Dusting off the Decades

LRGV History from Home and the Archives:

Caring for our treasures

Actress Julie Harris dusting bookshelves in her apartment while standing barefoot on a chair - Life Magazine
Why should we care?

Documents help us remember the past and are important clues to the history of a region, an organization, a family, and an individual. Protecting and preserving historical books, documents, photos and other materials is each generation’s responsibility.

If the materials might be of interest to future researchers consider talking to an archivist about donating your documents to an archives.
The Basics

Always handle with care

• Wash and dry hands thoroughly and often.
• Remove jewelry
• Don’t use lotion before handling items
• Wearing clean cotton gloves can prevent oils and dirt from your fingers transferring to items
• Work on a clean, flat surface.
The Basics

- Clean items with a soft brush.
- Only brush off what is easily removed.
- Do not try to remove stains.
GENERAL ENVIRONMENT: TEMPERATURE, HUMIDITY, AND LIGHT

The single most important decision you can make to protect your treasured items is by selecting an appropriate location.

Store items in an environmentally controlled area, such as the main part of the house, not an attic, garage, or storage shed.
Light Damage

Light damage is cumulative and irreversible.

It will continue after the source of the damage has been removed.
Light Damage

Try not to place objects in front of windows where they will receive the most sunlight.

Ultraviolet light, as found in sunlight and fluorescent lights, can cause fibers in the paper to break into smaller and smaller units until they are so short they can no longer maintain the bonds necessary to hold the paper together.
Areas with high humidity attract mold, insects, and rodents.

Temperature and Relative Humidity

**Ideals**

**Temperature:**
68°F

**Relative humidity:**
40%

Less than 10% fluctuation in 24 hours
Temperature and Relative Humidity:

Mold

*Mold grows if temperature is over 70° F and humidity is over 60% for more than 24 hours*

Mold digests and break down the materials they feed on causing foxing and staining, and weakening the structures.

Dehumidifiers will help keep the moisture out of the air.
Welcome to the Dew Point Calculator!

1. Use the sliders for Temperature, Relative Humidity (RH) and Dew Point to define an environment.
2. Observe the relationship of the three environmental variables. For example, as Temperature goes up, the RH goes down.
3. Notice the preservation consequences of different combinations of Temperature and RH in the Preservation Evaluation section.
Temperature and Humidity

and Pests

The best pesticide is prevention

Pests such as bugs and sometimes rodents are often attracted to warm, humid, and dirty or dusty conditions.

Keep area clean, dry, cool and well-ventilated
What to do if the bugs find your treasures

Place the object in a plastic bag and seal it to prevent the insects from spreading.

Never spray pesticides directly on your treasured objects. It could stain or discolor them.

Freeze objects which are made up of one material, such as paper.

Do not freeze objects which are made up of layers of materials like photographs. The different layers may freeze differently causing disruption or buckling.
Storage:
What to look for when you’re at the store or ordering from a catalog

"Archival" is not a standardized term. A manufacturer may put the term ‘archival’ on anything, regardless if it will help protect your treasure or harm it over the long term.

Look for terms like acid-free, lignin-free, buffered or alkaline reserve, and PAT tested
Storage Do’s and Don’ts

**What’s stronger?** If something is going to tear will it be the letter you want to save or the tape, rubber band, or staple you put on it?

**Reversibility:**
If it's not reversible, don't do it.
Technology may change or you may change your mind how you store it.

**Always use pencil to label items.** Write the information on a the folder or a separate piece of paper and include with the item. You may label the back of photographs with soft lead pencil.
Books are meant to be read and not simply stored on a shelf as a museum piece.

Careful storage and handling of books can prevent costly repair, rebinding and replacement.

Never pack or shelve books fore edge down as this position suspends the entire weight of the book from its joints and pulls the text block out of its cover.
BOOKS

Don't bend the pages back or push the book down flat on a table or photocopier.

Use only paper bookmarks.

Don’t leave metal or leather bookmarks, newspaper clippings or other materials in the book in the book as they may tear or stain the pages or stress the binding.
BOOK SHELVING

Books are designed to stand upright on shelves, supported on each side. Don't let books lean at an angle as that places stress on the spine and joints.

Don't pack books so tightly you can't easily pull them out.

Don't pull a book by its headcap, instead push in the adjoining books to grab the spine.
Unfold items as paper tends to tear where it has been folded. Paper also has a "memory". If it has been folded or rolled a long time, it wants to stay that way until you train it differently.

High heat and moisture accelerate the chemical processes that result in embrittlement and discoloration to the paper. Some of the copies from our archives that we have displayed here are very brown, this is a result of advanced aging from environmental storage.
NEWSPAPERS

Keep highly acidic paper such as newspapers and clippings from touching other paper items.

If you keeping the newspaper for the information either make a photocopy or scan and print it on acid-free paper.

If you are keeping the newspaper as an artifact, such as a front page of an important day, it is best to place it in an envelope to prevent acid-migration to other papers.
PHOTOGRAPHS

Handle your photographs and negatives by supporting the back and only handling the edges and with clean hands.

White cotton gloves will allow you to easily handle photographs.

Don’t worry – this was done with Photoshop!
ALBUMS

Albums allow you to organize and label photos, keep them safe from light damage, and provide an easy way to view the photos.

DO Use photo corners, or polyester mounting strips or sleeves or photo pocket pages that have passed the PAT test

DO NOT use acetate sleeves, self-adhesive album or scrapbook pages, tape (even archival), glue, or rubber cement
Photograph Display

Display a copy. This will keep the original safe from light damage and water leaks.

If displaying the original, use a UV filtered glass, rotate images to prevent fading, and acid-free mat board and spacers.
TECHNOLOGY ≠ LONGEVITY

3000 B.C. the written word appears

1830 Photography invented

1877 Phonographs … 8 track tapes, audio-cassette tapes, Compact Discs, mini discs, and Digital Audio Tapes

1970s Betamax and VHS … ¼” to 2” and discs including laser discs and DVDs
TECHNOLOGY ≠ LONGEVITY

1971   8” floppy disk was invented, replaced 5 years later
1976   5 ¼” floppy disk, replaced 5 years later
1981   3 ½” disk replaced by CD-R, CD-RW, DVD-RAM, DVD-Audio, and USB flash drive, etc.

You probably recognize PDF, HTML, TXT, DOC, and XLS for mats.
What about  MCW, WRI, WPD, WK4, WPS, SAM, RFT, WSD?
An Ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure

Prepare for every emergency, from a leaky pipe to a hurricane

Remember, no piece of paper or photograph is worth your life
Water Damage

The most likely damage of materials that can be recovered will be water damage

The most likely result of water damage is mold.

Do not store your treasures under sinks and off the floor in case of flooding

Freeze or dry the documents within 48 hours to prevent mold growth.
Water Damage: Books

Freezing will stabilize the books and give you time to set things up.

If there aren’t too many books, or they aren’t too wet, air drying is the easiest way to dry books.
Do not freeze photographs.

The different layers in the photograph will freeze differently, leaving it buckled and warped.

Air dry face up. Do not touch the image.
Preservation risk calculator for aging, mechanical damage, mold, and corrosion based on temperature and relative humidity

http://www.dpcalc.org/

National Archives: Caring for your family archives

http://www.archives.gov/preservation/family-archives/

American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC)

http://aic.stanford.edu/library/online/brochures/

ICPC: Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium Tip Sheets

http://web.grinnell.edu/individuals/stuhrr/icpc/tipsheet.html

CoOL: Conservation OnLine resources for professionals

http://cool-palimpsest.stanford.edu/

ReCollections: Caring for Collections Across Australia