



SAVING YOUR Treasures

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



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DOCUMENTING YOUR FAMILY HEIRLOOMS

In attics and basements, drawers and closets, live the remnants of our past. These objects hold memories of our lives and the lives of loved ones. By caring for these artifacts we are keeping the memories that surround them and the family alive. Our heirlooms all have a story and a reason to be kept, but often times the information is not recorded. How many times have we said to ourselves, "One of these days I'm going to write this information down"? Perhaps one of the reasons we do not get around to writing the information down is we do not know what information is important or even what format to use. The following may help you to understand why documentation is especially important to your family's history.

Create a Filing System

Successfully documenting your family heirlooms requires is a good filing system. Depending on your comfort level with a computer you can make regular paper files or you can record information in a database using one of the many software programs that are available today. Microsoft Office Suite comes with pre-made databases for your home inventory, wine collection, and book collections. These can be easily adapted for your heirloom collections. New software and programs designed for organizing collections at home are good but a physical file is still needed for each object. The files should contain photographs, sales receipts, insurance policies, newspaper clippings, family anecdotes, catalogue sheets, and other associated information. These files can be cross-referenced with your electronic database to make it easier to locate the object or its digital images. Actual reference materials added to your file acts as support evidence, therefore adding more value to the object.

Materials

It is important to understand the information in your file can be as important as the object itself. To properly store this information you will need the following items:

- 1) Acid-free, lignin free file folders
- 2) Soft #2 pencil
- 3) Mylar or polyethylene envelopes for photographs, negatives, etc.

- 4) Acid-free lignin free barrier paper to interleave between pieces of information you have collected
- 5) A camera (35mm or digital) to photograph the object
- 6) A tape measure
- 7) A large file box (acid free, lignin free cardboard or polyethylene or polypropylene)

To find where to purchase some of these recommended materials see the "Conservation Supplies" list.

Photography

Documentation should include photographs for each object. Photographs provide visual documentation of the object. The first step in documenting your family heirlooms is to photograph the object. The photograph may be as elaborate as you wish, but we suggest keeping it simple. A 35mm camera will suffice. Even a disposable camera can be used if you don't have a 35 mm. If it is possible, photograph the object with natural light. This will reduce the glare often created by flash photography and will result in more accurate colors. Indoor lighting can be used to augment natural light when the object is large or can't be moved to a place with adequate natural light. Take as many photographs of your object as needed to obtain a complete record of the object. A complete set of photographs would contain images of all sides of the object, top and bottom, and any identifying marks (maker's mark, cracks, etc.), and close-ups of any important details.

Identification Forms/Catalogue Sheets

Identification forms or catalogue sheets should be filled out to include owner information, measurements, object history, insurance, artist and materials, and other relevant facts about the object. These act as a summary of all the information you have about your items. You may create your own personal identification form or use the sample form below. Cecile Wendover Clover, an art conservator and anthropologist, has created *Documenting My Collection*, a software program with supplemental identification forms, to assist others in documenting their family heirlooms. Patricia A. Kuentz's *Our Family Heirlooms and Their Stories* was developed as a practical method for storing information regarding family heirlooms. Both are good sources to review when determining the best method for documenting your family heirlooms.

To complete the catalogue sheet, the following information may be helpful. We recommended filling out the form with a pencil so the form may be regularly updated.

Reference Number

Each object should be assigned its own unique identification number. The number may be a number or a combination of numbers and letters. It is important to remember the number must be unique to the object. It is the key that links the object with its documentation. It is important to remember to be consistent with your numbering

system and never duplicate id numbers for duplication only leads to confusion. In museums we often use the year a piece entered our collection followed by a sequence number. For example: # 2007.01. You can also use this number to associate your photographic or digital images with this object.

Date

Record the date the form was filled out. Remember to change the date each time the catalogue sheet is updated.

Recorded By

Write your name here unless you are assisting someone else. In that case, you may choose to write something like "Betty Bell completing form for friend Katherine Kale."

Title

Give the object a title. You may wish to refer to it by the name you usually call it, e.g. Dad's pocket watch or Uncle Mac's flag.

Object Type

Identify the type of object, i.e. jewelry, furniture, plate, glass, textile, etc.

Medium/Material

Identify the material from which the object is made. (wood, copper alloy, iron/steel, plastic, etc.)

Current Location

It is very important to know where the object is located. This information may help your family identify certain objects in the future. Be sure to update the catalogue sheet each time you move the object to a different place. If it is in a storage facility or a safe deposit box, be sure to include the name and address of the location of the storage or bank.

Style

Many objects are created in a certain style. If you know what style it is record it here. Some examples of style are Rococo table, Greek vase, or Impressionist painting.

Age/Date

Record the date in which the object was made. If you do not know the exact date notations such as "mid-19th century" or "circa 1940" should be included.

Photograph

Attach a recent photograph of your object. Keep additional photographs within the object file, electronic or paper.

Maker/Artist and Mark

Record the artist's name or who made the object. Look for a signature or maker's mark.

Location of Mark/Signature

Write down the location of the maker's mark or signature if there is one. This will help others identify the object.

Description

Write a brief description of the object in your own words. Describe color, texture, shape, and any identifying characteristics that may not appear in the photograph.

Number of pieces

If you are recording a set of objects such as china, silverware, or chess set, write down the number of pieces that belong.

Original or Adapted

Check the box identifying if the object in the photograph is being used as it was intended or if it has been adapted to another use. For example is it a vase that has been made into a lamp. Identify its original intention.

Dimensions

Record the **Length** or **Height**, **Width**, **Diameter**, and **Circumference** of the object.

Place of Origin

If you know where the object was created or made, record it in this space. Sometimes the place of origin is stamped on the back or bottom of an object.

Object Condition

It is important to keep a close eye on your heirloom's condition. Regular inspections allow you to identify a problem in the beginning and stop it before any serious damage takes place. Give a brief description of the object, and then proceed to go into more detail. Describe scratches, flaking paint, discoloration, foxing, and missing or loose pieces.

History

Record the history of the object in the overall history of the world. Describe when it was made, why it was made, for whom was it made, when it stopped being made, and its impact within society. Include everything you know about the object from what has been told to you to research you have completed.

How did the current owner acquire it?

Describe how you or the current owner came to acquire the object. Was it purchased at an auction, thrift store, or antique shop? Did a friend or a family member give it to you? Do you know who owned it before you? Record as many details as you can, even what you were feeling when it came into your possession.

Personal anecdote

Write down a story about the object. It can be what you were doing when you first saw it, the role it has played in your family, or something you have learned about it during

your research. These stories are great because they help others to understand why you kept the object and what it meant to you. The object itself, the stories, and its importance are better understood by others and may be passed down from generation to generation.

Original Owner

Record the name of the original owner of the object if you know.

Place Collected/Received

Record the place in which you or the original owner first acquired the object such as the name of the antique store or yard sale.

Date Collected/Received

Write down the date it was acquired.

Price Paid for Object

Fill in the amount you paid for the object.

Receipt

Mark if you have the receipt. If you do, do not forget to place it within the object file.

Appraisal

Has the object been appraised? Mark it here. If it has, fill in "Appraiser, Current Value, Date of Appraisal, and Copy of Appraisal."

Current Value

Write down the current value of the object according to the appraiser.

Date of Appraisal

Record the date of the appraisal here.

Appraiser

If the object has been to an appraiser, record the appraiser's information here.

Copy of Appraisal

Do you have a copy of the appraisal? If you do, remember to keep the original or a copy in the object file.

Insurance

Is your object insured? Mark it here. If it is, fill in "Insurance Company and Insurance Policy."

Insurance Company

Record the insurance company that insures your object. Remember to include the name of the company, your agent's name, the address, and policy number.

Copy of Insurance Policy

If you have a copy of the insurance policy, remember to include it in the object file.

Other Associated Material

List any other documentation associated with your object in this box. Remember to keep a copy of the documentation in the file.

Current Owner

If you are the current owner of the object, write your information in the space provided. If you are not the owner, but are helping someone complete the form, record his or her information here.

Object Recipient Upon Death

If you have decided who should receive the item after you, indicate it in the space provided. If you do not have a specific person in mind, you may leave this area blank or write "Not Determined." A copy of this catalogue sheet should be given to the individual with the item so they may have the story behind the object.

The first step in preserving the future of the past has already been taken. The objects have been collected and saved by family members and other individuals. It is imperative future generations have an understanding for the importance of family heirlooms and items that have been saved. If the information is not recorded, its history and significance will be lost. We hope this information will guide you in preserving your heirlooms and bring you closer to their history.

Resources:

Art Restoration Services. 1993. *Documenting Your Possessions*. Charlottesville, VA: Art Restoration Services.

Kuentz, Patricia A. 2006. *Our Family Heirlooms and Their Stories*. Golden Valley, MN: Recollections.

SAVING NEBRASKA'S TREASURES		2
Reference #: Documenting Your Family History	Date Recorded:	Recorded by:
Title:	Object Type:	Medium/Material:
Current Location of Object:	Style:	Age/Date:
Photograph:		Maker/Artist & Mark:
		Location of Mark/Signature:
Description:		Number of Pieces:
Original use as shown		Adapted to another use. Original use:
Dimensions: <input type="checkbox"/> L/H: W: D: <input type="checkbox"/> C:		Place of Origin:
Object Condition:		
History:		

How did the current owner acquire it?

Personal anecdotes:

Original Collector/Owner:

Place Collected/Received:

Date Collected/Received:

Paid Price for Object: \$

Receipt: Yes No

Appraisal: Yes No

Current Value: \$

Appraiser:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ *State:* _____ *Zip*
Code: _____

Telephone: _____ **Fax:** _____

Date of Appraisal:

Copy of Appraisal:

Yes No

Insurance:

Yes No

Insurance Company:

Name: _____

Agent: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ **State:** _____ **Zip Code:** _____

Telephone: _____ **Fax:** _____

Policy No. _____

Copy of Policy:

Yes No

Other Associated Material:

Current Owner: Name: _____ Address: _____ <i>City:</i> _____ <i>State:</i> _____	Object Recipient Upon Death: Name: _____ Address: _____ City: _____ State: _____
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