



Main Menu – Genealogy A Beginner’s Workshop

Class 6 – This is Just the Beginning

Taking care of your documents and photos.

Conservation versus Preservation

Preservation’s goal is to prevent damage to documents, photos, etc., in the first place.

Conservation is restoring and repairing an item as close to original condition as possible. All repairs must be reversible, and ideally, easily reversible. Conservation is expensive and is not generally something an untrained person should undertake.

We will focus on **preservation** of your documents and photographs, i.e. exposure to exterior elements including dust, bugs, light, temperature.

1. What are you trying to prevent?

The goal is to prevent the chemical breakdown of the materials that are part of your document: paper, glue, ink, etc. Many papers are chemically unstable. This also extends to prevent exposure to external elements, i.e., dust, bugs, light, temperature.

2. How do you prevent it?

You can only slow down the chemical breakdown.

- Lower the temperature where you store your items. 65-70 degrees Fahrenheit is a good temperature range. The lower the temperature, the better. But we have to live with the documents in our homes. Try to avoid going above 70 degrees. Avoid sudden big fluctuations in temperature.
- Humidity is also a factor: Keep humidity at reasonable levels: not too high, not too low. A range of +40% to -5% is acceptable. Avoid sudden, big fluctuations in humidity
- Light is the third key factor. Store items in the dark. Avoid direct sunlight. Avoid exposure to UV light.
- Storage in containers that will mitigate the effects of the external contaminants including pests.

3. What does this mean to the world we live in?

- Avoid storing family documents in attics, basements and closets with outside walls.
- Display good quality copies: the copy can then fade and turn yellow or brittle and the original will be safely preserved.
- If displaying an original, hang it on an inside wall away from direct sunlight and use UV filtering glass. Check it regularly for damage. Make sure it is matted so it doesn’t touch the glass. Specify an acid-free mat.

4. First, do no harm.

Items are often damaged by our attempts to preserve or repair them.

Things to NOT do:

- No pressure sensitive tape
- No folding
- No laminating
- No rubber bands
- No paper clips
- No staples

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6. What should I do?
The basics for all items:
 - Clean hands
 - Avoid using ink
 - Do not directly touch ink, illustrations, or photo emulsion because it can transfer oils and finger prints

Store in the best environment you can. Provide physical protection.

 - Acid-free boxes
 - Acid-free paper: “perma-dur” is the phrase you will often see. Perma-dur paper is permanent and durable.
 - Acid-free binders
 - Use bookends (preferably non-damaging ones) to keep books straight on shelves to avoid the “lean”
 - Place books of similar size next to one another
 - Use plastic sleeves or folders made from inert material, such as polyester, polypropylene, or polyethylene. Avoid anything with vinyl in it. Plus, if it smells like plastic, don’t use it.

7. Photographs
 - For photographs, use acid-free, NON-BUFFERED or inert plastic storage materials.
 - Don’t let your images roll and/or curl.
 - Store negatives away from prints – different chemical compositions mean they can each affect the lifespan of the other.
 - Use gloves when handling – or at least make sure your hands are clean and free of lotion.

8. Scrapbooks
Mostly scrapbooks are a preservation nightmare.
 - Use the same recommendations as for other paper records
 - Will need to make individual decisions depending upon the type of scrapbook and the types of materials in it
 - You may want to take the pages out of the binding and store in folders in boxes

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10. Sources for safe storage materials
 Archival Products: <http://www.archival.com/>
 Gaylord: <http://gaylord.com/>
 Hollinger Metal Edge: <http://www.hollingermetalede.com/>
 University Products: <http://www.universityproducts.com/>

11. Preservation can be expensive.
 How can I possibly do the right thing for all my photos and documents? Make thoughtful decisions.
- Why is this item important? Is it important for the information contained, for the item itself, or for sentimental value?
 - Prioritize: some items get your best efforts; others get the leftovers
 - Do something! Don't let the fact that you can't do everything cause you to do nothing.
 - Remember, doing nothing is better than doing the wrong thing.

12. Digital files
 Back them up.
 LOCKSS: Lots of Copies Keeps Stuff Safe
 Store them safely: basically that means in the same environment as your paper items.
 Open them every so often so you will know the media is still good and that the file formats are still compatible
 Copy to new media every so often – 5 years or so
 Move them forward to new formats as they become available
 Store backups away from other files

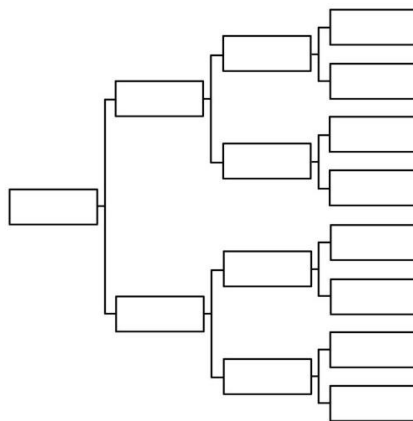
13. Other media types
 Reformatting is probably your best option for VHS and 16mm, etc.
 Retain the original if you can – and if it's safe to do so.

Keep track of your records

Find a method to keep track of all of the good information you've found. The best way to keep track is to document and organize as you go. Don't build a pile.

One method is using an ahnentafel chart. The word ahnentafel is from the German words "ahnen" meaning ancestors and "tafel" meaning table. Hence, ahnentafel means table of ancestors.

The ahnentafel chart starts with you. You are number 1. Traditionally, your father is number 2 (your number multiplied by 2). Your mother is number 3 (your number multiplied by 2, then add 1). For the next generation and subsequent generations, to identify the father of the person, multiply the person's number by 2. To identify the mother of the person, multiply the person's number by 2, then add 1.



The formula can be “reversed” to find the ancestor’s descendant. An ahnentafel chart can be used for an infinite number of generations. With the variety of today’s family units, this method can still be adapted for use to keep the family lines clear.

Questions and Answers

Genealogy is not a sprint. It is a *marathon*.

- No one knows everything. It’s okay to ask for help.
- You are likely to hit a “brick wall” at some point. Don’t be discouraged. Sometimes brick walls crumble more easily than you expect. Maybe it’s time to call in help. Maybe it’s time to step back and look at something different, or look at the wall differently.
- Set a goal. It is easier to look at one family or one person at a time. Don’t try to find all your ancestors at once.
- There may come a time when you find one family or one piece of a family that is quickly becoming your favorite. That’s okay. Don’t feel that you are ignoring other ancestors.
- Go beyond birth, marriage and death dates and locations. The more you learn about your ancestor, the more interesting and personal your ancestor becomes.

What are your questions?

HOMEWORK

View the following programs on Davenport Public Library YouTube.

- Preserving Family Heirlooms: Books, Paper, and Photographs, originally posted April 30, 2020, 1 hour, 11:02 minutes.
- Preservation Workshop: Encapsulation originally posted June 24, 2021, 17:29 minutes.
- Read Genealogical Estate Plan