

Preserving History

Additional Information

Common Preservation Terms

Understanding these terms can help you make better decisions about preserving records and artifacts.

Archival

A term that suggests a material is chemically stable and can be safely used for preservation purposes.

Lignin

Contributes to paper degradation. Avoid using materials with this chemical.

pH

(from *potential of hydrogen*) the level of acidity/alkalinity on a scale of 0-14. Store your records and artifacts in acid-free containers.

- Acid: pH of less than 7
- Alkaline: pH of more than 7
- Neutral: pH of 7
- Acid free: pH of 7 or greater

Provenance

The history of who has been in possession of a document or artifact.

RH

Relative humidity. Try to keep the relative humidity surrounding your documents and artifacts to about 33%. This can be measured using a barometer.

To find local suppliers of archival materials

1. Contact local libraries, especially major public or national libraries.
2. Ask for their preservation or conservation department. When talking to the preservation or conservation specialist, explain that you are creating a small archive and would like to use archival materials for storing your archives.
3. These specialists should be able to help you find the best archival suppliers for your area.

Sample Preservation Plan

Sister Jones has received a box full of records and artifacts from her great grandmother, Mae Smith. She wants to preserve these materials so both she and her posterity can study and enjoy them. She decides to take the following actions.

- Before handling the objects in the box, she clears her kitchen table and covers it with a protective cloth. She puts on gloves and then places the box on the table.
- While handling each object, she is as careful as possible. She places each item on the table on its most stable side.
- Once she has spread out all the objects, she writes down a brief description of each one, including any information she knows about its provenance.
- When her list is complete, Sister Jones organizes the objects in three general categories: documents, three-dimensional artifacts, and photographs. For each category, she further organizes the objects. Here is what her organized list looks like
 - Documents
 - 1887-1900
 - 1901-1920
 - 1920-1950
 - 1950-1976
 - Photographs
 - Of Mae Smith
 - Of Mae Smith's family and relatives
 - Of Mae Smith's associates
 - Miscellaneous
 - Three-Dimensional Artifacts
 - Created by Mae Smith
 - Owned by Mae Smith
- Sister Jones decides to store each item in a more appropriate container.
 - For the photographs, she uses archival quality photo sleeves which she then places in an archival 3-ring binder
 - She places the documents in acid-free folders, one folder for each grouping of documents. She then places these folders in archival quality boxes.
 - She wraps each three-dimensional artifact in acid-free tissue paper and places them in boxes that support and protect their fragile elements.
 - However, she wants to display some of these items. So she arranges for a safe location in her home, away from windows and above the reach of children. She purchases frames, easels, and mounts that fully support and protect each item.
- Finally, Sister Jones takes her newly housed items and stores them in a closet in her home. She knows this location is safe and stable because it is out of direct sunlight and the relative humidity is fairly constant. It is away from sources of steam and water. She labels and arranges each container so she can easily identify their contents later on.

Online Resources

- Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI): Preserving My Heritage.
<http://www.preservation.gc.ca/howto-comment/grid-eng.asp>
- Library of Congress: Caring for Your Collections.
<http://www.loc.gov/preservation/care>
- American Institute for Conservation
<http://www.conservation-us.org>