

Preserving Family Records

How and Where to Store Your Family Records

- Store books, documents, and photographs in clean, insect-free areas. Keep temperature and humidity moderate and stable. Avoid storing records in attics and basements, or in any area near sources of heat and water.
- Protect materials from direct exposure to windows and light sources. Light--especially sunlight and fluorescent lighting--fades records and accelerates their deterioration. Consider displaying copies of documents and photographs instead of originals.
- Unfold documents before you store them.
- Convert your unstable records to more permanent formats. For example: copy newspaper clippings to acid-free paper; copy color photographs (which fade over time) to black and white.

Tools to Use and Tools to Avoid

- Use a pencil instead of an ink pen to label and identify materials. Inks contain sulfur and dyes that can discolor, bleed through, and otherwise harm paper and photographic materials.
- To ensure the long-term preservation of your materials, store them in special acid-free or buffered boxes, folders, and sleeves ("Acid-free" products contain no acid; "buffered" products contain alkaline to help neutralize any acid in items being stored.) Acids present in wood and most commercial paper products can fade, stain, and speed the deterioration of your family records.
- Avoid placing tape, labels, rubber bands, metal fasteners, and liquid glues in contact with documents and photographs. These items can stain and tear your records, and speed their deterioration.
- Most scrapbooks and photo albums sold commercially are not designed for the long-term preservation of materials. "Magnetic" albums, in fact, contain many elements that speed the deterioration of records. Invest in acid-free and buffered albums that can help preserve your keepsakes. (Such products are available through archival supply companies)
- Use paper comers to mount items in albums and scrapbooks. Avoid applying tape, glue, or any other adhesive directly to your materials.
- Interleave scrapbooks and photo albums with acid-free or alkaline-buffered paper.