Practices for Preserving Family and Cultural Histories

Kao Lee Vang

University of Minnesota Twin Cities

College of Continuing and Professional Studies

Masters of Professional Studies in Arts and Cultural Leadership Capstone

Tom Borrup, Ph.D., Capstone Advisor

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Abstract

This capstone project explores practices and tools for preserving family and cultural histories, with a focus on Hmong immigrant narratives. Through a combination of research, personal reflection, and collaboration with Hmong community partners and professionals in collections management and conservation, the project examines how family archives—photographs, documents, objects, and ephemera—function as critical tools for storytelling and cultural preservation. A significant component of the research involved engaging with community organizations to contextualize a personal family archive and better understand ongoing efforts to preserve Hmong culture and material history. The project highlights both physical and digital preservation methods that support the longevity and accessibility of family histories. It also emphasizes the role of collaboration among individuals, families, and cultural institutions in linking private collections with public memory and fostering a culture of care. This research is guided by the question: *What practices can be created to help people preserve their family and cultural histories?* The findings inform the development of adaptable preservation practices and resources that can assist others in curating, protecting, and transmitting their own cultural narratives.

Keywords: family history, cultural preservation, Hmong immigrant narratives, ephemera, archiving practices, community collaboration, digital preservation, storytelling, Hmong diaspora, cultural identity

Introduction

In February of 2024, my father, Nhia Sue Vang, passed away. It wasn't until then that I truly began to examine my own family history and archive. This process led me to a variety of visual essays and presentations focused on family history and ephemera, appearing in formats such as blogs, social media posts, videos, reels, exhibitions, genealogy charts, and books. I came across numerous articles and journals discussing how family history, storytelling, and ephemera are used to build connections, educate, and challenge systems of oppression. Many sources emphasized the importance of story, diaspora, and personal connection, with a particular focus on ethnography—especially autoethnography. They also explored how ephemera could serve as an educational tool and foster a strong sense of belonging.

My research is grounded in personal experience, conversations with community members, and institutional visits. As a 1.5-generation Hmong woman who immigrated to the U.S. with my parents and brother, I was raised with first-generation traditions, but due to my young age at the time, I have characteristics more aligned with second-generation experiences. My academic and professional journey, including my Master's program at the University of Minnesota, has shaped my understanding of cultural preservation. I acknowledge the privilege I have in accessing technology, connecting with large institutions, and communicating in two languages, all of which supported my research.

This project explores the question: What practices can be created to help people preserve their family and cultural histories? A significant aspect of this work involved reaching out to Hmong community partners and organizations to contextualize my family archive and learn about their ongoing efforts to preserve Hmong culture and material history. Their insights were

invaluable in shaping my understanding of the broader context of cultural preservation. As I looked more closely through my own family archive, I realized the importance of learning technical and professional methods for preservation and storage that I could adapt for use at home. This knowledge became especially important when considering how to care for and store my father's shaman tools—items that carry both cultural and spiritual significance.

Through a combination of research, personal reflection, and collaboration with Hmong community partners and professionals in collections management and conservation, this project examines how family archives—photographs, documents, objects, and ephemera—function as powerful tools for storytelling and cultural preservation. The research highlights both physical and digital preservation methods that support the longevity and accessibility of family histories, while emphasizing the role of collaboration among individuals, families, and cultural institutions in linking private collections with public memory and fostering a culture of care. As I reviewed sources and reflected on my own experience, I came to understand how ephemera—such as photos, letters, and keepsakes—can deeply shape identity and culture. “What we find in the archive is ourselves” (Woodham et al., 2017, p. 203), and family archives reveal how personal possessions and stories intertwine to form both individual and collective identities. Families act as “curators” of their histories, managing objects like photos, medals, and documents to preserve memory and pass down identity across generations (Woodham et al., 2017, p. 203). This project includes a practical guidebook for preserving family histories, with examples from my own work, offering tools for families to curate and protect their stories, build community, and strengthen identity. By creating archives and sharing stories, individuals can see their lives as part of something larger, preserving histories in ways that are both meaningful and personal.

Literature Review

This literature review looks at key areas that help inform how people preserve their family and cultural histories, especially within immigrant and refugee communities. I focus on themes such as autoethnography, family and community archiving, curatorial ethics, cultural sustainability, and translocal placemaking. Together, these frameworks support my understanding of how personal memory and cultural identity are preserved, interpreted, and shared through both institutional and community-centered practices.

The Power of Storytelling

Most stories have a beginning, middle, end and serves as a tool for communication. Stories help both insiders and outsiders understand how people communicate and make sense of their experiences. Stories are valuable to both participants and observers as they strengthen identity, resilience, and pride by connecting individuals to their heritage (Feldman, Sköldberg, Brown, & Horner, 2004). In, *History Comes Home: Family Stories across the Curriculum* in *The History Teacher*, the authors make the observation that, "Stories not only serve as personal histories, but they also illuminate social histories" (Keller, Clair, Zemelman, Bearden, Simmons, & Leki, 2001). In contrast, a narrative is the structure within a story that shapes how the story is told and presented. Narratives organize information in ways that convey specific perspectives or points of view.

Building Connection and Confidence Through Heritage

Connecting with one's heritage fosters pride, resilience, and self-worth, which can supplement engagement, academic success, and confidence to achieve goals. In *Passing on the Legacy: Relevance of Historical Family Narrative in Motivating Student Efficacy and Inspiring*

Learning, Lawuane Moorman (2011) demonstrates how personal and cultural narratives foster academic success and self-efficacy. Narratives help students make sense of the world and their place within it. When students connect personally to these stories, engagement will increase; they will develop cultural awareness, understanding how they fit into a larger context while building pride in their identity.

This connection nurtures **self-efficacy**—the belief in one's ability to achieve goals. (Moorman, 2011) Stories about family members overcoming historical and social challenges can inspire resilience and provide representation. Understanding one's heritage cultivates a sense of worth and capability, empowering students to feel they deserve their place in the world and can achieve even the most complex goals. Family stories not only serve as personal histories, but they also illuminate social histories. (Keller, Clair, Zemelman, Bearden, Simmons, & Leki, 2001)

Hmong Diasporic Storytelling and Memories

Tebchaws: A Theory of Magnetic Media and Hmong Diasporic Homeland by Mitch Ogden (2015) explores audio and video recordings of memories that are shared across generations. Filled with many metaphors, he warns of the potential risk of losing refugee experiences and wisdom if these are not acknowledged.

Hmong cosmology emphasizes the importance of ancestral connections and memories. "Tebchaws [DAY-char]—a common compound word that draws concepts of "land" (teb) and "place" (chaws) together for a broadly flexible term that can identify a formal nation state…" (Ogden, 2015) Hmong gatherings often include story circles—a patriarchal circle that talks of tebchaws. The "tebchaws with ancestral cosmology—a crucial shift from the plane of three-dimensional reality. Hmong cosmology explains that after death departed" (Ogden, 2015)

There's a saying, "Tsis muaj teb tsis muaj chaws…" meaning, "Without land and without a place..." that captures the complexity of belonging and identity for those in the diaspora.

Ogden analyzes magnetic media like audio cassettes and videos as a tool for memory; these were the refugees' way of recording and sharing their stories in refugee camps and contrasting it to recorded media from contemporary times. These recordings share tebchaws that evoke a sense of nostalgia. Tebchaws includes both nature and human experiences, showing that identity is tied to inhabited spaces. "A surge of nostalgia seems to have struck with the closing of the Thai refugee camps in the mid-1990s, sending amateur videographers back to Thailand with their cameras, hoping to see what was left behind as the camps were themselves abandoned." (Ogden, 2015) Many reflect a longing for their heritage. These recordings blend personal and collective histories that share the importance of these memories for future generations.

The Role of Ephemera in Cultural Preservation

Family photos capture the fluidity of memory and personal history. As Rachel Yim (2023) notes in *Speculative Ephemera: Reimagining Racialized Embodiment in Korean American Family Photographs*, "The ephemerality of family photographs offers a way to think about the nonlinearity of memory and the everyday presence…" This raises questions about how sharing family photos shapes perceptions and uses of these images.

Yim emphasizes that visibility is connected to humanness. Family photographs affirm identity and belonging, even when they are not intended for public consumption: "Photographs that prove one's humanity—through identity-as-belonging and assimilation—do not need to be produced for the gaze of others" (Yim, 2023).

The author's family photos illustrate how family photos can reflect struggles for acceptance and survival while offering opportunities to redefine identity beyond traditional norms. Yim shares from *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: The New Press, 1995), 64. Quoting "Photography has been, and is, central to that aspect of decolonization that calls us back to the past and offers a way to reclaim and renew life-affirming bonds. Using images, we connect ourselves to a recuperative, redemptive memory that enables us to construct radical identities, images of ourselves that transcend the limits of the colonizing eye." Yim encourages us to look beyond the surface of family photos, considering the unseen stories and memories they represent.

Media can become a disposable commodity, and abandoned recordings symbolize the complexities of remembering diasporic experience. Mitch Ogden (2015) reflects on this in *Tebchaws: A Theory of Magnetic Media and Hmong Diasporic Homeland*:

> "The media is commonplace—to the point of becoming a mundane commodity, valued but disposable. Intended as entertainment, it is rendered a child's plaything—carelessly treated and eventually abandoned. Furthermore, the abandoned video cassette marks the neglect and excess of memory. What is wound within the plastic case... is practically invisible by non-technological and non-invasive everyday practices—a reminder that the complexities of a diasporic imaginary are not always externally apparent." (p.21)

Creative Approaches to Family History

To preserve family histories, creative practices such as memory books, written stories, scrapbooks, cookbooks, and genealogy projects provide artistic and personal approaches. Collaborative efforts, such as community archives and conversations, play a vital role in

preserving collective memory, ensuring that individual stories contribute to a larger understanding of cultural identity.

Brian Niiya's visual essay, *Ask a Historian: Could Japanese Americans Drive Themselves to Camp?* (2024), explores the accounts of Japanese Americans who drove to internment camps during World War II. While most were transported by bus or train, some were allowed to drive their own cars, which were later confiscated and sold by the military, sometimes for as little as $25. The photographs include lines of cars heading to the Manzanar and Santa Anita camps, families having their cars and luggage searched, and rows of impounded cars awaiting auction. These images underscore the loss of personal property and the disorganization of the early relocation days.

Niiya (2024) explains, "The early caravans to the 'assembly centers' are part of the complicated and fraught story of the roundup and incarceration and another example of the chaos and seemingly improvised nature of its earliest days." The essay highlights shared experiences of resilience, community support, and the ongoing relevance of civil rights and social justice issues.

In 2007, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival hosted *Mekong River: Connecting Cultures*. This festival highlighted several different populations from the Mekong region. Helen Rees (2012) shares about the planning process behind the festival in *Connecting Cultures: The Mekong River at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, 2007.* This community event demonstrated an authentic cultural exchange and representation of traditions.

The festival's planning was thorough and intentional, focusing on fostering a three-way cultural exchange between participants, the audience, and the presenters. Participants were carefully selected as culture-bearers from the Mekong region, chosen with the help of local

researchers, institutions, and government bodies to ensure authentic representation. Facilitating cultural connections was a priority, with the festival emphasizing genuine community traditions rather than relying on actors.

The Mekong River region, known for its trade, migration, and shared cultural characteristics, serves as a connector. Initially, I did not realize that the festival featured culture-bearers directly from these countries and regions, rather than just individuals of descent or immigrants living in the United States. This event included authentic cuisine, musicians, and artists, offering a true taste of these cultures. (Rees, 2012)

As an optimist, I see the potential for globalization, nostalgia, and new experiences for festival-goers. However, as a critic, I wonder what happens after the festival ends. Although there was extensive planning and collaboration involved, what will the future of these relationships look like? Rees (2012) notes how countries like China, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand have seen a resurgence in traditional arts, due in part to relaxed political policies and post-conflict recovery. These efforts reflect a growing commitment to safeguarding and revitalizing cultural practices, including rituals, folk arts, and community traditions.

One of the key takeaways from Rees's work is the role the Mekong Festival played in fostering cultural recognition. She concludes by noting how the 2007 festival proved to be timely, contributing to cultural revitalization and the preservation of intangible heritage (Rees, 2012). Yunnanese official Fan Jianhua also pointed out how participating in such international festivals can shift attitudes back home, with locals realizing that "Our things have value!" (Rees, 2012).

Rees (2012) concludes that events like the Mekong River festival contribute to cultural revitalization and the preservation of heritage. This can elevate local and cultural pride and demonstrate the worth of traditional arts on a global stage.

Institutions play an influential role in protecting and enriching cultural preservation and identities. Fan Jianhua's comment, "Our things have value!" Rees (2012) shines light on the importance of fostering both personal value and institutional support to answer the question: *What practices can help people preserve their family and cultural histories?*

Community archives play a key role in supporting cultural resilience by challenging traditional knowledge-power dynamics. These archives disrupt conventional practices by creating spaces for marginalized memories, allowing communities to define their own narratives on their own terms (Beel et al., 2017). This empowerment fosters a sense of ownership over historical preservation as well as strengthens community identity and agency.

Rather than focusing on step-by-step practices or resource guides, practitioners and advocates in the fields of cultural preservation and storytelling might consider fostering a culture of care—one that encourages curiosity, empowers individuals, and supports them in preserving their histories. Through my research, I have explored storytelling, cultural memory, and family history sharing as tools for influence and education. Using keywords like "ephemera," "diaspora," "Hmong," "oral history," and "autoethnography," I have identified broader conversations around these themes. Understanding our roots through relatable historical accounts can deepen our sense of identity and potential.

Despite this, many individuals feel their stories or informal archives lack value. This perception presents an opportunity to cultivate a culture of care—one that inspires story sharing

and makes the process equitable. To do so, we must provide people with the language and tools to recognize the value in their belongings and the importance of cultural preservation.

Family and community archives play key roles in shaping individual and collective identities. As Hadi and Gerson (2023) note, “Archives allow us to contextualize ourselves as individuals, groups, and societies historically, helping us shape ourselves in the current moment and think about what comes next.” Family archives embody heritage in both formal and informal contexts, bridging managed and unmanaged histories. These archives not only preserve personal and familial narratives but also raise important questions about how formal institutions like museums might support their preservation and significance (Woodham, King, Gloyn, Crewe, & Blair, 2017).

Community archives, as Hadi and Gerson (2023) suggest, offer a radical approach to archiving. Unlike formal archives, which often impose biases by determining what is preserved, community archives allow marginalized groups to represent their histories on their own terms (Beel et al., 2017). This approach fosters representational belonging, enabling communities to see themselves reflected across past, present, and future narratives.

Community heritage also builds resilience. Beel et al. (2017) emphasize that day-to-day heritage activities enhance a sense of identity and place while fostering human agency. Digital technologies have further transformed archiving practices, making preservation more accessible and engaging for younger generations. Digital archives enable communities to contribute from anywhere, offering ongoing opportunities to document their histories and ensure cultural assets are preserved for the future.

The sustainability and legacy of these archives depend on actions such as securing funding, acquiring spaces, and developing resources. Embedding a culture of care within these efforts, alongside equitable archiving practices, ensures that community histories are preserved in ways that resonate with lived experiences.

Institutional support and community-driven initiatives are essential to these efforts, as they help build the foundation for long-term success. According to Beet et al. (2017), the integration of digital methodologies further amplifies these endeavors by transforming cultural production into digital formats, making family and cultural stories accessible and sustainable for future generations. This digital resilience is especially crucial for rural and underserved communities, enhancing their ability to engage and thrive in an increasingly digitized world (Beel et al., 2017).

Through these combined efforts, community heritage can be a powerful expression of place-based connections, where individuals come together to collect, share, and preserve their historical narratives. Community archives, in this way, become vital platforms for cultural memory, fostering both intergenerational continuity and a deeper sense of belonging.

As I delved deeper into this research, one article really stood out to me because it connected so well with what I am trying to explore: *We Are What We Keep: The "Family Archive," Identity and Public/Private Heritage* by Woodham et al. (2017). Anna Woodham, Laura King, Liz Gloyn, Vicky Crewe, and Fiona Blaire explore how family archives shape identity and connect personal histories to broader cultural narratives. They highlight how everyday objects—photographs, documents, and keepsakes—serve as anchors of memory and meaning, blending managed and unmanaged heritage.

This article raised questions about the intersection of private collections and public institutions, offering insights into how museums and archives can support individuals in preserving their personal histories. By focusing on collaboration, storytelling, and the cultural value of ephemera, the study highlights the power of family archives to foster belonging, educate, and sustain cultural heritage, aligning seamlessly with the purpose of my project. This analysis provided not only inspiration but also a practical framework for thinking about how we can help individuals preserve their family and cultural histories in meaningful ways.

The family archive is an evolving collection of ephemera, or objects, photographs, documents, and memories. These archives mix personal and public heritage, encompassing both carefully curated artifacts and items accumulated more naturally. Woodham et al. (2017) examine how these archives shape identities, emphasize their cultural importance, and explore ways families and institutions can better collaborate on preserving personal heritage. Unlike official archives housed in museums and libraries, family archives provide insights into lived experiences, reflecting the everyday practices of memory-making.

Woodham, et al. emphasize the significance of these collections in shaping identity and preserving stories often overlooked by traditional heritage institutions. By examining how families create and maintain these archives, the authors highlight their potential to enrich our understanding of the past and connect personal stories to larger cultural narratives.
Family archives are important to shaping personal and family identities. They hold items like photos, life-stage documents, and keepsakes that connect family stories to history. These objects often represent key life moments and help preserve and legitimize family histories. These archives are inherently selective, reflecting memories that individuals and families choose to prioritize, and they highlight how identity evolves over time. By humanizing history, family

archives provide a counterpoint to institutional collections, offering a perspective that enriches our understanding of the past.

Family archives do more than preserve memories; they validate the people within them and connect personal histories to broader conversations. Woodham et al. (2017) note that the most common items found in family archives are life-stage documents, which are often intentionally preserved. In contrast, photos and everyday objects tend to be collected more informally, usually because they help recall meaningful stories and moments. Regardless of how they enter the archive, each item serves a purpose. Life-stage documents not only tie personal histories to state records but also highlight where private lives intersect with public systems, helping to legitimize family narratives within a wider context.

Although everyday objects may seem ordinary, they carry deep cultural and historical significance. Items like quilts, letters, and photographs reflect family identity and show how it changes over time. Woodham et al. (2017) conducted focus groups to explore whether people viewed items in their family archives as part of a bigger historical or cultural story. Many participants underestimated the value of their possessions, often seeing them as less important than what might be found in an institution. As the authors note, "Participants' prior conceptual associations with the term 'archive'... they viewed as more official than an individual or a family's private collections" (p. 211). Yet, family archives humanize history. They capture everyday life and show how personal experiences contribute to broader cultural narratives. Participants in the study generally agreed that for an object to count as part of an archive, it needed to hold importance beyond just one person (Woodham et al., 2017).

Through their research, Woodham et al (2017). noticed that women, in particular, played a central role in preserving family history through objects traditionally associated with

domesticity and care. In contrast to the more public-facing artifacts linked to men, such as military medals or economically valuable heirlooms. This gendered approach to material culture highlights how women often serve as stewards of memory, curating intimate artifacts that may lack financial value but carry profound emotional and cultural meaning. These inherited possessions, passed down through generations, not only expand family collections but also introduce new stories, reshaping and enriching family identity. This emphasizes the need to bridge the gap between public and private perceptions while highlighting the importance of recognizing everyday items as essential parts of history.

Institutional and Community Collaboration

A growing trend among cultural institutions involves engaging the public in archiving efforts through crowdsourcing and participatory projects. (Woodham et al., 2017, p. 204-205) Often, these initiatives focus on tasks like tagging or transcribing, which can unintentionally limit the integration of personal perspectives alongside professional expertise. For instance, the National Archives promotes its citizen archivist programs to expand access to information through the efforts of everyday people helping with tagging and transcription, and invites people to leave comments if they happen to know additional details about the record. True collaboration would empower families to take an active role in interpreting and preserving their collections, bridging the gap between public heritage and personal history (Woodham et al., 2017, pp. 205, 216-217).

The family archive, as a collection of unmanaged heritage, presents museums and archives with an opportunity to rethink their approach. By forming collaborative relationships that value private collections as equal to institutional holdings, institutions can bridge the gap

between public and private heritage. This partnership has the potential to democratize heritage practices, ensuring diverse voices and stories are represented (Woodham, 2017).

For these partnerships to work, museums can help families with practical challenges like organizing items, figuring out storage solutions, and understanding digital preservation. At the same time, they can guide families in recognizing the value of their collections. This collaboration can make heritage preservation more inclusive, ensuring more voices and stories are shared and celebrated.

Family archives reveal how personal possessions and stories intertwine to shape both individual and collective identities. Families act as “curators” of their histories, carefully managing objects like photos, medals, and documents to preserve memories and pass down identity across generations (Woodham et al., 2017). As the researchers note, “What we find in the archive is ourselves”(p. 217), emphasizing how family history serves to humanize and deepen our understanding of identity. Objects in these personal collections hold strong cultural value, connecting family narratives to broader historical contexts and highlighting the significance of personal history. Every day items like keepsakes and letters, often overlooked by public institutions, carry stories that matter deeply to those who cherish them. These collections remind us, as Woodham et al. explain, that "the stories and histories we choose to remember via our possessions are always selective" (p. 212) and yet incredibly significant in shaping a family’s past and present.

Family archives present opportunities for collaboration with museums and historians. While professionals often focus on preserving public heritage, everyday items from family collections provide deeply personal perspectives. As Woodham et al. (2017) note, “there is clearly a great deal of expertise and experience in those who handle ‘unmanaged’ heritage.”(p.

216) Museums can support families in understanding and preserving their collections, connecting personal stories to broader cultural narratives.

While collaboration holds great potential, it also poses challenges, such as determining what can realistically be preserved, maintaining an object's story, and addressing digital preservation. Despite these hurdles, bridging private and public heritage yields significant rewards: families share their stories, and institutions enrich their narratives with more inclusive histories. By partnering with local organizations and communities, museums can foster trust and empower individuals to see the value in their collections.

Such partnerships create a culture of shared responsibility, ensuring that personal stories are preserved and celebrated as vital contributions to collection histories.

Woodham et al. (2017) share insights into the challenges and gaps that individuals face in maintaining personal collections of family archives. I appreciate the authors' encouragement for greater collaboration between individuals and institutions. Their work highlights the social benefits of these partnerships, particularly through their choice not to focus on specific examples of family archives or how to share family histories. Instead, they emphasize empowering individuals and addressing the disconnect that often exists between people and their personal archives. They see this gap as an opportunity to elevate personal treasures and show how they can contribute to broader stories and historical contexts in more formal or institutional settings. While institutions and larger community collections often preserve specific stories and historical accounts, everyday individuals may undervalue their personal archives. Many feel their collections lack significance because they seem incomplete, ordinary, or unattainable. This perception fosters a sense of personal and historical insignificance that can stifle cultural preservation.

Ethical Stewardship in Cultural Institutions

Institutions play a crucial role in protecting and enriching cultural preservation and identities. Fan Jianhua's comment, "Our things have value!" (Rees, 2012 p. 44) shines light on the importance of fostering both personal value and institutional support to answer the question: *What practices can help people preserve their family and cultural histories?*

Community archives are pivotal in supporting cultural resilience by challenging traditional knowledge-power dynamics. These archives disrupt conventional practices by creating spaces for marginalized memories, allowing communities to define their narratives on their terms (Beel et al., 2017). This empowerment fosters not only a sense of ownership over historical preservation but also strengthens community identity and agency.

Rather than focusing on step-by-step practices or resource guides, practitioners and advocates in the fields of cultural preservation and storytelling might consider fostering a culture of care—one that encourages curiosity, empowers individuals, and supports them in preserving their histories. Through my research, I have explored storytelling, cultural memory, and family history sharing as tools for influence and education. Using keywords like "ephemera," "diaspora," "Hmong," "oral history," and "autoethnography," I have identified broader conversations around these themes. Understanding our roots through relatable historical accounts can deepen our sense of identity and potential.

Despite this, many individuals feel their stories or informal archives lack value. This perception presents an opportunity to cultivate a culture of care—one that inspires story sharing and makes the process equitable. To do so, we must provide people with the language and tools to recognize the value in their belongings and the importance of cultural preservation.

To build on these ideas, I explored two pieces of literature that provide complementary perspectives. Irene Campolmi's *Institutional Engagement and the Growing Role of Ethics in Contemporary Curatorial Practice* (2016) examines the ethical responsibilities in curatorial practices and the dynamics of trust and criticism among stakeholders. Nancy Duxbury and Elizabeth Gillette's *Culture as a Key Dimension of Sustainability* (2007) discusses the role of sustainable culture and the value of social and cultural capital. Together, these works deepen the conversation about bridging the gap between private and public heritage.

Campolmi (2016) explores curatorial ethics and emphasizes that ethical curating isn't about strict rules or morality, but rather responsibility. This responsibility involves rethinking what we already know about art and artists, allowing curators to discover new meanings and connections that speak to today's world. As Campolmi puts it, "Curatorial ethics consist of unlearning what is already known about the works of art and artists' stories to research and develop numerous possible interpretations" (p. 74).

Museums, in this view, are a part of a larger cultural ecosystem. They do not just preserve artifacts; they must adapt to changes in society to stay relevant. Campolmi (2016) describes this dynamic, saying, "The institution could be considered as part of a larger cultural ecosystem, where it is the museum that has to adapt to the changes that affect the cultural sphere in order to survive" (p. 70). This adaptability also extends to the relationships among stakeholders—museum staff, curators, artists, audiences, and collections—all of whom contribute to shaping exhibitions that reflect the world we live in.

Campolmi (2016) argues that museums have a responsibility to engage with current social and political issues. She notes, "In recent years, art museums have taken on the responsibility of engaging with relevant social and political topics both via exhibitions and

public programming initiatives" (p. 69). For curators, this means being aware of the world around them and creating exhibits that address important topics in thoughtful, meaningful ways. By doing so, museums can spark conversations that matter and connect with their communities. Trust is another key part of ethical curatorial practice. Campolmi (2016) observes that curatorial ethics revolve around relationships of trust between artists, curators, institutions, and audiences, where each relies on the other. "For example," she notes, "artists trust curators with the presentation and interpretation of their works; in turn, curators trust artists and listen to their suggestions; institutions trust curators who speak for them; curators trust the public and their desire to engage with the exhibition on various levels." (p. 72) Curators must also maintain a critical perspective. Without this balance of trust and critique, exhibitions risk losing their relevance and failing to engage audiences.

Campolmi also highlights how museums can be spaces for political and ethical change. Drawing from French theorist and activist Chantal Mouffe's ideas, she suggests that museums can serve as "vibrant sites for contemporary political and ethical intervention" (p. 73). These spaces are about more than just displaying art—they are about fostering trust, encouraging dialogue, and building relationships that connect people and ideas.

The concept of "relevance" is central to this discussion. Since the 1960s, museums have increasingly focused on addressing contemporary social and cultural issues. Campolmi and others argue that relevance also means being willing to address controversial topics. As Campolmi (2016) says, "Relevancy entails a comfort with controversy," pushing museums to take risks and address difficult questions (p. 79). This ensures that exhibitions remain thought-provoking and meaningful to diverse audiences.

Co-curation is often seen as a way to make exhibits more inclusive by involving a wider range of voices in creating knowledge. However, it can also raise ethical concerns. Campolmi (2016) points out that co-curation can sometimes turn into a way for curators to step back and let others take the lead, leading to less cohesive or well-researched exhibits. While it's important for exhibitions to ask big questions, Campolmi stresses that museums also have a responsibility to provide some guidance and responses to these questions. If an exhibit doesn't offer clear takeaways, audiences might feel lost instead of engaged. To make sure visitors stay interested and empowered, curators need to find the right balance between encouraging exploration and providing enough direction so that people feel both challenged and supported while exploring the stories on display.

Campolmi (2016) sees curatorial ethics as flexible and responsive to the times. She calls this an "ethics of contingencies," meaning that ethical decisions in museums are not fixed—they depend on the specific social and political context of each exhibition (p. 81). Curators must reflect on their choices and create exhibits that meet the needs of their institutions, artists, and audiences. At their best, exhibitions can become spaces for profound connection and dialogue about the contemporary world.

Campolmi presents curatorial ethics as a practice rooted in responsibility, trust, and adaptability. By engaging with relevant issues and embracing flexibility, museums can remain vital, transformative spaces that help us understand not only the past but also the present. Through thoughtful curation, they can inspire and challenge us, producing knowledge that leaves a lasting social impact.

Nancy Duxbury and Elizabeth Gillette's Culture as a Key Dimension of Sustainability (2007) expands the concept of sustainability beyond just protecting the environment or boosting

the economy. They argue that for communities to truly thrive, they must also focus on social and cultural well-being. As they put it, "...Requires community to define sustainability from its own values and perspectives." (p. 6) In other words, sustainability is not one size fits all—it should reflect what matters most to the people who live there.

Duxbury and Gillette (2007) outline six forms of "community capital" that work together to create sustainable communities. Each plays an important role:

- **Natural Capital**: Taking care of the environment and managing resources wisely.
- **Physical Capital**: Building and maintaining infrastructure like parks, libraries, and transportation systems.
- **Economic Capital**: Supporting local businesses and fair trade practices.
- **Human Capital**: Investing in people's health, education, and skills.
- **Social Capital**: Strengthening relationships, trust, and teamwork within the community. Duxbury and Gillette point out that social capital grows when communities embrace good governance, shared decision-making, and open communication. They write, "*Multiplying social capital requires...participatory planning, access to information, and collaboration and partnerships*."(p. 7)
- **Cultural Capital**: Honoring traditions, history, and the arts to build identity and connection.

Cultural capital stands out because it helps communities connect their past, present, and future. It is about more than preserving old buildings or holding festivals—it is about keeping traditions alive and celebrating what makes each community unique. Duxbury and Gillette say, "*Preserving cultural heritage links past, present, and future, ensuring cultural sustainability and*

benefiting tourism and regional development." (p. 10) This doesn't just preserve history; it also creates economic opportunities, like cultural tourism. When done thoughtfully, it allows future generations to enjoy and learn from the same heritage that shapes communities today.

Duxbury and Gillette (2007) also emphasize the power of the arts in building stronger communities. The arts help people connect with one another, build trust, and develop a sense of belonging. They write, "Arts and culture...create a sense of place and occasions for sociability that draw people together who might not otherwise be engaged in constructive social activities." (p. 11)

Involving young people is especially important, according to Duxbury and Gillette. Programs that connect arts, culture, and education can help the next generation see a brighter, more sustainable future. As the authors explain, "Involving youth in educational programs...can help provide them with a more optimistic and sustainable outlook on the future." (p. 11)

Preserving cultural heritage is about more than nostalgia—it is about maintaining a sense of identity while preparing for what's ahead. Duxbury and Gillette's (2007) ideas remind us that sustainability isn't just about saving the planet or growing the economy. It is about valuing the people, stories, and traditions that make communities feel like home. When we prioritize culture alongside other aspects of sustainability, we create places where everyone can thrive, now and in the future.

Gaps in Literature and Practice

Many articles highlight the power of archives to help people tell their own stories, such as Woodham's work, which shows how archives can shift power and let communities define their histories. Much of the literature focuses on specific case studies or institutional projects. While

those examples are valuable, they often feel too narrow and do not provide broader guidance or accessible tools that everyday people can use to preserve their own family histories.

There is also a lack of research on how institutions, like museums, libraries, and archives, can actively support families in this kind of work. This gap is especially noticeable for underrepresented communities, like the Hmong. Although there are studies on Hmong religion, language, and migration, very few focus on preserving cultural objects or oral traditions. Additionally, there is limited information on how to care for older media formats, such as magnetic tapes or home recordings, which were once common ways to capture and pass down stories.

While community archives and sustainable cultural models offer important ideas, there is still a missing link between personal and public memory, between what institutions hold and what families try to preserve at home. What is needed are more inclusive, community-centered resources that connect cultural identity to family history and offer everyday tools for preservation, especially for those who may not have easy access to institutions or training. This project addresses that gap by focusing on storytelling, care, and practical support that meets people where they are.

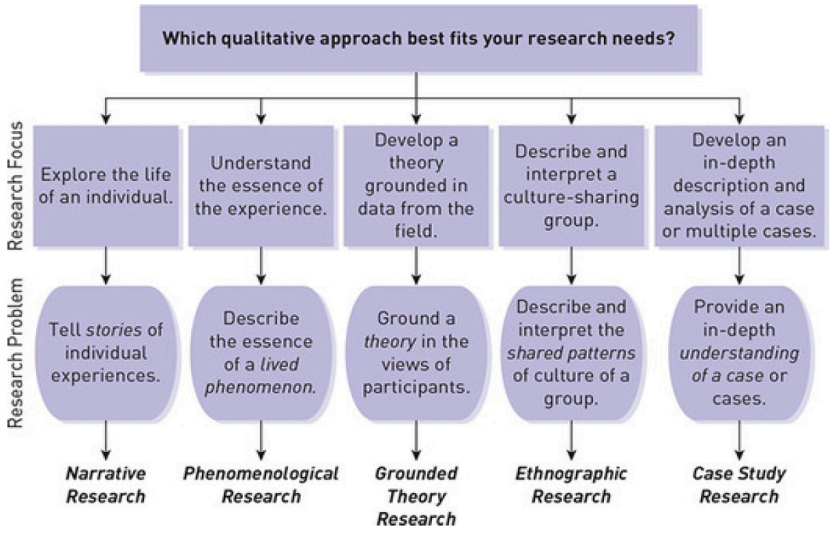
Methodology

My research explores the question: **What practices can be created to help people preserve their family and cultural histories?** To address this, my chosen methodology includes storytelling and practical research methods to preserve my family's history and offer ideas for others interested in archiving their own. By documenting the stories and materials that shape my family's journey, I am capturing what makes our history unique. At the same time, I am

exploring ways to make archiving personal and family histories easier for others. The project culminates in a physical exhibit of my family archive and a resource guide for preserving personal family histories and their cultural context and meaning.

Guiding the Data Collection Strategy

This approach emphasizes documenting personal and family experiences in a practical, adaptable way. This research combines narrative research and ethnography to understand how people interact with their family and cultural archives, the value they place on preserving their heritage, and how to make preserving family history simpler and more accessible. By blending these approaches, I explore the practices, challenges, and motivations behind archiving while fostering a culture of care and empowerment that encourages families and communities to preserve their histories.



Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Narrative Research To investigate the personal significance of preserving history, I gather stories and information from my family members. Although I did not conduct formal interviews with individuals outside my family, I consulted with professional collections managers and conservators, as well as staff from community organizations engaged in cultural preservation work. These conversations helped me contextualize the importance of preservation in both personal and institutional settings and offered insights into best practices.

In addition, I explored community-based resources that support cultural archiving, focusing particularly on Hmong history and heritage. This included studying the missions, programming, and outreach efforts of local organizations that serve the Hmong community. Through these engagements, I identified recurring themes that highlight the emotional and cultural importance of these practices and the potential of more accessible preservation strategies. These insights reveal not only the connections between individual experiences and broader historical contexts, but also opportunities for making archival practices sustainable and culturally relevant.

Ethnographic Approach Ethnography allows me to observe how individuals within the Hmong community interact with their archival materials and the value they place on preserving their histories. This approach was important to me as I focused on preserving my family and cultural history. One key aspect of this ethnographic approach is observing in action. By attending family gatherings or community workshops, I can observe firsthand how Hmong individuals engage with their archives. These interactions offer insight into the ways they connect with their personal and collective histories, particularly as they pass down stories across generations.

In addition to observing, ethnography emphasizes collaboration with communities. As I focus on the Hmong community, building strong relationships is essential in encouraging participants to take an active role in preserving their cultural histories. By engaging with Hmong individuals and families, I work to create a sense of ownership and empowerment that encourages them to safeguard their personal and community narratives. This collaboration is not only about the preservation of history but about cultivating a shared sense of cultural pride and resilience.

Through this ethnographic process, I can deepen my understanding of the Hmong culture and how its traditions influence the way individuals approach archiving. This exploration reveals how cultural practices, language, and values shape how stories are shared and preserved. I aim to simplify these archiving methods to ensure they are more inclusive and accessible for future generations. This approach is central to my larger goal of creating an exhibit and a toolkit focused on preserving the Hmong experience, particularly within my family. By preserving these histories and making archival practices more sustainable, I hope to ensure that the Hmong community's stories are not lost but rather celebrated and passed on for generations to come.

Practical Applications To make the findings useful, I also look at how institutions and community programs can support cultural preservation. This involves learning from local organizations already contributing to archiving efforts, such as museums, libraries, and cultural groups. By examining how these institutions approach preservation, I can identify best practices and strategies that might be adaptable for individuals and families within the Hmong community. Their experiences provide valuable insights into the structures, resources, and frameworks that can support cultural preservation on a broader scale.

Another key aspect of this work is identifying resources that are accessible and practical for families and communities to use in their own preservation efforts. By compiling simplified, user-friendly tools and strategies, I aim to empower individuals and groups to take charge of preserving their own histories. This approach ensures that preservation work is not limited to large institutions but is something that can be undertaken at the grassroots level, where it matters most.

Finally, I focus on sharing these ideas and findings in a way that can inspire and motivate both families and organizations to embrace a culture of care for their histories. By turning my research into practical recommendations, I hope to provide a roadmap for how communities can more actively engage in preserving their cultural legacies. This is not just about offering solutions, but about fostering a mindset of preservation and care that ensures the stories of the Hmong community and others are passed on for future generations to cherish and learn from.

Data Analysis To create a practical and culturally grounded preservation guide, I draw from personal and professional sources. This includes my own family's archival materials and stories, as well as insights gathered from interviews and consultations with professional collections managers, preservation educators, and conservators—most notably Rebecca Newberry, Director of Collections Stewardship at the Science Museum of Minnesota. A unifying theme across these conversations is a shared commitment to preserving Hmong cultural items with care, building contextual understanding, engaging communities, and supporting professional education.

I begin by organizing the data—archival materials, field notes, observations, and professional consultations—into core themes: preservation processes, community engagement,

education, and care practices. I then compare insights across different voices and sources to deepen my understanding and make sure the guide reflects both real community experiences and thoughtful preservation practices.

From there, I craft narratives that weave together personal family history with professional insights, spotlighting preservation methods that are both meaningful and manageable. These stories highlight not just the uniqueness of Hmong experiences, but also offer accessible strategies for others interested in preserving their cultural heritage.

This approach supports the development of a guide that is informative, community-driven, and grounded in real practices. It encourages a culture of care, simplicity, and empowerment in personal archiving and cultural preservation.

Collecting and Contextualizing the Family Archive

This research explores how people can preserve their family and cultural histories. I began by gathering photographs and documents from my family's home. I spent time going through them with my sisters, Annie and Paula, and asked my brother, Cha, if he recognized any people or places. My mother, Lao Vang, helped identify older relatives and explained how they were connected to us. I recorded some of these conversations to reference later as I digitized and cataloged materials.

Sorting through these items helped me understand what was in our family archive. It also revealed what I was missing, both in terms of information and preservation knowledge. I came across objects I did not know how to care for, which led me to seek out professional methods and community resources. This section outlines what I learned through that process, including the

patterns I noticed, the gaps I encountered, and how I began to organize and preserve our family history.

Figure 1. Nhia Sue Briefcase

Nhia Sue Vang's black briefcase with the original IOM sticker, brought to the United States in 1993. The briefcase contains documents from his time in the refugee camp.

Personal collection, photographed by author, 2024.

Figure 2. IOM Bag

White and red plastic bag labeled with "IOM," brought to the United States in 1993, which held my family's migration documents.

Personal collection, photographed by author, 2025.

While going through our unorganized collection of artifacts, documents, random bags, and photo albums, I found old photos from Thailand, identification cards from the refugee camps, and stacks of paperwork needed for our resettlement in the United States. There are group photos from Phanat Nikhom, where my parents and many others took classes to prepare for life in a new country. Scattered throughout are family photos—my parents and extended relatives in different refugee camps, frozen in time. And then there are the photos from our early years in America—pictures of my family standing outside the different homes we lived in as we grew, moved, and tried to make a life here. These photos and documents can be found in the appendix (see Appendix A).

The documents provide a record of our journey. The UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Resettlement) Bio-Data sheets and IOM (International Office for Migration) tags document our transition from stateless refugees to immigrants with a designated destination. A disbursement voucher from September 10, 1993, details the financial assistance we received upon arrival: $600 for lodging, $200 for food, $100 for clothing, and $100 for miscellaneous expenses. This highlights the limited resources available and the challenges my parents faced in navigating resettlement. Additional records include health documents, boarding passes, and certificates from the Consortium training programs, illustrating the difficulties and journey of immigrating (see Appendix B).

And then there are the objects that have endured over the years. Inside my father's black briefcase are documents and items he saved from Thailand, including banknotes and coins(see Appendix C). My mother's hand-sewn fabric bag holds my father's shaman tools (see Appendix D), which are deeply tied to our spiritual traditions and family history. According to my mother, Lao Vang, there are two sets of Split Horns (Kuam, k-ua). Both were given to my father, Nhia Sue Vang, by his stepmother, but originally inherited from his mother and used by three generations of shamans.

Lee Pao Xiong, the founding director of the Center for Hmong Studies, has helped create an invaluable resource for understanding Hmong migration, history, and refugee experiences. The center holds a vast collection of photos, documents, and original materials from refugee camps, along with slides and footage of Hmong people from Laos and Thailand, including soldiers and civilians. It provides crucial context for the Hmong resettlement in the U.S. and the war that led to it, essentially preserving key events and the documents associated with them.

While visiting the Center for Hmong Studies, I learned more about Phanat Nikhom. Growing up, I was always known as the kid who was born in “Phanat,” but I had very little understanding of what that meant. I assumed it was just another refugee camp, like Ban Vinai—the camp I knew my family had lived in based on stories from my parents and the case ID marked on numerous documents (BV######).

Lee Pao Xiong provided an overview of refugee camps and the waves of Hmong immigration. Because my family resettled in the United States in the 1990s, later than most Hmong refugees, our experience was different from those between 1975-1980s. I learned that "Phanat," as many Hmong refer to it, was Phanat Nikhom, a transition camp that opened in 1980. It was established in response to the challenges many refugees faced assimilating into life in the United States. Unlike earlier refugee camps, Phanat Nikhom was specifically designed to help refugees adjust before resettlement. It housed a diverse group of people—Hmong, other indigenous ethnic groups, Lao, Thai, Cambodian, and Vietnamese—who had been transferred from different refugee camps as part of the resettlement process.

The camp provided structured programs to teach refugees essential skills for adapting to a new country. Classes covered topics such as using household appliances, navigating city life, and even basic tasks like using and cleaning a toilet. Education courses were required, and this was also where many refugees underwent health screenings and vaccinations. Most families stayed for about a month, though some remained longer, depending on paperwork, the new country, and medical needs. My family’s stay was extended because my mother was pregnant with me, and after I was born, I had pneumonia, which delayed our departure.

Lee Pao Xiong's insights into Hmong migration helped me connect the stories I had heard growing up and better understand the documents I have been sorting through in the old IOM bag. He emphasized that a significant part of his work at the Center for Hmong Studies is preserving physical items tied to historical events, as they provide depth and context to a past that can otherwise feel distant.

During our conversation, I could tell how deeply he cares about ensuring that Hmong history is remembered. He shared with me, *"People only know what they know."* His work focuses on humanizing history and making it accessible, helping individuals connect with their past when they seek resources at the center. That is exactly what he did for me—he helped me better understand the place I was born and gave me a clearer picture of my parents' experiences. It is hard for people to care if they do not know, and the Center for Hmong Studies plays a crucial role in preserving and sharing this history. It holds one of the largest collections of photos, footage, and documents related to the refugee camps where many Hmong people once lived. The center has also collaborated with various organizations and filmmakers, such as Twin Cities PBS (TPT), to provide archival footage that helps contextualize these projects.

The Center for Hmong Studies is an excellent resource for connecting documents and photographs to historical events, but Lee Pao Xiong recommended visiting the Hmong Cultural Center to learn more about cultural practices. The Hmong Cultural Center features a small storefront museum that provides a broad overview of key aspects of Hmong culture. Its exhibits include references and videos showcasing various cultural traditions.

Beyond its museum, the Hmong Cultural Center offers a range of programs to support the Hmong community, including assistance with housing and food, English language courses, and

Hmong language classes for those seeking fluency. The center also hosts workshops on traditional practices, such as learning to play the Qeej, understanding Hmong wedding procedures and rites, and studying Hmong funeral customs. The center's educational website houses more contemporary content of cultural practices in an educational way.

During my visit, I explored the Hmong Cultural Center's library, which houses an extensive collection of literature, including works by Hmong authors. The collection features biographies, memoirs, academic journals, dissertations, and research studies covering topics such as Hmong culture, diaspora, refugee experiences, religion, health, medicine, gender, language, and adaptation/assimilation. I spent some time looking for books about preservation or could cover the topic of care and preservation. This specific topic was scarce but the variety of literature available was interesting.

Another key organization in the Hmong community in the Twin Cities included the Hmong Museum. The museum has a smaller collection of artifacts and historical context built in. They focus on reconnecting to culture and how we can honor and practice our cultural heritage in a contemporary way. Their programming includes workshops, events, artistic and cultural projects with community partners, and more recently, Ua Ke, an educational resource and curriculum designed for all ages, featuring research-based content, visuals, and a variety of supporting materials. In the fall of 2024 Hmong Museum held a workshop in collaboration with Midwest Art Conservation Center (MACC) on preserving Hmong Silver with Conservator Nicole Grabow and Preservation Educator Olivia Thandabout.

Learning from Experts

Preserving my family's history involved researching best practices, consulting with experts, and utilizing accessible resources to support long-term preservation. The primary objective was to protect these materials while maintaining a practical and cost-effective approach suitable for home use.

Seeking Expertise at the Midwest Art Conservation Center (MACC)

I consulted with Olivia Thandabout at the Midwest Art Conservation Center (MACC) for her expertise in the proper storage and preservation of artifacts, specifically my father's shaman tools, which include both organic and mixed materials. It is important to acknowledge that MACC is a specialized organization that primarily serves institutions and organizations, with services extended to private clients. While they occasionally offer public workshops, these typically involve associated fees.

Olivia previously held a fellowship with MACC and was offered the opportunity to stay with MACC as a Preventive Conservation Educator. I deeply valued her work and professionalism, especially her ability to bridge preservation and conservation practices with her lived experience as a Hmong American woman. During her fellowship, one of her key projects included leading a hands-on workshop at the Hmong Museum focused on the cleaning and care of Hmong silver. In collaboration with her supervisor, Nicole Grabow, Director of Preventive Conservation at MACC, she co-curated the workshop and developed an instructional guide for preserving Hmong silver (available upon request from MACC).

The instructional handout adhered to MACC's professional standards for silver care and was written in terminology familiar to conservation specialists. However, recognizing the need for accessibility, Olivia created a supplemental guide tailored to Hmong silver artifacts. This included alternative cleaning methods, acknowledging that most individuals do not have access to specialized materials such as calcium carbonate, the recommended substance for cleaning silver tarnish.

In our conversation, Olivia emphasized the importance of making conservation methods practical and accessible for everyday individuals. She highlighted that before these objects entered the realm of formal preservation, they were lovingly maintained and passed down through generations. Her approach to conservation is not only about protecting artifacts but also about honoring the cultural practices that have preserved these items over time. As she shared, preserving culture extends beyond the objects themselves—it includes recognizing the ways our mothers folded, stored, and cared for family heirlooms.

Resources from Ramsey County Historical Society

During my 2024–2025 fellowship with the Ramsey County Historical Society (RCHS) and the Center for Hmong Studies, I was connected with Mollie Spillman, Director of Collections and Exhibitions at RCHS. Mollie provided guidance and resources related to preservation practices, artifact handling, and materials for storage and housing. These resources reflect the professional standards and procedures she implements at RCHS.

To further my understanding, I also consulted with additional professionals in conservation and archiving. Mollie offered specific insight into textile preservation, highlighting

the importance of avoiding hard creases and using acid-free paper to support folds. She also recommended covering delicate fabrics with undyed, 100% cotton sheets to prevent damage.

I also inquired about the preservation of 35mm film and Polaroid photographs. Polaroids and older color prints are prone to deterioration over time, often shifting to reddish-orange hues and releasing a noticeable chemical odor. Although digitization remains the most effective preservation strategy, if retaining the physical originals, storing each photograph individually in archival sleeves helps prevent chemical interactions between prints. Likewise, 35mm film should be housed in individual sleeves to avoid further degradation. Some of my family's film negatives, which were originally brought from Thailand, had been cut into small sections; I placed each section in a protective sleeve to minimize additional damage.

Figure 3. Printed Photo

Old Polaroid photograph from my family archive showing early signs of deterioration.

Personal collection, photographed by Nhia Sue Vang, 2004. A slight orange hue is visible on the right side, with chemical leaching appearing along the bottom edge of the image.

Paper Conservation Guidance

For paper conservation, Diana Clise from MACC suggested partial encapsulation with L-velope sleeves or three-sided sleeves, particularly for fragile papers. She emphasized the need to digitize carbon paper documents, as they deteriorate quickly due to pressure sensitivity.

Custom Storage for Family Heirlooms

My conversations with Olivia Thandabout and Nicole Grabow at the Midwest Art Conservation Center (MACC) emphasized the specific preservation needs for objects such as my father's briefcase, coins, shaman tools, and textiles. While the briefcase and its contents are historically and conceptually connected, Thandabout and Grabow advised that they be stored separately to ensure long-term preservation, while maintaining their relational context. Rather than using the briefcase as a storage container for its original contents, they recommended developing a dedicated storage solution that protects each item individually. A labeled exterior and accompanying packing list were also suggested as part of best practice.

A practical solution would involve designing a storage box with designated compartments—one for the briefcase and another for its contents. For museum-quality preservation, a custom enclosure made from acid-free blue board is ideal, or a large archival book box can be sourced from a preservation supplier. To further stabilize the items, a mold can be cut from polyethylene foam and wrapped in Tyvek to provide an additional protective layer before being placed inside the box. Coins should be stored in polyethylene sleeves, while metals

and textiles should be kept away from wood and acidic materials to prevent chemical deterioration.

Figure 4. MACC Enclosure Solution

Example of a custom archival storage solution for preserving items with mixed materials. *Courtesy of Olivia Thandabout, Midwest Art Conservation Center, used with permission.*

Textile Storage Considerations

The storage approach for textiles depends on their current condition (see Figure 5 for an example of the fabric from the family collection). If the textile is fragile or weakened, it should

be gently humidified to relax the fibers, after confirming that the dyes are not water-soluble. If the fabric is stable, a light mist of water can be applied before flattening the piece under blotter paper with a weighted press.

For textiles that remain structurally sound, careful ironing may help restore their form. For long-term preservation, fabrics should be wound around a rolled mount covered in Tyvek or cotton fabric. In cases where garments or accessories are intended for display or occasional wear, a supportive mount shaped to mimic the human form can be created from polyethylene foam and covered in Tyvek or cotton fabric. This type of support prevents strain on the textile and maintains its shape.

Light exposure remains one of the most significant threats to textiles and paper-based artifacts. Keeping materials away from direct light is critical to preserving color and structural integrity. Even the more durable objects in the collection benefit from protection against light and physical impact. For these, custom enclosures made from polyethylene foam molds, wrapped in Tyvek, provide additional stability and security.

Figure 5. Shaman's Veil

Shaman's veil belonging to Nhia Sue Vang, hand-sewn by his wife, Lao Vang. The textile reflects traditional design elements and was preserved as part of the family archive.

Photographed in 2025. Personal collection.

Institutional Practices from the Science Museum of Minnesota

To further ground this work in institutional practices, one of the highlights of my research and data collection was meeting with Rebecca Newberry, Director of Collections Stewardship at the Science Museum of Minnesota. I spent two hours with her exploring items from their Hmong collection. We talked about storage basics—avoiding moisture and humidity, limiting exposure to bright lights, using breathable archive boxes, and storing items in ways that reduce friction,

even across different materials. She explained that their archive boxes contain calcium carbonate, which helps neutralize acidity from the stored items and extends their lifespan.

Newberry shared that 100 percent washed and dried cotton is a simple, effective material to store and cover objects—it helps with padding and protection against environmental damage. When I asked how the museum acquired its Hmong items, she said many were sourced through community partners, collectors, and individuals, both local and from Laos and Thailand, over the past 40 to 50 years.

Newberry talked about her role, not just as a department lead and conservator, but as someone focused on education, access, and culturally appropriate preservation. She mentioned hosting open houses and connecting collections with museum staff, community organizations, and funders. What stood out to me most was her approach to ethnographic conservation—she is intentional about learning from and working with communities.

She showed me several skirts that were repaired and explained how, through community outreach, she connected with a Hmong woman who was recommended to help. The museum paid them for their expertise to teach and hand-stitch the skirts, carefully rolling them to maintain the pleats instead of storing them flat, like institutions commonly practice. It was also a learning moment for Newberry, who took the opportunity to learn how to hand-stitch the pieces herself.

Figure 6. SMM Hmong Skirt Collection

Traditional Hmong skirts in the Science Museum of Minnesota's Hmong collection, rolled for storage to maintain pleating.

Photographed by author, 2025. Courtesy of the Science Museum of Minnesota.

Newberry also told me about the Hmong House exhibit, which the Science Museum commissioned in 1990. It was on display in the anthropology hall for twenty years. She shared the story of how it was built in partnership with Hmong community members, and how a manual was created to ensure it could be disassembled and reassembled in the future—working closely with both the original builders and the museum's shop crew (Benson et al., 2001, pp. 41–42). The intentional care that went into the care of the shaman tools and things, as simple as stitching skirts, and making sure the Hmong House was cared for, really stood out to me.

After two decades, the Hmong House was transferred to the Hmong American Partnership, a key resource for the local Hmong community. During our conversation, I also shared how my mother and grandmother store items at home—how wrapping Hmong clothes and Xauv (the traditional silver necklace) in scarves and fabric is not just practical, but also a ritual, a part of our culture and tradition. Newberry affirmed that cloth is a great way to protect items and that there's something to be said about how generations have been able to keep items in their ways and make them last. She emphasized that as professionals, it is something to acknowledge and learn from.

I appreciated learning about how this large institution makes efforts to be respectful and community-driven by reaching out to experts and cultural partners. There is always room for improvement, but as someone who sometimes feels removed from museums and institutional collections, this meeting gave me hope.

Building Your Family Archive: Identifying and Selecting Materials

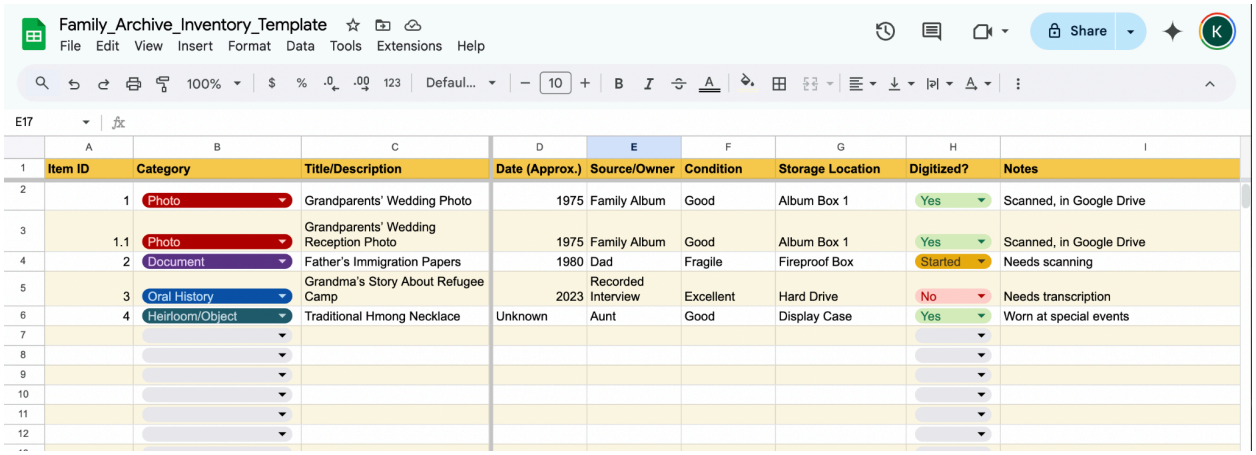
The initial step in building a family archive involves identifying materials that are personally and culturally significant—items that contribute to the narrative of a family's heritage. These may include documents such as birth and death certificates, immigration records, marriage licenses, personal letters, diaries, and school records; photographs and videos, including family portraits, candid snapshots, home videos, and travel images; oral histories recorded as interviews with family members; cultural artifacts such as heirlooms, textiles, recipes, and handmade items; and digital footprints, including emails, social media posts, and other born-digital materials that reflect personal and familial milestones.

It is important to recognize that not every item needs to be preserved in its original physical form. Items of uncertain or limited significance can be digitized and later evaluated for their long-term value. In my archiving process, I chose to digitize materials I was unsure about, preserving a memory while avoiding unnecessary physical storage.

Organizing the Archive

Once materials have been collected, the next critical step in the archiving process is organization. Items should be sorted thematically—for example, by topics such as immigration, family traditions, significant milestones, or individual family members—and labeled with contextual details, including names, dates, and locations. Several practical strategies can support this phase. Labeling materials with archival-quality ink pens or pencils helps ensure that identifying information remains intact over time. Creating a visual timeline or family tree can further contextualize materials and reveal generational patterns or historical connections. For digital materials, applying metadata—such as keywords, file names, and dates—enhances searchability and categorization. Additionally, maintaining an inventory log that addresses key archival questions (e.g., who, what, when, where, and why) ensures that materials retain meaning even as time passes. To support my organizational process, I developed a Family Archive Inventory Template, which guided the consistent documentation and categorization of items in my collection.

Figure 7. Family Archive Template



Family_Archive_Inventory_Template

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	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
1	Item ID	Category	Title/Description	Date (Approx.)	Source/Owner	Condition	Storage Location	Digitized?	Notes
2	1	Photo	Grandparents' Wedding Photo	1975	Family Album	Good	Album Box 1	Yes	Scanned, in Google Drive
3	1.1	Photo	Grandparents' Wedding Reception Photo	1975	Family Album	Good	Album Box 1	Yes	Scanned, in Google Drive
4	2	Document	Father's Immigration Papers	1980	Dad	Fragile	Fireproof Box	Started	Needs scanning
5	3	Oral History	Grandma's Story About Refugee Camp	2023	Recorded Interview	Excellent	Hard Drive	No	Needs transcription
6	4	Heirloom/Object	Traditional Hmong Necklace	Unknown	Aunt	Good	Display Case	Yes	Worn at special events
7									
8									
9									
10									
11									
12									

Family Archive Inventory Template.

Developed by the author to support the documentation, categorization, and contextualization of archival materials. The template includes fields for item type, description, date, individuals involved, source/original owner, and notes on significance.

Digitization: Creating a Digital Archive

Digitizing family archives not only supports long-term preservation but also increases accessibility across generations. The process varies depending on material type, condition, and size.

Photographs: Digitally printed photographs in good condition can typically be scanned using an automatic feeder. However, fragile or historical images require a flatbed scanner or should be photographed in indirect natural light. Polaroid images, in particular, should be digitized immediately due to their rapid color deterioration and chemical instability. I scanned

the majority of my photographs at the FamilySearch Center in Crystal, Minnesota. A free genealogy-focused resource that provides access to an Epson Foto Scanner capable of bulk image scanning. For film negatives and fragile or oversized prints, I utilized Springboard for the Arts' Resource Center, which offers a large-format flatbed scanner and a film scanner available for artists at no cost.

Documents: To preserve original context, I first photographed documents in the condition in which they were originally stored, then scanned individual pages to create detailed digital records. Standard-sized documents were scanned using flatbed scanners. For oversized materials in good condition, I paid to use a large-format blueprint scanner at FedEx, which allowed me to digitize items that exceeded 12"x18". Alternatively, oversized, fragile, or sensitive documents can be photographed in a well-lit space to create digital copies.

VHS and Audio Cassettes: For analog video and audio materials, I partnered with Astound Sound in St. Louis Park to preview and convert magnetic media. The total cost included a media preview and digitization of one VHS tape. I provided my flash drive for storage. Previewing the content before conversion allowed me to determine whether the material was worth preserving.

Objects, Textiles, and others: Objects and textiles should be photographed in a well-lit space with a plain background. Initially, photograph items as they were originally kept, and then take additional photos in a flatlay arrangement after preparation for archival storage.

These combined tools and community resources made the digitization process both feasible and affordable. By utilizing accessible scanning services and commercial options where

necessary, I was able to create high-quality digital versions of materials central to my family archive.

Physical Storage and Conservation

Proper storage of physical materials is critical to long-term preservation. Best practices include:

- **Storage Materials:** Use acid-free, lignin-free, 100% cotton, or polyethylene/polyester/polypropylene enclosures.
- **Storage Methods:**
    - Paper sleeves for rarely handled items; plastic sleeves for frequent use.
    - UV-filtering acrylic for framed items; store away from sunlight.
    - Use interleaving paper to separate and protect photos or documents.
- **Environmental Considerations:**
    - Store materials in cool, dark, dry places and away from pests.
    - Elevate storage to prevent water damage.
    - Use silica gel or desiccant packets to manage humidity—something I incorporated into each box and enclosure.

Document and Photo Storage Tips

- Documents should be flattened, unstapled, and sorted by size and theme into acid-free folders and boxes. Limit exposure to light, and store newspapers separately due to their acidity.

- For photographs, my approach was to organize by “eras,” defined by the homes my family lived in. This practical method allowed flexibility for later refinement. Storage

materials included archival photo boxes, index cards, envelopes, tissue padding, and polyethylene sleeves.

Tools, Materials, and Where to Find Them

Archiving requires specialized supplies that can be found through reputable vendors or adapted from more affordable sources as long as the materials meet preservation standards. Essential tools and recommended vendors include:

- Tools for Cleaning and Labeling:
    - Microfiber cloths, air puffers, craft spatulas, staple removers.
    - Pigma Micron Pens (archival ink), Derwent Art Pencils, and Post-It notes.
- Archival Vendors:
    - Gaylord Archival, Archival Methods, Hollinger Metal Edge, University Products, Lineco, Archival Products.
    - General retailers like Blick Art Supplies and Michaels (for select archival items).
- What I Purchased:
    - From Archival Methods: 3-sided polypropylene sleeves, photo kits, document boxes and spacers, side-loading sleeves, and cardstock.
    - From Blick: Interleaving paper, poly sleeves, mounting boards, Pigma pens.
    - From Michaels: Archival pens and boxes.
    - I also reused silica gel packets based on recommendations from the Canadian Conservation Institute and Archival Methods' Preservation Guide.

Digital Storage

Digital preservation is an equally essential component of archiving. Following best practices from my background in graphic design and archival and collections professionals, I understood that all files should be backed up across multiple platforms:

- Storage Devices and Platforms:
    - HHD, SSD, Flash drive (external drive).
    - iCloud and Google Photos (cloud-based).
    - Permanent.org (encrypted, nonprofit digital archive with legacy planning features).
    - Other notable platforms: Dropbox, OneDrive, pCloud, iDrive, and Forever (which includes facial recognition features).

To assist with cataloging and planning, I created a digital spreadsheet via Google Sheets to track metadata, file locations, and notes related to each archival item.

Conclusion

Preserving family and cultural histories requires thoughtful practices that honor personal stories and connect them to a larger narrative. Storytelling, photo documentation, memory books, and community archives are powerful tools for bringing overlooked histories to light. These personal keepsakes hold deep cultural meaning, enriching individual and collective identities.

My research question—*What practices can be created to help people preserve their family and cultural histories?*—guided my exploration into how we can take steps to protect these important stories. Through my research, I reached out to Hmong community partners and visited organizations to contextualize my family archive and explore how they work to preserve culture and artifacts. Their willingness to connect with me, invite me into their institutions, and

consult on my project was encouraging and reaffirming. It highlighted the role institutions play in creating value and influence by emphasizing the importance of preserving family and cultural histories. This collaboration showed how institutions can inspire individuals to recognize the significance of their histories and encourage them to take steps toward preserving their stories.

Collaboration is key to making these efforts meaningful and sustainable. Families and cultural institutions must work together, with museums and archives adapting to engage communities and bridge personal stories with public memory. As Nancy Duxbury and Elizabeth Gillette (2007) point out, “Supporting cultural heritage isn’t just about nostalgia—it’s about ensuring that communities thrive by valuing traditions and shared histories” (p. 12).

By creating spaces and practices that celebrate personal histories and the value of everyday objects, we can also teach practical ways to preserve physical items for the long term. This work helps individuals see their role in a broader cultural narrative, ensuring stories and belongings are preserved, remembered, and valued for generations.

Appendix

Appendix A

Family Photo Archives

Figure A1

Nhia Sue Vang and Lao Xiong Vang, ca. 1985

Note. Damaged photograph of Nhia Sue Vang and his son Lao Xiong Vang, taken around 1985. The photo shows early life following resettlement and serves as a visual representation of familial connection and memory preservation within the refugee experience.

Figure A2

Class Photo – Phanat Nikhom Refugee Camp

Note. Group photograph taken at The Consortium in Phanat Nikhom Refugee Camp, Chonburi, Thailand. Nhia Sue Vang is standing second from the right. Though undated, the photo captures a moment of community and education during the refugee resettlement process.

Figure A3

Xiong Family Photo

Note. Undated photograph of Lao Xiong Vang's extended family. Although Lao is not pictured, he would have been a young adolescent at the time. His maternal grandparents, Sai Lee and Youa Pao Xiong, are positioned fifth and sixth from the right, standing next to each other and holding a baby. The image reflects familial ties and generational presence within the Hmong community.

Figure A5

UNHCR Bio-Data Sheet Family Photograph

Note. Family photograph originally stapled to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Bio-Data sheet used during the immigration process to the United States in 1993. This image was part of the required documentation for refugee resettlement. See Appendix B, Figure B1 for the corresponding UNHCR Bio-Data sheet.

Figure A6

Film Negatives of Photographs from Thailand

Note. Film negatives brought from Thailand, containing photographs taken in various refugee camps. The top row features (from left to right) Nhia Sue Vang, Lao Xiong Vang, and Kao Lee Vang. While exact dates and locations are unknown, the negatives offer a rare and personal glimpse into life in refugee camps prior to resettlement.

Figure A7

Early Family Photo in America

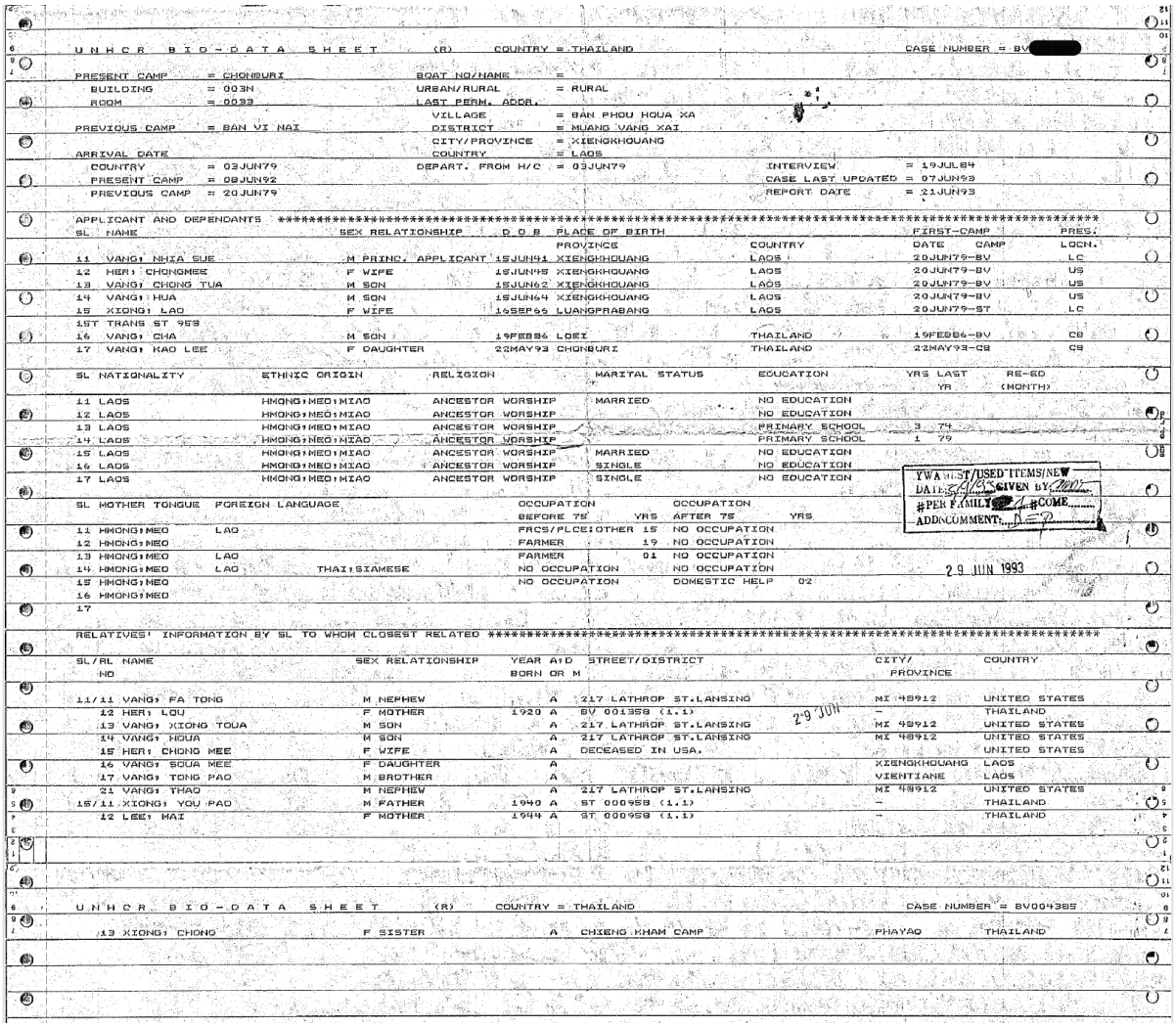
Note. Photograph taken shortly after the family's arrival in the United States in 1993. Pictured are Lao Xiong Vang holding baby Kao Lee Vang, alongside the wife of Hua Vang (stepson of Nhia Sue Vang) and Mee Vang, wife of Ber (Charlie) Vang, who sponsored the family's resettlement. The image marks an early moment of reunion and new beginnings in America.

Appendix B

Family Documents

Figure B1

UNHCR Bio-Data Sheet



U N H C R B I O - D A T A S H E E T (R) COUNTRY = THAILAND CASE NUMBER = BV [redacted]

PRESENT CAMP = CHONBURI BOAT NO/NAME =
BUILDING = 003N URBAN/RURAL = RURAL
ROOM = 0033 LAST PERM. ADDR.
VILLAGE = BAN PHOU HOUA XA
PREVIOUS CAMP = BAN VI NAI DISTRICT = MUANG VANG XAI
CITY/PROVINCE = XIENGKHOUANG
ARRIVAL DATE COUNTRY = LAOS
COUNTRY = 03JUN79 DEPART. FROM H/C = 03JUN79 INTERVIEW = 19JUL84
PRESENT CAMP = 08JUN92 CASE LAST UPDATED = 07JUN93
PREVIOUS CAMP = 20JUN79 REPORT DATE = 21JUN93

APPLICANT AND DEPENDANTS

SL	NAME	SEX	RELATIONSHIP	D O B	PLACE OF BIRTH PROVINCE	COUNTRY	FIRST-CAMP DATE	FIRST-CAMP CAMP	PRES. LOCN.
11	VANG; NHIA SUE	M	PRINC. APPLICANT	15JUN41	XIENGKHOUANG	LAOS	20JUN79	BV	LC
12	HER; CHONGMEE	F	WIFE	18JUN48	XIENGKHOUANG	LAOS	20JUN79	BV	US
13	VANG; CHONG TUA	M	SON	15JUN62	XIENGKHOUANG	LAOS	20JUN79	BV	US
14	VANG; HUA	M	SON	15JUN64	XIENGKHOUANG	LAOS	20JUN79	BV	US
15	XIONG; LAO	F	WIFE	16SEP66	LUANGPRABANG	LAOS	20JUN79	ST	LC
1ST TRANS ST 953									
16	VANG; CHA	M	SON	19FEB86	LOEI	THAILAND	19FEB86	BV	CB
17	VANG; KAO LEE	F	DAUGHTER	22MAY93	CHONBURI	THAILAND	22MAY93	CB	CB

SL	NATIONALITY	ETHNIC ORIGIN	RELIGION	MARITAL STATUS	EDUCATION	YRS LAST YR	RE-ED (MONTH)
11	LAOS	HMONG;MEO;MIAO	ANCESTOR WORSHIP	MARRIED	NO EDUCATION		
12	LAOS	HMONG;MEO;MIAO	ANCESTOR WORSHIP		NO EDUCATION		
13	LAOS	HMONG;MEO;MIAO	ANCESTOR WORSHIP		PRIMARY SCHOOL	3 74	
14	LAOS	HMONG;MEO;MIAO	ANCESTOR WORSHIP		PRIMARY SCHOOL	1 79	
15	LAOS	HMONG;MEO;MIAO	ANCESTOR WORSHIP	MARRIED	NO EDUCATION		
16	LAOS	HMONG;MEO;MIAO	ANCESTOR WORSHIP	SINGLE	NO EDUCATION		
17	LAOS	HMONG;MEO;MIAO	ANCESTOR WORSHIP	SINGLE	NO EDUCATION		

YWA LIST USED ITEMS/NEW
DATE 29 JUN GIVEN BY
#PER FAMILY #COME
ADD/COMMENT:

SL	MOTHER TONGUE	FOREIGN LANGUAGE	OCCUPATION BEFORE 75	YRS	OCCUPATION AFTER 75	YRS
11	HMONG;MEO	LAO	FACS/PLCE;OTHER	15	NO OCCUPATION	
12	HMONG;MEO		FARMER	19	NO OCCUPATION	
13	HMONG;MEO	LAO	FARMER	01	NO OCCUPATION	
14	HMONG;MEO	LAO THAI;SIAMESE	NO OCCUPATION		NO OCCUPATION	
15	HMONG;MEO		NO OCCUPATION		DOMESTIC HELP	02
16	HMONG;MEO					
17						

29 JUN 1993

RELATIVES' INFORMATION BY SL TO WHOM CLOSEST RELATED

SL/RL NO	NAME	SEX	RELATIONSHIP	YEAR BORN	A;D OR M	STREET/DISTRICT	CITY/ PROVINCE	COUNTRY
11/11	VANG; FA TONG	M	NEPHEW		A	217 LATHROP ST.LANSING	MI 48912	UNITED STATES
12	HER; LOU	F	MOTHER	1920	A	BV 001358 (1.1)	-	THAILAND
13	VANG; XIONG TOUA	M	SON		A	217 LATHROP ST.LANSING	MI 48912	UNITED STATES
14	VANG; HOUA	M	SON		A	217 LATHROP ST.LANSING	MI 48912	UNITED STATES
15	HER; CHONG MEE	F	WIFE		A	DECEASED IN USA.		UNITED STATES
16	VANG; SOUA MEE	F	DAUGHTER		A		XIENGKHOUANG	LAOS
17	VANG; TONG PAO	M	BROTHER		A		VIENTIANE	LAOS
21	VANG; THAO	M	NEPHEW		A	217 LATHROP ST.LANSING	MI 48912	UNITED STATES
15/11	XIONG; YOU PAO	M	FATHER	1940	A	ST 000958 (1.1)	-	THAILAND
12	LEE; MAI	F	MOTHER	1944	A	ST 000958 (1.1)	-	THAILAND

U N H C R B I O - D A T A S H E E T (R) COUNTRY = THAILAND CASE NUMBER = BV004385

13	XIONG; CHONG	F	SISTER		A	CHIENG KHAM CAMP	PHAYAO	THAILAND

Note. Official United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Bio-Data sheet used during the refugee resettlement process. This document includes personal information such as country of origin, dates of issuance and approval, religion or place of worship, refugee or asylum status, language, and close relatives. It functioned as a form of identification. A family photo was originally stapled to this sheet (see Appendix A, Figure A5).

Figure B2

IOM Identification Cards

Note. Identification cards issued by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) for the 1993 flight from Thailand to Eau Claire, Wisconsin. The cards belonged to Nhia Sue Vang, Lao Xiong Vang, Cha Vang, and Kao Lee Vang, and were used for refugee processing and transit during resettlement to the United States.

Figure B3

Northwest Airlines Boarding Passes

Note. Boarding passes issued by Northwest Airlines (now part of Delta Air Lines) for the family's flight from Bangkok, Thailand, to Minneapolis–St. Paul, Minnesota, in September 1993. These passes document the final leg of the resettlement journey to the United States.

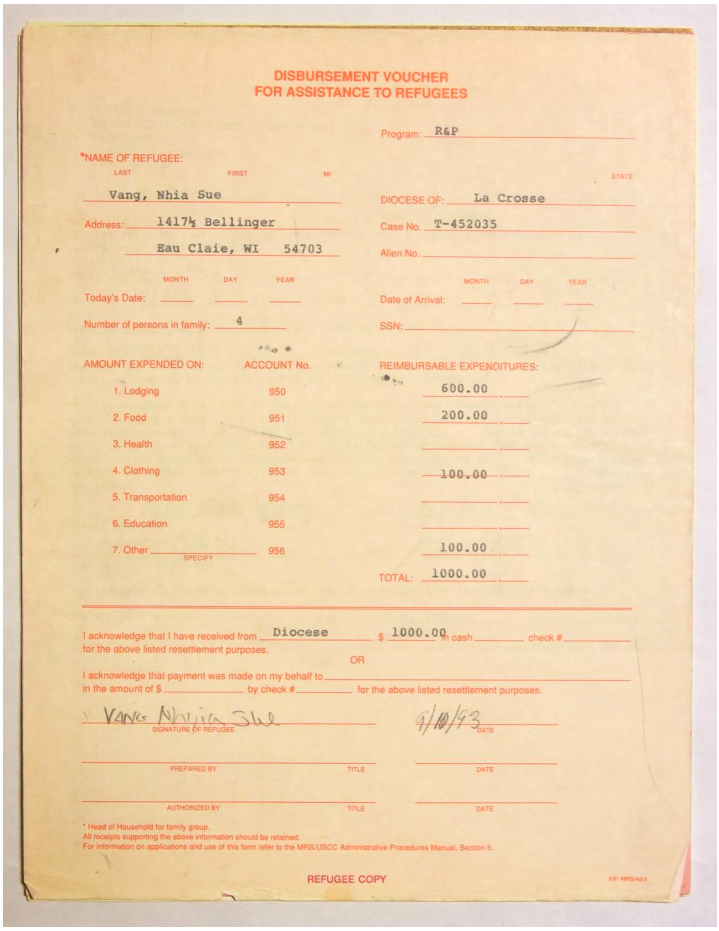
Figure B4

Travel Permit Receipt, 1985

Note. This document was issued on April 26, 1985, to Nhia Sue, author KaoLee Vang's father, by the Central Refugee Office, Region 2, of the Lao People's Democratic Republic. It authorized travel and served as a receipt for a 20.00 Kip payment. The document includes an official stamp featuring the map of Laos, as well as a photograph and signature confirming identity and approval.

Figure B5

Disbursement Voucher for Refugee Assistance



DISBURSEMENT VOUCHER
FOR ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEES

Program: R&P

*NAME OF REFUGEE:
LAST FIRST MI
Vang, Nhia Sue

Address: 1417½ Bellinger
Eau Claie, WI 54703

Today's Date: MONTH DAY YEAR

Number of persons in family: 4

DIOCESE OF: La Crosse STATE
Case No. T-452035
Alien No.

Date of Arrival: MONTH DAY YEAR

SSN:

AMOUNT EXPENDED ON:	ACCOUNT No.	REIMBURSABLE EXPENDITURES:
1. Lodging	950	600.00
2. Food	951	200.00
3. Health	952	
4. Clothing	953	100.00
5. Transportation	954	
6. Education	955	
7. Other (SPECIFY)	956	100.00
	TOTAL:	1000.00

I acknowledge that I have received from Diocese $ 1000.00 in cash ____ check # ____
for the above listed resettlement purposes.

OR

I acknowledge that payment was made on my behalf to ____
in the amount of $ ____ by check # ____ for the above listed resettlement purposes.

Vang Nhia Sue 4/10/93
SIGNATURE OF REFUGEE DATE

PREPARED BY TITLE DATE

AUTHORIZED BY TITLE DATE

* Head of Household for family group.
All receipts supporting the above information should be retained.
For information on applications and use of this form refer to the MRS/USCC Administrative Procedures Manual, Section 5.

REFUGEE COPY

Note. Disbursement voucher issued in 1993 through the Reception and Placement (R&P) program, documenting financial assistance provided to Nhia Sue Vang as a newly arrived refugee. This document illustrates the types of support available during the early stages of resettlement and serves as evidence of U.S. governmental aid during that period.

Appendix C

Figure C1

Nhia Sue Vang Briefcase and Contents

Note. Leather briefcase belonging to Nhia Sue Vang, containing personal and historical items reflecting his experience as a refugee and immigrant. Contents include documents, photographs, Thai coins (baht), identification cards, a Thai library card, and various ephemeral items such as receipts and handwritten notes. These materials support the project's focus on family archiving and cultural preservation.

Appendix D

Objects: Nhia Sue Vang Shaman Tools

Figure D1

Ox Split Horn or Kuam (K-ua)

Note. Hollowed ox horn used in Hmong shamanic practice to call spirits and answer yes or no questions. Shamans require two or more of these horns, traditionally made from bull or buffalo. This horn was passed down to Nhia Sue Vang by his mother, Naib Her.

Figure D2

Wood Split Horn or Kuam (K-ua)

Note. Carved wooden split horn used in Hmong shamanic practice to call spirits and answer yes or no questions. While traditionally made from ox or buffalo horn, some are crafted from wood. This horn's date of origin is unknown.

Figure D3

Shaman Altar

Note. Photograph of Nhia Sue Vang's shaman altar, taken in 2023. This altar held his spiritual tools including a handsewn bag for safekeeping.

Figure D4

Shaman Rattle (Tsiab Neeb) - From Thailand

Note. A ceremonial rattle used by Hmong shamans during rituals to fight off spirits and stay spiritually focused. This rattle was brought from Thailand to the United States and stored in a handsewn bag with other tools. It is often tied with red or white string and varies in size. Some shamans hold it throughout the ceremony, while others use it with the help of an assistant.

Figure D5

Newer Shaman Rattle (Tsiab Neeb)

Note. A more recent shaman rattle purchased by Nhia Sue Vang in the United States to supplement older tools. Used in Hmong ceremonies to protect against spirits and maintain focus during ritual work. Like traditional rattles, it is often tied with red or white string and varies in size.

Figure D6

Sewn Bag for Shaman Tools

Note. Handsewn bag that currently holds Nhia Sue Vang's shaman tools. Photographed in 2025. The bag has not yet been formally preserved or stored.

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