

Through The Lens

*A guide to digital photography for computer enthusiasts.
After the click of your camera, you're only half done!*

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Photo Restoration

by Lynda Buske

How many of us have a big Rubbermaid bin of old photos from parents and our own past? Well, I'm happy to say that the bin I have has been greatly reduced but it definitely took some time. Scanning old photos is such a tedious process that if you don't break it into chunks, it is easy to get discouraged. My strategy was to break down my family history into manageable sections. I scanned (1200 dpi is best) about 30 images dating from 1899 to 1930. After editing them, I created a hard copy photo book using Shutterfly. The following year I tackled 1940s to 1960s and the third year I did late 60s to early 80s. These made perfect gifts for my sisters and did not take up much space on their shelves.

I've written many articles on editing digital photos using free PhotoScape X (PSX) software. Please refer to archived articles at <https://opcug.ca/digital-photography/>. This article will highlight some of the techniques that are particularly useful when restoring scanned family photos.

Many old photos, both black/white and colour, fade over time. A good place to start with restoring images is to add some contrast to provide, in the case of a black/white image, some pure black and pure white areas rather than a sea of soft grey (<https://opcug.ca/Photography/PunchUpPhotos.pdf>).

Often old print photos have signs of wear. There may be spots or lines that will show up in the scanned version. To remove these, use the spot healing brush (under *Tools* tab) in PSX. You can drag the mouse over more than one spot at a time if the background is relatively homogeneous since the program will be looking for pixels in the area to use as a replacement for the dot or scratch line. With complex backgrounds, I find I get optimal results by doing a small area at a time. You can also use this tool to remove acne blemishes or reflections off eye glasses. In the paid version of PSX (\$60 CDN), there is a clone brush that allows you to remove unwanted objects (e.g. pop can in image below)

While you can sharpen the whole image (*Adjustments/Sharpen*), you may wish to concentrate on certain areas such as faces. Sharpening or whitening eyes can have a great impact as the viewer is drawn to faces first and then eyes. To whiten, click on *Colour* tab, then *Mask* to select a certain area (by dragging your mouse) that you wish to change. Then use the brighten slider bar. Teeth can also be whitened with the same process. To sharpen just the eyes, go to *Adjustments/Sharpen*, paint a *Mask* and then adjust the sliders.

For old coloured photos, it is sometimes difficult to restore the original hues and saturation adjustments can cause the image to look phony. My preference is to convert them to a black/white image so that people are focusing on faces rather than distracting clothing colours (see sample image below).

Consider cropping all images to something tighter to focus on the importance of the people of your photos.

(see images next page)

Original photo



Restored photo

