

# DHPS | NY



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DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE  
& PRESERVATION SERVICES  
*FOR NEW YORK*

*THANKS FOR JOINING US! TODAY'S PRESENTATION  
WILL BEGIN SHORTLY.*

*IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR WANT TO REPORT ANY TECHNICAL ISSUES,  
CONTACT US AT [INFO@DHPSNY.ORG](mailto:INFO@DHPSNY.ORG) OR (267) 362- 9433.*

## COMMON COLLECTION CONDITIONS:

Assessing the condition  
of your photograph  
collection

Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York is a five year initiative to deliver collections-related training, preservation surveys, archival assessments, and other services to the historical records community in New York.



New  
York State  
Library



DHPS|NY

DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE  
& PRESERVATION SERVICES

*FOR NEW YORK*

Website: [dhpsny.org](http://dhpsny.org)



*New York State  
Archives*

CONSERVATION  
CENTER

*for Art & Historic Artifacts*

# Barbara Lemmen

Senior Photograph Conservator  
Conservation Center for Art and  
Historic Artifacts (CCAHA)

Photograph conservation, collection  
surveys and consultations

Meets with clients to assess collection  
objects

Workshops, lectures, webinars

[www.ccaha.org](http://www.ccaha.org)



**CONSERVATION  
CENTER**  
*for Art & Historic Artifacts*

# Today's Goals:

- Introduce participants to factors that affect the long-term preservation of their collections.
- Provide a framework to prioritize preservation needs.
- Discuss some methods for caring for collections until the next steps can be taken.



# WHY ASSIGN PRESERVATION PRIORITIES?

- Provide data for creating a preservation plan
- Improve access
- Focus time, preservation efforts, funding, and storage strategies
- Support applications for funding for preservation and conservation projects

## When do you prioritize a collection's preservation needs?

- When accessioning or cataloguing new collection items
- During processing or appraisal
- As part of a collections survey

# Assessing condition on the frontline

- Volunteers
- Archivists
- Curators
- Educators
- Collectors
- Donors
- Registrars
- Researchers
- Collection Managers
- Anyone who looks at your collection!



Courtesy of the Withers Collection Museum and Gallery



# Prioritizing by condition



Image courtesy of Fisk University

# Condition Priority Levels

<b>Urgent</b> (Contagious)	Immediate intervention is needed; cannot be accessed without treatment
<b>High</b>	Object(s) are in danger of further damage; access should be limited or none
<b>Moderate</b>	Object(s) are vulnerable but not in immediate danger; should be handled with moderate supervision and instruction
<b>Low</b>	Object(s) would benefit from treatment but can be safely accessed
<b>None</b>	Object(s) are in stable, good condition

# Priority: Urgent

- Damp objects
- Active or inactive mold
- Active insect infestation
- Sooty or extremely soiled objects



**NOTE:** This category will always be the highest priority requiring immediate attention regardless of the object's or collection's mission relevance

# Priority: Urgent



# Priority: High

**An object that  
may be a risk to  
itself and cannot  
be accessed  
safely**



# Priority: High

- Deteriorating film
- Severe flaking
- Significant structural damage
- Blocked prints or negatives



<https://psap.library.illinois.edu/collection-id/guide/negative#silverneg>

- Cased image issues
- Rolled objects



Courtesy of a private client

# Priority: Moderate

- Minor edge flaking
- Distortion
- Pressure-sensitive tape
- Loose surface soiling
- Moderate physical damage
- Fading of color images



Image courtesy of Debbie Norris

# Priority: Low

- Small tears, creases, losses
- Staining
- Light surface soil
- Broken glass negatives



Courtesy of a private client

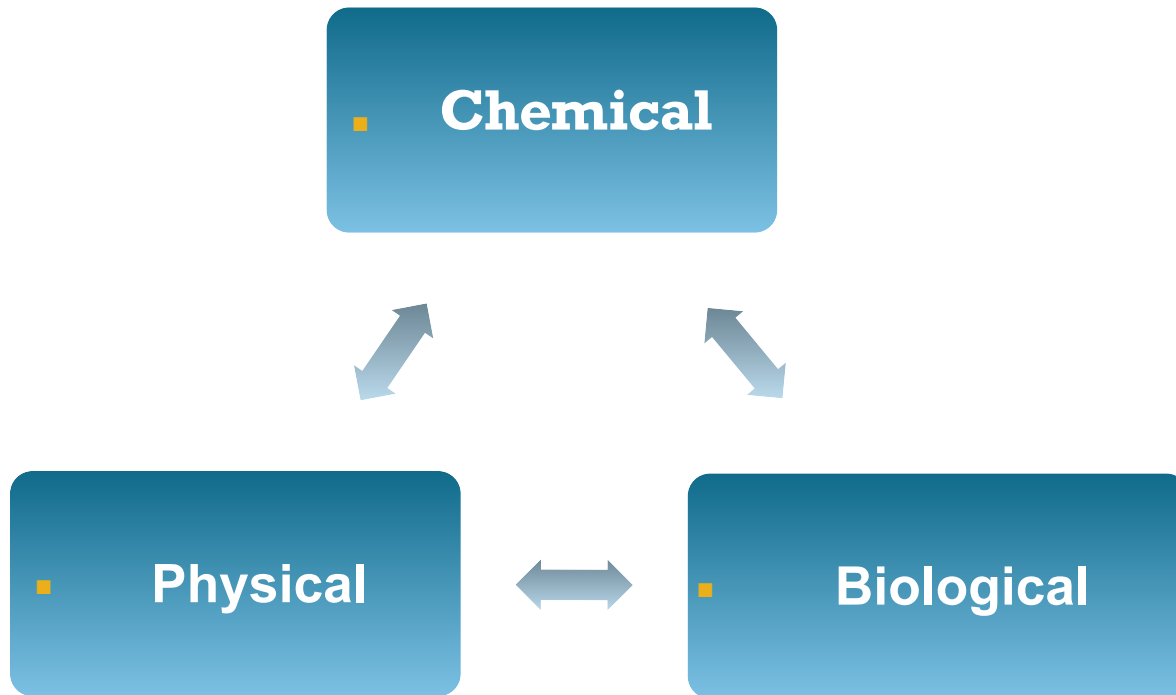


# Priority: None



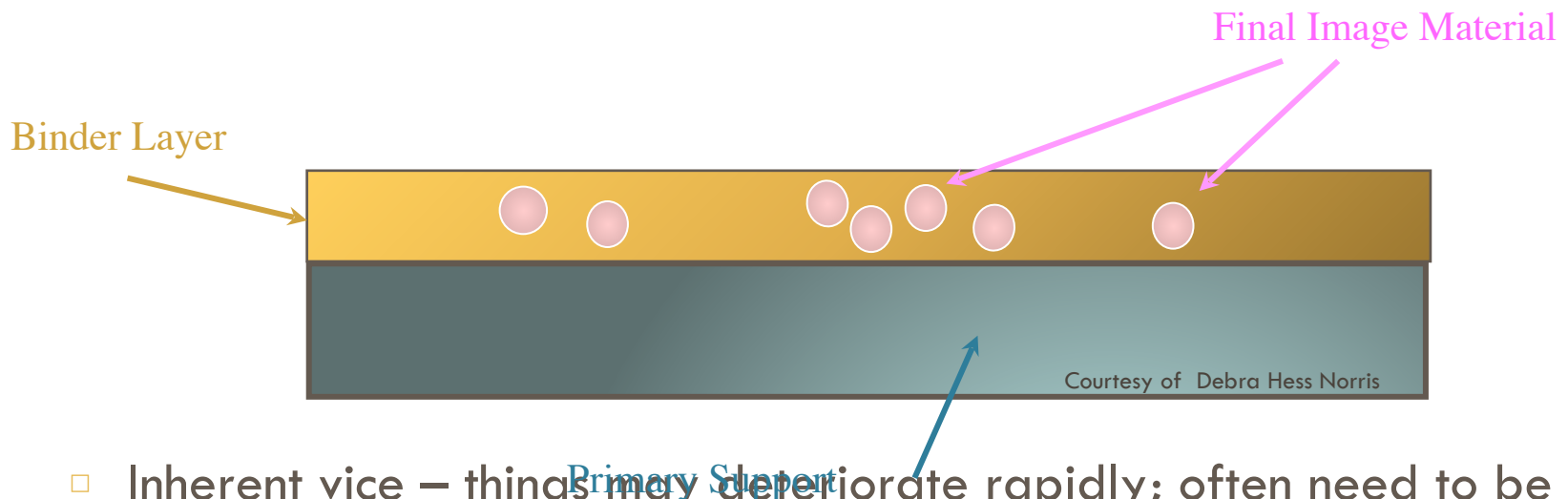
Image courtesy of Kentucky State University

# Types of Deterioration



# Vulnerabilities of Photographs

- Wide variety of image materials and supports
- Organic components -- *gelatin and paper*
- Laminate structure



- Inherent vice – things may deteriorate rapidly; often need to be addressed collection wide, rather than at item level

# Major Photo Processes and Formats in Collections

- ***Prints*** -- 1839 until today
- ***Film-base negatives*** -- 1890's until today
- ***Glass negatives*** -- 1850 until 1925
- ***Cased photographs*** -- 1839 until 1930's

# Examining Photographs



Courtesy of Ronel Namde

- Create a well-lit, secure, clean and organized space
- Wear nitrile gloves
- Avoid causing surface abrasion
- Use supports to turn or flip flat objects: looking at the verso is very important
- Use a clean secondary support to reduce handling and protect the object from dirt and grime
- Get help when handling oversized or heavy objects

# Film Base Deterioration: *Cellulose Nitrate*

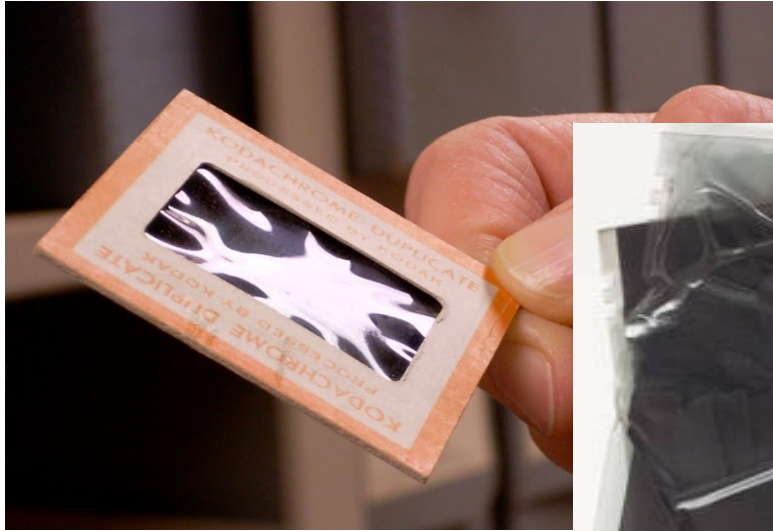
*HIGH*

gawainweaver.com



# Film Base Deterioration: *Cellulose Acetate*

*HIGH*



<https://psap.library.illinois.edu/collection-id-guide/negative#silvergelneg>



# Fading of color images

*MODERATE*



Courtesy of [image-restore.co.uk](http://image-restore.co.uk)



# Fading of silver images

*NONE*



Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art



# Silver mirroring

*NONE*



# Staining of supports

*LOW*



Courtesy of private client



Courtesy of Debbie Norris

# Staining of silver images

*LOW*



Courtesy of a private client



Courtesy of Lee Price

# Mold

*URGENT*



Courtesy of Mogens Koch



Courtesy of the Winterthur/ University of Delaware Program  
in Art Conservation, Class of 2018

# Insect damage

*URGENT*



Courtesy of a private client

# Surface soil or grime

*RANGE*



# Fingerprints

*NONE*



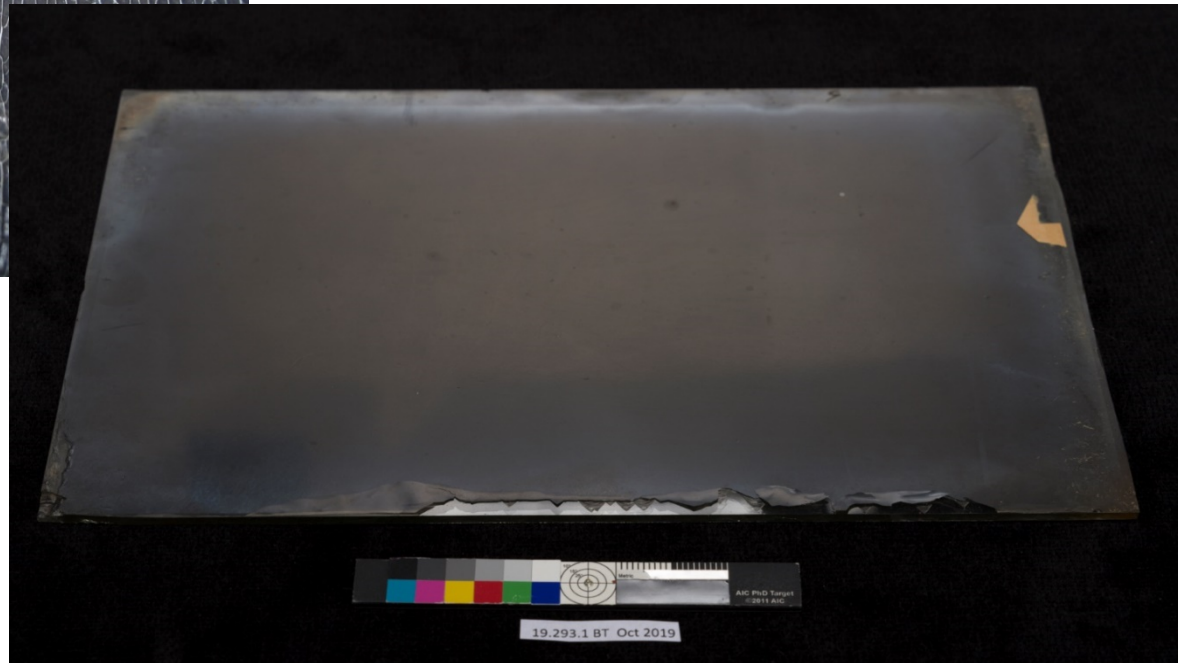


# Flaking binders

*MODERATE*

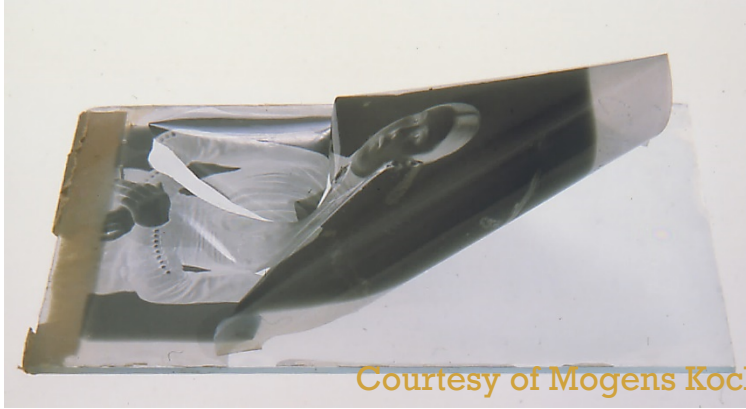


Courtesy of private clients



# Flaking binders

*HIGH*



Courtesy of Mogens Koch



Courtesy of private clients

# Abrasion

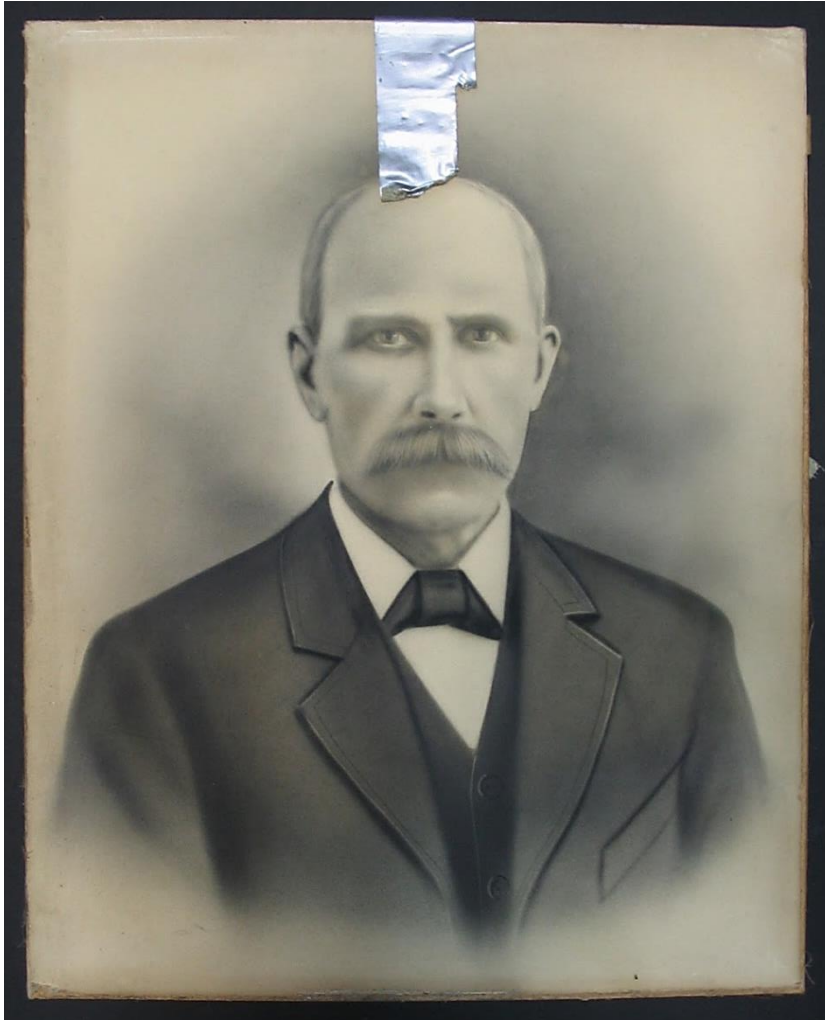
Courtesy of Image Permanence Institute



*NONE*

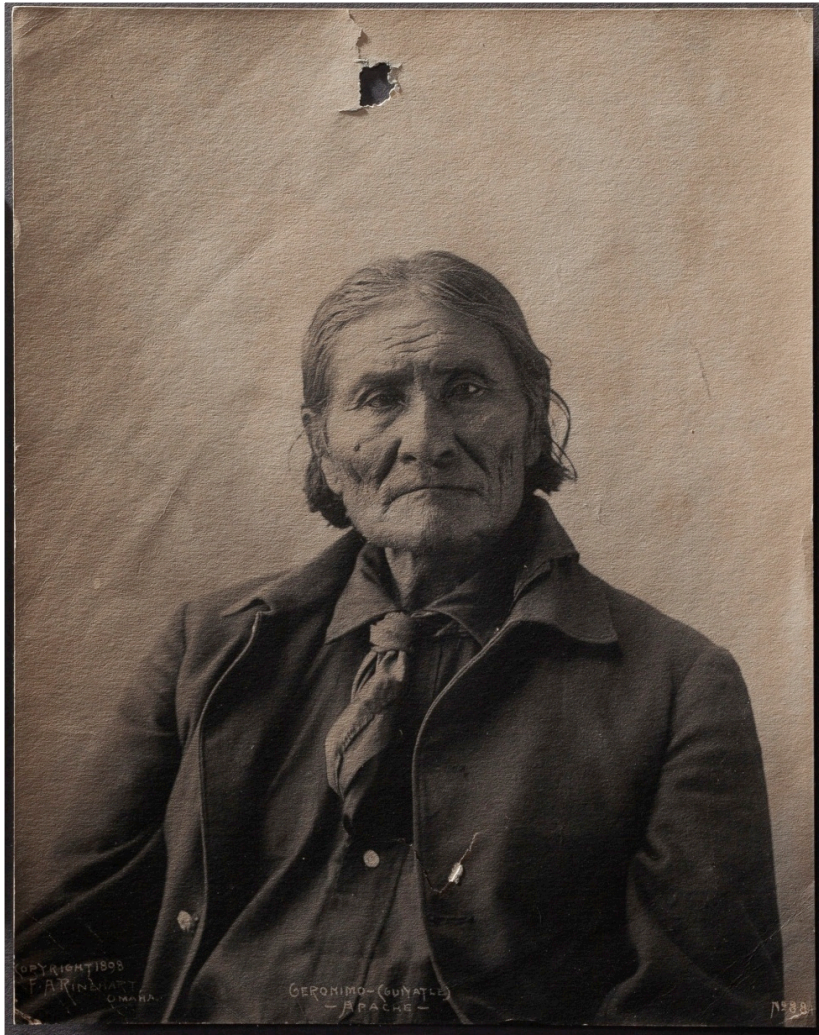
# Pressure-sensitive tape

*MODERATE*



# Tears, Creases, Losses

*RANGE*



Frank Rinehart, *Geronimo*, Platinum Print  
University of Pennsylvania, Museum of Archeology &  
Anthropology



Courtesy of a private client

# Tears, Creases, Losses

*RANGE*



Courtesy of private clients

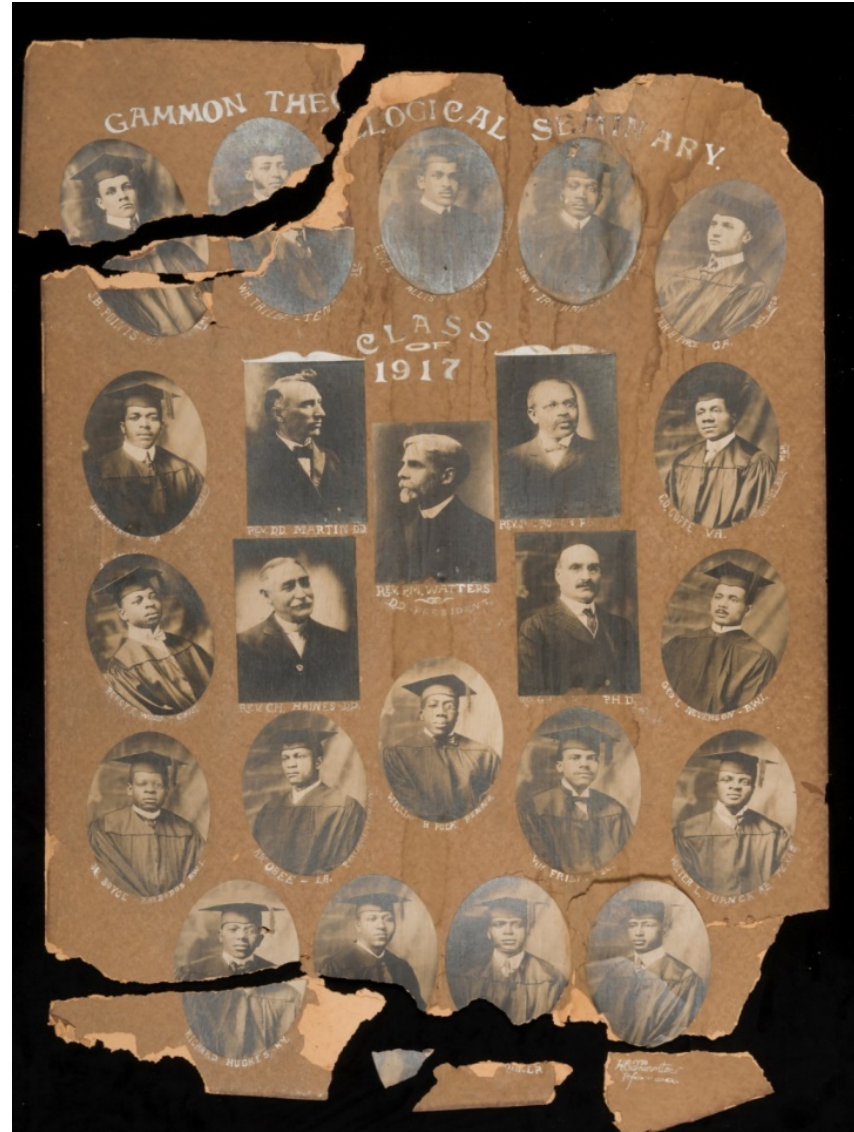


# Breakage

*HIGH*



Courtesy of private clients



# Distortion

*MODERATE*



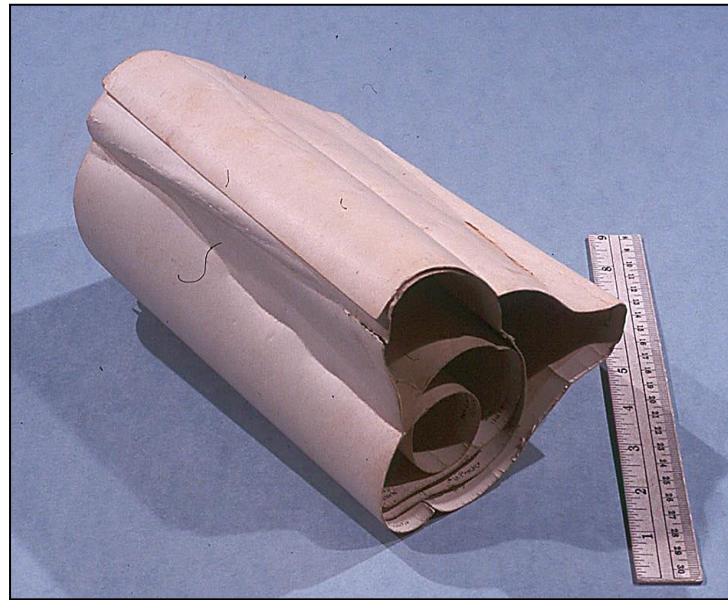
Courtesy of private clients





# Rolled

*HIGH*



*Courtesy of Chicago Albumen Works*

# Cased Photographs

*HIGH*



Courtesy of a private client

# Cased Photographs

*HIGH*

Image courtesy of a private client



Courtesy of the Library of Congress

# Broken glass

LOW



Courtesy of Mogens Koch

# Blocked to glass

*HIGH*



# Blocked Prints or Negatives

*HIGH*



# Condition Priority Levels

## *Examples for Photographic Materials*

### Urgent

- Wetness
- Mold
- Active pest infestation
- Extreme soiling/soot

### High

- Degrading film
- Extensive flaking
- Severe structural damage
- Rolled prints
- Blocked items
- Cased image issues

### Moderate

- Loose soiling
- Minor flaking
- Distortion
- Moderate physical damage
- Pressure-sensitive tapes
- Fading color images

### Low

- Light soiling
- Small tears, creases, losses
- Staining
- Broken glass negatives

# MODERATE



Courtesy of private client

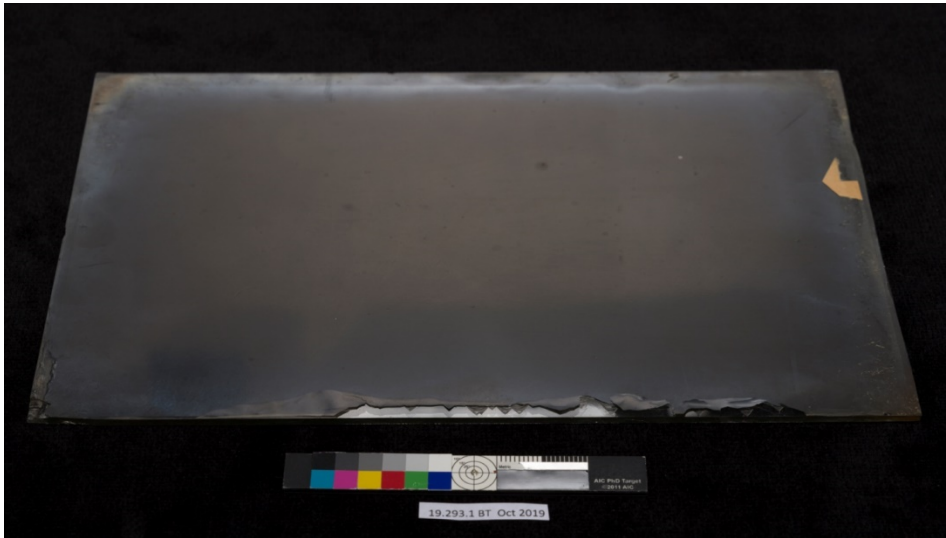


Image courtesy of Debbie Norris



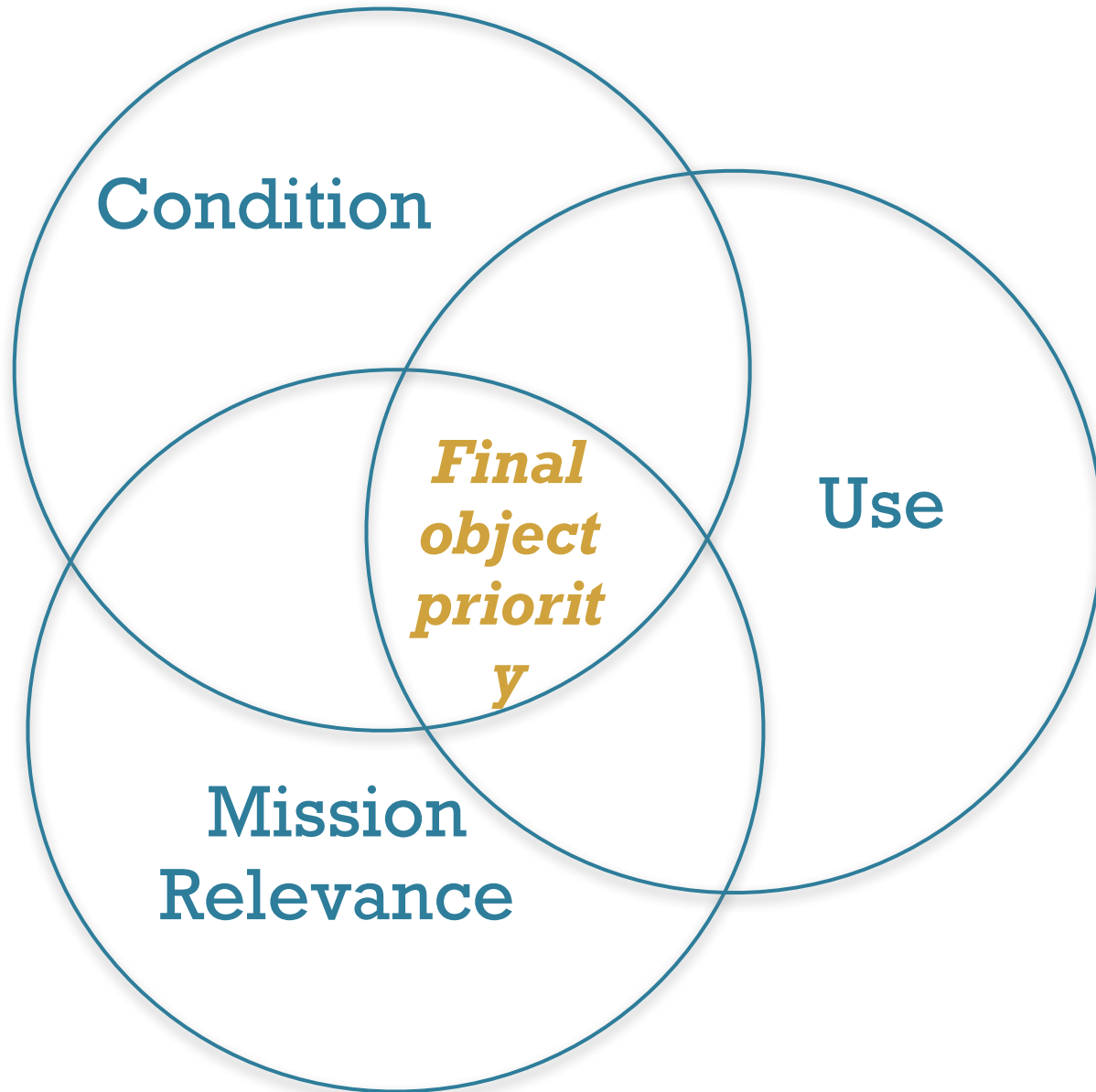
*HIGH*





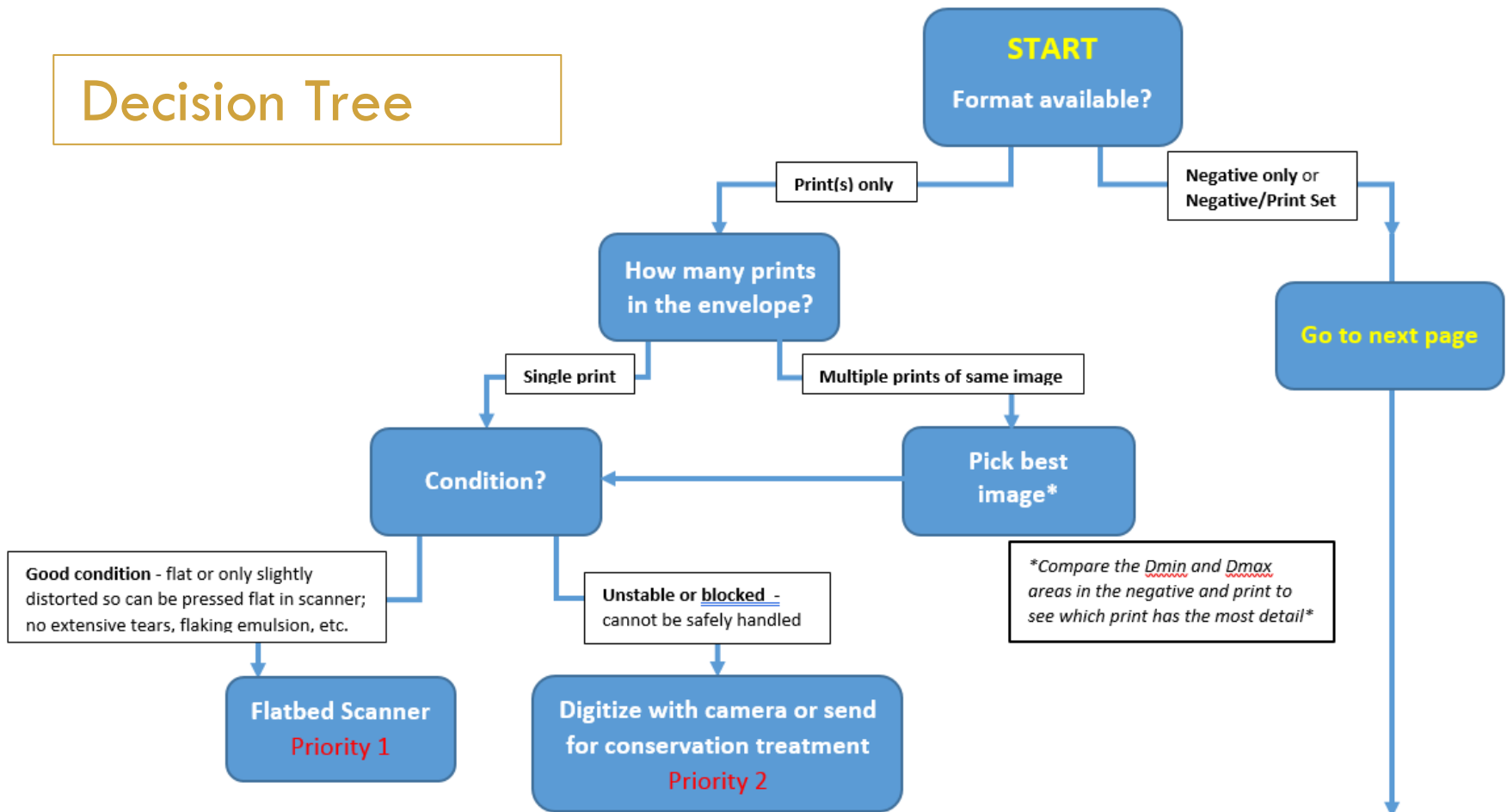
*LOW to HIGH*





# Other Prioritization Methods

## Decision Tree



# Merging Condition with Other Priorities

		<i>CONDITION LEVEL</i>				
		5	4	3	2	1
<i>VALUE</i>	5	25	20	15	10	5
	4	20	16	12	8	4
	3	15	12	9	6	3
	2	10	8	6	4	2
	1	5	4	3	2	1

Matrix  
merging 2 factors

$$\frac{(3B + 2A + 2C + D + M + E) \times P}{\text{Dup}}$$

- Moravian Archives of Bethlehem, PA  
“Eastern West Indies Records  
Planning Project White Paper”
- Overall prioritization rating for digitization
- P is the physical condition taken from a CCAHA survey

Custom equations  
with multiple factors



<http://blogs.harvard.edu/hfacollections2/intercatnet/>

# Questions?

**Barbara Lemmen**

**Email:** [blemmen@ccaha.org](mailto:blemmen@ccaha.org)

**Phone:** 215-545-0613 ext. 308

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### *Questions?*

DHPSNY staff is available to answer your questions.  
Contact us at [info@dhpsny.org](mailto:info@dhpsny.org) or (215) 545-0613.

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