

CHECK IT OUT: PRESERVATION CHECKLIST

History Detectives spends a lot of time investigating the origins and mysteries surrounding local history and historical artifacts.

We're lucky to have a remarkable amount of primary source material to refer to and learn from thanks to the hard work of conservators and archivists at local and national museums.

Many of us also have historical material in our own home. And while you may not be related to a president or have a skeleton in your basement floor—it's still important to take care of your family treasures. The following checklist is the place to start.

Photographs

- Don't display precious photos. Instead, get a digital copy made and frame that one. This is easily and cheaply done at any local photo store.
- If you insist on displaying an old photo, avoid regular frames with glass plates, as moisture can seep in and adhere the glass to the picture. Instead, have it professionally mounted and framed. Pay extra for archival or "museum-quality" glass -- it cuts out ultraviolet light.

Negatives

- Remove your negatives from the plastic or paper sleeves they came in. Instead, keep them organized in what is known as "inert plastic" (non-PVC), or in acid-free envelopes.
- Handle them carefully so as not to leave fingerprints.
- Negatives do best in a cold place. (But not the attic, garage or basement!)
- Very old, glass negatives should be stored on their edges (not one on top of another) in an archival box.

Photos

- Store photos in plastic sleeves or acid-free envelopes. If you write on the back of the photo, use soft pencil. Pens and markers can cause damage over time.

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- Don't assume that photos stored in an old black paper album are doomed to deteriorate quickly. Removing photos from the album can cause even more damage. Leave them be, just store them in a cool, dry environment.
- Avoid albums with self-sticking (or "magnetic") pages.
- Mount photos in albums with acid-free pages and use acid-free or plastic corners to secure the photos. Glues and tape can permanently harm the photos. If the photos are too large for photo corners, use archival paper hinging tape, which can be found at good photo and art supply stores.

Linens

- First identify the fabric(s) and the approximate age of the item, so you can know how to care for it. (Link to fabric analysis piece when it's completed)
Local libraries are good sources for books on identifying vintage textiles. A nearby museum will also offer good suggestions and may also have a library you can use. (See list for books)
- If the fabric is not too fragile, the item should be properly cleaned before storage:
 - *Before doing anything, spot test the fabric. Touch a moistened cotton swab to the different colors and areas, if dye transfers to the swab—stop! Contact a local conservator for help.
 - *Never dry-clean: Delicate fabrics can't take the harsh chemicals.
 - *Gentle cleaning agents such as Orvus are recommended by some experts. It can be found at quilting supply stores, as well as animal supply stores (it is also an equine soap).
- After the item is cleaned, it should be stored in an acid-free container.
- Roll heavy objects like quilts around a tube that has first been covered in acid-free tissue.
- Avoid folding. If you must fold, fold around acid-free tissue to prevent splits where the fabric is folded.
- Do not store textiles on bare wood shelves or cedar boxes as oils from the woods will discolor the fabric.

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- Never store your textiles in plastic bags. The airless environment suffocates the fabric.

Books and Loose Family Papers

- Have any repairs to the books done by a professional conservator.
- For books with fragile bindings or any other loose collection of documents, have a specific box made for the book of acid-free materials. This will protect the materials from the elements and from rough handling
- Protect book dust jackets. Acetate covers, like those used in libraries can be bought from archival supply stores.
- If your books are suffering from mold, brush the fuzz off with a soft cloth. However, the tell-tale brown spots known as “foxing,” are signs of mold damage from long ago, and unfortunately, there’s nothing to be done about it. The only recourse is to prevent mold growth in the future. A dehumidifier will help.
- The smell that’s closely associated with old books is mildew and is usually caused by a cold, damp environment. Immediately remove the books from the area and –here’s the only time you can do this with these old things – place them in the sun for a brief sunbath to dry them out. You can also place them in a dry room with a fan on low.