

Photography Guidelines for Historic Buildings

Recommended equipment

- **35mm camera:** A good-quality, name-brand camera with through-the-lens viewing and detachable lenses is preferred.
- **Standard Lens:** 50mm; good for general photography but somewhat limited.
- **Wide Angle Lenses:** 20mm, 28mm, or 35mm. These are very useful for interior photographs, exterior photos where you have to stand closer to the building (because of trees, for example), or exterior photos of large buildings or sites.
- **Zoom Lens:** Approximately 35mm–80mm. This can be a good all-purpose lens. Larger zoom lenses, approx. 80mm–200mm, can be useful at times, but are usually not necessary for most occasions.
- **Macro Lens:** This is for copying older photographs. Some zoom lenses have a macro feature, though the images they produce will not be as sharp as with a true macro lens. Another option for copying photographs is to use extension tubes on a standard lens.
- **Filters:** A standard “skylight” filter helps reduce atmospheric glare and protects the lens. Other filters, which can enhance the image, are not recommended for the average photographer.

Recommended media

Digital Photos: Digital photographs are preferred and should be printed on photographic paper at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) in 4”x 6” prints or larger. These should be printed out on glossy, high-quality photo paper in color or black and white. A gold archival CD-R with all the images (in color) should be submitted along with the photo prints. For the purposes of the State Historic Preservation Office, the size of each image must be 3000 x 2000 pixels or larger, at 300 ppi. It is recommended that digital images be saved in 8-bit (or larger) color format, which provides maximum detail even when printed in black-and-white. TIF images are preferable as they are higher quality, but JPEG images are acceptable. For more information on digital photo standards, [contact us](#).

Slides: Digital images on a CD are preferred; however, slides are still acceptable. Kodak has stopped making slide film, as have most other manufacturers. One of the more available films is Fujichrome Velvia 100, which is a good all-purpose film; films with a lower ASA number produce a better image.

Black-and-White Prints: Black and white prints are more archival and fade less than color prints. Like all films, there are fewer options now for black and white, however Kodak, Fuji, Agfa and Ilford all make this film in a range of speeds. Higher-speed versions of the film can be used in reduced lighting situations or when a larger lens is being used. The higher-speed films will not produce as sharp a print, however.

Recommended photographic techniques

Lighting: As a general rule, shoot with the sun at your back so the sunlight is on the face of the subject building. Avoid shooting toward the sun. Buildings that face north should be photographed earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon to avoid shooting directly into the sun.

One problem with sunlight is that it can cause shadows that obscure some of the architectural details; dappled shadows from nearby trees are especially distracting. Shadows can be avoided by photographing on a lightly overcast day. However, if the sky is heavily overcast the photograph will be too gray and murky.

Interior lighting: A flash unit is necessary for many interior photographs. Natural and room lighting can be used successfully if you are using a high-speed film and a tripod.

Composition: The subject should dominate the photograph, but its surroundings should also be included to some extent. If the setting is particularly important or unique, a more panoramic photograph may be in order. In general, however, avoid extensive foreground and sky in your photographs.

Artistic techniques can be employed to create more interesting and dramatic photographs. These include the use of unusual angles, stark lighting, depth-of-field adjustments, and creative framing (a tree bough across the top of the image, for example).

Remember, however, that the primary purpose of the photograph is to document the building, so don't get carried away with artistic embellishments.