

The pictures tell the story

Guest speaker at genealogy group's meeting stresses importance of keeping family photos

By David Leone
Staff Writer

Everyone knows that a picture is worth a thousand words.

What many do not know is that the paper the picture is printed on can be worth just as much.

That was the topic of the area's genealogy group meeting held recently at the Eva Perry Regional Library.

"It didn't use to be scholarly to use photos in history writing," says Dick Lankford, Assistant State Archivist from the Division of Archives and History. "Photography is just as much a record as a paper collection. It's just a different format."

As the speaker for the group's November meeting, Lankford talked about the importance of preserving photographs with a personal, cultural and historical significance and he described how the photos often have more to meet the eye.

"We look at old photographs and see what we can glean from them," Lankford says.

Take a century-old photo of a horse and buggy in downtown Raleigh.

The driver's shoes and clothing can dictate area fashion, street facades show area architecture, all helping to nail down the date and place the picture was taken.

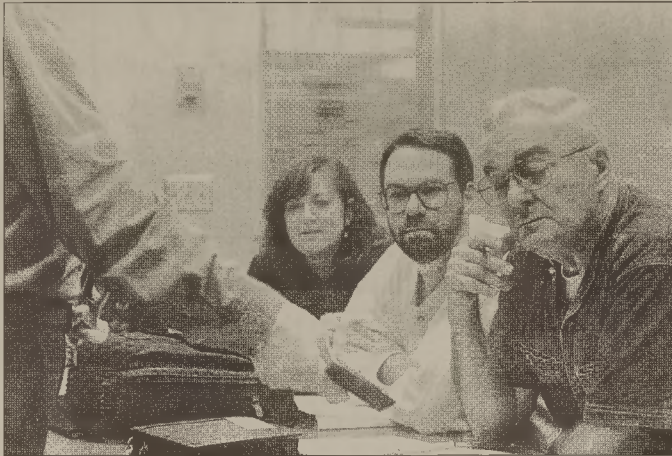


For the genealogy group members, this could mean finally putting a name to the face in a box of old photos, finding an ancestor in the family line.

"How to deal with background details is a topic we've discussed before," genealogy group member Scott Lee says.

The group meets monthly and is open to anyone interested in their heritage.

"People come to get answers to



Genealogy group members John Baron (right) and Scott Lee take a look at one of the old photographs encased in glass and a frame during Dick Lankford's presentation. Lankford explained to the family history buffs how photos can be dated by their composition and sometimes even by the type of frame they are encased in.

questions," Lee says.

In the process of researching one's ancestral heritage, the other group members can help with some of those answers.

On special occasions, speakers like Dick Lankford can provide insight.

Lankford described how looking at the paper or plate they were printed on could date the pictures.

For instance, the Daguerrotype and the Calotype were the first photographs invented in 1839.

Daguerrotype photos use no negative - instead are exposed onto a silver emulsion copper plate covered in glass. The photographs are exquisitely detailed.

Since Daguerrotypes were phased out in the 1860s, any Daguerrotype

a person finds in his collection can narrow down the date the photo was taken to that time period.

The same plate or paper dating process can be used for all pictures taken since then, Lankford says.

He added that even the housing or frame the photo is encased in can reveal some of its history.

The cartes-de-visite photos of the mid-to-late 1800s were paper images mounted onto 2 1/2 by 4 or 6 1/2 by 4 1/2 inch cards.

"Cartes-de-visites got so popular people were actually collecting them just like we collect baseball

cards today," Lankford says.

Therefore, a politician's photograph might just be one many, and not mean he was related to the people in the rest of the collection.

Lankford's presentation was not entirely academic though. He also spoke of the different types of photographs.

Take the Ambrotype, used in the late 1850s. Using alcohol to clean the photo wipes the image away.

Tintypes (actually made of flattened iron) will rust if left wet or in a moist area, while water will damage some glass plate negatives taken during the same time period.

And old roll film, used between 1889 and 1951, consists of cellulose nitrate, and is extremely flammable.

"Nobody really likes to have nitrate film, ordinarily because it is a fire hazard," Lankford says. "There were actually people killed copying these films."

Even the film that was used up to about 1970 has its problems. Chemically unstable, this "safety" film eventually degenerates.

After Lankford's presentation, the 15 or so genealogy group members began to pour over their own photographs - checking for the details that could help them put a time or name to the pictures.

Lee explained the need to know. "We're all historians," he says. "We all are descended from somebody important and famous. A lot of people take pride in finding they descended from someone famous."

Others are just plain curious.

Lee stressed the need to record that heritage. One obvious way to do so is by taking pictures. People love to see old photos of their parents, grandparents and so on.

There is another way to keep them alive, Lee says.

"You probably know your grandparents. Have you ever written anything about them?" he asks. "Your children and grandchildren would probably love it."

In his spare time, Lee himself is writing a book of stories about his family members.

This practice has proved invaluable, he says.

"At a family reunion I encouraged them to take 15 minutes to write something down about one of their grandparents," Lee says.

A second cousin sent him a tale of a grandfather who had taken her along on his postal route. The anecdote included the grandfather spelling out the deadly fate to which would befall the girl if she ever dared to open the glove box.

"It just helps you understand people," Lee says.

Local church to perform cantata, puppet show at Triangle mall

Morrisville First Baptist Church will help shoppers get into the Christmas spirit at Triangle Factory Shops Mall on Thursday, Dec. 18.

At 6 p.m., a presentation by the church's puppet ministry will be featured.

At 7 p.m., the choir will sing "Ev-

erlasting Light," a candlelight Christmas cantata by Claire

Kloninger and Mark Hayes.

Thank You For
Reading The Progress!

Town board okays extension of waterline along Davis Drive

The Morrisville Board of Commissioners approved funding to design a project to extend water lines near the intersection of Davis Drive and Aviation Parkway.

The lines would serve residents of the Holly Creek subdivision as well as those along Davis Drive and along Morrisville-Carpenter Road to the west of Davis Drive.

The project will consist of approximately 3,800 linear feet of 16-inch water main along Morrisville Carpenter Road; approximately 4,500 linear feet of 12- or 16-inch water main along Davis Drive and approximately 1,800 feet of 12-, 8-, and 6-inch water main in Holly Creek Road.

Bass, Nixon and Kennedy consulting engineers will design the system for \$35,000.

Also during the public comment time, Barbara Robinson asked for a stop light at Church Street and Chapel Hill Road, but learned that the intersection is in Durham County. The board voted to write a letter to the City of Durham requesting its help in the matter.

Merry Christmas!

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