



Resources and Tips for Preserving Family Collections and Stories

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Resources for Preservation Planning

- A manual intended for use by heritage professionals: *The ABC Method, A risk management approach to the preservation of cultural heritage* by the Canadian Conservation Institute. Available as a pdf online: www.iccrom.org/sites/default/files/2017-12/risk_manual_2016-eng.pdf
- An online tool to help prioritize collection care: *Preservation Self-Assessment Program (PSAP)* by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: psap.library.illinois.edu
- A general guide on organizing and preserving family collection: *Creating Family Archives, A Step-by-Step Guide to Saving Your Memories for Future Generations*, by Margot Note and published by the Society of American Archivists. Available through booksellers and as an e-book. Find more: www2.archivists.org/publications/creating-family-archives
- For those considering donating family collections to an archive or other cultural repository: *Donating Your Personal or Family Records to a Repository*, by the Society of American Archivists: www2.archivists.org/publications/brochures/donating-familyrecs
- For an overview on preserving paper, photographs, textiles, and objects, *Preserving Personal Collections*, from the 2019 Virtual Genealogy Fair www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-fair/2019
- *Preserving and Digitizing Personal Photo Albums and Scrapbooks*, from the 2021 Genealogy Series: www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-series/2021

Maintaining a Preservation Environment

- The cooler, dryer, and more stable the environment is, the better. Keep the temperature and humidity stable.
- Keep items out of basements, attics, garages, barns, and any uncontrolled storage areas.
- Take items out of storage for only short periods of time. Avoid natural and fluorescent lighting for items placed on display.
- Monitor pest activity, and contact a conservator if damage occurs.
- Dust is damaging. Wipe your items clean with lint-free rags and consider storing them in appropriate boxes.

Handling Collections

- Wash hands regularly.
- Do not use lotion, hand sanitizer, or anything advertised as an aid in handling items – these can leave residues.

- Clean hands when handling books and documents. Wear gloves when handling photographs, film, metal items, and textiles.
- Do not force bound books open.
- Carry fragile items on rigid supports.

Finding Appropriate Housings

Be aware that “archival” is not a standard or certification. It can be used to advertise items that conservators and conservation scientists don’t necessarily recommend. Do look for:

- Lignin free
- Alkaline reserve or buffered – usually calcium carbonate. Buffered materials can counter acids in materials that will naturally degrade.
- Envelopes and sleeves made of stable plastics such as polyester, polyethylene, and polypropylene to hold photographs.
- Materials that have passed the Photographic Activity Test (PAT). The PAT is a test that determines whether a storage material will cause fading or staining of photographs. The PAT method is outlined in the International Organization of Standardization (ISO) standard named ISO 18916:2007, Imaging Materials—Processed Imaging Materials—Photographic Activity Test for Enclosure Materials: www.iso.org/standard/31940.html. Many manufacturers test their products with the PAT and advertise storage materials that have passed the PAT.
- Paper should also meet the standard for permanent paper ANSI/NISO Z39.48, Permanence of Paper for Publication of Documents in Libraries and Archives: www.niso.org/publications/z3948-1992-r2009-permanence-paper. This standard specifies the characteristics of paper that is long lasting and will not harm other documents with which it is in contact.

Avoid using the following materials: white glue, rubber cement, pressure-sensitive tapes and films, staples, or hot glue-gun adhesives. These materials do not age well and can physically damage and/or discolor paper and photographs. Avoid albums with self-stick pages (“magnetic pages”) as well, because of the adhesive used on the mounting page.

Removing photos from a magnetic album

The Smithsonian Institution provides a video on removing photos from sticky magnetic albums: siarchives.si.edu/blog/how-get-out-sticky-situation

Words to know

Archival: Often used in product descriptions but has no manufacturing standard. On its own, it can be misleading.

Acid-free: Has a neutral pH at time of manufacture. Users need to be aware that all organic materials will become acidic over time.

Lignin: Found in the wood used to make paper. If left in, lignin will become acidic over time and cause the paper to discolor and become brittle.

Interleaving: A thin paper or tissue used to separate items, such as two pages in a book or album, to protect from abrasion or transfer.

Buffered (also found as alkaline reserve): Product made with the addition of an alkaline, often calcium carbonate, which will neutralize acids as they form. Can be used with most papers, black-and-white photos and negatives, cottons, and linens.

Unbuffered: Products without an alkaline reserve that may be safely used in contact with blueprints, cyanotypes, color photographs, color negatives, silk, wool, or leather.

Where to go for assistance

- Preservation Programs at the National Archives and Records Administration:
www.archives.gov/preservation
Email: Preservation@nara.gov
- American Institute for Conservation (AIC): www.culturalheritage.org/resources/collections-care
- Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC): www.nedcc.org/free-resources/overview
- In the event of a disaster:
 - www.culturalheritage.org/resources/emergencies
 - www.archives.gov/preservation/records-emergency

Selected Sources of Supplies—General

Archival Methods: www.archivalmethods.com

Archival Products: www.archival.com

Gaylord: www.gaylord.com

Hollinger Metal Edge: www.hollingermetaledge.com

Talas: www.talasonline.com

University Products: www.universityproducts.com

Selected Sources of Supplies—Custom Boxes

HF Group: archival-boxes.com/products/kaseboxes

Conservation Resources International: www.conservationresources.com

ECS Conservation: ecsconservation.com/services/archival-enclosures