



# SAVING YOUR Treasures

*A Website about what you can do to protect and preserve the things of importance in your life*



## Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center Nebraska State Historical Society

1326 S. 32<sup>nd</sup> Street, Omaha, NE 68105 (402) 595-1180, Fax: (402) 595-1178  
[treasures@nebraskahistory.org](mailto:treasures@nebraskahistory.org)  
[www.nebraskahistory.org](http://www.nebraskahistory.org)

### HOUSINGS FOR OBJECTS

Conservators and museum professionals have recognized that preventing deterioration is far more beneficial to the long-term survival of artifacts than treatment. Objects should be handled, stored, or displayed in ways that are aimed at extending their longevity. Monitoring the environment (temperature, relative humidity, and light), proper handling, and adequate storage are all ways to prevent deterioration. While properly storing objects is important, in some cases it may be necessary to provide additional protection and support especially for fragile artifacts by creating housings for the objects.

Housings such as boxes, folders, mats, and other enclosures help to provide secure and stable environments, support, and surface protection from the elements. They can also help to provide protection during handling, movement, and access. Damage due to the effects of time such as creeping, embrittlement, and old breaks can be addressed with proper support. Objects require support for three reasons:

- the object is inherently weak or deteriorated,
- the object needs to be mounted or stored in a certain way,
- and/or the object is too fragile to be handled.

It is important to choose the proper materials when making object housings. Materials should be acid free and lignin free, strong enough to support the weight of the object, non-abrasive, colorfast, as well as economical and durable. Some examples of acceptable materials to use in making housings are:

- **Backing and support materials:** acid free corrugated board, acid free foam core board, acid free lignin free mat board (various thicknesses) and boxes, and Microchamber® board and boxes.
- **Cushioning or padding:** Ethafoam®, Volara®, micro foam (polyethylene or polypropylene foam).
- **Coverings:** Tyvek®, Reemay® or Hollytex®, unbleached muslin (washed and dried without fabric softener), Pacific Silvercloth®, food-grade polyethylene or polyethylene film (not cling wrap!), corrosion Intercept® film.
- **Papers:** acid free lignin free glassine, mylar, acid-free tissue (buffered, unbuffered, abaca), Dartek®, Microchamber® paper

- **Adhesives/Tapes:** J-Lar® tape, acid free linen tape, hot glue (polyethylene), Jade 403® PVA emulsion, wheat starch paste

Good quality housings should provide adequate and evenly distributed support to fight gravity and prevent drooping and sagging and dampen vibrations caused by bumping or movement. When designing housings for objects, ask the following questions:

- Can the object hold itself together?
- Is it made of rigid or flexible material?
- If it is a composite object, which material is most fragile?
- Does the object suffer from any form of inherent vice?
- Is the surface stable or friable?
- How can the object be housed with as little space and material as possible?
- How can you make housings as quickly and efficiently as possible?
- How can you make a housing as inexpensively as possible?
- Where will the object be stored once it is housed?
- If the object is going in a drawer, how will you protect it from movement/vibration/abrasion within the drawer?
- Does the shelving have weight loading or size limitations?
- Do you understand the object's construction and condition well enough to provide complete and even support, as well as protection?
- Is an additional mount needed inside the box or are there appropriate resting spots?
- Once the object is in the box, how will you get it out again without damaging it?
- Can you remove the object from the box without touching it?
- Who will need access to the object? What type of access will they need?
- How can the object be made accessible for studying without increasing its handling?
- Does the object need more intervention than you can provide with housing?

Some examples of common housings include:

- Folders for paper documents, certificates, letters, advertisements
- Sleeves for photos, posters, baseball cards
- Boxes for sleeved photos, objects, textiles, motion picture film, hats, etc.
- Padded hangers and covers for textiles and garments
- Rolls for carpets, large textiles, oversized paintings
- Window mats for works of art on paper
- Backed frames for paintings
- Carpeted dollies with covers for furniture and large sculpture

Storage techniques for specific objects are used by many institutions. Information and instructions for making many of these housings are available as technical leaflets or handouts on the Internet. When choosing a method that fits your object remember to

keep in mind the essential features of your object. Choose storage methods that best suit your objects and your institution's or family's needs.

### Recommended Sources

American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC)  
<http://aic.stanford.edu>

Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI)  
<http://www.cci-icc.gc.ca/>

National Park Service—*Conserve O Gram*  
[http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/publications/conserveogram/cons\\_toc.html](http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/publications/conserveogram/cons_toc.html)

Northeast Document Conservation Center—Preservation Leaflets  
<http://www.nedcc.org/resources/leaflets.list.php>

Rose, Carolyn, Catharine Hawks, and Hugh Genoways. eds. 1995. *Storage of Natural History Collections: A Preventive Conservation Approach*. Volume I. York, PA: Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections.

Rose, Carolyn and Amparo de Torres. eds. 1995. *Storage of Natural History Collections: Ideas and Practical Solutions*. Volume II. York, PA: Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections.

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