



CHEVY CHASE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



PRESERVING YOUR PRECIOUS ITEMS AT HOME

A PRESENTATION AND DEMONSTRATION BY CHEVY CHASE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Renata Lisowski, MSHP
Director, Archive and Research Center
Chevy Chase Historical Society
info@chevychasehistory.org

OVERVIEW

- **Goal:** provide you with information so you feel empowered to preserve your collections
- Understand risk factors for your collections, and how to mitigate the risk
- Bad, better, and best practices for preservation
- Case studies for common preservation problems
 - Family documents
 - Photo albums
 - Scrap books
 - Newspaper
 - Digital resources

WHAT HARMS YOUR COLLECTIONS?

LIGHT

MOISTURE

METALS

ACIDITY

ADHESIVES

POOR STORAGE

EXCESSIVE HANDLING

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Needs – level of preservation
 - Preservation needs are dependent on many variables
 - Are your items in need of short term interventions or long term preservation?
 - Are your items damaged by mold or moisture, or need emergency intervention?
- Cost – type of material
 - You don't need to spend a fortune to preserve your precious items!
 - Product suppliers like Gaylord Archival, Hollinger Metal Edge, and Brodart Library Supplies sell high quality archival products
 - Some acceptable products can be purchased affordably though Amazon, craft stores, or big box retailers (Walmart/Target/Staples)

WHY ARCHIVAL?

- Archival products have specific material properties that make them safe for long term preservation
- “Acid free is just one part of the preservation puzzle”
 - Acid free
 - Lignin free
 - Buffered material
 - Photographic Activity Test
 - Inert plastics
 - Safe adhesives
 - Layers of protection
 - Design and construction



¹. Applies to paper/board products.

². Some items may be sensitive to alkalinity and require unbuffered materials.

ACID FREE

- Paper becomes acidic during the manufacturing process
- Acid causes paper to become yellow and brittle
- ACID FREE is an essential aspect of archival safe materials
 - Look for acid free NOT “archival quality”
- pH testing pens can help determine if items are acidic

Acid-Free
*pH is 7.0 or greater at
the time of manufacture.¹*



LIGNIN FREE

- Lignin is an organic compound found in plant stems
- It produces acids which can weaken and discolor paper
- Archival products contains less than 1% lignin
- When buying products, look for **LIGNIN FREE**

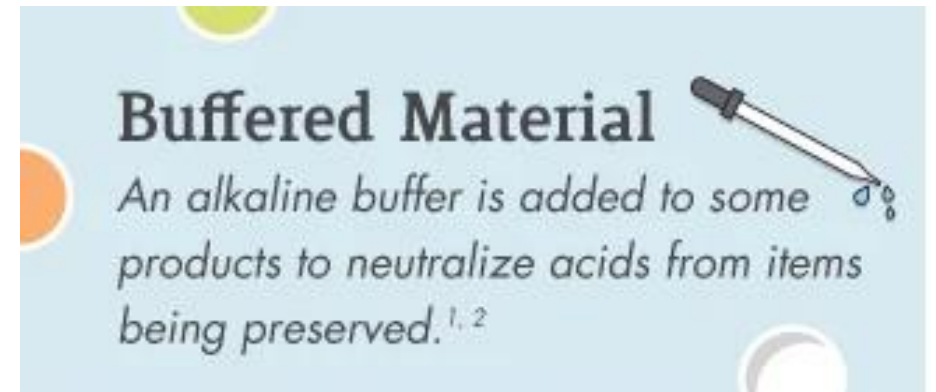
Lignin-Free



Lignin is removed from the wood pulp because it produces acids and darkens paper.'

BUFFERED MATERIAL

- Buffered materials contain alkaline substances which neutralize acids
- Use buffered material with cellulose based items such as cotton, flax, linen, and jute to protect them from acid migration
- Use unbuffered material with protein based items such as leather, wool, silk, and pearls
 - Blueprints, albumen prints, and cyanotypes should only come in contact with unbuffered materials



PHOTOGRAPHIC ACTIVITY TEST

- The chemicals used to develop photos are sensitive to other compounds and chemicals
- PAT tests for possible interactions between photographs and a given material after prolonged contact
- Look for **Passed PAT** when purchasing photo storage supplies



INERT PLASTICS

- Only stable plastics are safe for preservation
 - **Archival polyester (PET)** also known as **mylar**, is clear, strong, and rigid
 - **Polypropylene** is heat resistant and protects against moisture
 - **Polyethylene** is safe and affordable
- Polyvinyl chloride (PVC) also known as vinyl, is not recommended
 - If it has a plasticky smell, it is not safe for preservation



SAFE ADHESIVES

- Many glues and tapes have harmful chemicals
- pH neutral adhesives like PVA glue and pure wheat starch are safe
 - Look for **pH neutral** labeling!

Safe Adhesives

*Adhesives are pH neutral
and don't contain
damaging chemicals.*



LAYERS OF PROTECTION

- More layers = more protection
- Buffer paper prevents acid migration
- Folders keep items flat and rigid
- Boxes keep items organized and clean



Layers of Protection

Archival products are designed to work together to create layers of protection and support.

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

- Metal edges maintain box shape for stackability
- Tight fitting lids keep out dust and pests
- Many sizes and shapes available for the best fit for items
- Suitable for long term storage

Design

Archival enclosures have features that help minimize damage during storage and handling.



Construction

Archival enclosures are built to stand the test of time.



MUST YOU USE ONLY ARCHIVAL PRODUCTS?

- NO!
- But it is recommended
- There are bad, better, and best options for preserving your collections
 - **BAD** – not recommended
 - **BETTER** – ok for short term solution
 - **BEST** – for long term preservation

BAD



Not recommended

Plastic bins create a micro-climate that can encourage mold growth and damage your items

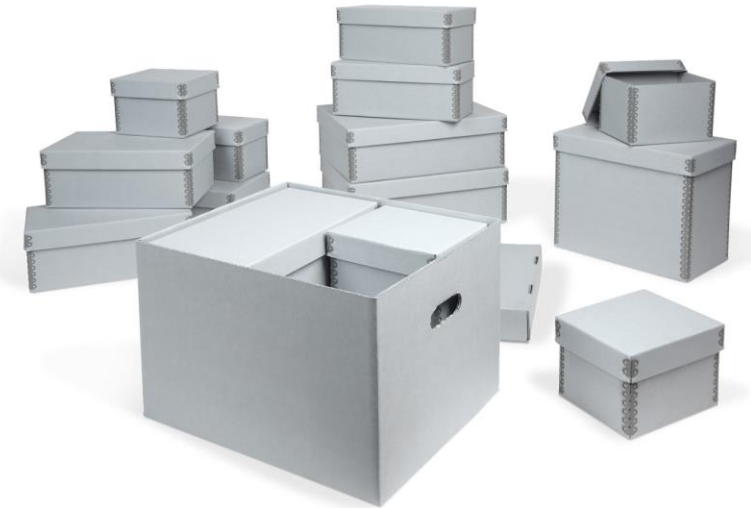
BETTER



Amazon \$20

Crates with slots allow for ventilation which prevents mold growth on your items

BEST



Gaylord \$5-\$200+

Archival containers prevent acid migration and damage during storage and handling

BAD



Not recommended

Metal paper clips will corrode over time and should always be removed

BETTER



Amazon \$7 / 200 pieces

Coated paperclips create a barrier between the metal and the items

BEST



Gaylord \$18 / 200 pieces

Flat plastic clips won't corrode, mark, stain, or tear paper

*Stainless Steel paper clips are also a good option, but very expensive (\$10 for 50 clips)

BAD



Not recommended

Rubber bands will degrade and can even melt onto other objects, they should always be removed

BETTER



Amazon \$9 / 100 pieces

Velcro straps can be used to hold items together without causing damage

BEST



Gaylord - \$21 / 3 yards

Unbleached cotton twill tape creates support for artifacts and textiles, it is also good for packing and shipping

BAD



Not recommended

Sticky albums transfer adhesive to photographs and cause irreversible damage, photos should be removed

BETTER



Amazon \$18 - **Not recommended**

Standard plastic sleeve albums are ok, but they are not suitable for long term preservation

BEST



Album – Gaylord \$30+

Archival quality photo albums with inert plastic sleeves will protect your photos long term

WHERE TO STORE YOUR ITEMS



- DO NOT store your items in a basement, attic, or garage
- DO store your items in an environment with minimal fluctuations in temperature and humidity
 - STABLE – CLEAN – DRY – DARK
 - 65 degrees and 45% humidity are ideal
 - Mold begins to grow at 65% humidity
- If you wouldn't want to sleep there, don't store your items there!

GETTING STARTED

- **What you need:**
- Clean, dry hands (wear cotton or non-powdered nitrile gloves when handling photographs)
- Clutter free surface (no food or drinks!)
- A goal



CASE STUDY I: FAMILY DOCUMENTS



What do you have?

- Assortment of documents in a cardboard box
- Some items organized in standard folders
- Other items inside of plastic, in boxes, and loose

What are your options?

- Better: rehouse to slow down deterioration
- Best: rehouse for long term preservation

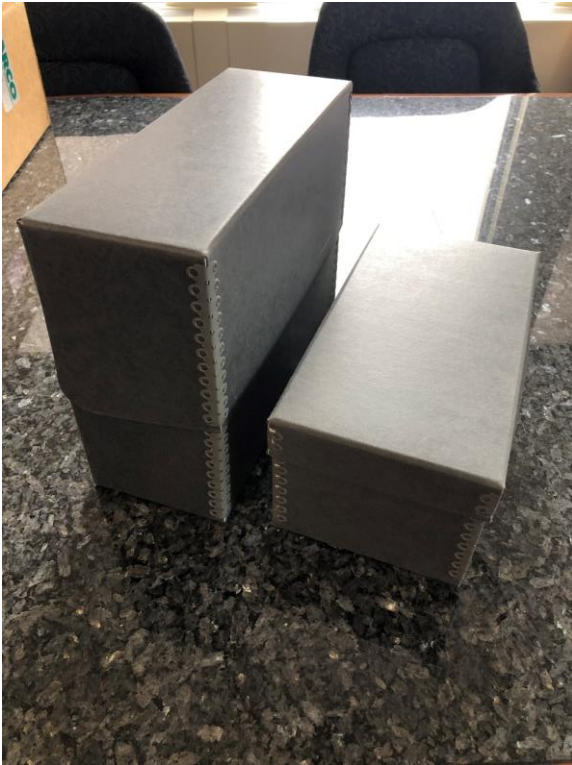
CASE STUDY I: FAMILY DOCUMENTS



Better: prevent further damage

- Remove metal staples and paperclips
- Flatten folded items
- Archival folders, non-archival box
- Keep original organization
- Create a contents list to reduce future handling

CASE STUDY I: FAMILY DOCUMENTS



Best: long term preservation

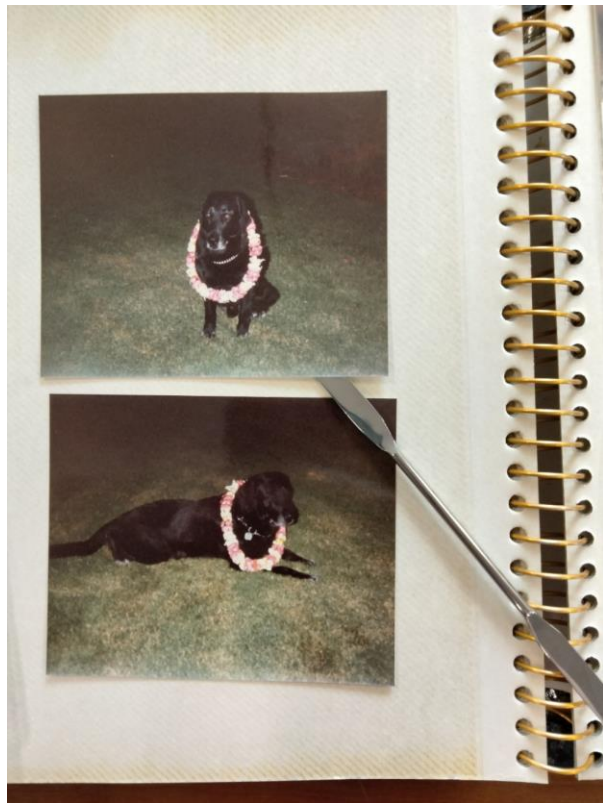
- All archival materials
- Documents stored in archival folders
- Small objects wrapped in archival tissue paper and stored in a separate archival container
- Create a contents list to reduce future handling

CASE STUDY 2: STICKY PHOTO ALBUM



- Sticky photo albums cause irreversible damage to photos
 - Acidic adhesive transfers to the photos causing them to become brittle and discolored
- All photos should be removed from sticky albums if possible
 - Floss and spatula methods
- Before you start removing photos
 - Document the appearance of the pages, scan or photograph
- After you remove photos
 - Stick the photos on buffer paper to prevent them from sticking together
 - Record everything you know about the photos (who, what, when, where, why)

CASE STUDY 2: STICKY PHOTO ALBUM



- Spatula method
 - Gently slide the spatula between the photo to loosen it from the page
 - Take care not to force the photo up

CASE STUDY 2: STICKY PHOTO ALBUM

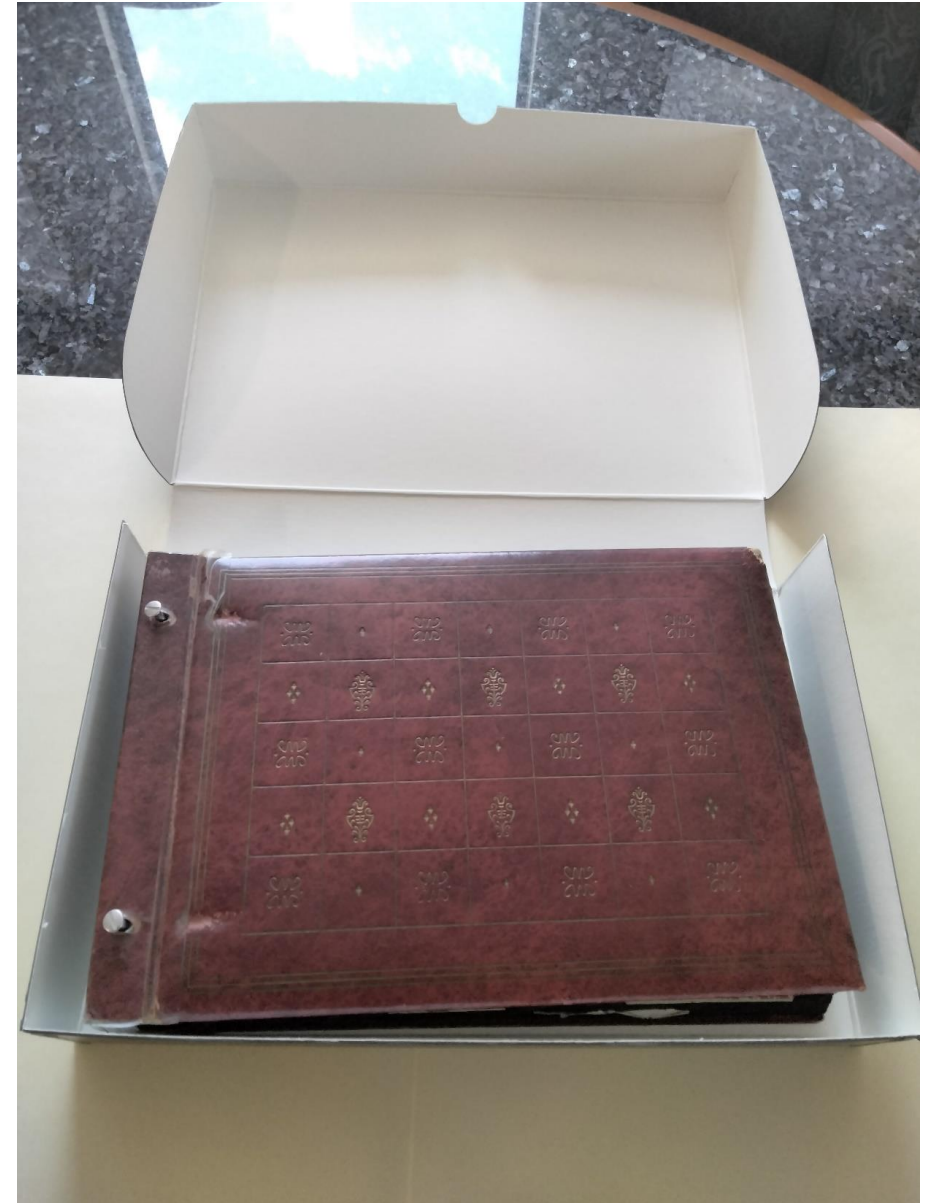


- Floss method
 - Use unwaxed, unflavored dental floss, wear gloves
 - Find a corner that is slightly lifted, pull side to side (don't drag the floss or lift up on the photo)

CASE STUDY 3: SCRAP BOOKS



- Old and fragile scrap books
- If you decide to break up the book
 - Always record the original context of items
 - Carefully remove photos with a spatula, gloves
 - Store items in acid free containers
- If keeping intact
 - Limit handling
 - Record what is on the pages (photos, not scans)
 - Interleave with acid free tissue paper
 - Store in a protective container



CASE STUDY 3: SCRAP BOOKS



- Newer scrap books with standard pages
- Record the pages (scanning is ok)
- Test the pH of the paper
- Transfer pages into polypropylene inserts
- For future scrap books, use acid free paper, photo corners, pH neutral adhesives, and inert plastic inserts
 - Consider using copies in scrap books instead of originals

CASE STUDY 4: NEWSPAPER



- Newsprint is highly acidic
 - Oxidation of lignin causes rapid discoloration
 - The acid in newspaper will transfer to other items
- Decide if you want to keep the newspaper
 - Many newspapers are available in archives or online
 - Consider making photocopies onto acid free paper
- If you keep the newspaper
 - Isolate it from other items
 - Use buffer paper, acid free folders, or inert plastic sleeves

Remove unwanted pages



Make copies on acid free paper



Interleave with buffer paper

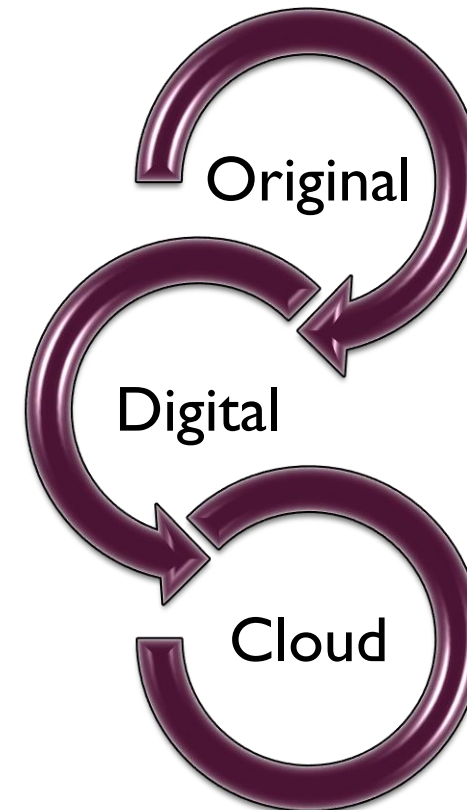


Store in inert plastic



CASE STUDY 5: DIGITAL RESOURCES

- It is best to have three copies of everything
 - One original, one digital copy, and one copy stored in a cloud
 - For collection items and catalog lists
- For digital and cloud based collections
 - Create and upload in highest quality possible
 - Choose a naming convention for files
 - Stay consistent between hard drive and cloud





CHEVY CHASE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY