



## Preservation Guidelines For Collections

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*Prepared by Jamie Kingman Rice, M.S., Public Services Librarian, Maine Historical Society*

The following information outlines basic steps that any historical organization can take to improve the care of its collections. Taking even small, gradual steps in improving how collections are stored can have a significant impact on their preservation.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

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### PRESERVATION VS. CONSERVATION

- Preservation is about caring for and maintaining your collections.
- Conservation is about cleaning and repairing your collections. Conservation should only be attempted by trained professionals. Please do not attempt to clean, repair, or remove items from frames, etc. to which they are adhered.
- The **North East Document Conservation Center** in Massachusetts offers a variety of technical leaflets for attempting to preserve and conserve collections. Visit: <http://www.nedcc.org/resources/leaflets.introduction.php>.

### ARCHIVAL PRESERVATION VOCABULARY

- **Processing:** to organize, re-house, label and create and inventory to collections.
- **Re-housing:** to remove all harmful components (staples, etc.) and place into proper storage.
- **Preservation photocopying:** to copy deteriorating materials, like newspaper, onto acid-free paper for posterity.
- **Creating Surrogates:** non-flash digital photographs, scanning or photocopies for use or display.
- **Finding Aid:** an inventory to collections, along with biographical information, bulk dates and provenance.
- **Provenance:** refers to who created the items, how they were obtained, where they came from.
- **Bulk dates:** the dates for which most of the collection hails from.

## TYPES OF ARCHIVAL MATERIAL

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### PAPER-BASED DOCUMENTS: Letters, Receipts, Business Papers, Deeds, Probate

- **Organize:** maintain original order or apply an order that makes sense-by date, by author, etc.
- **Re-house:** remove paperclips, staples, rubber bands. Remove items from envelopes. Unfold or unroll documents (unless detrimental). Place items in to proper enclosures and storage.
- **Separate mediums:** Remove photo, negatives, and clippings. (Remember to make notes about what is removed and from where.)
- **Preservation copies:** Copy all newspaper clippings and pages that are harmful to surroundings. Original newspaper clippings may be discarded. Original documents that are photocopied because they are brittle or harmful to their surroundings should be kept in addition to the copies. Buffer harmful paper with two sheets of acid free paper.
- **Label all enclosures with pencil** and number for ease of use.

#### Other tips for paper based items:

- Use plastic paperclips to keep like items together. Do not over do it with the clips. If there are only a few pages in a folder it's not necessary to clip associated pages together. The clips may bend the pages if too many pages are clipped together. Consider a single folder for multi-page documents.
- Try to put no more than about 15 pages in each folder. However, if you feel more than 15 can be placed inside safely (to keep a 25 page document together, for example) that is fine... 15 is just a general rule.
- Place copies of clippings back with associated materials once copies have been made.
- Do not store harmful materials in the same folders with other items: i.e. items backed on cardboard, clippings, ribbons, botanicals, etc. If, for ease of use, these items remain within a folder with other items be sure to buffer or place at the end.

#### Ideal and Acceptable Storage

- **Ideal:** Acid-free folders and acid-free boxes. Less than 15 pages per folder. Never leave a box half full. Store in a cool, dry, and dark place with 50/50 temp/humidity.

- **Acceptable:** Acid-free folders and acid-free boxes. Less than 20 pages per folder and if a box is half full, lay it on its side to keep items from curling, or use an acid-free cardboard place holder (available from archival supply vendors).

## **BOUND ITEMS: Books, Diaries, Scrapbooks**

- **Store upright** like library books. Do not stack. If you must stack, never stack more than two or three high, and never let them lean. Store on shelf in size order to keep from the books from leaning against one another, unless there is an order to the books already, as with a series.
- **Use rare book tags** to label. Never write on spine. To identify inside, find a blank corner close to the front and use pencil. **NEVER use an ink pen!** Be considerate of future generations and write neatly.
- **Interleave scrapbooks with acid free paper** in case of botanicals. Too many interleaves will cause the scrapbook to swell, so use discretion.
- **Preservation photocopies:** Copy all news clippings or scrapbook pages. Keep printed copies if you digitize. Disks are not permanent and may not re-open with later technology.
- **Tie with archival ribbon** like a present if the spine is loose. Do not tie so tight that the ribbon cuts into the binding.

### Ideal and Acceptable Storage

- **Ideal:** on shelf, upright, no book-ends that cut into bound items, store in size order. Store in cool, dry, and dark place at 50/50 temp/ humidity.
- **Acceptable:** stack two or three high. Stack in size order, smallest on top. Store in stable environment.

## **PHOTOS**

- **Separate** negatives and photographs.
- **Sleeve** photographs into enclosures, always open on one end.
- **Rolled photos:** unroll once and create surrogate. Leave rolled in storage.
- **Leave all conservation work to professionals.**
- **Display** surrogates.

- **If framed**, look at the reverse and determine if adhered to mat. If not, remove from frame. If adhered, place a piece of unbleached linen over front to keep light out and leave framed until removed by professional.
- **NEVER** try and clean a photograph or glass plate negative!

Other tips for photos:

- Photos love to be very cold, though not freezing: 40°F - 55°F.
- Never store negatives with photos. Nitrate negative should be frozen or disposed of properly.
- Separate types of photos—black-and-white from color.
- Be aware that digital photos have a shorter life span.
- Keep items framed if removing item will cause any damage.
- Cover framed items with unbleached linen available from any fabric store.
- Display surrogates or display in museum quality framing (UV resistant and archival matting).
- Use corners for inserting into albums; never use adhesive.
- Never write on photos with anything but archival markers. Preferred labeling is on sleeve.
- Never flatten a rolled photograph. Unroll once, duplicate, and leave rolled.

Ideal and Acceptable Storage

- **Ideal:** Store photos sleeved individually and in open-ended sleeves. Mark sleeves with archival marker, never mark on photo. Special pens may be ordered from an archival dealer to write on reverse of images. Store in a cold, dry, dark place: 40-50% humidity. Store upright in enclosures or flat in boxes; never overstuff. Keep rolled photos rolled and framed photos framed if changing will harm images. Make surrogates for use.
- **Acceptable:** Stable environment. Buffer images if you cannot sleeve. Write on labels (on sleeves) with pencil, but **never** while image is inside. If placing into album, use corners. Consider using Mylar sleeves if they are affordable. (Perhaps select the most valuable images for such sleeves.)

## OVER-SIZED PAPER-BASED ITEMS

- **Store flat**, in boxes or enclosures. Buffer with archival tissue.
- **Ideal Storage:** in flat files, individual folders or enclosures, in archival boxes, stacked by size and interleaved with archival tissue (this however would be considered ideal for newspapers vs. flat files)
- **Never hang originals** unless in museum grade frames (and hang in low light)
- **Cover framed items** with un-bleached linen

## COSTUMES/TEXTILES

- **Do not hang** items without proper museum equipment (or at all). **Store** costumes flat in proper boxes.
- If you must hang the costume, use padded hangers available from archival suppliers. This is still not ideal, but placing in boxes may be prohibitively expensive for large collections or full dresses, etc.
- If it must be folded, pad the items at the folds.
- Roll textiles or rugs. Never hang these items from clips.
- **NEVER** try and clean yourself. Always consult a conservator!

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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- Gaylord Brothers: Library Supplies, Furniture and Archival Solutions
  - [www.gaylord.com](http://www.gaylord.com)
- Northeast Document Conservation Center
  - [www.nedcc.org](http://www.nedcc.org)
  - [www.nedcc.org/resources/resources.php](http://www.nedcc.org/resources/resources.php)
- The Henry Ford
  - <http://www.thehenryford.org/about/conservation.aspx>

## MORE INFORMATION

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Visit the [Share YOUR Local History](#) section of the Maine Memory Network website, [www.MaineMemory.net](http://www.MaineMemory.net).