

Preserving Heirlooms – Your Genealogical Treasurers

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Deciding What to Save, Give Away, or Toss

- Weighing *emotional* versus *financial* importance is difficult.
- A child's first drawing is important to the parent, but not worth a lot of money.
- Most of us cannot save everything - You are forced to make choices
- The first step in developing a preservation strategy is deciding what stuff you want to keep, and why you want to keep it, which is not always easy.
- Even museums cannot save everything - They have staff and labor resources to consider.
- The staff must rank the objects in the collections with regard to the mission of the museum.
- The "whys" are simple: An object can be monetarily valuable, emotionally important, or sometimes both.
- These are the questions curators face daily.
- As the curator of "the museum of you," you must confront the same questions.
- You have to make the decisions.
- Here are some things to consider when making your decisions:

Who	What	When	Where
Owned it?	Is its financial value?	Did you acquire it?	Did it come from?
Made it?	Is its emotional value?	Was it made?	Any markings or other clues?
Gave it to you?			
Do you leave it to?			

- Make a list of all your collectibles you want to save on the piece of paper. Don't prioritize at this point.
- Go over your list and choose the ten most important items. This can reveal unimportance as well as importance.
- Put these collectibles in order numerically, one through 10, from most important to least.
- In order of their importance, enter your list of stuff on Worksheet #1.
- In the space provided, record why you value these objects.
- On Worksheet #2, list each object in order of importance and then enter all the information you have concerning it.
- This is different from "why" it's important to you: It is the total of everything you know about each item.
- Save both lists in a secure place. It is a great reference not only for you but also for your heirs.

Preserving Stuff

- Now that you have determined what you want to save, you now have to make sure it survives.
- Everything you own and love eventually falls apart - No matter how big or how sturdy, it falls apart.
- The technical term for this process is "**entropy**".
- A common term is "**going back to dirt**."
- Whatever the size of your collectible, the general process remains the same.
- What differs is the time involved.
- Our job is to **slow down** this "going back to dirt" journey as much as possible.
- Of course, the best way to ensure that stuff lasts is to place all your collectables in.....
- An Egyptian tomb and then seal them in.....
- After leaving the prerequisite **deadly curse** on all who dare enter.
- Stuff lasts for a really long time in a cursed sealed tomb.

Why?

No Light
No Humidity Fluctuation
No Contamination
No Bugs
No Furry Friends
No People

- Let's look at what we can do to protect our family heirlooms for the next generations.
- Here are the 6 items we have to watch for and be careful of:

Light
Temperature
Moisture

Contamination
Biological Attack
Use and Handling

Light

- For living things, light is a necessary energy source for growth and vitality
- But light makes dead stuff fall apart.
- Light damage can cause fading and other changes in the appearance of an object.
- For example, if you remove a framed print from the wall where it has been hanging for some time, you will notice a fading pattern on what was everywhere except for the space where the framed print hung.
- Congratulations!
- You have successfully protected a portion of your wall from the ravages of light. But what took the attack instead? The artwork, of course.
- Curtains, rugs, clothing, prints (paper stuff of all kinds; actually), paintings, and furniture are all at risk of fading due to light damage.
- If the light levels stay high enough, long enough, the light can actually go beyond changing the colors and destroy the underlying materials as well.
- In other words, light not only can fade your favorite rug but turn it to powder right where it lies.
- The higher the light energy (intensity or wavelength), the more rapid the damage.
- Ultraviolet (UV) light from natural sunlight is particularly troublesome because it is the highest energy of the normally occurring light sources.
- The trouble is, you can't tell how much UV light is falling on your collection of stuff because by definition it is not visible to the naked human eye.
- To fight this, make sure your windows have shutters, UV filtering glaze, absorbing films on the windows, or retractable UV-filtering shades.

Temperature

- Temperature is involved in **four** major mechanisms of deterioration:
 1. The human comfort level is perfect for bugs and mold. Mold occurs between 60 and 120 degrees Fahrenheit and reaches its zenith at about 90 degrees.
 2. Temperature helps determine the rate at which stuff falls apart. Heat speeds up the whole process.
 3. As a general rule, when stuff gets colder, it becomes more brittle, and when it gets warmer, stuff turns more rubbery.
 4. Thermal shock occurs when a material is either heated or cooled very rapidly.

Temperature and Humidity (Moisture)

- Now we have temperature and its favorite dance partner, humidity, and what happens when these two boogie together to just the right song? They are called partners in crime.
- Rarely is one force solely responsible for turning your stuff back to dirt (except in the case of fire, flood, earthquake, pets, or children).
- Instead, the forces of deterioration act in concert with each other.
- Any one of the agents that cause stuff to turn to dirt is a problem by itself, but give any of them a dance partner, and the rate of deterioration increases exponentially.
- Substantial humidity (more than 70%) combined with high temperature (more than 80° F) wreaks havoc on almost any collection that isn't glass.
- When these two start dancing together, mold and mildew appear, and your stuff turns green, sometimes black, and always yucky.
- More Moisture Concerns: Flooding, leaky pipes, leaky ceilings. These will destroy your heirlooms.....**ALL OF THEM...**

Biological Attack

- Insects, rodents, and the problems they cause
- Rodents chew on whatever is in their way or to gather nesting material
- Insects do a lot of chewing as well, but some actually view your collection as the buffet to end all buffets
- Bugs particularly love nibbling on natural fiber textiles, book binding glue, and old photographs

- Regardless of the reason that bugs and insects chomp, the result is the same: The loss of the object or even the loss of an entire collection.
- The first line of defense against insects is to make sure they cannot get in your house.
- Make sure there are no unsealed openings in walls, under eaves, or around doors and windows.
- Avoid bug zappers. All they do is attract more bugs.
- If you want to use a bug zapper.....Give it to your neighbor and have the bugs go to his house.

Contaminants

- When we think of contaminants and pollution we usually think of belching smoke stacks and green pond scum.
- To be sure, bad things happen to stuff that is placed in such environments.
- But to a lesser degree our stuff is also subjected to chemical assaults and unwanted physical deposits.
- All too often, we expose our treasures to harmful contaminants without even knowing it.
- Such as:
 1. Don't store metals such as art bronzes and silverware in wool wraps. The sulfur in the wool tarnishes (corrodes) the silver almost immediately.
 2. The same is true for oxygen, which reacts with silver to form silver oxides.
 3. Don't wrap silver in plastic cling wrap. It is made of a chemical called vinylidene chloride, and chlorine and all its evil chloride cousins are corrosive agents for metals.

Use and Handling

- In many instances, and for a lot of collectables, "normal use" presents no unusual risks because they are decorative.
- Normal use of furniture and other functional objects is a catch-22.
- The mere act of sitting on a chair places stress on the seat, legs, and back. Repeated enough times, the chair will collapse.
- **Handling and misuse**
 - How you handle – pick up, pack, move, and ship – your collectibles is important.
 - The number one cause of preventable damage to stuff is handling.
 - Carelessness or incomplete information on how to handle stuff often results in damaged goods.
- **Pets and children**
 - OK, the truth is that you love 'em.
 - Another truth is they destroy more stuff than flood and fire combined.
 - If you have two children, 2 cats, and a dog, you have your own....Demolition Squad

Preserving Family Photos

- People whose homes are threatened by fire often try to grab their photographs as they escape out the door.
- That is, once they are sure the kids, pets, and other loved ones are safe.
- Think "Duplication"

Seven Rules for Photographs

1. **Duplicate!**
 - If you want to display a photo, make a duplicate and display the duplicate while storing the original.
2. **Avoid light.**
 - Photo albums are ideal for keeping your photos out of direct sunlight.
 - Light is enemy number 1.
3. **Keep out the critters.**
 - Keep the area around your photos and photo albums clean and food free.
 - If you are concerned about bugs, keep your photos and photo albums in sealed archival safe storage containers.
4. **Always wear clean cotton gloves when handling photos.**
5. **Handle photos and films by holding the edges, never the face of the image.**
6. **Never bend your photos.**
7. **Be careful about dust because dust actually scratches old photos and emulsions.**

Telling Your Photographic Artifacts Apart

- There are two major types of artifacts to be concerned about:
 - Photographic prints
 - Photographic film, also known as transparencies.
- Photographic film includes negatives, slides, and movie film.
- You need to be able to identify what you have in order to determine how to take care of it.

Metal & Glass Print Photos

- Daguerreotypes (1839 to about 1860)
 - The first widely available photographs, these are positive images made from photo-sensitive emulsions cast on polished copper plates or silvered copper plates.
- Tintypes (1855-1930)
 - Technologically similar to daguerreotypes, they are positive images made from photo-sensitive emulsions cast on polished iron plates.
- Ambrotypes (1850-80)
 - Ambrotypes are glass negatives placed over black paper in order to reverse the image. Most glass plates were developed as negative images. These glass plates were the first negatives from which positive prints on paper were produced.

Duplication Options

- Photos present a perplexing problem.
- Preserving them usually means not enjoying them, at least not enjoying the original.
- Continued handling and exposure to light causes long-term degradation.
- In order to preserve photos, you should make copies for your family and friends' enjoyment and put the original in an appropriate storage place for permanent preservation.
- There are two general but distinct methods of duplication:
- Photographic replication
- Digital replication
- Each is a valuable and widely used method for preserving photographic collections in museums, although they are usually referred to as reformatting.
- Photo replication is pretty much what it sounds like: using a photographic method to reproduce the material being preserved.
- Digital replication involves changing your photographic information into a format that can be stored on your computer's hard drive or on a CD or DVD.

There are a number of things to consider before you decide the process to use:

- How do you normally like to view your images?
- As a photo?
- On the computer?
- Are the photos you want to preserve already damaged or faded?
- Do you want the copies you make to last forever like the images from your parents' wedding day, or are they less memorable but still amusing like your college-age son's Friday night out?
- What is the original format?
- Do you have the original negative, or is it digital?
- Do you want to deal with computers at all when duplicating photos?
- These and other considerations will help you decide which process is best for you. The decision tree that follows will help you determine your best option.
- Is the photographic keepsake you want to duplicate a photo or a digital image?

If you have the Photo-

- Do you have the original negative?

Yes

1. Take the negative to a local photo shop and get a duplicate.
2. Then-
3. Scan the original negative.
4. And then
5. Store the original negative

No

1. Have the local photo shop print a duplicate for display.
2. Or
3. Scan the original into your computer
4. And then
5. Print your photo for display

- If you have a digital image-

1. Print a copy of the image with a high quality inkjet or laser printer
2. *Or*
3. Take your CD to a local photo shop and let them make duplicate prints
4. *And then*
5. Make duplicates of your digital files

- Decide which of the family photo treasures are worth investing the time and money it takes to restore and preserve them.
- The cost of turning negatives into photos is negligible.
- Creating a print from a print without its negative is expensive.

Scanning Photos

Resolution	What is it good for?	Color Depth
72 dpi	Publishing any graphics to the web	8-bit
150 dpi	Scanning halftones (i.e. newspapers)	24-bit
200 dpi	Line art that is sent to a printer	8-bit
300 dpi	Printing photos and other images without resizing	24-bit
600 dpi	Printing photos that will be enlarged by no more than four times the original	Minimum 24-bit
1200 dpi	Printing photos that will be enlarged more than 4 times the original	Minimum 24-bit

Photo Albums

- Perhaps the most popular format for saving a collection of family or personal photos is the photo album.
- For the most part this is a good compromise between keeping your favorite pictures forever and having your fingertips for occasional journeys down memory lane.
- Certainly the album protects photos from light and handling, but other dangers can be present.
- Water, bugs, and mold are still hazards you need to watch out for.
- If your photo album is made from acid-free pages and covers and is stored in a dark, bug-free, dry place, your collection is well cared for.
- If, though, you are in any doubt about the quality of the album materials, replace your current album with a good quality new one.

Rules for Choosing a Photo Album

- Make sure the pages are acid free.
- The "archival" quality of photo albums is a strong marketing tool. If it is acid free, it will say so. If it doesn't, it isn't.
- Check that the plastic sleeves into which you slide the photos are made from polyethylene, polypropylene, or polyester rather than polyvinyl chloride.
- Polyvinyl chloride emits contaminating substances that will damage your photos.
- Be careful when purchasing one of the popular magnetic-style albums where the photos are held under sheets of transparent plastic.
- These can be a real problem because the plastic is often polyvinyl chloride and is held to the page by an unstable adhesive.
- Also, the paperboard is probably wood pulp, which is acidic and degrades, and may contribute to the deterioration of other things in contact with it.
- A triple-header of bad news.
- The only good news is that modern resin-coated photos are pretty tough, so the album itself is likely to disintegrate before the photos.

Slides, Negatives, and Movie Film

- Unlike photographic prints, which are comfortable when you are comfortable, film such as slides, negatives, and movies want things as cold as you can get them.
- The term ***cold storage*** is the mantra of the film preservationist.
- So, whenever possible, store your film in a frost-free freezer or, if that is not feasible, the coldest place you can.
- If cold storage is not an option, these are a few of the rules you should be aware of:
- Do not store film in an attic. Too much temperature variation and way to hot in the summer.
- Do not store film near heaters, plumbing pipes, sprinklers, windows, electrical sources, etc.
- Do not store film in direct sunlight. Avoid exterior, south-facing walls or locations that receive direct sunlight.
- Avoid high humidity.
 - Do not store in the basement.
 - Most basements are quite humid and perfect for mold.
 - There is also danger of flooding
- Wear cotton gloves.
- Handle only by the edges.

Suppliers of Archival Supplies

- **Hollinger Metal Edge, Inc.**
Archival Storage Materials
6340 Bandini Blvd.
Commerce, California 90040
800-862-2228
www.metaledgeinc.com
 - **Light Impressions**
P.O. Box 2100
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670
1-800-828-6216
www.lightimpressionsdirect.com
- **Hollinger Corporation**
PO Box 8360
Fredericksburg, Virginia 22404-8360
1-800-634-0491
www.hollingercorp.com
 - **University Products Inc.**
The Archival Company
517 Main Street
PO Box 101
Holyoke, Massachusetts 01041-0101
1-800-628-1912
www.universityproducts.com

Books on Preserving your Stuff

- **Saving Stuff: How to Care for and Preserve Your Collectibles, Heirlooms, and Other Prized Possessions** - Don Williams and Louisa Jagger (Paperback - May 31, 2005)
- **Uncovering Your Ancestry through Family Photographs** - Maureen Taylor (Paperback - Jun 24, 2005)
- **Digitizing Your Family History** - Rhonda McClure (Paperback - Aug 19, 2004)
- **An Ounce of Preservation: A Guide to the Care of Papers and Photographs** - Craig A. Tuttle (Paperback - Mar 1995)
- **Organizing and Preserving Your Heirloom Documents** - Katherine Scott Sturdevant (Paperback - Aug 2002)

Risk Chart for Collectibles

	<i>Light</i>	<i>Insects/Mold</i>	<i>Handling</i>	<i>Contaminants</i>	<i>Normal Use</i>	<i>Temperature</i>	<i>Moisture</i>
Rag paper	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Pulp paper	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Glass and ceramics	☺	☺	☹	☹	☹	☹	☺
Metals	☺	☺	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Wood and baskets	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Textiles—natural	☠	☠	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Textiles—synthetic	☠	☺	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Photos—prints (pre-1970)	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Photos—B&W prints (1970-)	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Photos—color prints (1970-)	☠	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Photos—film (pre-1950)	☹	☹	☹	☠	☹	☹	☠
Photos—film (after 1950)	☹	☺	☹	☺	☹	☹	☹
Oil painting	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
Acrylic painting	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☠	☹
Watercolor	☠	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☠
Pastels—charcoal	☹	☹	☠	☹	☹	☹	☹
Plastics	☹	☺	☹	☹	☹	☠	☹

Legend

- ☺ Generally no practical risk or immediate threat under normal conditions
- ☹ Some risk that can usually be minimized, depending on specific circumstances
- ☹ Fairly high risk of damage; pay particular attention
- ☠ Immediate risk of catastrophic damage