

Archiving Photographs and Family Papers

Information courtesy of the National Archives
<https://www.archives.gov/preservationfamily-archives>

Tips for Handling Family Papers and Photographs

- Have a clean, clear space prepared to place the originals before you get them out.
- Don't eat, drink, or smoke around originals
- Wash hands before handling paper and don't apply lotion as it can stain paper. Paper can be handled without gloves because clean, lotion-free hands will not stain the paper and gloves can make it hard to handle delicate paper.
- Handle photographs and negatives with gloves. Fingerprints can cause permanent stains on photographs and negatives.

Storing Family Papers and Photographs

Store items at a low temperature and a low relative humidity

- The lower the temperature the longer your items will last, because cooler temperatures slow the rate of chemical decay and reduce insect activity. Keep the temperature below 75 degrees Fahrenheit (F).
- Keep the relative humidity (rH) below 65% to prevent mold growth and reduce insect activity.
- Avoid very low relative humidity because relative humidity below 15% can cause brittleness.

Digitizing Family Papers and Photographs

Digitizing your originals can allow you to view and share your items without handling, which can cause damage. Keep your originals after you digitize them, because digital files have their own preservation risks and can easily be lost. Whether digitizing your family papers yourself or having a company do it, it is important that the originals be handled carefully so they are not damaged in the process

A few considerations in digitizing:

- For flat paper and photographs, make sure the original fits complete on the surface of the scanner. The lid of the scanner can crush and crease the original if the paper doesn't fit on the scanner.
- For books, use a copy stand instead of a flatbed scanner. Use book supports, wedges or a cradle so the binding is opened comfortably without force.
- Automatic feed scanners are not suitable for fragile, weak, bent, or valuable papers; papers can jam and become torn in automatic feed scanners.

- File Naming: Use only the letters of the Latin alphabet (A-Z, a-z) when creating alpha-numeric identifications. Don't use spaces, punctuation or symbols. Use hyphens and underscores instead of spaces.
- Add basic Metadata to files: Who, What, Where, and When. Metadata helps find and identify files later in time; there are a number of metadata options.
- Back Up your files – Follow the 3-2-1 Rule. Three copies, stored on two different media, and one copy located off site.

What to Do About Moldy or Insect-infested Family Papers and Photographs

If your books, papers, or photographs are infested with insects

Isolate infested materials, so the insects don't spread. Insects can be difficult to eradicate. Consider the value of the item and if it can be replaced such as a mass market book. Consult a conservator about valuable or sentimental items that are infested with pests.

Learn more about this at:

- Northeast Document conservation center – Integrated Pest Management (<https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/3.-emergency-management/3.10-integrated-pest-management>)
- Integrated Pest Management Working Group – Solutions (<http://museumpests.net/solutions/>)

Help! My books, papers, or photographs are moldy

- Mold can be a health hazard to people, so limit handling of the moldy items. Remove the source of water or high humidity so the mold stops growing.
- Consider the value of the item and if it can be easily replaced. Consult a conservator to have valuable or sentimental items treated.
- Learn more about treating mold at: Northeast Document conservation Center – Emergency Salvage of Moldy Books and Paper (<https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/3.-emergency-management/3.8-emergency-salvage-of-moldy-books-and-paper>)