Public Service: Military & Civilian

NATIONAL ARCHIVES

2023 GENEALOGY SERIES

May 3–June 14 on Wednesdays at 1 p.m. ET

www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-series/2023
Welcome!

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) is pleased to present this educational series of lectures on how to conduct family research.

As one of the nation’s premier genealogy institutions, it is our mission to inform the public about National Archives holdings that relate to family history and to make those records available to you.
About the Sessions

Our presentations will demonstrate how to use federal resources at the National Archives and Records Administration for genealogical research. This year we focus on individuals who have served our nation in military or civilian service. We also have a session on how to preserve your own family collections.

National Archives presenters are broadcasting from Washington, DC; College Park, MD; Denver, CO; and St. Louis, MO. Sessions are intended for beginners to experienced family historians—all are welcome!
Join the conversation!

Participate with the presenters and other family historians during a session’s premiere.

Live Chat on YouTube
Log in and type your questions and comments.

Follow us at @USNatArchives on Twitter and join the Genealogy Series conversation using #GenieSeries2023.
Instructions

Show More
• captioning
• handout
• evaluation

Chat
• log in
• participate
• ask questions

Videos and presentation materials remain available after the premiere date.
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<td><strong>Civilians at War: Records of Participation in U.S. Military Conflicts</strong></td>
<td><strong>Claire Kluskens</strong> - Subject Matter Expert for Genealogy/Census Related Records and Digital Projects Archivist from the National Archives in Washington, DC</td>
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<td><strong>Cody White</strong> - Subject Matter Expert for Native American Related Records and an Archivist from the National Archives at Denver</td>
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<td>June 7</td>
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<td><strong>Accessing and Understanding Korean War Army Unit Records</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rachael Salyer</strong> - Subject Matter Expert in Modern Military Records and an Archivist from the National Archives at College Park, MD</td>
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<td>June 14</td>
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<td><strong>Creating Your Own Preservation Survey and Plan for Family Collections</strong></td>
<td><strong>Sara Holmes</strong> - Conservator in Preservation Programs from the National Archives at St. Louis</td>
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<td>June 14</td>
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Planning, Techniques, and Strategies for Preserving Family Collections and Stories

Learn how professionals preserve records with surveys to create a plan, use archival techniques, and select storage strategies. Surveys help you create a plan of action to determine record treatment, housing, and storage. Archival techniques can be used on your own personal collections of paper-based materials, photographs, and objects. Strategies include how to identify storage needs for papers and photographs. We will tie this all together and show you how significant documents and records help to tell family stories.
Sara Holmes started working at the National Archives in Preservation Programs at St. Louis in 2007. She is currently a Conservator. Before coming to the National Archives, she was a conservator at Texas Tech University and the Missouri State Archives. Ms. Holmes has a Master’s in Library and Information Science with a Certificate of Advanced Study in Conservation of Library and Archival Materials from the University of Texas and a Master’s in History from the University of New Orleans. She is also a Certified Archivist and was selected as a member of the first cohort of the Archives Leadership Institute in 2008.
Planning, Techniques, and Strategies for Preserving Family Collections and Stories

Sara Holmes
June 2023
Creating a preservation strategy for large institutional collections can include:

- Environmental standards for different kinds of records
- Identification of at-risk formats (audio, video, digital storage)
- Random sample surveys (statistically based)
- Collaboration with staff to help meet the needs of users
- Emergency planning

29-foot-high shelving on the first floor of the National Personnel Records Center
Assessing Risk & Priorities through Surveys
The significance of a collection depends on its provenance and context.

Provenance
- The origin or source of something
- Information regarding the origins, custody, and ownership of an item or collection

Original Order
- The organization and sequence of records established by the creator of the records

From the Dictionary of Archives Terminology, Society of American Archivists
Evaluating Risk

Risk Management
- Describes the activities people and organizations undertake to identify, assess, and treat the risks that could potentially affect their businesses or organizations (or their family history!)

Factors affecting risk
- Environment (temperature and relative humidity) in which collections are stored
- The media, materials, and condition of the items in your collections
- Accessibility of the item (book, floppy disc, 35mm slides, Betamax tape, audiotape, Wordstar file, etc.)
- Condition (inherent vice, natural chemical deterioration, and/or physical damage)
Case Studies in Assessing Risk & Priorities in Family Collections
Evaluating Significance & Risk

Case Study: Aunt Mable’s teapot

• Aunt Mable marked Dad’s name on tape on the bottom (but the tape fell off years ago).
• What did the teapot mean to Mable?
• Why did she want dad to have it?
• We don’t know!

Significance: Low
(But it is cute)

• Materials: Porcelain
• Condition: Excellent
• Stability: Low – easily broken
• Housing: Protect from breaking in secure display or box with padding
Evaluating Significance & Risk

Case Study: Toy Army Trucks, “U.S. Army Transport”

On his last Christmas at home, Wendell gave these toys to Dad.

Wendell was in the U.S. Army’s 10th Mountain Division (Ski Patrol).

He was killed in battle in Italy in 1945.

Significance: High

- Materials: Wood, metal, paint
- Condition: Very good, some paint loss; stable and durable
- Housing: Display, or store in a fitted or padded box to keep from rolling
Grandpa Sam was a rural mail carrier for 28 years.

His “Safe Driver” awards were significant career achievements.

Significance: High
Evaluating Significance
Case Study: Leather Mail Pouch

But then we learned more –

Family documents and photos now combined with archival sources gave far more detail.

The Post Office Official Personnel Files has a 39-page record!
And even more –

Wendell’s Official Military Personnel File was lost in the 1973 fire.

However, there are other sources.

Sergeant Merrill Archard to Reick family, 1945 (family collection)
But then we learned more –

An unexpected family conversation led to a better understanding of the bigger story.

Significance: Great American Story!
Document your findings related to objects, photos, and papers to demonstrate significance.

Cite your sources! Tie together family items, stories

• Establishing significance can ensure that the next generations appreciate the stories connected to family collections—and will seek to preserve papers, photos, and objects passed down.

• You may wish to contact an archive and discuss donations so that your family collection is available to researchers and for potential exhibits, books, or articles.
Creating Your Own Risk Assessment Survey
For our purposes today, let’s define stability to determine risk:

Stability: The quality of resisting change or deterioration (inherent vice, accessibility without obsolete technology, durability)

• Low risk—no obvious signs of instability, incompatibility, or fragility
• Moderate risk—minor instability seen, such as wear or discoloration
• High risk—breakable, fragile, has lost or will lose information, or is already inaccessible
Assessing Risk Based on Condition

For our purposes today, let’s define condition to determine risk:

Condition: The current physical state of your item

• Minor damage—shows damage, but can be handled without an aid or support, such as a box, folder, or sleeve
• Moderate damage—can be carefully handled, may need minor treatment, would likely benefit from an enclosure, such as a box, folder, or sleeve
• Severe damage—cannot be handled without easily causing more damage, would likely benefit from professional treatment
Assessing Risk

Using a matrix will help you determine your priorities based on risk and identify your order of priorities.
Focusing on Assessing Risk For Paper Collections
Creased and Torn Paper

- Condition: Minor damage
- Stability: High to moderate
- Low risk
- Housing — Sleeved in polyester, or simply unfolded and kept inside a folder
• Condition: Severe damage
• Stability: Low
  Very hard to handle without creating more damage
• Housing: Sleeve in polyester
• Treatment: Consult a conservator
Polyester sleeves can have a static charge. If the fragile paper is forced into the sleeve against a resisting static charge, it may be torn. Use a piece of clean paper to support the fragile page and slide them in together, carefully removing the supporting paper once your fragile sheet is in the sleeve.
Video of Placing a Document in a Polyester L-sleeve

[youtu.be/tOP2t26AdhQ](https://youtu.be/tOP2t26AdhQ)
Creased and Torn Paper (continued)

Paper is a 3-dimensional object, made of fibers that bond and interconnect

When creased, fibers are damaged
• Creases will also be relaxed over time if pages are simply unfolded and placed in folders
• Use existing folds if placing papers in folders that are too large to completely unfold
• Use interleaving if you are concerned about migration or transfer
Bone folders can be used to lightly relax creases in paper and prevent additional damage.

Teflon folders can also be used.
Creased and Torn Paper (continued)

Humidification is common in labs, but not recommended at home!
• Be aware that some inks and media will bleed or sink – or disappear!
• Some papers can block and fuse together (example: coated papers)
• Photographs can be damaged

Mending tears is also not recommended
• Never use any kind of tape with adhesive
• Stabilize fragile paper in polyester sleeves instead of attempting to treat

A preservation technician places documents from an Official Military Personnel File (OMPF) damaged in the 1973 fire in a humidification dome.
Focusing on Assessing Risk for Books
Books Overstuffed with Papers

- Condition: Minor to moderate damage
- Stability: Moderate — Spine lost on book, but binding intact; mix of different papers and acidities, but nothing is fragile
- Housing: Use folders, interfiling envelopes, or polyester sleeves for inserted materials
Document original order first!

Use regular folders, and possibly also paper file folder inserts—like the one below—for loose papers removed from books. Label each folder with the page number where the papers are found.
Common Problem

Book with Loose Gatherings

• Condition: Moderate to severe damage

• Stability: Low to moderate
  Binding has separations and some sections are falling out; there are inserted papers with a mix of different acidities/discolorations, but nothing is fragile

• Housing: Use folders or interfile folders, or polyester sleeves for inserted materials, documenting original order. Purchase a custom-fit box to stabilize the book

• Possible treatment: Consult a conservator
Focusing on Assessing Risk For Photographs
Cased Photographs

• Condition: Moderate damage

• Stability: Low, very fragile – never open cased photographs!

• Housing: Needs protection from dust or accidental damage, such as an “acid-free” box padded with tissue. This box is a make-do! We made do with an old hard-covered watch box and unprinted tissue that was on hand.

• Treatment: Consult a conservator specializing in cased photograph treatment
Photo on Canvas

- Condition: Severe damage, extensive losses
- Stability: Low, easily crumbles off
- Housing: Wrap carefully in tissue (no fabric!) and box. Canvases are ideally stored vertically to prevent sagging
- Treatment: Consult a conservator
Silvered Photographs

- Condition: Minor damage
- Stability: High
- Housing: Paper, plastic sleeve, or envelope that passes the P.A.T. (Photo Activity Test)

Silvering is seen at an angle only
Dirt or Mold?

Minor or severe damage?

High stability or fragile?
Dirt or Mold? (continued)

Mold can come in any color
• If actively growing, it is moist and wet
• If dormant, powdery and easily inhaled
• Can noticeably grow where it can feed (but be aware—high humidity can foster mold growth!)
• Dormant mold can actively grow again
• With exposure, mold can cause health issues

Recommendation
• Isolate in a bag or at least a box stored away from clean items
• Treatment by a conservator experienced in working with mold
Dirt or Mold? (continued)

- Conservators cannot make a determination from images alone and would need to assess in-person to verify
- If in doubt, assume you have mold, not dirt, and isolate the item
- If certain you have dirt or dust only, use a soft brush to gently clean

(Top to bottom: goat hair dusting brush, two sizes of sable hair brushes, two sizes of sheep hair hake brushes)
Implementing Your Plan
• Stable environment is the first consideration. Do not store in attics, basements, garages, or any area where temperature and humidity are not controlled.

• Check storage areas periodically for any problems such as leaks or pests.

• Stabilize the most at-risk. At a minimum, use clean boxes with no signs of damage, deterioration, or odor.
Bringing Your Plan Together (continued)

Improve housing by progressively seeking to move from good, to better, to best.

• Keep in mind how much space you have for storage.
  • Check the exterior measurements of boxes so they fit on your shelves!
  • Small boxes may need to be consolidated in larger boxes (photos, custom book boxes).
  • Items needing padding (textiles, breakable objects) will take up space.

• Consider whether different branches of your family should be stored separately—keep different provenances separate.
  • Describing your collections may be easier if family groups are recognized.
  • Consider how collections will be passed on to the next generation. For example, you may be splitting maternal and paternal collections among relatives.
Beware: There is no certification for products called “Acid Free” or “Archival”

What to look for:

• Products that are pH neutral
• Lignin-free paper-based products
• Boxes and folders with a buffer (usually calcium carbonate)
• Enclosures and supplies for use with photographs that have passed the P.A.T. Test (Photo Activity Test)

If interleaving:

• Use buffered tissue (with an alkaline reserve) for black-and-white photos, negatives, most papers, and cotton-based textiles
• Use unbuffered tissue (no alkaline reserve) for color photographs and negatives, blueprints, silk, wool, leather, and metals
• Using Boxes
  • Consider custom-sized, machine-made boxes for books, albums, and scrapbooks that may need support
  • Boxes will provide an additional layer of safety in case of damage, as well as provide a microclimate

**TIP:** Buying in bulk is typically cheaper, but some purchases may have minimum order requirements. Consider working jointly with friends or through a local Genealogy Society to make a joint order to bring the costs down.
The Preservation Self-Assessment Program (PSAP) is a free online tool that helps collection managers prioritize efforts to improve conditions of collections. Through guided evaluation of materials, storage/exhibit environments, and institutional policies, the PSAP produces reports on the factors that impact the health of cultural heritage materials, and defines the points from which to begin care.

Refer to the handout for this presentation
For More on Preservation

www.archives.gov/preservation

www.culturalheritage.org/resources/collections-care

www.nedcc.org

Email us at preservation@nara.gov
Finding Personnel Files

The National Archives at St. Louis holds records for both Official Military Personnel Files and Official Personnel Folders of former federal civilian employees

www.archives.gov/st-louis

Special thanks for assistance to:

Cousins Becky and Dana

National Archives at St. Louis research room staff Eric Kilgore, George Fuller, and Kayla Dawkins
After the broadcast . . .

Email questions to
inquire@nara.gov

Video recordings of lectures and
downloadable handouts
will remain online at

www.archives.gov/calendar/genealogy-series/2023
Feedback

We value your opinion.

Please take a minute to complete a short evaluation. Your comments help us maintain the quality of our services and plan future programs.

Thank you!

Event Evaluation:

www.surveymonkey.com/r/KYREventEval
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<td>Sasa Simic</td>
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Educational resources on how to access and conduct research using U.S. federal government records held at the National Archives and Records Administration.

Know Your Records
www.archives.gov/calendar/know-your-records

Videos and Handouts on YouTube
Playlists: Civilian Service and U.S Veterans
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<td>August 10</td>
<td>Sound Recordings of the World War II Era</td>
<td>Ashley Behringer – Archivist from the National Archives at College Park, MD</td>
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<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>September 13</td>
<td>The Records of the Provost Marshal General and Enemy Prisoners of War Held in the United States during World War II</td>
<td>Rachael Salyer - Subject Matter Expert in Modern Military Records and an Archivist from the National Archives at College Park, MD</td>
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Questions & Answers in Chat

Please stay if you have questions.

Although this concludes the video portion of the broadcast, we will continue to take your questions in chat for another 10 minutes.