

Service Bulletin

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PROTECT YOUR FAMILY PAPERS

Many family papers have value, both to family members and to historical researchers. Such papers include Bible and family records, letters and diaries. They often come to archives for safekeeping and research purposes.

The history of paper is a tale of discovery and exploration. Invented by the Chinese about 105 A.D., the formula for paper was carried by trade routes through such exotic places as Samarkand, Baghdad, Egypt and Morocco. Paper factories were present in Europe by the 12th century.

Paper—the material information is recorded on—has had an incredible influence on the cultural, social and informational history of our world. Its presence encouraged Gutenberg's invention of movable type, and the availability of paper with the development of printing in the 15th century allowed the increase of book production, reading and the spread of ideas.

James Westfall Thompson in *The Medieval Library* (1939) states that “modern society is founded upon paper.” Today we are almost overwhelmed by it.

We also take paper for granted, often unaware of the biological enemies that feed on this substance and of the harmful practices that lead to the destruction of both the paper and the information on it.

We recommend the following measures to extend the life of your family papers. These are measures designed to slow the process of deterioration. Any active conservation practices should be done by a professional conservator.

The Environment

Minimize temperature extremes and fluctuations. Ideals are no higher than 70 degrees F with 50 percent relative humidity. Keep materials cool and dry.

Avoid storing in attics, basements, outbuildings and

areas around water pipes. Such environments encourage mold and mildew, and moisture rusts fasteners.

Avoid direct light. Sunlight and fluorescent light weaken and fade papers and inks. Store papers in a dark area.

Avoid food and drink while handling materials. These items can soil your papers and attract insects and rodents.

Avoid dirt and dust. These are abrasive elements. Keep your papers covered.

Store in acid-free boxes and use acid-free folders that are buffered with an alkaline reserve. Although more expensive, these materials help preserve your materials.

Handling Practices

Wear cotton gloves and wash hands prior to handling historic materials.

Unfold materials carefully but do not force or back fold. Folds and creases weaken paper.

Avoid clips and fasteners including staples and pins, pressure-sensitive tapes, rubber bands and glues and other adhesives.

Photocopy newspaper clippings instead of keeping the original (noting date and source), or separate them from other papers. The acid in newsprint transfers to surrounding papers, discoloring and weakening the fibers.

Make security copies. Many repositories will photocopy materials if the papers meet collection policies, and the repository can retain a copy for research purposes.

These are simple practices that can prevent problems with paper materials. For more information, a list of resources and suppliers is available on request from Concordia Historical Institute.