

# Archival Preservation Information and Resources

Hidden Collections Initiative for Pennsylvania Small Archival Repositories

<http://www.hsp.org/hcipsar>

## Preservation Best Practices

### General Guidelines

- Keep food and beverages away from collections
- Use clean hands when handling collections. Use cotton gloves when handling photographs.
- Handle items gently
- Do not use metal paper clips, staples, scotch tape, or rubber bands on archival materials

### Environment

Controlling the environment in which your archival collections are housed is the single most important step you can take to ensure their preservation. Try to maintain moderate, constant temperature and relative humidity levels 24 hours/day, 365 days/year. Ideal levels are 65-70<sup>o</sup>F for temperature and 40-50% for relative humidity. The most important consideration is to strive to maintain an environment without extreme fluctuations in these levels. Light levels should also be kept to an absolute minimum, particularly sunlight.

- If necessary, seal windows using plastic sheeting and tape.
- Keep outside doors and windows closed.
- Move collections away from radiant heat sources.
- Monitor humidity levels and if necessary and possible purchase a room dehumidifier.
- Limit light exposure. Use room darkening curtains or blinds on windows to block UV rays, and turn off lights when rooms are not in use.

### Storage Enclosures and Equipment

Use archival-quality storage materials, such as non-acidic boxes, folders, and sleeves. These archival enclosures work to create a “microclimate” that helps to protect collections from temperature and humidity fluctuations. When filling boxes it is important to not over or under-fill them, as this can warp materials. Use appropriate storage furniture (metal shelving, cabinets, and flat files) to keep boxes off of floors and to allow adequate room for objects to be stored and accessed. Avoid wooden storage equipment if possible. Storage supplies should be purchased from established archival supply companies such as Hollinger/Metal Edge ([www.hollingermetaledge.com](http://www.hollingermetaledge.com)) or Gaylord ([www.gaylord.com](http://www.gaylord.com)).

### Housekeeping

A good, systematic housekeeping program should be a priority because clean storage and exhibition areas significantly aid in the long-term preservation of collections. A consistent housekeeping program is also a good opportunity to identify objects and collections that might need improved storage or conservation treatment, identify pest infestation or damage, and to identify possible concerns with the building itself.

## Preservation Resources

The standard reference book for archival preservation is *Preserving Archives and Manuscripts* (2nd edition) by Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, available from the Society of American Archivists ([www.archivists.org](http://www.archivists.org)). The following websites offer excellent information on preservation:

- Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts ([www.ccaha.org](http://www.ccaha.org))
- Northeast Document Conservation Center ([www.nedcc.org](http://www.nedcc.org))
  - Low Cost/No Cost Improvements in Climate Control  
([http://www.nedcc.org/resources/leaflets/2The\\_Environment/06LowCostNoCost.php](http://www.nedcc.org/resources/leaflets/2The_Environment/06LowCostNoCost.php))
- Connecting to Collections Online Community ([www.connectingtocollections.org](http://www.connectingtocollections.org))
- American Institute for Conservation ([www.conservation-us.org](http://www.conservation-us.org)).