lab stuff together. I'm also available for video calls of all shapes and sizes if that would be helpful.

Again thanks to PLA for having me and now I'm ready to answer any questions you might have.