



Article: Photographic Paper XYZ: De Facto Standard Sizes for Silver Gelatin Prints
(Abstract)

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Topics in Photographic Preservation, Volume 16.

Pages: 226

Compiler: Jessica Keister

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Papers presented in *Topics in Photographic Preservation, Vol. 16*, have not undergone a formal process of peer review. Responsibility for the methods and materials described herein rests solely with the authors, whose articles should not be considered official statements of the PMG or the AIC. The PMG is an approved division of the AIC but does not necessarily represent the AIC policy or opinions.

Photographic Paper XYZ: De Facto Standard Sizes for Silver Gelatin Prints

Jennifer McGlinchey Sexton and Paul Messier

Presented at the 2015 PMG Winter Meeting in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Historical references of silver gelatin photographic paper sheet size and thickness were collected to determine standardized dimensions in use during the 20th century. A total of thirty-two sheet sizes and three thicknesses were determined to be de facto standards. Despite periodic attempts to create international standards, manufacturers of photographic paper resisted broad standardization and instead relied on traditional and aesthetic norms, many dating back to the origins of photography. Five aspect ratios were found to dominate these sizes, implying that image scaling was a major factor for determining sheet dimensions. By contrast, standards that emerged from the paper-making industry had a small impact on sizes of photographic paper. The identified de facto standards for sheet dimensions were distilled from a larger population of great diversity, with numerous non-standard sizes appearing and disappearing over time. This diversity is less pervasive for sheet thickness with single and double weight sizes dominating throughout the century with a medium weight option gaining ground after the 1940s. In all cases, the three dimensions of a finished photograph, X, Y and Z, reflect practical and aesthetic decision-making. When compared to the de facto standards determined in this research, these dimensions can provide insight into the working practice and intentions of photographers.

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