

AN ARCHIVAL ALBUM DESIGN

by

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presented at Ox Bow Paper and Book Intensive

1985

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arts**

box 115

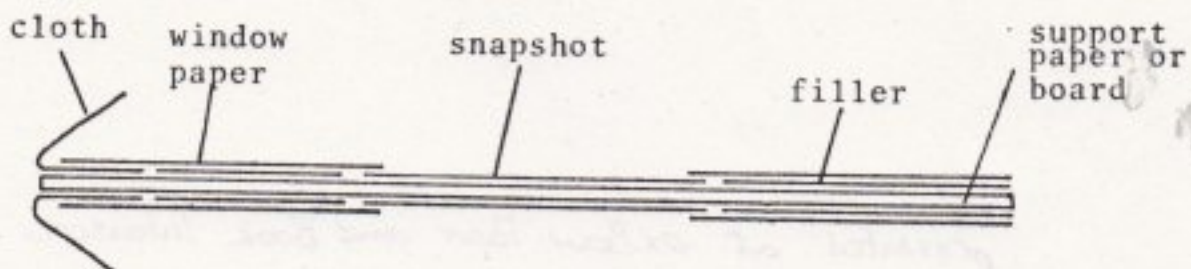
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In the history of photograph album design, hollow-paged albums have been tried out for cartes-de-visite

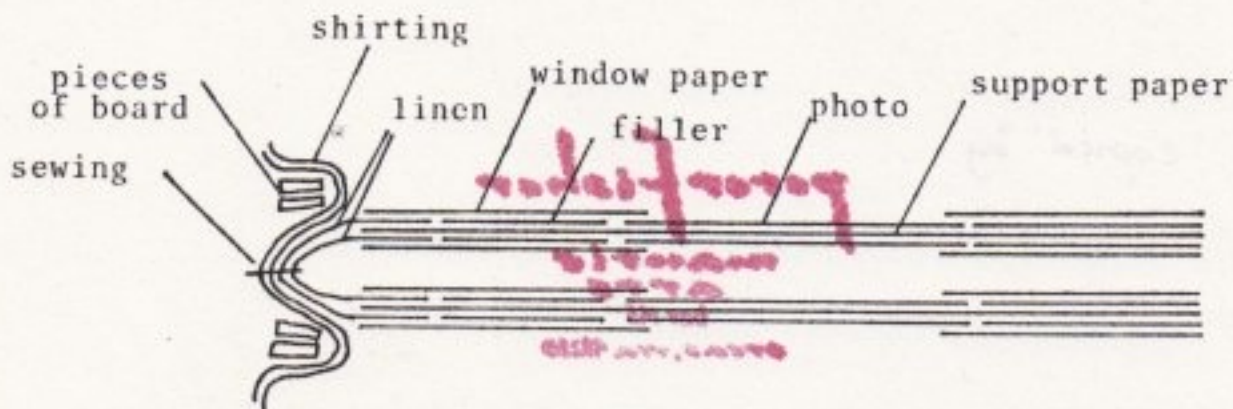


carte de visite album page
cross-section. ca. 1865

and for silver gelatin photos.

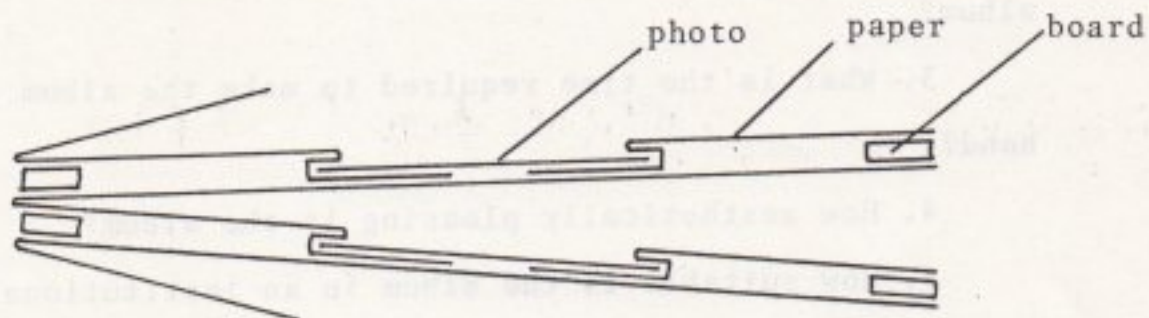


Kodak snapshot album page
cross-section, ca. 1905



Album by Otto Gurbat, Berlin, 1932

But mounting photos by means of hidden flaps inside a hollow page is an idea I've never seen put into practice before I tried it myself.



It has two advantages over previous hollow-page mounting techniques: (1) The flaps are not fixed in place by glue; they have some give, and won't cramp the photo if it expands in a moist environment. (2) The flap nearest the head of the page can be pulled out and the photo extracted from its mounting without undergoing a lot of stress. The photo can be returned to its mounting by reversing this process.

Now that we have an album with certain advantages for a conservator, we should ask ourselves if it's a practical, easy-to-make album, or a fluke. Here are some factors to be considered.

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1. What types of photographic print will it safely and effectively house, and what percentage of the total number of existing photographic prints do these types represent?

2. How expensive are the supplies used to make the album?

3. What is the time required to make the album by hand?

4. How aesthetically pleasing is the album?

5. How suitable is the album in an institutional setting?

- a. How easy is it to insert and remove photos?

- b. How many photos will be accommodated for the shelf space taken by the album?

- c. How easy to use is the album, in terms of

- (1) weight?

- (2) size?

- (3) openability?

If constructed entirely of lignin-free, pH neutral materials, my album safely and effectively houses

1. gelatin prints.

2. most cartes-de-visite.

3. tintypes, if not bent.

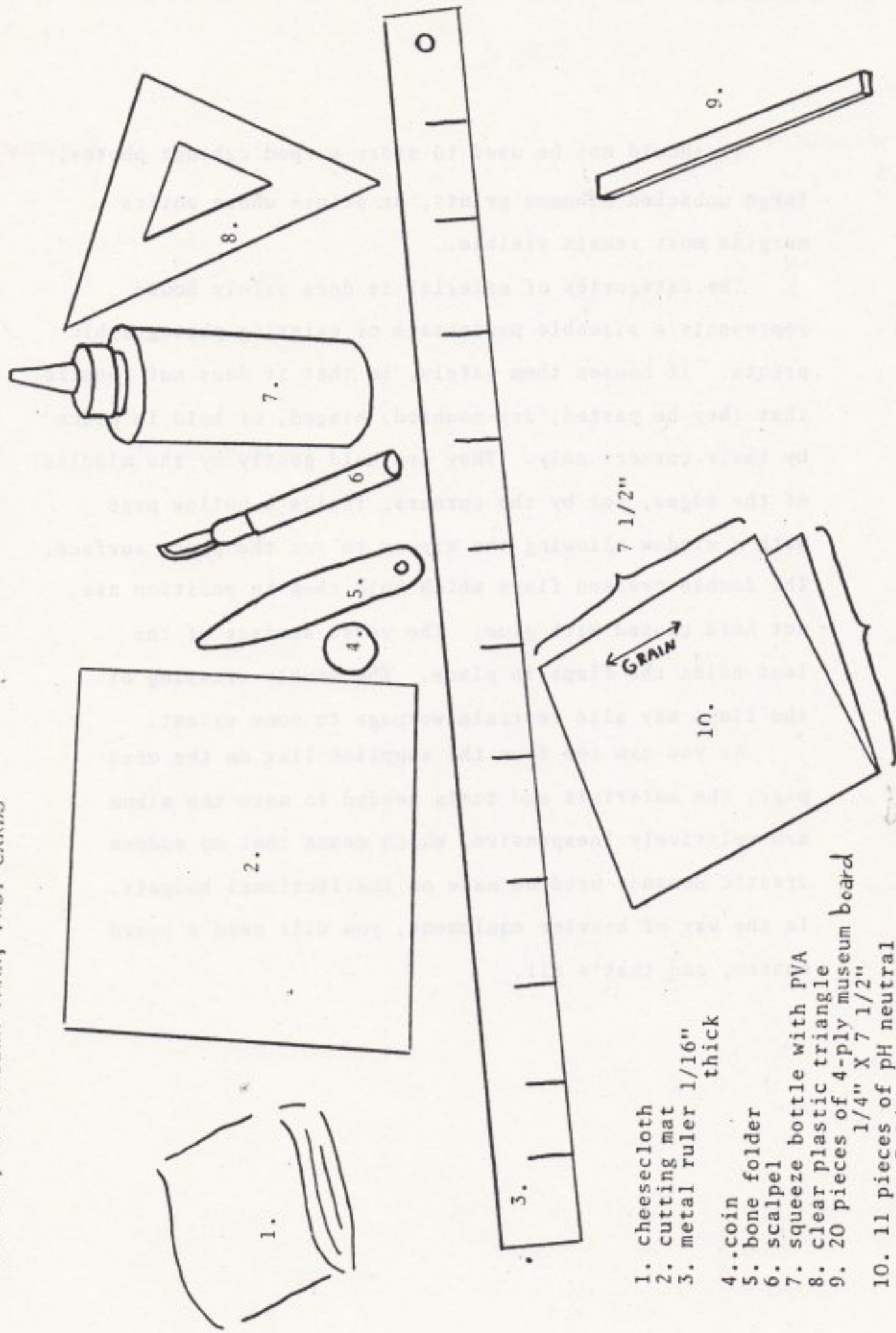
4. post cards.

It should not be used to store warped cabinet photos, large unbacked albumen prints, or prints whose entire margins must remain visible.

The categories of material it does safely house represents a sizeable percentage of existing photographic prints. It houses them safely, in that it does not require that they be pasted, dry-mounted, hinged, or held in place by their corners only. They are held gently by the middles of the edges, not by the corners, inside a hollow page with a window allowing the viewer to see the photo surface. The double-creased flaps which hold them in position are not held closed with glue. The verso surface of the leaf holds the flaps in place. The double-creasing of the flaps may also restrain warpage to some extent.

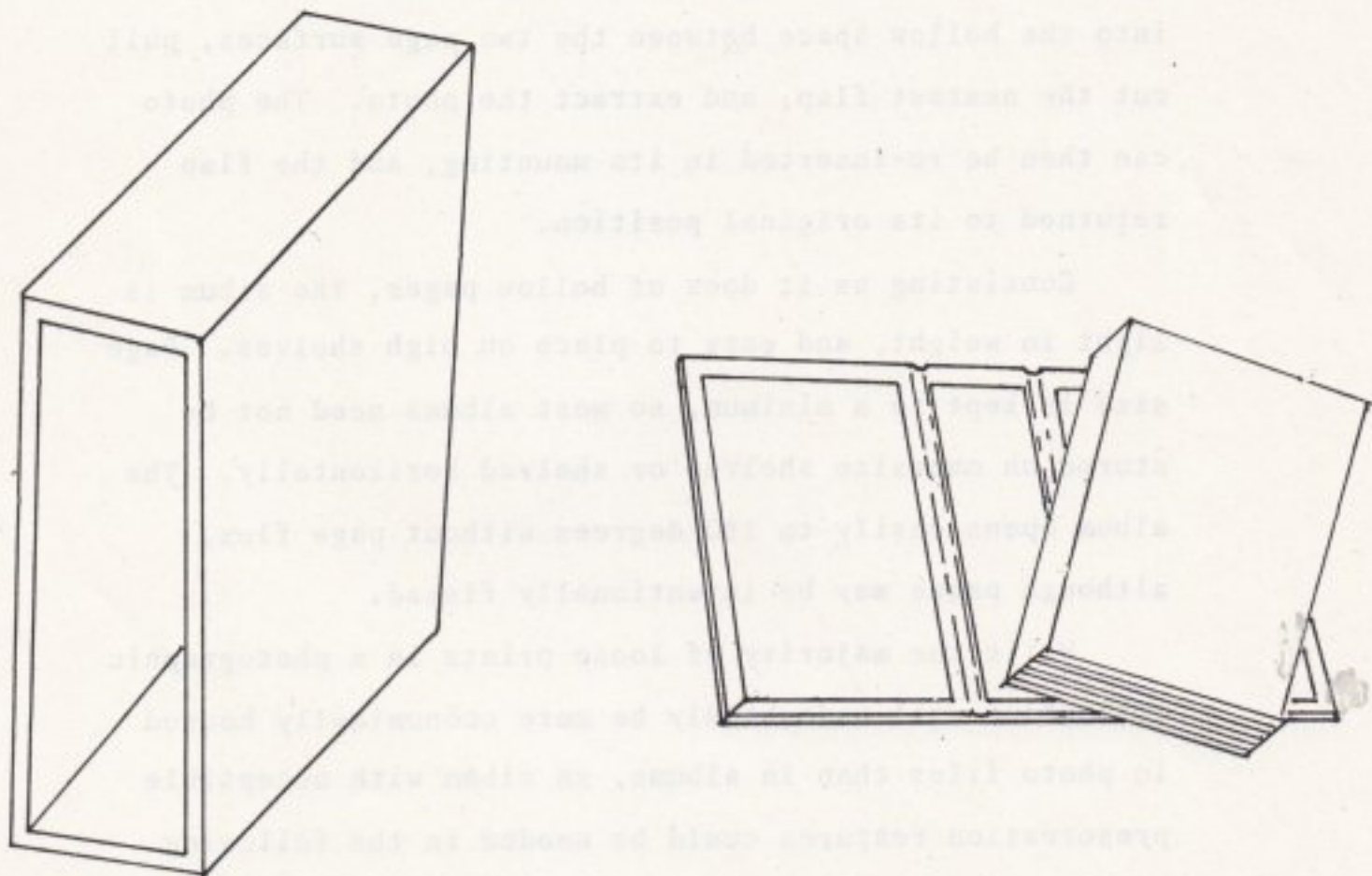
As you can see from the supplies list on the next page, the materials and tools needed to make the album are relatively inexpensive, which means that no sudden drastic demands need be made on institutional budgets. In the way of heavier equipment, you will need a board cutter, and that's all.

MATERIALS AND TOOLS NEEDED TO CONSTRUCT AN ALBUM HOUSING POST CARDS AND PRINTS THE SAME SIZE AS, OR SMALLER THAN, POST CARDS



1. cheesecloth
2. cutting mat
3. metal ruler 1/16" thick
4. coin
5. bone folder
6. scalpel
7. squeeze bottle with PVA
8. clear plastic triangle
9. 20 pieces of 4-ply museum board
1/4" X 7 1/2"
10. 11 pieces of pH neutral
paper 7 1/2" X 11", the grain
parallel to the 7 1/2" side.
These will be folded with the more
interesting surface inside the fold

Albums may be hand-produced in 15 to 30 minutes per page. They can be housed in commercially produced archival photo storage boxes (to which they can be exactly fitted), phase boxes, Solander boxes, clamshell boxes, or double-tray book boxes. I find a three-sided portfolio inside a slip case to be ideal.



Private collectors will be pleased by the album's attractive appearance and openability, as well as its higienic photo storage qualities. Institutions will insist that photo mountings allow the photograph to be removed from the page from time to time for cleaning, or so that inscriptions on the verso may be seen. To remove a photo from the page, a staff member can reach into the hollow space between the two page surfaces, pull out the nearest flap, and extract the photo. The photo can then be re-inserted in its mounting, and the flap returned to its original position.

Consisting as it does of hollow pages, the album is light in weight, and easy to place on high shelves. Page size is kept to a minimum, so most albums need not be stored on oversize shelves or shelved horizontally. The album opens easily to 180 degrees without page flex, although pages may be intentionally flexed.

While the majority of loose prints in a photographic collection will undoubtedly be more economically housed in photo files than in albums, an album with acceptable preservation features could be needed in the following cases.

1. Oftentimes, the imperfect structure of an original album, or its deteriorated condition places its entries in eminent danger of being damaged, unless they are removed

and placed in a new album with an archivally acceptable structure and mounting method.

2. An institution or individual may acquire a collection of loose photos which were once housed in an album, and which, it is decided, should be returned to an album format.

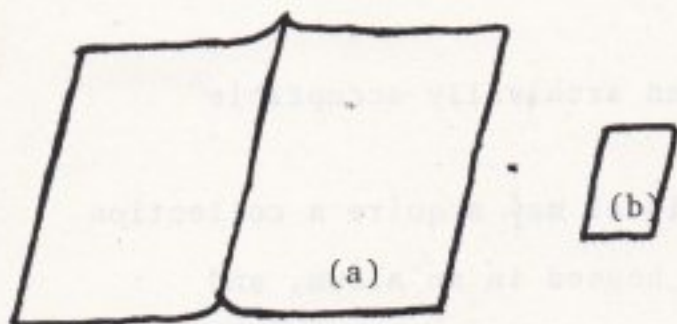
3. A display or exhibit with a particular theme may call for the collection of a set of loose photos relating to that theme, and the photos may be mounted in an album.

4. A private collector may call for an album to house and display the prints of which he is most fond.

5. Patrons at a research library may frequently call for the prints of a well-known photographer. These could be mounted in an album for their protection while being viewed.

Here is a step-by-step guide to constructing my album.

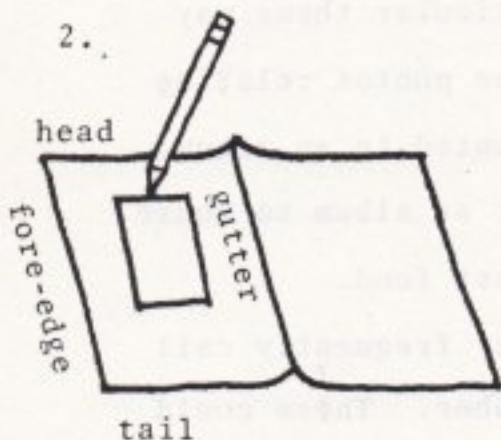
1.



Place one of the leaflets of paper (a) face-down on the work surface.

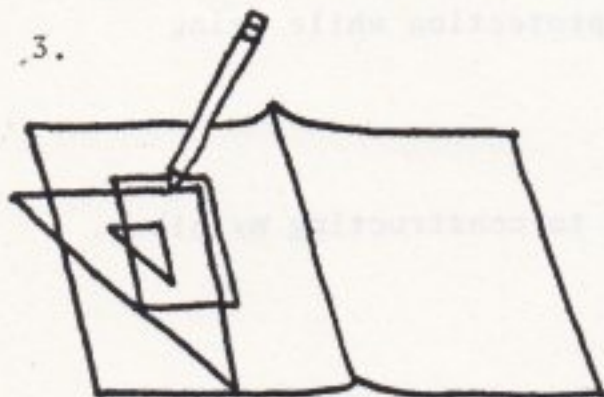
Cut a piece of manila (b) with the same dimensions as the photo.

2.



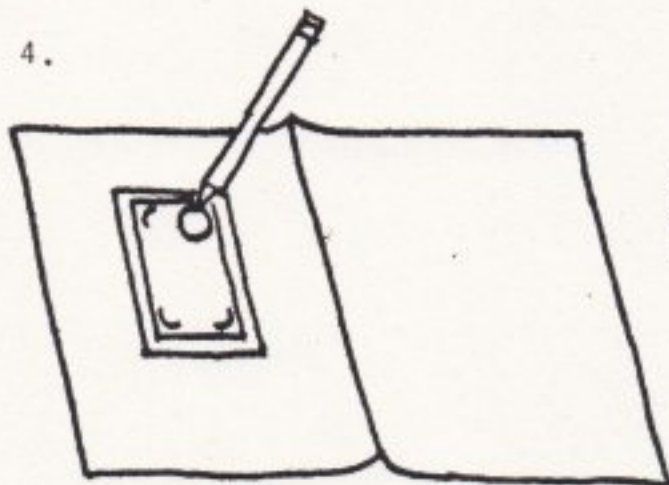
Center the piece of manila on the left-hand side of the leaflet, one inch from the head, fore-edge, and gutter, and two inches from the tail. Outline the manila with pencil, and discard it.

3.



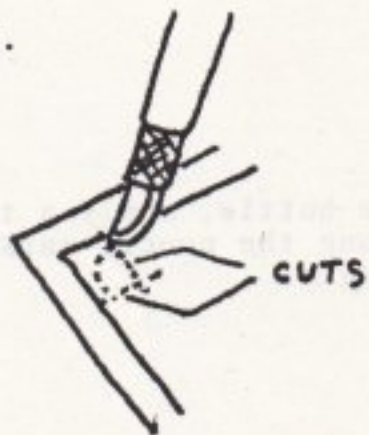
With the aid of the clear plastic triangle, pencil a smaller rectangle inside the larger one. The area between the larger rectangle and the smaller rectangle will be the portion of the window which covers the edge of the photo

4.



With the aid of a coin, pencil quarter-circles inside the corners of the smaller rectangle.

5.

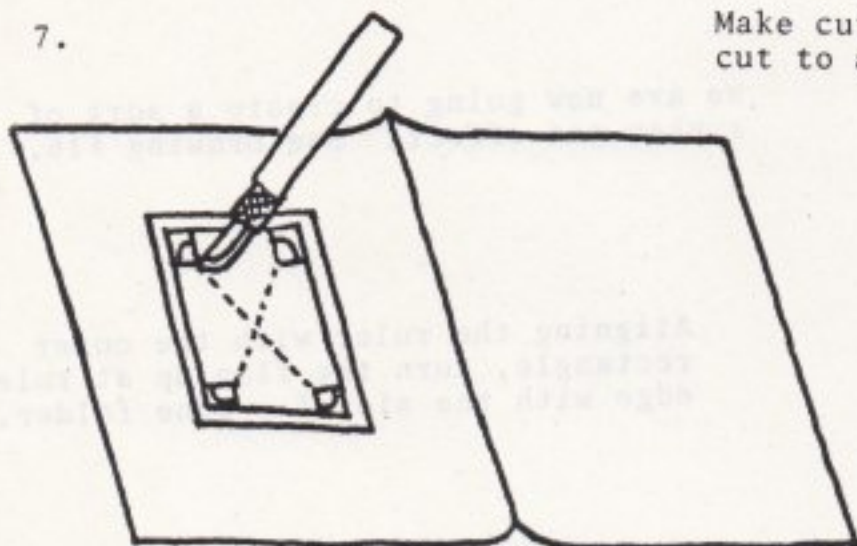


Make cuts as shown in the illustrations.

6.



7.



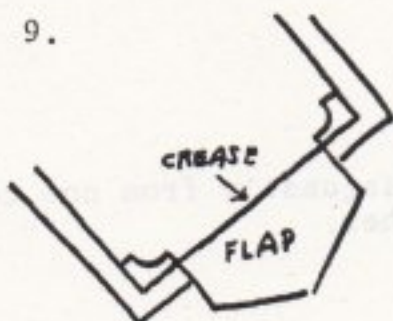
Make cuts diagonally from one corner cut to another.

8.



With the squeeze bottle, apply a thin trail of PVA along the pencil-mark of the inner rectangle.

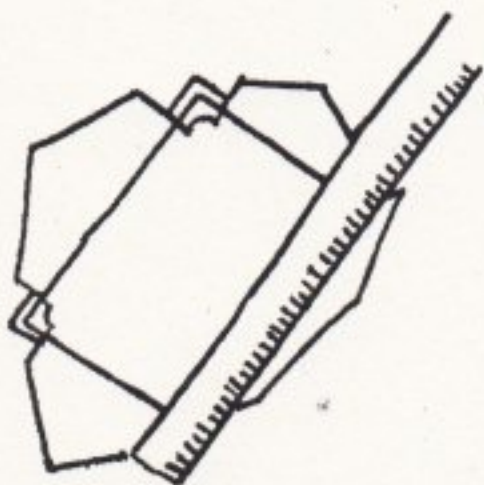
9.



Fold the flap outward at the inner rectangle, and burnish the fold with a bone folder. Do this for all four flaps.

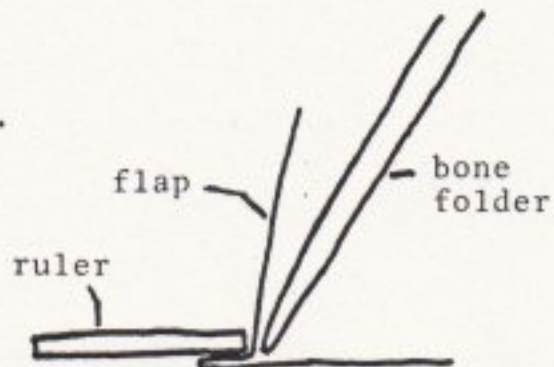
We are now going to create a sort of sunken-mat effect. See Drawing #16.

10.

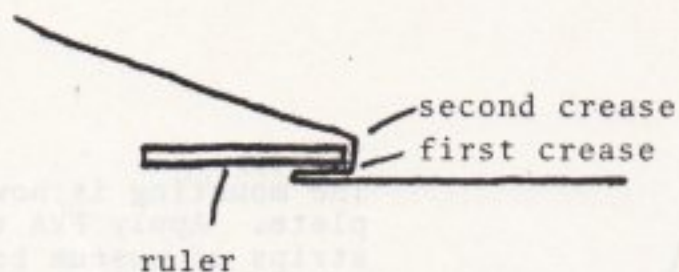


Aligning the ruler with the outer rectangle, turn the flap up at ruler's edge with the aid of a bone folder.

11.

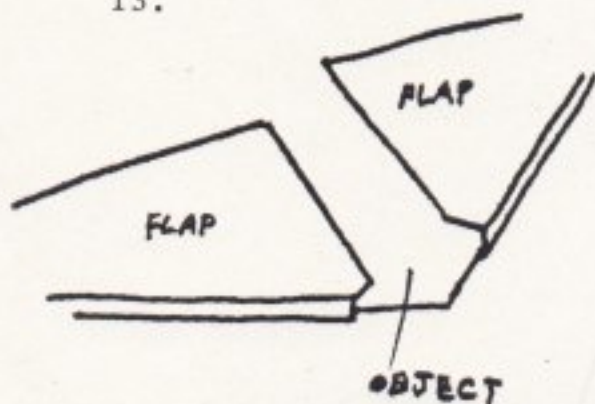


12.



Shape a second crease in the flap with your fingers, using the top edge of the ruler as a mold. If the ruler is $\frac{1}{16}$ " thick, the second crease should automatically be $\frac{1}{16}$ " from the first.

13.



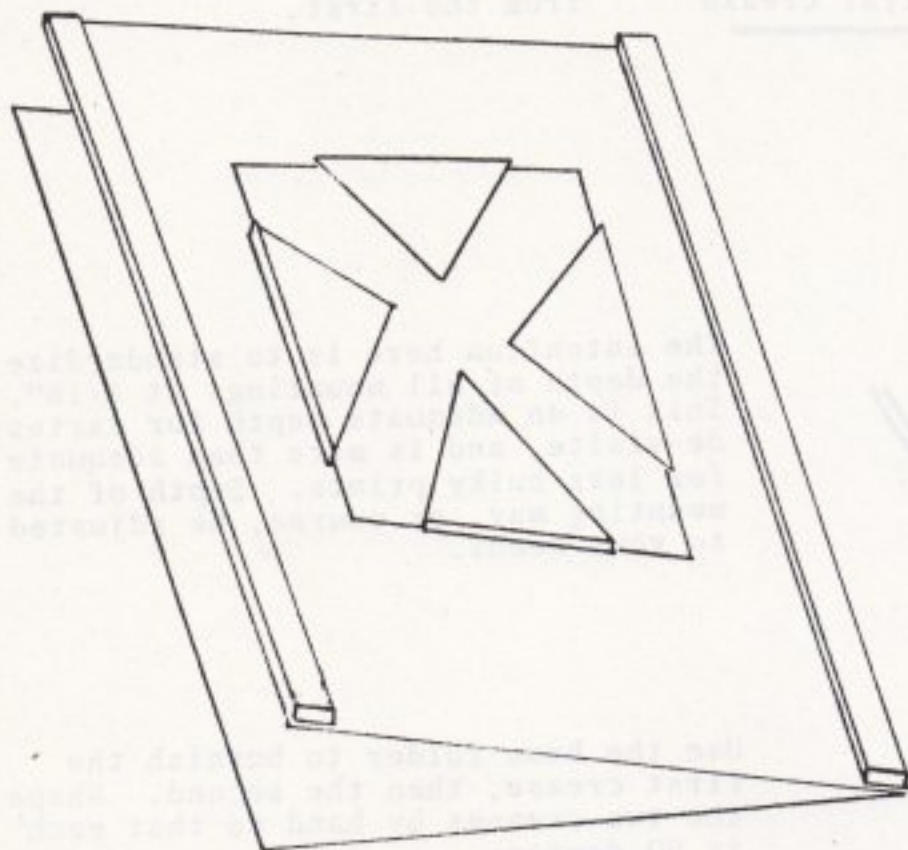
The intention here is to standardize the depth of all mountings at $\frac{1}{16}$ ". This is an adequate depth for cartes-de-visite, and is more than adequate for less bulky prints. Depth of the mounting may, or course, be adjusted to your needs.

Use the bone folder to burnish the first crease, then the second. Shape the two creases by hand so that each is 90 degrees.

14.

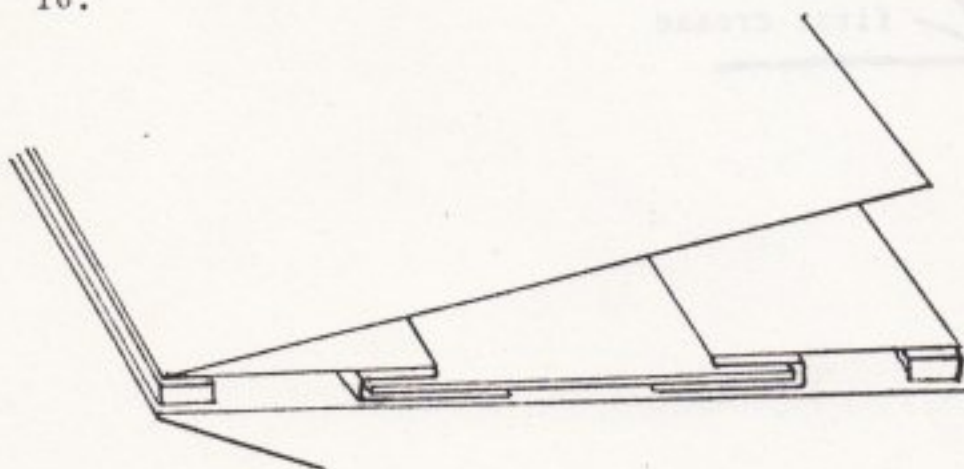


15.



The mounting is now complete. Apply PVA to two strips of museum board (see **supplies list**) and position them at the fore-edge and gutter edge of the folded sheet. This completes the segment.

16.



Apply PVA to the museum board strips, and align the segments to create album leaves.

Cross-section of finished album page