

Preserving Vital Records And Other Family Treasures

"People who care nothing for the past usually have no thought for the future and are selfish in the way they use the present. When there is proper regard for the past and its people, we enrich the present as well as the future."
Spencer W. Kimball

Preserving Documents

Although most paper produced since the Civil War has been made from acidic materials which cause brittleness and browning, important papers can be preserved for posterity if they are treated properly. Methods of photocopying, deacidifying, repairing, cleaning, protecting, and storing documents, letters, newspaper clippings, and journals are available for personal use. Only in cases of extreme damage to important papers does a professional conservator need to be contacted.

Photocopying

All valuable documents should be photocopied on acid-free paper using a copy machine that uses a powdered carbon-based toner for a permanent image.

Deacidifying

The most convenient way to deacidify documents is by using a product called Wei T'o. It increases the life of documents by neutralizing acids, preventing future acid development, and stops the browning of paper by molds. Wei T'o can be purchased from archival supply houses.

Repairing

Small tears can be repaired by using an archival document repair tape according to the directions which come with the tape.

A paper conservator usually needs to be contacted if the paper is damaged by water or mold, or has been torn or rolled tightly.

If a document has become wet, it should be frozen immediately and a paper conservator contacted for treatment.

Cleaning

Documents can be carefully cleaned using soft brushes of good quality and grated Magic Rub erasers. CAUTION!! Be aware that this process can damage pencil drawings, paper which is very fragile, etc.

Protecting

Because paper needs to breathe, the best way to protect documents is to encapsulate them using Mylar D, polypropylene, or polyethylene. Because polyester encapsulation actually inhibits the circulation of air around a document, deacidify the document first.

Slip it into plastic page protectors of one of the three materials mentioned above or encapsulate it. Cut 2 pieces of Mylar D larger than the document and place one on a grid. Apply 3M #415 double-coated tape to the edges. Set the second piece of Mylar on top and seal. Trim the edges of the Mylar.

Storing

Ideal storage for documents includes 1) Temperature of fifty degrees and moderate humidity of 30-40%; 2) Acid-free file folders in acid-free boxes or enameled metal cases; 3) Avoidance of strong light, high heat, insects, car exhausts, leaky pipes, and swings in temperature and humidity.

Hints

Letters should be stored unbundled, unfolded, deacidified, and flat.
Journals should be written on acid-free paper and placed in an archival binder.

Old journals should be photocopied and sprayed with Wei T'o.

Preserving Old Photographs--Provide a good environment

Never store photos/negatives in a basement or attic where they will be at risk due to temperature fluctuations, insects, and rodents.

Photos/negatives should be stored in a dry, dark, temperate (no higher than 70 degrees Fahrenheit), acid-free climate.

Do not store photos or albums near unfinished wood.

Wear white cotton gloves when handling photographs/negatives.

Store negatives in acid-free paper enclosures or in clear plastics such as Mylar D, polyethylene, or polypropylene. If your photos are destroyed, you can always make another copy if you have preserved the negative.

NEVER use magnetic photo albums. The press-down plastic used in these books chemically reacts with the picture surface. Fading and discoloration are the results. If you presently have photos in these albums, and they can be easily removed, do so at once!

Rehouse your photos in albums on alkaline paper or in plastic sleeves made of Mylar D, polyethylene, or polypropylene. Do not use acetate or polyvinyl (PVC) covers.

Adhesives such as rubber cement, spray glue, or cellophane tape may fade or mark your photos. Mylar corners are acceptable. You may also mount photographs by cutting slits in the alkaline paper and insert in the corners of the photos through the slits.

Make copies of your photos

Make copies of your valuable photos. Store the original in a protected environment (dark, acid-free, temperature and humidity controlled), and display your copy. Any valuable color print should be copied in black-and-white. Color is unstable.

Remat your photos

Photos which are framed without a mat do not allow space for the photo to shrink or expand. Humidity may cause the photo to adhere to the glass without this breathing space.

Use only acid-free materials to remat your photos. Non- buffered materials are suggested for color photos.

Avoid disasters

Store original photos and negatives in a bank safety deposit box, or in someone else's home. If you have a disaster you will still have your photos.

Think about what would happen to your photos in case of a flood, a fire, or an earthquake. A dark closet on an inside wall in a bedroom not located in a basement or near a water pipe is probably the best location in most homes.

Consult an expert about your priceless heirlooms!

Daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and tintypes, as well as old photographs with paper backing (pre 1900), should be individually assessed.

Preserving Textiles

Initial care of textiles

· Learn as much as possible about the history, age, fabric content, original owner, etc.. of the textile.

Check overall condition and perform minor repairs. All sewing should be done with a ballpoint needle to separate fibers instead of cutting them. Thread used in the repair should be of the same fiber content as the article.

Cleaning textiles

Dry cleaning should be used primarily to remove oil-based stains and only contemporary or sturdy textiles should undergo this process. Matching pieces should be dry cleaned together in case of any color loss.

Wet cleaning - Check for colorfastness by letting a drop of distilled water soak into each colored area. Repeat the process with detergent. If the color bleeds do not use this process. If the article is colorfast then clean by soaking. Some very soiled textiles cannot be wet or dry cleaned and vacuuming can be an option, but this takes a great deal of time and care.

Storing textiles

Environment. Choose a storage area which is cool, dry, clean, and dark and which has a stable control of light, temperature, and humidity.

Storage materials. Wood drawers or chests, most paper products from shoe boxes to tissue paper, and plastic storage bags or boxes are very damaging to natural fibers and will cause deterioration. Textiles should be stored in acid free materials. Special acid-free storage boxes, tissue paper, tubes, and 100% cotton bags should be purchased from archival suppliers.

Storage methods. Flat storage is the ideal method for most textiles. If folding is necessary, place tissue rolls at the fold lines to relieve stress. If an article is too large to store flat it can be rolled. Acid free tubes can be used to support a rolled article. Strong fabrics can be stored on a padded hanger made from 100% cotton materials and hung inside a 100% cotton bag.

These basic guidelines will help you prepare and store your precious textile items for years to come. If you have any questions or want further details about any of these procedures or materials please consult a professional conservator.

Preserving Genealogical Data– Personal Ancestral File 3.0 - New Features

Improved file management and larger data files: Each database consists of one file, with up to one million people in a single file. There is easy switching between different data files.

Improved Configuration: Each data file has its own set of preferences.

Improved viewing: Information can be viewed on the Small Pedigree screen, in a five-generation pedigree, on an individual record, or in an alphabetical list.

Longer name, date, and place fields: The fields for personal names and place-names can fit up to 120 characters, and the fields for dates can fit up to 35 characters. Dates can be nonstandard or B.C.

Diacritics and special characters: You can now type non-English letters and characters.

Multiple parents: You can link a child to more than one family and also specify the type of relationship - biological, adopted, guardian, sealing, challenged by others, or disproved.

Ability to add and store sources: Sources are tied to specific information on a person's individual or marriage record. You can record details about authors, publishers, books, pages, and places where you found the information.

You do not have to retype the same source: After you type it the first time, you can move the cursor to any of the first five fields on the screen and select the source you want from the Source List. The information will be filled in for you.

Improved notes editor: You can keep separate notes for individuals and marriages. The Notes Editor now has

word-wrap capabilities like a word processor. You can cut, copy, and paste notes within the same record.

Improved focus capabilities: You can focus on information regarding 1) individual records, 2) marriage records, 3) notes, and 4) sources. For example, you can focus on Smiths who lived in California between 1850 and 1950 by focusing on the surname, birth year range, and place of birth.

Personal Ancestral File Companion

Works with all Windows-compatible printers, including dot matrix, Ink-jet, and laser printers.

Will print quality pedigree charts, family group records, ancestor charts, descendant charts, fan charts, and narrative reports.

Prints on any size paper-letter, legal, A4, etc.

Many pages can be tiled to form very large charts for family reunions.

Cousin Smart option eliminates duplication from common ancestors.

Creates a narrative report that is automatically output to the word processor of your choice (Microsoft Word, WordPerfect, Lotus AmiPro, Microsoft Write, and Microsoft Works). From there you can perform additional editing, such as adding photographs to your report before printing.

Can run your Personal Ancestral File program without exiting Personal Ancestral File Companion.

Preserving Family Stories-- Tips for Recording Oral Histories

Schedule the oral history session in advance. Don't just show up on a person's doorstep unexpectedly.

If you want to use a tape recorder, make sure you get prior permission from the person you're interviewing.

Ask questions to start things off, but don't be afraid to let the person you're interviewing talk "off the subject." You may get some of the best stories this way.

If you ask "when" something happened, the answer will often be "I don't know, " because the individual doesn't recall the exact date or year. Ask the question in relation to another event. You can also ask "About how old were you when...."

If you have any old pictures or other items that you have questions about, bring them along. You may get answers to your questions, and you will probably hear some good stories, too.

Keep the session relatively short, no more than one or two hours. Recording an oral history should be fun, not hard work.

(From Family Tree Maker Online)

Suggested Topics and Questions for Oral Histories

The Basics: Make sure you get down the name and birth date of the person you're interviewing, as well as where they fit in your family tree.

Childhood: What do you recall about your childhood? Where did you live and go to school? What do you remember best about your parents?

Family Traditions: Did your family have any special traditions, such as things that they did on holidays or birthdays?

Growing Up: When did you leave home? Why did you leave and where did you go? How did your life change? Did you feel grown up? Were you a little scared?

Historical Events: Which significant historical events have taken place during your lifetime? Were there wars, natural disasters, or political changes? How did these events affect you?

Hometown: What was the name of the place where you grew up? Was it a big city or a small town? Were there any special activities or festivals at different times during the year?

Immigration: How old were you when you immigrated to the United States? Were did you come from and where and when did you arrive? How did you travel? By boat, plane, or train?

Occupation: What did your parents do for a living when you were growing up? Did you ever help them out? Was your family financially comfortable? What was your first job?

Physical Characteristics: What physical characteristics do people in your family share? Do they all have the same hair color or eye color? Whom in the family do you resemble?

Previous Generations: Did you know your grandparents or great-grandparents? What were their names? Where did they live? What stories can you tell about them and their lives?

Religion: What part did religion play in your family? Were you very religious? Did you go to religious services on a regular basis?

· **Other possible topics:** Education, Politics, Military Service, Recreation, Family Personalities, Family Pets, Traveling, Dating, Clothing, Family Recipes, Favorite Songs or Poems, Family Medical History, Marriage and Raising a Family, and anything else that may be of interest to your family....
(From Family Tree Maker Online)

Labeling Pictures

When mounting photographs in albums or scrapbooks, be sure to label each one. Pens with acid-free ink help to maintain the acid-free environment. Of course you will include names, dates and places, but additional comments enhance the meaningfulness of your scrapbook.

(From Heritage Quest)

Publishing Family Histories -- How to Write and Publish Your Book

Having decided to publish a history about your family, there are two things which you must have firmly in mind before beginning. They are:

What is the **PURPOSE** of your book?

· What **FORM** will your book take?

The answers to these questions will determine the appearance, form and shape your book will have at the completion of your work.

What is the purpose of your book? Who will read it?

For use only by immediate family

Specific event, such as 75th or 90th birthday

To tell the life of only one person

To tell the experience of the original immigrant and to display the descendants

Mainly newspaper articles with a minimum of writing
Your own life for the sake of your grandchildren

What Form Will Your Book Take?

Folder, 3-ring notebook, soft-cover, metal spiral, comb binding, hardback, library quality binding?

Desktop publishing, professional formatting, locally Xeroxed, lithographed, Docu-tech?

Pictures, type of paper, dimensions of book (8 1/2 X 11 or a comfortable hand-held book)?

Book Design

Go to your personal library or the public library and study the appearance of various books. What do you like or not like? Remember: It's YOUR book. If you enjoy the appearance, the family will, too.

Book Content

Begin with an outline of topics you wish to cover:

Memorable family gatherings; the first-ever gathering.

Histories of towns where the family lived. This type of information lends "local color" and helps the reader to reconstruct the types of lives the ancestors lived.

Newspaper articles about the ancestors or important historical events that were part of their lives. Spend time in the small town libraries and newspaper offices.

Recipes, poems and songs from the family itself or from the general time period.

Property maps and homestead maps. These are especially important if the ancestor was born in a foreign country. Where is that hamlet in Germany located?

Biographical sketches of each ancestor and descendant.

Include sufficient pedigree charts for proper identification.

· Use photographs and pictures; scenes of the homeland, etc.

Writing the Book (Getting it onto paper and preparing it for publication.)

Use the method most comfortable for you - handwritten yellow-paper drafts; typewriter, word processor.

You do not need to write it in sequence. Write the sections as you have sufficient information or as your interest dictates. Some parts will be easier to write. Later you can rearrange the sections as you like or as seems logical.

DO use at least a minimal outline for each section of the book as you begin.

Be aware of and use various writing techniques that add interest: 1) Narrative; 2) Descriptive; 3) "Reporting;" 4) Eyewitness accounts from letters, legal documents, diaries; 5) Quotations; 6) Memories; 7) Translations

Use a thesaurus. There is a word for everything in English!

Documentation

Use footnotes; Page references within the text; Citations for quotes; etc.

Proofreading

Be thorough and careful. Check all dates with the original research. Confirm all page references within the book.

If possible, have another family member read the manuscript, if there is one who knows how to proofread. He will note the rough spots in text-flow and find the errors you will not notice because you are too close to it.

If you have to do it yourself, do it in small segments and carefully!