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DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE & PRESERVATION SERVICES FOR NEW YORK

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PHOTOGRAPHS IN THE ARCHIVE:

Caring for Photographic Collections

Amanda Murray, DHPSNY Preservation Specialist

Documentary Heritage and Preservation Services for New York is an initiative to deliver collections-related training, preservation surveys, archival assessments, and other services to the historical records community in New York.



New York State Library

New York State Archives

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Documentary Heritage & Preservation Services for New York

Website: dhpsny.org

The University of the State of New York
The State Education Department
1784

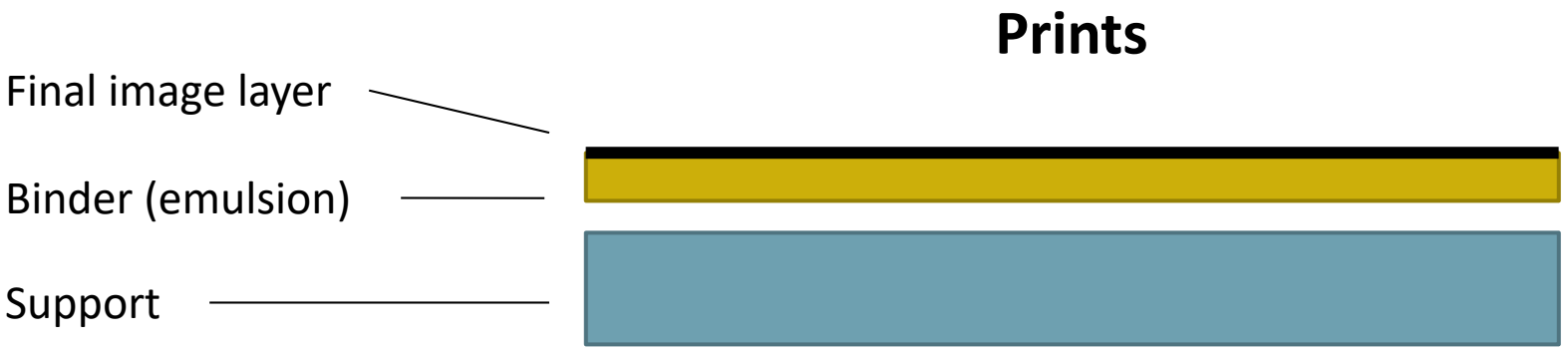
Conservation Center for art & historic artifacts

Preserving Your Photographic Collections

- Photographic materials
- Deterioration
  - Biological threats
  - Chemical deterioration
  - Physical damage
- Mitigation strategies
  - Storage environments
  - Handling
  - Housing and labeling



Basic Photographic Structure



- **Process** –method by which a photograph was made (gelatin silver, albumen, chromogenic)
- **Format** – method of presentation (stereoview, postcard, carte-de-visite)

Agents of Deterioration

Water

Incorrect Temperature

Physical Force

Pests

Incorrect Humidity

Light

Pollutants

Theft & Vandalism

Fire

Custodial Neglect

Biological Threats

Pests
Water

- Pests and mold can spread quickly and cause irreparable damage
- Mitigation strategies:
  - Have an emergency plan in place
  - Complete regular maintenance inspections
  - Follow housekeeping procedures consistently
  - Do not allow food or drink in collection storage spaces
  - Inspect incoming collections
  - Regularly spot check collection materials

Chemical Deterioration

- Staining
- Yellowing
- Fading
- Color shifts
- Silver mirroring
- Metal and glass corrosion
- Foxing of paper supports





Storage

Light
Pollutants
Incorrect Relative Humidity
Incorrect Temperature

- Enclose all materials in archival boxes
- Limit or filter UV light
- Install metal shelving and flat files
- Provide stable environmental conditions



Setting Temperature and RH Goals

	Temperature	**Relative Humidity**
General Guidelines	*59–77˚F*	*45–55% ±5%*
Cool Storage	*50–65˚F*	*30–50%*
Cold Storage	33–50˚F	
Frozen Storage	Below 32˚F	
Fluctuations <5˚F or <5% RH daily		

- Set institutional goals
- Monitor regularly
- Aim to mitigate large fluctuations

Passive Environmental Controls

- Stand alone humidifiers/dehumidifiers or AC
- Seal building envelope including around windows and doors
- Add UV filtering films to windows
- Increase air circulation
- Monitor environmental conditions regularly

Physical Damage

- Dirt or residue
- Tears or losses
- Creases or folds
- Cracking or flaking of the emulsion layer
- Abrasion or scratches
- Warping, cockling or rolling
- Breaking or detachment of cases, hinges, mounts



Handling Photographs

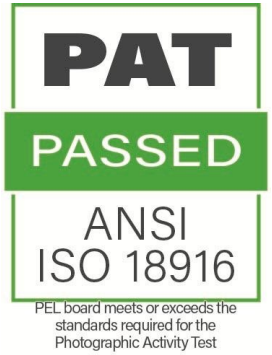
Physical Force

- Use nitrile gloves
- Hold with two hands and keep fingers off emulsion surfaces
- Have a clear workspace to shift materials
- Use support boards for moving oversize or fragile materials
- Avoid scratching photographic surfaces
- Be aware of condition issues
- Use book trucks or carts to move boxes
- Avoid rolling, flexing, or bending
- Do not slide photographs across each other – lift each

Selecting Housing Materials

Physical Force Pollutants

- ISO 18916 and 18902 for standards on housing materials
- Be careful of the term "archival"
- Paper
  - Acid-free
  - Lignin-free
  - Have passed the P.A.T.
  - Buffered
    - Unbuffered for cyanotypes and blueprints
  - Interleaving papers should have smooth texture
  - Avoid glassine





Selecting Housing Materials

Physical Force Pollutants

- Plastic sleeves
  - Polyester, polyethylene or polypropylene
  - L-sleeves or locking sleeves (open on two ends)
  - Do not use polyvinylchloride (PVC)
- Boxes
  - Ensure acid-free (can use a pH indicator pen)
  - Avoid lignin-core in new purchases, and replace as possible if present in collections

Housing Photographic Prints

- Paper folders or envelopes
- Individually sleeve in inert plastic enclosures photographs that are often used/handled or photographs that are damaged, brittle or fragile
- Interleave photographs with residue, ink, or sticky labels on verso
- Store in horizontal or vertical boxes
- Use spacers to prevent slumping
- Store oversize prints horizontally



Image: universityproducts.com

Housing Cased Photographs

- House in four-flap enclosures
- Store vertically in well-fit boxes
- Do not take apart the packet – if cleaning is needed consult a conservator
- Tintypes without a case can be housed in paper enclosures





Housing Glass Negatives and Lantern Slides

- Store in three or four-flap paper enclosures that fit the size of the negative well
- Place in enclosures emulsion side down, to lessen handling when viewing
- Store vertically in well-fit boxes
- Do not pack too tightly
- Use foam spacers where boxes are not full
- Label boxes as “glass”

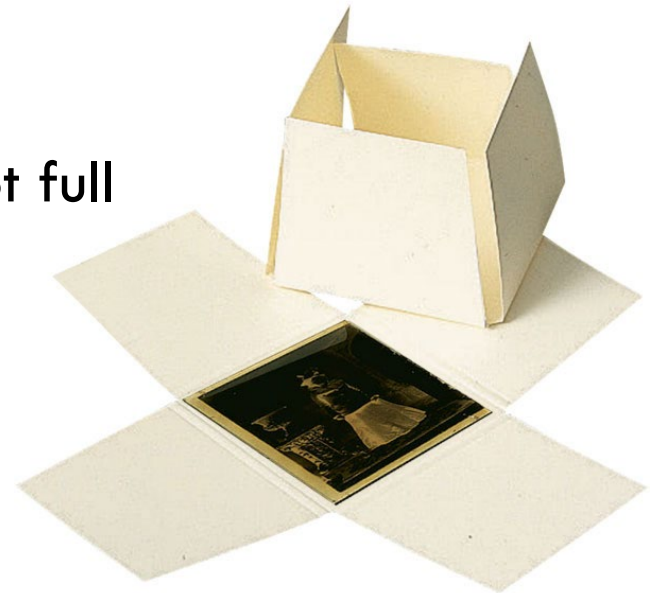


Image: universityproducts.com

Housing Film Negatives

- Store cellulose acetate and cellulose nitrate film in paper enclosures
- Polyester film can be stored in inert plastic film sleeves or in paper sleeves
- Store separately from photographic prints

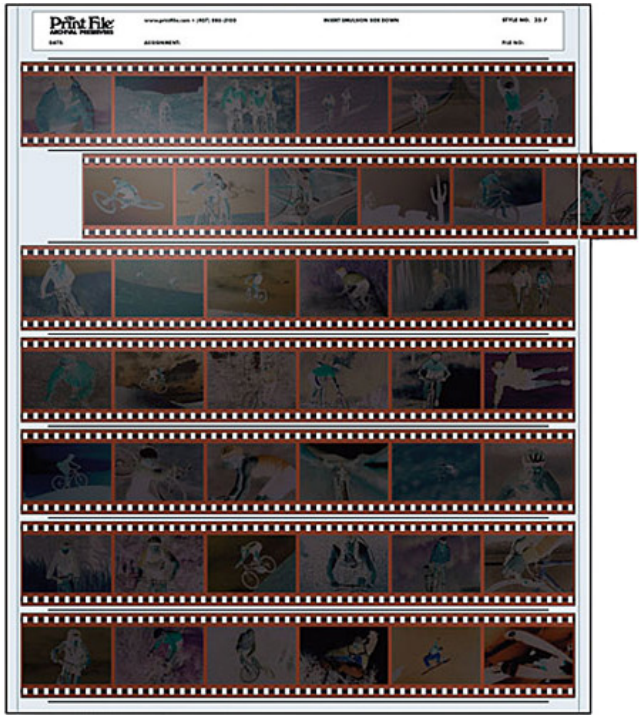


Image: bhphotovideo.com

Housing Slides

- Slides can be stored in inert plastic sleeves or acid-free slide boxes
- Avoid wooden or plastic drawers or boxes.



Image: universityproducts.com

Housing Albums

- Can be stored vertically on shelves if in exceptionally good condition
- Albums with loose photographs or pages, or broken bindings should be stored horizontally in custom-fit boxes
- Interleaving can be used between pages where see off-setting, abrasion, or deterioration

Labeling enclosures

Custodial Neglect
Physical Force

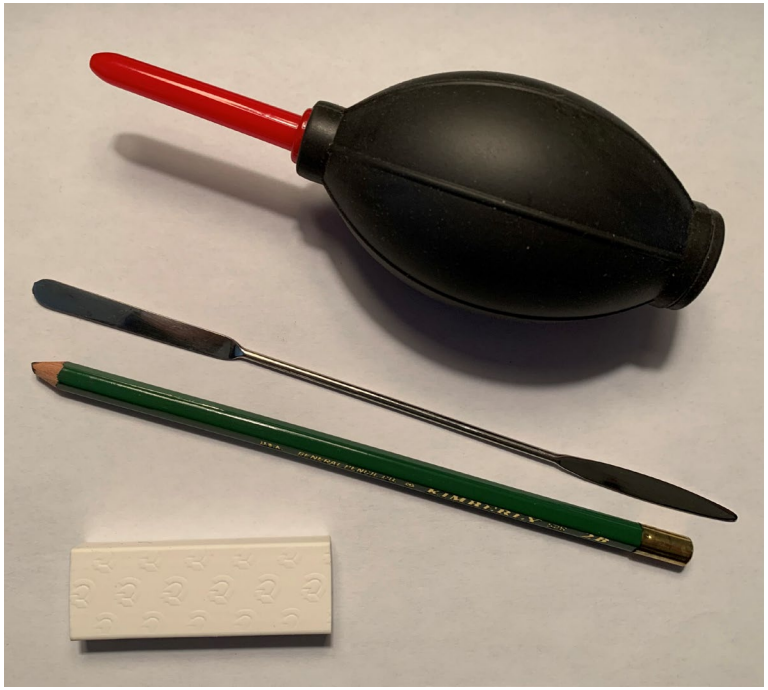
- Use pencil
- Label enclosures clearly and consistently
- Label in consistent location on enclosure
- Remove materials from housings before labeling



Labeling photographs

Custodial Neglect
Physical Force

- All labeling should be reversible
- Use a clean, hard surface to write on
- HB or 2B or softer high-quality pencil
- Vinyl eraser
- Label in consistent location on object



Improving Preservation

- Improving handling guidelines
- Monitoring environment
- Improving housekeeping
- Improving exhibition and loan policies
- Initiating regular inspection of collections
- Isolating unstable materials
- Developing an emergency response plan

Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, Photographs: Archival Care and Management, 2006.

Documentation

All 10!

- Preservation Plan
- Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan
- Housekeeping Procedures
- Maintenance Schedule
- Integrated Pest Management Program
- Handling Guidelines
- Preservation and Conservation Needs

Online Resources

- Canadian Conservation Institute, Agents of Deterioration https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/agents-deterioration.html
- Museum Pests https://museumpests.net/
- Graphics Atlas http://graphicsatlas.org/ (*photo identification*)
- AIC Environmental Guidelines https://www.conservation-wiki.com/wiki/Environmental_Guidelines
- DHPSNY, Common Collection Conditions: Assessing the Condition of Your Photograph Collections (*webinar*) https://youtu.be/3rslQnLt8VQ

Online Resources cont.

- CCAHA, Storing Your Photographic Collection https://ccaha.org/resources/storing-your-photographic-collection-guide-choosing-proper-materials-long-term-storage
- CCAHA, ISO Standards for Housing Photographs https://ccaha.org/resources/iso-standards-housing-photographs
- DHPSNY, Demistifying Cold and Frozen Storage (*webinar*) https://youtu.be/r-ztfs3RAdc
- National Park Service
  - Cold Storage Overview https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/conserveogram/14-10.pdf
  - Vapor-Proof Packaging https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/conserveogram/14-12.pdf

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Questions?

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