

A Family Story: Shared Two Ways

An antique photo revealed a larger story of connection. Now a new way to share the story in both a frame and a continuing legacy.

November 1, 2023, by Barbara Tien

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OVERVIEW

I've had the good fortune to inherit an extraordinary collection of family history materials from our late grandmother, an amateur genealogist. Among her papers was an unexpected carte de visite. It featured a man, possibly Turkic in origin, holding a pipe and wearing a fez-like hat. I wanted to know who this was and how it got into our family collection.



Unwinding our connection took me on a journey through social media and into the archives. The resulting story is as much about my journey into genealogy as it is about the connection itself. To share this as a journey, I decided to put together a collage as a visual way to tell the story but connect it to an online version that would be interactive. In this sense, it was a gift served **"Two Ways."**

I hope these instructions will give you enough to get started creating something like it for your own family. Note this recipe is a variation of an earlier version created during the summer of 2023 and presented on [September 14 at a Projectkin Recipe event](#).

Goals

I wanted to use the digital artifacts I'd discovered to create a collage that could be framed and presented as a gift. To make the gift accessible to younger generations, I also wanted to create a digital component. This would have the added benefit of creating something that I could continue to add content to.

I had a few simple goals.

1. The image had to be of the highest possible quality so that its aesthetic qualities could be appreciated.
2. The digital link had to be accessible to anyone on a smartphone of reasonably modern vintage (iOS or Android).
3. I had an existing 11" x 14" frame I liked and wanted to reuse. That specific constraint forced several other decisions, as it turned out.

Solution

I created a collage of the core digital artifacts and links found in my research. I arranged them in a way that was aesthetically pleasing. I then made a photographic print of the collage and framed it. The collage included a dynamic QR code that allows me to invite a viewer to explore and comment on the image in electronic form from any mobile device. (More about why "dynamic" later.)

Research

As I dug into my research, I also realized that the collage should include a timeline of both historical and important family events.

Curiosity led me to use the facts I'd learned to connect several family photographs passed down to me and suddenly understand them in context. The resulting collage included pointers between:

- An Illustrated Atlas of the state of Indiana from the [David Rumsey map collection](#).
- A portion of our family tree is shown as a fan chart from [FamilySearch.org](#)
- A chapter from my grandmother's book, now abridged in the [Internet Archive](#).
- Personal family photographs shared by my cousins.
- An article written by the scholar Linda K. Jacobs of the [Near East Foundation](#).
- A few paragraphs of copy telling my story.

Technology

I used the digital whiteboard features on the Canva design platform to not only create my digital collage but also make it accessible to anyone as a link from a QR code.

- Canva's whiteboard makes it fun to combine components with drag-and-drop ease.

- Created a dynamic QR code and added it to the piece as an image.
- Exported an image file of the collage into a high-resolution image file.
- Had the image file printed by a photo processor.
- Framed the resulting photo print with a matboard and glass for display in a home.
- By pointing to the QR code, the digital version opens on any smartphone.

Lessons Learned

While simple in concept, there turned out to be a few unexpected twists. You should be aware of these should you try to create one of these yourself.

- 1. Start with the goal:** Since the size of my physical frame was fixed, that aspect determined the layout for the digital version.
 - Using an existing 11x14" frame set my first variable.
 - Not having access to a matt cutter, I had to rely on pre-cut matboard at my local art store. 8x10" was available locally at \$4 each.
 - *Mind your aspect ratios:* Width/height creates a percentage (8x10" = 80%, for example.) Multiply that number by the height in pixels for your digital version, and you'll have the width of your mat in pixels, for example.
- 2. Keep the design simple** AND go for the highest resolution possible. Always a good rule, but in this case it was especially important.
 - Printing photographically gave me a much higher resolution than I would have had from my own printer.
 - I'm very glad I paid the extra to have the processing done by a high-end processor that works with ad agencies and artists. The print cost \$8.
 - **Note:** The fine lines I used in my illustration were hard to see in the printed version. If I could do it again, I'd have made those lines thicker and darker.
 - Even better would have been to do test prints and have time to adjust.
- 3. Give yourself guides in the design for mating the print to the matboard.**
 - I originally planned to do a bleed print which takes the image all way way to the edges of the photo printed page.
 - Getting your aspect ratios right in item 1 makes it much easier to match the mat to the artwork. As a good rule of thumb, give yourself an extra 1/8" to 1/4" (or about 1/2 cm) extra space around the edge of your artwork.

Surprises

- Probably the single biggest surprise was that I wouldn't ACTUALLY share the same version I'd printed as the digital version.
 - It turns out that the QR code on the printed version is very confusing when you look at it on the digital version so:

- I created the master copy first, then...
- Made a copy where I removed the QR code. Simple solution.
- I've saved both versions one as "PRINT" and the other as "ONLINE." I can make duplicates at any time.
- Since I can modify the online version at any time, I can also ruin it with a click. To ensure that it's protected I've done two things:
 - Archived the print version as a final project.
 - Created duplicate copies I'm using here to share with you labeled (prominently as "STUDIO")

Milestones

I. Start with the goal

Once you have a clear idea of the end deliverable, it's much easier to understand the steps to achieve it. If you aren't really sure of the end goal, give yourself some time to experiment, make mistakes, and then plan the real thing.

II. Design the collage

Using Canva's Whiteboard feature made it fun to pull a variety of original sources together into a collage. It was almost hard to know when to stop and declare this project ready for production. I would recommend:

- Start with the most important part of your story. In my case, it was this curious image.
- Add necessary elements for structure. I found:
 - A map
 - A timeline
 - A family tree including the relevant characters
- Add family photographs and other relevant elements

III. Plan the printing of the collage

Yep, plan again. Learn from the Carpenters' rule: Measure twice, print once. This is especially important if you're short on time. Test prints can be invaluable, but we rarely leave ourselves time for them.

IV. Print and assemble

With a little planning, this should be easy. Don't forget the frame backing (ideally acid-free/conservation quality board) for your frame+glass+matboard... Add the backing, and then the hooks so it's ready for your recipient to hang.

→ **NOTE:** *If money is more plentiful than time, you can consider a service like mpix.com or framebridge.com. Since the formula is exactly the same regardless of the "gift" element, consider posters, coffee mugs... anything.*

→ **How about a poster?** *Framing a photographic print can get expensive. Consider printing as a poster which can be well under \$20 and mounted on inexpensive foam core. It's a good solution for special occasions.*

V. Final review of the digital version & gift

This final review was essential as I kept finding little gotchas on the digital version. The good news is that you can continually futz with the digital version.

- TIP: If you use Canva.com for the digital version, consider sharing with the "Comment" version and not the "Edit" version.
 - In **Edit mode** your guests can accidentally make major changes to your original. Not good.
 - In **View-only mode**, your guests do little more than see your work.
 - **Comment-mode** seems to be ideal because they can navigate around without making changes, but they can engage with it by adding their own comments and contributions.


Privacy & Archiving

Here at Projectkin, we believe that protecting a family's **archives** and **privacy** are two of the **five essential elements** of family history projects. (To learn more about our approach to projects, see Projectkin.org/Projects) For each of our recipes, we like to spell out exactly how the two are protected, or what risks are introduced with a given recipe — as well as ways to mitigate those risks.

Privacy is Protected with Physical Control – and Good Judgement

This recipe offers partial privacy protection based on access to the QR code included in the printed piece. Generally, the expectation is that the piece will remain behind glass and in a home, not viewable from outside the home. If the same approach were to be used to produce something shared on a website, or printed onto something shared publicly, then additional constraints should be added such as access control or password protection.

Project Recipe

PROJECT RECIPE	
TITLE	A Map, Timeline, & Story: Two Ways
TYPE	A framed piece, plus a QR code on a printed version that takes a “commenter” to an online variation
TIME (est.)	2-5 days (not continuous)
TOOLS & MATERIALS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer, online access for research and testing • Photographic printer (do not try to print at home) • Photo frame and archival matboard • I used a Canva pro account though I don't think any of these features required the pro-level.
PREPARATION	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Plan the final deliverable 2. Design the collage 3. Plan the printing of the collage 4. Print and assemble 5. Final review of the digital version & gift
NOTES	<p>It would have taken me almost the same amount of time to create 15 copies of it as the one. This could make a nice gift to make for each of your cousins, for example.</p> <p>My only out-of-pocket costs were the photo processing, frame, and matboard. You could also combine these with a vendor like Shutterfly, Framebridge, MPix, or a similar vendor to produce these at scale. Sometimes their pricing will include shipping.</p> <p>While my detail describes doing this with Canva to provide the digital interface, it could just as easily be any kind of web-accessible link like an ordinary web page.</p>
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