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Archival 101 & Working with Vendors

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Archival 101 & Working with Vendors

An ALCTS Webinar by:
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What Does Archival Mean?

- Not Quantifiable.
- Can mean different things for different materials
- Storing / treating an item with the most sound appropriate material in the proper environment.
- Implies long term storage

Types of Materials

- Manuscripts: Letters, documents...
- Photographs / Prints / Maps
- Books / Pamphlets
- Ephemera: Broadsides, announcements...
- Textiles: Quilts, clothing...
- Objects: You name it.
- Records: official records with retention period. Discarded thereafter.

Issues & Problems

- Poor environment (too hot / humid...)
- Poor storage materials
- Handling
- Disaster preparedness
- Quality of artifacts: Acidic, brittle, torn, fragile, sensitive

Solutions

- Proper storage
  - "Archival" materials appropriate for artifact.
    - Boxes, folders, binders, albums, enclosures, raw materials…
- Proper environment
  - UV filters, desiccant, hygro-thermographs to monitor
- Repair / Conservation
  - adhesives, tapes, papers, board, cloth, erasers, tools

Acid-Free

- All paper / paper board products will be acid-free
  - Some buffered (alkaline, pH 8 - 9)
  - Some unbuffered (neutral, pH around 7)
- pH will be acid-free/alkaline at time of manufacture
  - Will become acidic over time as dust and other degradation products are absorbed from air and artifacts

Acid-Free

- Wait! Does this mean that I need to replace all my boxes...
- No – boxes still protect artifacts from light, dust, handling
  - No feasible for just about any organization to deacidify all documents and replace boxes / folders on regular schedule
- But, replace if breaking down or real deterioration noted.

Buffered / Unbuffered

- Buffered vs. unbuffered vs. acid-free
  - Buffered preferred for most materials except some photographs and textiles.
  - Buffered materials will absorb acids from air/dust/... for a longer period of time than unbuffered. Eventually will become acidic though too.
  - Have higher pH and $CaCO_3$ Reserve (ca 3% reserve).
  - Acid-free means neutral pH (7.0ish) at time of manufacture. Generally has no buffering.

Lignin free

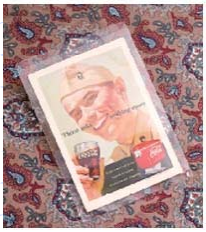
- Lignin free
  - Lignin is part of the plants used to make paper.
  - Can be removed when pulp is extracted chemically but remains in groundwood papers such as newsprint.
  - Responsible for rapid aging and yellowing of newsprint.
  - Lignin is not desired.

Lignin free

- Lignin free
  - All archival paper products are lignin free.
    - Blue/grey
    - Tan
    - Corrugated
    - …
  - Tan boxes cost more than “blue/grey”
    - Unbuffered likely to be tan only

Plastics

- Plastics safe for “archival” storage.
  - Mylar: Crystal clear, rigid, inert film.
  - Polypropylene: Like Mylar but not as stiff.
  - Polyethylene: Inert, but less clear and stiff.



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Plastics

- PVC and Acetate: BAD!!! PVC will off-gas chlorine which forms hydrochloric acid and will cause serious damage. Common in cheaper sleeves / albums. Can become brittle/break.

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Newspaper

- Newspaper
  - Made from poor quality groundwood paper.
  - Very acidic.
- If in good condition deacidify and store in buffered enclosure or sleeve.
- If in poor condition, make photocopy onto acid-free paper and deacidify original before putting into sleeve if need to keep.

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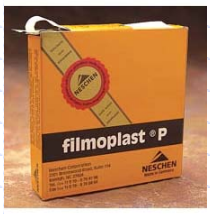
Adhesives I

- Tapes / Glue sticks…
  - Objects can be difficult to remove and tape/glue can cause damage
  - Try to avoid if possible. If you have to use tape use Filmoplast. Has buffered paper carrier with acrylic based adhesive.



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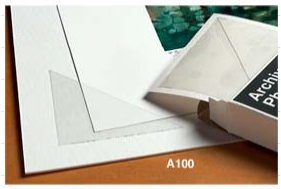
Adhesives II

- Instead use archival photo corners or strips.
  - Inert materials won't react with photos…
  - Easy to remove, no adhesive touches materials
  - *They're not just for photos…*



PASSED
PHOTO ACTIVITY TEST

How long do they last?

- How long will items last when put in archival materials?
  - It depends. Variables such as chemistry of artifact, temperature, humidity, condition, and usage will make a difference.
  - Most archival paper materials designed to last 500 years under optimal conditions.
  - Plastics can last almost forever.

PAT: Photo Activity Test

- Tests the reactivity of materials with photographs.
  - Performed on paper, board, plastics…
  - Usually requested by mfg. or seller.
  - Indicates that material is safe for use with photographs, though caution is called for.
  - PAT should be indicated in catalog.
  - Most paper/board/plastics sold by archival vendors safe, though not always indicated.

Expensive?

- Why so expensive?
  - Cost of raw materials. Archival quality materials cost more to produce as “ingredients” have to be of a higher/purer grade.
  - Market forces and perception.
    - Made for a select group. This is changing as more vendors begin to make and label products as archival. Costs will go down, as “archival” becomes a commodity.

"Undifferentiated" Product

- Archival supplies have become commodity items.
  - Products come from the same range of suppliers.
  - Composed of same raw stock and made with same equipment.
  - All geared towards same standards.
  - Quality relatively uniform, though some vendors better at some things than others.

Differences

- May be some visual/tactile differences between boards. DO NOT affect performance.
- COST
  - shop around.
  - request catalogs from others.

Vendor Provided Guides

- Vendor Information:
  - Gaylord
    - Tips and guides
  - University Products
    - Resources
  - Hollinger – Metal Edge
    - Guide to products
  - Creative Memories (Scrapbooking)
    - Tips and techniques

Be Flexible & Creative

- Materials can often be adapted for different purposes.
  - Use slide/photo pages for ephemera like buttons.
  - Put clippings in photo pages rather than adhering to album pages (back with acid-free paper).
  - Look at North American Permanent Papers. The copier/printer paper you're using may already be permanent. (Abbey pH pen helps).
    - <http://cool.conservation-us.org/byorg/abbey/napp/> From 1998...

Be Flexible & Creative

- Glue-in binders problematic.
  - Hard edge of cloth can cause problems with brittle or valuable materials. Solution: Fold piece of good paper around pamphlet, sew, then glue in.
- Make own envelope binders by sticking archival envelope into glue-in binder.
- Make own "envelope sling."
  - Fold piece of paper around brittle material, then insert.

Buying Tips I

- Compare pricing!
  - Pay attention to quantity price breaks.
  - Sales flyers. Most archival vendors now offer promotions.
  - Request bid pricing rather than ordering straight from catalog.
    - Requires larger quantities.
    - Combine orders with other organizations / bulk buying.
    - Check with purchasing on contract/bid pricing.

Buying Tips II

- If you have questions about:
  - Specific product: ask customer service.
  - Pricing : customer service / bid department / your sales rep.
  - Usage / specifications...
    - Regional preservation colleagues
    - NEDCC, CCAHA, Lyrasis...

Buying Tips III

- Read the catalog.
  - Catalogs have “tech tips” in relevant sections.
    - Show how to use.
    - Indicate for what types of materials suitable.
    - Most by preservation professionals.
  - Most product specifications indicated next to product.

Custom Orders I

- Most vendors happy to make custom sizes
  - Binders / folders / enclosures.
  - Boxes more complex.
    - require dies or now box cutting machines.
    - Can be worth it for large quantities.
    - Ensure “perfect” fit.

Custom Orders II

- Many items in the catalogs are made to order due to low sales volumes.
  - If you need a special size, ask for it. There may be minimums, but new tools make it “easy.”
  - If it’s made with one board, can be made with others.
  - Metal-edged designs ok as well as some ship-flat.
  - Corrugated cheaper than blue/gray, than tan…

Learning More

- A wealth of information is to be found on the Internet:
  - Conservation OnLine
    - http://cool.conservation-us.org
    - Northeast Document Conservation Center
    - http://www.nedcc.org
  - Conservation & Preservation at Syracuse
    - http://researchguides.library.syr.edu/preservation

Thank you

- Thank you for attending this webinar and please consider registering for others in the ALCTS series.
- I will work to answer as many of the questions as I can and post them online. An email will be sent to all those who registered announcing this.

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