

Helpful Hints for Preserving Family Collections

Achieving an acceptable environment for your family treasures is critical if the items are to survive. This includes selecting proper storage materials, maintaining temperature and relative humidity, and controlling what comes in contact with your items.

1. The rule of thumb in all preservation efforts is **REVERSIBILITY!** Any good practice will let you undo what you have done, in case technology changes or you change your mind about storage.
2. Store your family treasures where you live. Ideal storage conditions are relative humidity of 45%-55% and average temperature of 65 degrees. A good location in your home is a closet on the main floor with no exterior walls.
3. Light causes fading and other damage. Keep photos and art in the dark as much as possible. Don't put valuable books, papers or textiles where they will get direct sun or bright light of any kind.
4. Use a Photo-Marking Pencil to document information on the back side of resin coated photographs. This is a safe soft-lead pencil that will not break the resin coating. Do not write on your photographs with a ballpoint pen or felt-tip marker. The ink is unstable and will fade or leak through your photo.'
5. Don't laminate! Lamination accelerates the chemical aging of paper. It uses harmful adhesives and heat to permanently bond the document to the plastic. Use any "safe" plastic enclosure.

Additional preservation information and supplies area available at
BECHS Heritage Center and
Quality 1 Hour Foto



Blue Earth County Historical Society
415 Cherry Street, Mankato
507-345-5566

www.rootsweb.com/~mnbechs

Heritage Center Hours
Tuesday-Saturday
10 a.m. 4 p.m.

QUALITY
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Midwest Plaza, Mankato
507-345-7196

www.Quality1HrFoto.com

Store Hours
Monday-Friday 8:30 8:00
Saturday 9:00 5:00
Sunday 12:00 5:00

Photograph Preservation

A guide to safely
storing photographs
and negatives



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Glossary of Preservation Terms

There are many types of storage materials on the market, however not all of them are safe for long-term storage of papers, photographs and other family treasures. The following is a list of terms used to describe the contents of storage materials.

Beware: the terms "archival" and "acid-free" are used freely on many storage materials, be sure to read labels and understand the product before using with your family treasures. For example, a glue stick may be considered acid-free but the other chemicals used to make the adhesive can react with your photographs over time.

Paper Based Products

Acid-free

Different acids react in different ways with their environments. Many acids can be reactive with photographs and storage enclosures, shortening their life span. An "acid-free" product should ideally have a pH level in the 7-8.5 range (neutral to Alkaline). Acid-free applies to paper based products only.

Buffered

Paper can have a buffer such as calcium carbonate added during manufacturing making it slightly alkaline. This substance restrains the acid migration of materials and neutralizes present and future acidity. Use buffered paper products with cellulose fibers such as cotton, linen, rayon, paper, photographs.

Lignin-free

A chemically complex substance found in many plants that bonds the cellulose fibers. Lignin is believed to contribute to the degradation of both papers and photographs by weakening fibers and causing discoloration. Lignin-free applies to paper based products only.

Plastic Products

Polyester/Polyethylene/Polypropylene

A plastic considered safe for use with photographs and papers. The package may state PVC-Free.

Polyvinylchloride (PVC)

A plastic considered unsafe for use with photographs and papers due to its plasticizer content and potential for emission of hydrochloric acid upon it degradation.

Preservation Terms

Acid Migration

This term is often used to describe the movement of acids between adjacent materials, such as the transfer of acid from a newspaper clipping to a photograph when stored together.

Photographic Activity Test (PAT)

A test used to predict certain chemical interactions between scrapbooking materials and photographic images. This is one of many tests to determine if a material is safe for use with photographs.

Photograph Storage Tips

- Photograph storage supplies should be acid-free, lignin-free and buffered or be polyester, polyethylene or polypropylene plastic sleeves. Don't use self-adhesive photo albums; the sticky cardboard mount will adhere to the pictures permanently, also the sticky mount contains highly acidic chemicals. Note: There are pH testing pens available to test if an item is acid-free.
- Use photo-mounting corners or other PAT products to adhere photographs in albums or scrapbooks. Don't use rubber cement, glue or cellophane tape on your photos, it contains a sulfur compound which will cause your photos to yellow, fade and curl.
- Use "safe" plastics like polyester, polyethylene and polypropylene. The "safe" plastics will be clear and will not have a strong plastic smell. Don't use vinyl sleeves with polyvinylchloride as the main component, the off-gas created by this product is hydrochloric acid. Note: PVC plastic may give off a strong plastic smell and may appear cloudy or yellow.
- Store your photograph negatives in the "safe" plastic sleeves. Quality 1 Hour Foto uses polyethylene sleeves after developing. Also, don't throw your negatives away, they are the true original of that image.