

CARE OF SCRAPBOOKS

Scrapbooks can be unique, fascinating, even artistic glimpses into the essence of a person, place, or event. They can also be a real headache to take care of.

Scrapbooks can contain an accumulation of all sorts of different items, from photographs, newspaper clippings, and play bills to pressed flowers, ribbons, and locks of hair. These bits of history are fastened to the album pages in any number of different ways; glue, tape, photo corners, staples, and slits in the page are all common. Then there is the scrapbook itself, many of which were mass-produced with poor-quality paper and cheap binding materials. Over the years, these factors can combine to create acidic pages and weak, deteriorated bindings. And although most scrapbooks were manufactured to allow the book structure to expand when items were inserted, many were filled beyond that capacity, leading to strained or broken bindings.

So many different materials with different chemistries reacting differently together over the years can create some real preservation challenges!

Preventive Care

There are several basic ways to reduce damage to scrapbooks.

- Store them in a stable, moderate environment.
- Keep them out of the light, especially sunlight and fluorescent light.
- Shelve smaller scrapbooks (if they are in good condition) upright, next to books of similar size.
- If book ends are used, use ones that are large enough to support the whole cover area.
- Never shelve a scrapbook (or any other kind of book, for that matter) on its fore edge, as this can cause the text block to pull away from the spine.
- Flat storage is best for larger and overstuffed scrapbooks and those with broken bindings or loose items. Store them on shelves deep enough to give them full support, with nothing on top of them.
- When exhibiting a scrapbook, use book cradles or other supports to avoid stress on the binding, and change the pages on view to reduce light damage to any single page.
- Make a copy for use, so the original can be handled as little as possible. (See “Reformatting” section below.)
- If the scrapbook is bound with posts or strings, consider temporarily disbinding it before viewing. This will help keep brittle pages from bending and breaking as they are turned.
- Keep hands clean or wear white cotton gloves whenever handling the original scrapbook.
- Make sure that anyone handling the original understands that the item is fragile and must be handled gently.
- See our Conservation Note on *Storage and Housing* for more information.

But it’s already damaged!

Scrapbooks will often come with pre-existing problems. After all, most scrapbooks have not been sitting on a shelf all their lives. Instead, they have been examined and handled by many different people in many different settings over the years. These factors, combined with all the inherent problems of the different components of scrapbooks, often result in damage.

Repairs attempted by untrained individuals can result in immediate damage or long term problems. A professional conservator should handle any complex treatments. For help finding and selecting a conservator, contact the American Institute for Conservation at (202) 452-9545 or visit their website at <http://aic.stanford.edu/>. More information on selecting a conservator can be found in Jan Paris’ *Choosing and Working With a Conservator* at <https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/7.-conservation-procedures/7.7-choosing-and-working-with-a-conservator>.

Very few people or organizations have the funds available for full conservation treatment on every item. Most have to opt for stabilization and/or duplication.

Decisions, decisions ...

The first step in preserving a scrapbook is to spend some time going through it to see what it needs. What types of items are included? What is causing damage? Every item is different, so consider all the factors and make some decisions based on knowledge of the item, available finances, and preservation principles.

While going through the scrapbook, determine what makes this particular scrapbook special. That is, what is the most important aspect to save? It may not be possible to save every element of the content, arrangement, and informational value. Time and funding constraints often force us to make difficult choices.

One of the most significant choices may be whether to dismantle the scrapbook or leave it intact. If you make the difficult decision to dismantle a scrapbook, take time to document the original order and appearance of the book before taking it apart. (See the “Reformatting” section below for further information.)

What kind of scrapbook is it?

Some scrapbooks are valuable primarily for the information they contain. Maybe you have your great-grandmother’s scrapbook, containing pictures and articles she clipped from her favorite magazines. This may provide a very interesting glimpse of life in her day, but there is probably no particular value in the clippings themselves. Full conservation treatment of an item like this would be extremely expensive and time consuming. A better alternative might be to make a copy of the pages for use, then store the original scrapbook in a box and use it as little as possible.

Some scrapbooks include items that have artifactual value beyond their information content, while the book itself may not be all that important. For example, a deteriorating, mass-produced scrapbook with discolored, brittle, acidic pages on which are affixed your great-grandmother’s drawings and poems. In this case, the acidic pages of the scrapbook are actually damaging the items inside. The art is more important than the book, so it may be better to remove the items from the book to prevent further damage to them. The drawings could be placed in acid-free folders in a box, and the scrapbook itself could be placed in a separate box.

Then there are the scrapbooks whose value is intrinsic – that is, the whole thing combines to create an historic artifact in and of itself. Perhaps your great-grandmother’s drawings, poems and other memorabilia are identified in her handwriting and affixed to pages that she hand-decorated. In this case, it is not just the information or the artifacts that are important; the arrangement, the design, and the fact that she obviously put a great deal of herself into the making of the scrapbook combine to create a work of art that generally should not be permanently disassembled.

Many scrapbooks are a combination of these types. For instance, if you find a Babe Ruth baseball card in a scrapbook full of yellowing, acidic newspaper clippings, you may well decide to remove such a rare and valuable card to a safer place!

What are the options?

Having decided what the problems are and what makes the scrapbook special, develop a plan of action. Here are a few of the common types of damage to scrapbooks and some simple actions to help stabilize them.

- *Broken bindings and loose covers*
 - ⇒ Place the scrapbook in a good-quality flat box or wrap it in good-quality paper.
 - ⇒ Alternately, tie it closed with un-dyed bias tape (available from fabric stores) or a similar soft fabric ribbon.
- *Loose pages*
 - ⇒ Box or wrap the scrapbook, as above.
 - ⇒ Or store loose pages separate from the binding, in good-quality folders and boxes.
- *Brittle pages*

- ⇒ If loose, place the pages in polyester sleeves or encapsulate them, then store them in good-quality folders and boxes.
- ⇒ If still bound, consider disbinding the scrapbook to keep the pages from bending and breaking as they are turned.
- *Loose items*
 - ⇒ Decide whether or not to reattach the item to its original place.
 - Is it too heavy for the page? If reattached, is it likely to fall off again or tear the page? Is the item too bulky to allow the book to close properly?
 - Is it an important item that would be better preserved in separate storage?
 - Is the item damaging other artifacts nearby, or are they damaging the item?
 - ⇒ If you decide to reattach the item, you may reattach the item directly to the page, or place it in an enclosure and attach the *enclosure* to the page.
 - ⇒ Some items may be directly reattached to the page from which they came.
 - Lightweight paper items can generally be reattached with wheat paste, if the inks and dyes are not water soluble. Please see our Conservation Note on *Mending Paper* for more information on wheat paste and solubility testing.
 - Pressure-sensitive tape should never be used directly on an original artifact unless there is no other alternative.
 - Photographs (and other items) can be reattached using paper or plastic photo corners. Choose corners made with good-quality materials and stable adhesives.
 - ⇒ The other option for reattaching items is to place them in good-quality, clear plastic enclosures, then attach the enclosures to the original page.
 - A clear plastic enclosure helps protect the item from handling, dust, abrasion, and other things that can harm it. It also lets you place the adhesive on the *enclosure* instead of the item itself.
 - Insert the item in a pre-made enclosure, such as a sleeve or envelope, or encapsulate it.
 - Attach the enclosure to the original location with photo corners or a high-quality double-sided acrylic tape, such as 3M #415 tape.
 - Plastic enclosures are manufactured in varying degrees of rigidity. Photo corners are most appropriate for use with the more rigid varieties. The floppier enclosures may fall out of the corners.
 - If the page to which you are reattaching the item is artifactually important itself, avoid using tape or any corners that employ pressure-sensitive adhesive.
 - ⇒ If items are to be stored separate from the rest of the scrapbook:
 - Make sure to note in the original location where the item is now stored. This might be a light pencil notation on the page, or a slip of paper inserted between the pages.
 - When possible, place a copy of the item in the original location to help maintain the continuity of the book.
 - Store flat items in good-quality acid- and lignin-free folders and boxes. Good-quality boxes are also available in many different sizes for the storage of three dimensional items.
- *Tears and losses*
 - ⇒ See our Conservation Note on *Mending Paper* for more information on mending tears.
 - ⇒ Never use tape or other ordinary adhesives! They will cause much more damage in the future than they are fixing in the present.
 - ⇒ Sleeve or encapsulate torn items to help keep them together.
- *Dirty items*
 - ⇒ See our Conservation Note on *Surface-Cleaning of Paper* at <https://www.sos.mo.gov/CMSImages/LocalRecords/SurfaceCleaningofPaper.pdf>.
- *Discoloration from acids or media staining nearby pages and artifacts*
 - ⇒ Place sheets of good-quality tissue or thin paper between the pages. This process is called interleaving.
 - ⇒ Cut the sheets to the same size as the scrapbook page.
 - ⇒ Over time, interleaving paper may discolor due to staining or acid migration. When this occurs, replace the interleaving sheets.

- ⇒ Do not overstuff the scrapbook! This can cause the binding to break.
- ⇒ If a large amount of interleaving is needed, the additional bulk may be a reason to disbind the scrapbook.

Reformatting

One of the best ways to preserve a scrapbook is to reformat it – that is, to make a copy. Not only will this reduce wear and tear on the original, but it can also create a lasting record of the scrapbook itself. Because no matter how one cares for the scrapbook, it will not last forever. It will deteriorate. At some point in the future, the copy may be all that is left.

There are several different ways of making copies, including photocopies, photographic duplicates, digital images, and microfilm. Choose a process that is appropriate for the particular item, and follow recognized guidelines and standards to ensure that the copy lasts as long as possible. Whatever type of reformatting you choose, make sure that it is done by someone with experience in handling fragile artifacts and who understands the risks. Much damage can be caused to an already-stressed binding or brittle pages from careless or rough handling during reformatting.

Many people are lured by the newest technologies, particularly digital imaging. While these techniques often produce very attractive results, they probably will not provide a copy that will endure long into the future. Technology can change very quickly. The disk that holds digital information may be obsolete in a few years, and equipment to read the information may not remain available. A computer file may be readable 5 years from now or even 10, but what about 25 years? Or 100 years? What about 300 years? How many 8-track players or 5 ¼” disks are still in use today? Many technology experts warn that the media, software, and playback equipment that we use today may not be available to the next generation.

Other reformatting methods are more long-lived:

- Preservation photocopy: A long-lasting photocopy requires the use of permanent/durable paper, proper toner, and proper fusion of toner to paper. Guidelines are available at <https://www.archives.gov/preservation/holdings-maintenance/photocopying.html>.
- Photographic copy: A color photograph is probably best able to capture the look of the original, but color photos are notoriously short-lived. If you choose color, be especially sure to keep the negatives in a cool, dry place. Black-and-white images will provide a more long-lived copy, if professionally processed.
- Microfilm: Microfilming is a highly complex, technical operation. If standards are followed, it will yield a copy that will last centuries. This option is more appropriate to organizations than individuals; the Local Records staff can provide guidance.

Often the best solution is a combination of methods – an attractive, authentic-looking copy (such as a color photograph or digital image) for use, and a more stable copy (such as microfilm or a black-and-white photocopy) for long term preservation. Contact the Local Records staff for help in using and choosing among these options.

Sources

- ◆ Hanthorn, Ivan. “Tips on Preserving Scrapbooks: Helpful tips for preserving your precious documents and memorabilia.” ICPC Tip Sheet 1. Cedar Falls: Iowa Conservation and Preservation Consortium, 1996
- ◆ Ogden, Sherelyn. “Preservation Options for Scrapbook and Album Formats.” *Book and Paper Group Annual*, vol. 10. Washington, DC: Book and Paper Group of the American Institute for Conservation, 1991.
- ◆ Zucker, Barbara Fleisher. “Preservation of Scrapbooks and Albums.” Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 1984

For further information

The conservation staff of the Local Records Preservation Program is available to provide additional guidance and support. Contact them at: P.O Box 1747, Jefferson City, MO 65102, (573) 751-9047, or local.records@sos.mo.gov.

The Local Records staff has compiled a list of preservation-related vendors, particularly those that provide supplies and services to Missouri citizens and government officials. It is available from the Local Records office or at https://www.sos.mo.gov/CMSImages/LocalRecords/Vendors_Information.pdf.

Published by the Local Records Preservation Program, Missouri State Archives, Office of the Secretary of State. The full set of Conservation Notes on this and other topics is available at <https://www.sos.mo.gov/archives/localrecs/conservation>.

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