

Saving Your Family History

Katie O'Connell

What is all this
stuff?

(...and why is it in my
basement?)




Keep It Safe


Everything
deteriorates

Goal: keep it from
going faster

The Environment

- DO: keep it cool and dry
 - DON'T: keep it in your attic, basement or garage
 - Stability is key: a good target is 70 degrees Fahrenheit and RH below 55%
 - Light is the enemy: natural and artificial
 - Be on the lookout for bugs, water and mildew
- 

Storage

- “Archival Quality”: acid-free, lignin-free, passed P.A.T., buffered to resist acid migration
 - P.A.T. (Photographic Activity Test): international standard, guarantees that the enclosure will not react chemically with photographs.
 - Plastic? Yes: archival-grade polyester. NO!: polyvinyl chloride (PVC)
 - So many options: boxes, folders, envelopes, sleeves, etc...
 - Size matters: things should fit in their containers, no folds or hanging edges
 - Please no!: Tape, glue, rubber bands, paperclips
- 

Handling

- Clean hands, clean workspace: no hand lotions, food or drink
- Be gentle
- Gloves or no gloves?
 - Clean cotton or nitrile gloves for handling photos and negatives
- Twice as gentle: rolled, folded, creased
 - Store papers flat but don't try to flatten brittle creases
 - Don't try to unroll tightly curled photos or papers
 - Don't backfold items to flatten them



Keep It Organized

Family history is
everywhere


Goal: organize the
important stuff
without getting
overwhelmed

Getting Started


Make a plan

- Set reasonable goals for yourself
- What are you hoping to accomplish? What's the timeline?

Gather everything together

- Where is everything?
 - What do you have, what are you keeping?
 - Get a bird's-eye view
- 

Archival Basics

- Original order: sort material by groups, not individual items.
Context matters!
 - Metadata: data about data AKA “Who’s in that photo again?”
 - Finding aids: what’s in your collection and how to find it
 - Side note: documentation is your friend
 - Weeding and prioritization
- 

Get the Whole Story

Are there gaps in your family history?

- Put out the call
- Interview your relatives
- Ask the internet

Write it down!



Keep it Digital

Digitization & Born-Digital Files

Digitization: Making digital copies of physical materials (eg photographs, letters, scrapbooks, VHS tapes)

- Great for preservation, access & display copies, sharing with family
 - Scan once and scan well
- In-house vs paid services
- File types, resolution

Born-Digital: Files created digitally (eg on a phone or computer), with no physical counterpart.

Digital Preservation

Challenges

- Bit rot and deterioration
- Media/software obsolescence
- So much stuff!

How to Manage Them: Create a preservation strategy

- Survey, identify and prioritize
- Organization: inventories, weeding, file/folder naming
- Multiple copies: 3-2-1 Rule, LOCKSS
- Refreshment and migration



Resources

Further Reading

- How to Preserve Family Archives - National Archives (NARA)
 - <https://www.archives.gov/preservation/family-archives>
- Preservation - Library of Congress (LOC)
 - <https://www.loc.gov/preservation/>
- Personal Archiving: Preserving Your Digital Memories - (LOC)
 - <https://digitalpreservation.gov/personalarchiving/?loclr=blogsig>
- Caring for Private and Family Collections - Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC)
 - <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/overview>
- The Family Curator
 - <https://thefamilycurator.com/>

Archival Supplies

- Conservation Resources International (www.conservationresources.com)
- Gaylord Archival (www.gaylord.com)
- Hollinger Metal Edge (www.hollingermetaledge.com)
- MicroClimates (www.archivalboxes.com)
- Print File (www.printfile.com)
- Talas (www.talasonline.com)
- University Products (www.universityproducts.com)