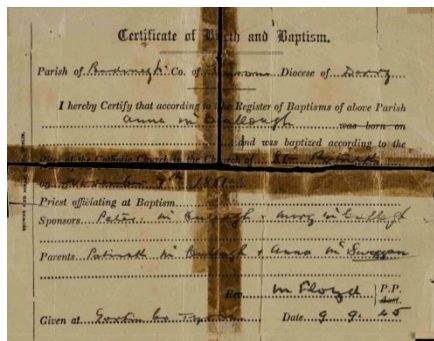


Hints for Preserving Family Collections

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Tape adhesive staining



Information layer removed from a CD by the adhesive on a post-it note



Broken photograph caused by trying to flatten an image glued to a cardboard backing.

1. The best protection for your books, papers, photographs, and prints is a cool, dry, stable environment, e.g., moderate temperature and relative humidity with relatively little fluctuation, clean air and good air circulation, little natural or fluorescent light, and good housekeeping.
2. Don't store your valuable collections in attics or basements, which are commonly subject to pests and excessive heat and/or moisture problems. Also avoid storing collections beneath or in close proximity to water sources like washing machines, bathrooms, or air-conditioning equipment. Be sure to consider what is in the room above your collections.
3. Heat causes damage. Don't hang valuable photos, documents, or artwork over radiators, heating ducts, heat-producing appliances, or fireplaces. Books and boxed documents or photographs with long-term value should also be shelved away from heat sources.
4. Light causes fading and other damage. Keep photos and art (prints, watercolors, and other works on paper) in the dark as much as possible. Don't put valuable books and papers in direct sun or bright light of any kind. Hallways or other rooms without windows are best. Install shades and put up heavy curtains where you can't avoid windows.

Storage Enclosures

1. Storage enclosures must be durable and provide physical support. The following characteristics apply to enclosure design.
 - Enclosures should be stiff enough to protect their contents from tears, breaks, slumping, or other distortion.
 - Boxes should be fully closed (without gaps or handle holes), with snug lids to exclude abrasives and other pollutants.
 - The size and shape of envelopes, boxes, folders, or other enclosures should match or be larger than the object or objects they hold.
 - Book boxes should be custom-made to the dimensions of each book.
2. Storage enclosures must also protect against chemical deterioration. Unfortunately there are not scientific standards defining the term *archival-quality* enclosures, and this term in catalogs can be misleading. When purchasing enclosures, look for specific terms that indicate the stability of the enclosure. Boxes, mats, folders, and other paper enclosures for preservation use at home should be *low-lignin* or *lignin-free*, and *buffered* throughout. Avoid lignin because it is a component of paper that leads to the formation of acid. The term *buffered* refers to the process of

¹ Third Thursday Presentation, *Preserving Your Family's Letters and Documents*, at the Connecticut State Library on October 17, 2019. Video of the presentation is available at <https://ctstatelibrary.org/category/news/third-thursday/>

adding a buffer (such as calcium carbonate) during manufacturing to neutralize acids as they form over time in the storage materials.

3. Be aware that paper enclosures labeled *acid-free* most likely do not have a buffer added, and they may not be lignin-free or low-lignin. These enclosures may become acidic relatively quickly. While buffered paper enclosures are generally preferred to acid-free, some drawings and paintings on paper, blueprints, and some photographs may be damaged by the chemicals used as buffers. These should be stored in *neutral* (unbuffered), low-lignin enclosures if paper enclosures are used.
4. The terms *acid-free*, *buffered*, and *lignin-free* do not apply to plastic enclosures. Instead, look for enclosures made from specific types of plastic. Preservation-grade polyester, known by brand names such as Melinex 516, is the most stable. Polyethylene and polypropylene can be used if they contain no plasticizers. Acetates can change dimension, so they are not recommended. Plastic enclosures made from polyvinyl chloride (PVC) should never be used for preservation storage."
5. When considering paper or plastic enclosures for photos, select enclosures that pass the Photographic Activity Test (PAT). This test ensures that the enclosure will not react chemically with photographs. Supplier catalogs should indicate whether a photographic storage product has passed the PAT.

Specific Media

1. Letters, clippings, and other documents should be stored unfolded, because folding and unfolding breaks paper along the fold lines. Storing documents in folders rather than envelopes is recommended, because envelopes can cause damage as items are removed and replaced.
2. To preserve wedding pictures (or photos of any event) as long as possible, be sure the photographer takes a roll of black-and-white film. Although improvements in technology have extended the life of color prints and negatives, color materials still do not last as long as traditional black and white photographs and negatives.
3. If you produce color photographic prints at home from an inkjet printer, these prints are not considered preservation quality, and no standards govern their longevity. To maximize the quality and durability of this type of color print, it is best to use the inks and photographic paper recommended by the printer manufacturer, rather than third-party inks or papers.
4. When storing photos in an album, use "photo" or mounting corners (available from preservation suppliers), not "magnetic" pages (which actually contain adhesive that can stick to or react with your pictures). Choose a photo album with buffered or neutral, good-quality paper and/or polyester, polypropylene, or polyethylene pages — not vinyl or PVC.
5. Make multiple backups of all digital photographs and other valuable media. Videotape, magnetic disks (hard drives and floppy disks), CDs, and DVDs all have a limited life expectancy and are subject to both gradual deterioration and catastrophic failure.
6. If you want to preserve a newspaper clipping for the long-term, photocopy it onto paper or digitize it.
7. To remove staples or old paper clips from documents (especially if they're rusty), slide a piece of stiff plastic (e.g., polyester, polypropylene) under the fastener on both sides of the document. Slide the paper clip off the plastic, or bend the edges of the staples up and pry it out with a pair of tweezers or a thin knife. The plastic protects the paper from abrasion and from damage by your tools. Do not use a staple remover, because it is likely to tear the paper.
8. Compare catalogs to find the supplies you want for the best price. Read product descriptions; if you have questions about the composition of a product, ask the supplier for details. If you can't get that information, find another supplier. There are now many excellent sources for storage enclosure and other preservation supplies. Many will sell to individuals and in small quantities.

Resources for Preserving Collections

Suppliers

Gaylord (www.gaylord.com)

Hollinger/Metal Edge (<http://hollingermetaledge.com>)

Talas (www.talasonline.com)

University Products (www.universityproducts.com)

University Products has a family collections line sold under the Lineco brand.

Conservation Resources (www.conservationresources.com)

CMI Boxes (www.archivalboxes.com)

Finding a Conservator

American Institute for Conservation "Find A Conservator"

<https://www.culturalheritage.org/membership/find-a-conservator>

Collection Resources

Preservation Leaflets from the Northeast Document Conservation Center

<https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/>

Storing and handling all sorts of objects

<https://learning.culturalheritage.org/public>

Everything you might want to know about pests

<http://museumpests.net/>

Personal Digital Archiving

<http://digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/>