



Find Your Past
VIRTUAL GENEALOGY FAIR

Preserving Your Family Records: Conversation and Questions

Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler

Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler will discuss how to preserve family papers and photographs, similar to her last year session (on [YouTube](#) starting at 1:13). This will be followed by a question-and-answer period designed to meet your needs and interests. Her talk covers how to preserve

family records and then safely mount, frame, and display them. She will also discuss the factors that cause damage to paper and photographs and how to store them in an environment that ensures their preservation. After her talk, have your questions ready!



Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler

Chief of the
Conservation Laboratory
National Archives
at College Park, MD

Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler is Chief of the Conservation Laboratory at the National Archives and Records Administration, where she has worked since 1985. She worked previously for the Society of American Archivists and the University of Illinois-Chicago, and has an undergraduate degree in English and a MSLS with a concentration in archives administration from Wayne State University. She studied bookbinding with Bill Anthony, and has published and lectured extensively in the area of archives preservation. She is the author of *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts* and co-author of *Photographs: Archival Care and Management*, both published by the Society of American Archivists, Chicago. She served as the lead of the conservation team treating and re-encasing the Charters of Freedom, 1999–2003.

Preserving Your Family Records



Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler
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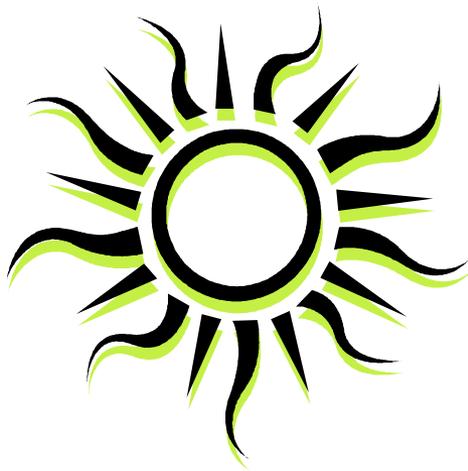
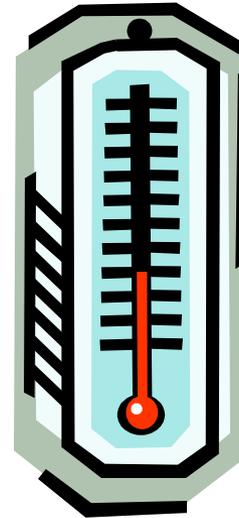
Basic Preservation Steps

- Good environment
- Non-damaging storage materials
- Careful handling
- Be alert: consider condition
- Limited display
- Use your nose...it will tell you if something is happening!

Environment

Critical Factors

- Temperature
- Relative Humidity



- Light Source and Levels
- Pollutants

Avoid Storing Papers and Photographs...

- Near sources of heat or moisture
- In attics, basements, garages
- Moderate conditions that are comfortable for people are suitable for storing most papers, books, and photographs

Preservation Problems Affecting Paper

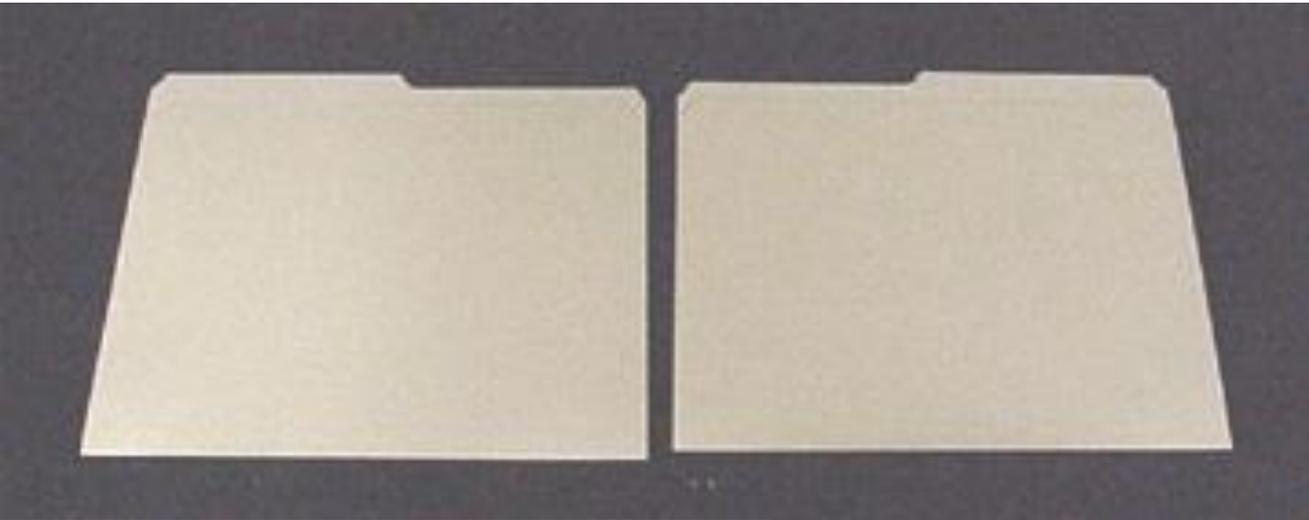
- Some papers are of inherent poor quality, such as newsprint
- Poor quality papers...and those exposed to poor environmental conditions...can become weak, brittle, yellowed
- Folded and rolled papers: special concerns

Mold and Insects



- Elevated moisture can cause mold growth
- Pests use paper for food or nesting material

Storing Loose Papers or Documents



- Alkaline folders and document boxes, often referred to as acid-free

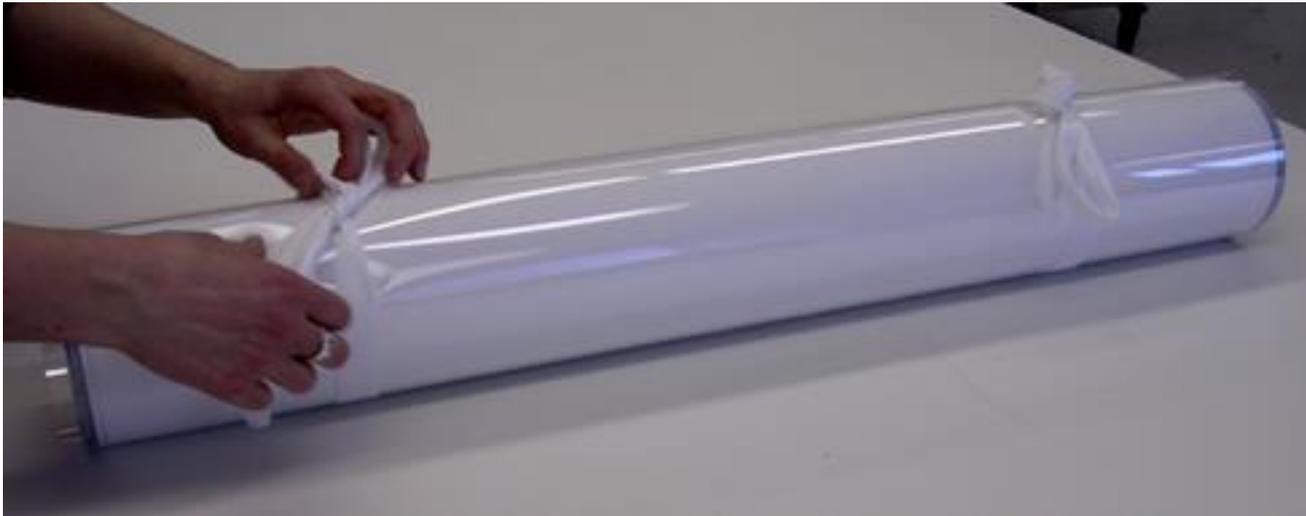
Oversized Items (Maps and Posters)

- Oversized records can be rolled onto acid-free tubes



Protect Rolled Items

- Protect rolled items from light exposure by using an outer wrap of acid-free paper
- Provide even greater protection with a final wrap of plastic (polyester or polyethylene) around the entire package. Tie the roll with cotton twill tape



Preservation Problems Affecting Photographs

- Poor original processing can result in yellowing and staining
- Metallic sheen known as “silvering” on black and white photos
- Color photographs are often unstable; dyes will shift and fade
- Poor quality paper supports and mounts can be weak and crack
- Wide variety of digital prints with different stability issues

Weak Damaged Mount



Preservation Tools

- Cool storage for color photographs
- Copying or scanning to protect originals

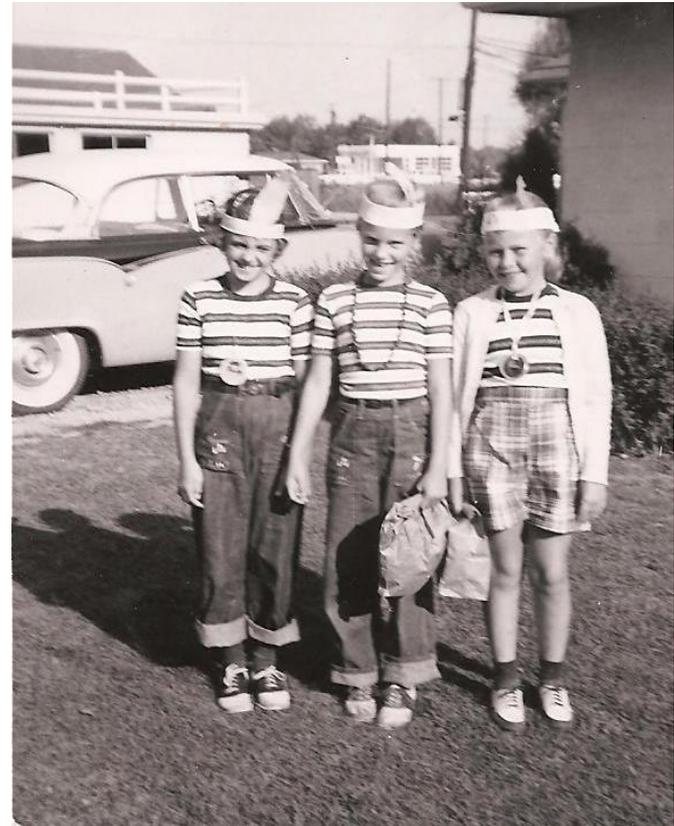


Image Permanence Institute

Visit the IPI site for information on storing photographs and the stability of digital prints.

<http://www.imagepermanenceinstitute.org/>

Storing Photographs

- Paper enclosures: alkaline envelopes, sleeves, folders
- Plastic enclosures: meet preservation requirements
- Safe plastics: polyester, polyethylene, polypropylene
- Avoid polyvinylchloride (PVC) [new car smell!]
- Purchase from suppliers of preservation materials

Alkaline Envelopes



Polyester L-Sleeves



Photo Albums

- Historic albums contain difference quality mounting sheets and different binding styles
- Potential problems with adhesive staining and weak paper that is broken at edges
- Respect and preserve historical structures

Mounted Photos with Original Captions



Problems with Some Modern Photo Albums

- “Magnetic” albums
- Poor quality papers
- Adhesives cause staining and can lose adhesive properties
- Unknown plastics can be unstable, cause yellowing, and adhere to photos

Preservation Quality Albums

- Polyester or polyethylene plastic sleeves available in different sizes
- No adhesives needed



Displaying your Family Treasures

- LIMIT light exposure
 - No sunlight
 - No fluorescent
 - Limited incandescent lighting
- Signs of Damage
 - Documents that are weak, brittle, or yellow to dark brown in color
 - Faded ink
 - Photos with a metallic sheen, that are darkened, cracked, or that have undergone changes in color

Display Copies Instead of Originals

- Color photocopy
- Digitally scan and print
- Retain originals safely in dark storage

When Matting and Framing Original Documents

- Use window mat to keep document from direct contact with glass
- Use acid-free rag board mats and backing boards
- Avoid adhesives by using photo corners

Plastic or Paper Corners

- Use polyester or acid free paper
- Adhesives do not contact document



PASSED
PHOTO ACTIVITY TEST

Avoid...

- Pressure-sensitive tapes
 - “Scotch” brand tapes
 - Masking tape
- White glues, such as Elmer’s
- Rubber cement
- Adhesives used with hot glue guns

Preserving Books

- Keep in original format
- Box for protection



Shelving Books

- Shelf books according to size so they can support one another
- Do not intersperse tall and short books
- Store large volumes flat
- Avoid unsealed wooden shelves
- Protect books from light to keep spines and covers from fading

American Institute for Conservation

- Referral service for conservators in your geographic area

The American Institute for Conservation
of Historic & Artistic Works

1156 15th Street NW, Ste. 320

Washington, DC 20005

<http://www.conservation-us.org/>

National Archives and Records Administration

- For more information about the National Archives and Records Administration look on-line at: <http://www.archives.gov/>
- For more information about preservation practices at NARA look on-line at: <http://www.archives.gov/preservation/>



**Presenter didn't
get to your question?**

**You may email us at
*inquire@nara.gov***