



WISCONSIN  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

Collecting,  
Preserving, and  
Sharing Stories  
since 1846



WISCONSIN HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## Managing Photographic Files

Published March 2019

**CONTACT US**

Division of Library, Archives and Museum Collections | [govarc@wisconsinhistory.org](mailto:govarc@wisconsinhistory.org)



# Managing Photographic Files



## File Naming

- **Be consistent:** Determine how your organization or department will name files, based on the factors below, and document those decisions. You might include a readme.txt file that explains your naming conventions and any abbreviations used.
- **Create unique file names:** Filenames should be unique enough to exist independently of their folders if they are moved.
- **Keep it short, but descriptive:** Keep filenames under 31 characters.
- **Use alpha-numeric characters:** A period (.) should only be used to precede the file type extension at the end of a filename. Avoid using the following special characters in filenames:
  - # pound
  - % percent
  - & ampersand
  - { left curly bracket
  - } right curly bracket
  - \ back slash
  - < left angle bracket
  - > right angle bracket
  - \* asterisk
  - ? question mark
  - / forward slash
  - \$ dollar sign
  - ! exclamation
  - ' single quotes
  - " double quotes
  - : colon
  - @ at sign

- **Avoid spaces:** Instead of spaces, use underscores (\_) or hyphens (-).
- **Use the YYYYMMDD format for dates:** Decide whether dates will be placed at the beginning or end of a filename, depending on how they are likely to be accessed. For images documenting events, placing the date at the front of the filename may be most useful for accessing these images later.
- **Version control:** For files with multiple drafts (such as processed images), include the version number at the end of the filename.
- **Sequential numbering:** Use leading zeroes to ensure that sequentially numbered files are stored in order.
- **Document abbreviations:** If abbreviations are used in filenames, document the commonly used abbreviations so that they are implemented consistently and can be deciphered later.

## Renaming Tools

If you wish to rename your files for easier management, but you have too many to rename them by hand, there are many free tools available for bulk file naming:

- Advanced Renamer (Windows): <https://www.advancedrenamer.com/>
- Bulk Rename Utility (Windows): [http://www.bulkrenameutility.co.uk/Main\\_Intro.php](http://www.bulkrenameutility.co.uk/Main_Intro.php)
- Renamer (Mac): <https://renamer.com/>

## File Organization

- **Store files on shared drives:** Store files on shared network drives, which should be regularly backed up, rather than on your computer's hard drive. If you choose to use a cloud storage system for your photo files (e.g. Flickr), consult with your Records Officer to ensure that this system is able to meet statutory requirements for the maintenance of electronic records and that you are able to export all files and associated information for transfer or migration, if needed.
- **Hierarchical folder structures:** Use folders and subfolders to organize your files, but try to keep the structure as "flat" as possible.
- **Remove duplicates:** There is no need to retain duplicate or near-duplicate photos. If copies of photo files are found, they can be deleted. If several similar images are identified, select one or two representative images and delete the near-duplicates.
- **Document contents:** Document folder contents, file organization, who "owns" the files, and any other information that might be useful for anyone that manages or later accesses the files. If there are related files stored elsewhere (for example, a program from the same event depicted in a group of photos), document this information. You might record this information in a readme.txt file.

## Near-Duplicate Image Finders

These free tools can be used to identify and remove duplicate or near-duplicate images:

- SimilarImages: <https://tn123.org/simimages/>
- VisiPics: [http://www.visipics.info/index.php?title=Main\\_Page](http://www.visipics.info/index.php?title=Main_Page)