

YOUR FIRST STEP

EVALUATING YOUR TREASURES

Before investing time and money to improve the condition of your documents, art, photographs, memorabilia, and books, you should first assess the importance of various items to you and your family. They may be objects of monetary value, or — like photographs of grandparents or a family Bible, Torah, or Koran — they may have intrinsic, sentimental or historical value. Identifying what you have will help you determine the best means of preservation.

Preservation measures that will protect your valuables often only require time and judgment. Inspect your valuable items a few times each year. This will enable you to keep track of their condition and be alerted to any problems. Periodic inspection enables you to detect problems before items are ruined. If an object is damaged, refrain from treating it yourself. For example, the use of pressure-sensitive tape, while a short-term fix, is especially harmful to objects and is not recommended. Rather than undertaking repairs yourself, contact a professional conservator. The American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works maintains a referral list. Their telephone number is (202) 452-9545.

Guidelines for ... Books

- shelve upright
- store large volumes flat
- don't pull on the headcap (top of the spine) of a book to remove it from the shelf
- support books with both hands when removing them from shelves and when carrying them
- store in acid-free, lignin-free cardboard boxes or wrap in acid-free, lignin-free paper and tie with a cotton ribbon
- don't press the pages of a book down to provide a flat opening if there is resistance in the spine (this will break the paper and/or the binding)

... Photographs

- don't touch the surfaces of your photographs
- avoid use of "magnetic" albums because adhesives on the mounting pages may stain photographs
- use photographic housing materials that have passed the Photographic Activity Test (P.A.T.) — a national standard which assures that enclosure and mounting materials will not chemically damage photographs (information about items meeting these requirements is often contained in catalog product descriptions)
- don't attempt to flatten photographs (contact a conservator)
- use copies for display rather than original, valuable photographs

... Documents and Graphic Arts

- fold and unfold documents as little as possible (store flat whenever possible)
- house newspapers and other highly-acidic documents separately from other items
- don't laminate paper materials using heat or adhesive fusion processes; encapsulate instead using Mylar™ sleeves or jackets (see "Storage" section, reverse side)
- house in acid-free, lignin-free paper folders and boxes
- don't attempt to flatten objects
- consider making copies of non-printed materials for display

Caring for Your Family Treasures

Adapted from an online brochure
at the Library of Congress website

<http://lcweb.loc.gov/preserv/treasurebrochure.html>
comments: lcweb@loc.gov

This brochure will provide you
with some basic information that
may be useful for protecting
your personal treasures. The
recommendations are based on
conservation experience and
scientific research involving
library and archival materials.

This brochure is not copyrighted.
Reproduce and distribute freely.
For information or advice about preserving
individual artifacts, feel free to contact
the librarian or curator at the

Chippewa Valley Museum
P.O. Box 1204
Eau Claire, WI 54702
(715) 834-7871
Fax: (715) 834-6624
email: info@cvmuseum.com

ENVIRONMENT

Store things properly to reduce physical damage and chemical deterioration.

The most important thing you can do to preserve your treasures is to store them in a stable, cool, and dry environment. Spaces with high temperatures and dampness or fluctuating conditions, like most attics and basements, are unsuitable for long-term safekeeping. The effects of chemical deterioration caused by a poor environment can be devastating. Overly dry conditions cause leather to crack. Damp conditions cause mold.

If you are unable to store your materials under acceptable environmental conditions, such as 68°F and 40% relative humidity (RH), then incremental improvements can still be beneficial. Simply moving items from an attic with 85°F and 80% RH to a room that has 75°F and 60% RH conditions can increase the life of your treasures by 3 1/2 times. Moving things from such hot, humid attic conditions to an environment of 68°F and 40% RH provides a tenfold improvement in the life of paper artifacts. Using an air conditioner or a dehumidifier may be a cost-effective way to achieve a stable, cool, dry environment. Good housekeeping is also important. You should dust objects and keep storage areas clean. This will help prevent insect infestations and damage caused by airborne particulates.

HANDLING

Careful handling will reduce the risk of physical damage.

Correct handling practices will assure better preservation of your treasures. Physical damage

such as tears, creases, abrasion, scratches, breakage, and losses is often caused by incorrect handling. Good handling practices are largely based on common sense — being careful, deliberate, and not in a hurry.

Here are a few other points to keep in mind when handling objects:

- make sure that your hands are clean
- be certain you have enough space on which to place the object
- do not eat or drink (or set liquids nearby) while handling your valuable objects
- when a structure is weak, such as a broken photograph, support it overall with rigid material such as a piece of acid-free cardboard.

Storage

Containers provide safe protection for valuables and make handling them easier.

Enclosures also protect items from dust and light, and physical damage. A wide variety of storage enclosures is available to suit different needs. It is important to select an enclosure that is suitable for the object it is intended to protect. Since enclosures are either in direct contact with or in close proximity to items, it is vitally important that the materials used to make enclosures are of good quality. Both paper and plastics may be used. Paper and paper boards must be acid-free and lignin-free [lignin is an organic compound found in wood products, including paper] — and must contain few additives. “Rag” paper is an example of a good quality paper having these properties. A buffer, usually calcium carbonate, is added to many papers. This creates an “alkaline reserve” that will neutralize acids that may continue to be generated in the

paper through environmental exposure and internal paper degradation. Polyethylene, polypropylene, and polyester film (often called Mylar™) are used to produce good quality enclosures. Plastics such as polyvinyl chloride (PVC), which are chemically unstable, should be avoided.

Display

If you choose to display items, follow these general guidelines:

Fading and color changes are the most common form of light damage. It is important to recognize that damage may occur gradually over many years and may be difficult to notice initially. Damage caused by light cannot be reversed; it can only be prevented. Particularly valuable objects should only be exhibited for short periods of time (3-4 months) at low light levels. Avoid permanent display of your objects, especially photographs and colored prints.

Direct sunlight and high light levels must also be avoided. Keep lighting fixtures away from your objects because they may also produce damaging heat. Dimly lit interior hallways and staircases are often good locations in a home for display. One approach for showing your treasures is to rotate their display when your family is decorating during holidays or on other special family occasions. While professional framing with good quality materials can be expensive, in the long run it is money well spent.

Resources

Jane Long and Richard Long, *Caring for Your Family Treasures*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 2000.

Arthur W. Schultz. *Caring for Your Collections*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1992.