



DHPS | NY

DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE
& PRESERVATION SERVICES

FOR NEW YORK

Thanks for joining us! Today's presentation will begin shortly.

If you have questions or want to report any technical issues,
contact us at info@dhpsny.org or (215) 545-0613 ext.317



Photo: Cortland County Historical Society

Preservation in Exhibits

Creating Budget-Friendly,
Preservation-Focused
Exhibitions

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Agenda

Focus: Object preservation when creating new exhibitions

- **Slide presentation** – 45 minutes
 - Planning and budgeting
 - Cost-effective display solutions
 - Preservation techniques
- **Q&A** – 15 minutes



Display about the effects of fingerprints on various materials.

The Challenge

- 🚨 Limited budgets → Cases & mounts are expensive
- 🚨 Environmental risks → Light, humidity, pollutants
- 🚨 Staff constraints → Preservation and conservation
- 🚨 Access vs. safety → Balancing engagement & protection

The Goal

- ✓ smart budget allocation prioritizing preservation
- ✓ Using store-bought displays creatively to cut costs
- ✓ DIY solutions that are preservation-friendly
- ✓ Best practices to maintain collections on display

The Impact

- ★ Objects for future research, exhibitions, and education
- ★ Saving money on conservation from exhibition damage
- ★ Increased credibility w/ donors, granting agencies, public
- ★ More sustainable collections management



Planning and Budgeting for Preservation-Focused Exhibitions

Exhibition Guidelines

- 📌 Why have an Exhibition Policy?
- 📌 Ensures consistency, accountability, and preservation
- 📌 Should include:
 - Object selection criteria
 - Appropriate display materials
 - Handling and climate control guidelines

Exhibition Documentation

-  Accession records
-  Loan agreements
-  Condition reports
-  Photography
-  Conservation history
-  Object research

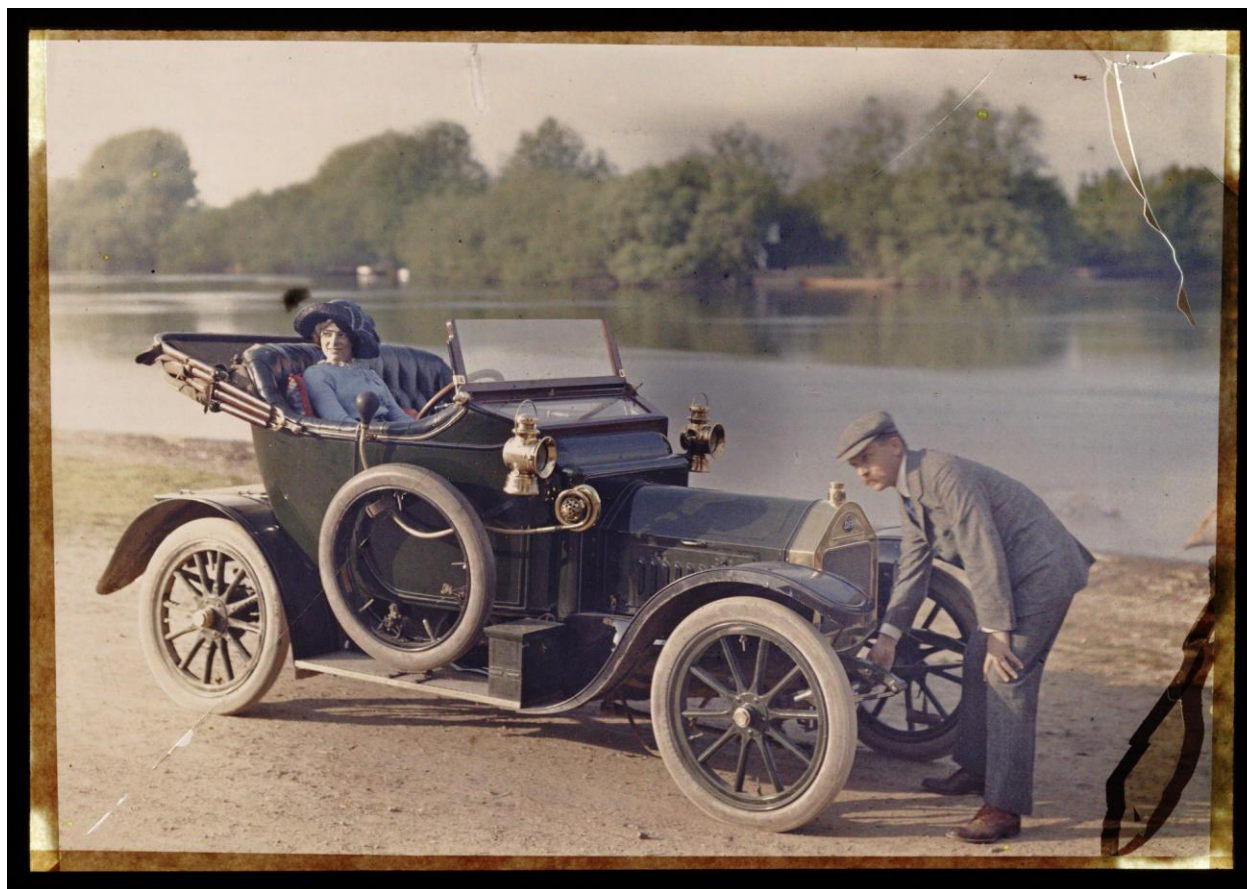
Assessing Collection Needs

- 🔍 Not every object is exhibition-ready!
- 🔍 Assess:
 - Condition (fragility, prior damage)
 - Suitability (light, humidity, framing/mount needs)
 - Rotation schedules for sensitive objects



Silk and beaded gown too fragile and damaged for display.

Photo: hermitagemuseum.wordpress.com/2020/05/14/behind-the-scenes-making-a-clothing-exhibit/



Autochromes are too susceptible to fading to be on display.

Photo: blog.scienceandmediamuseum.org.uk/autochromes-the-dawn-of-colour-photography/



Conservation work required to display an 1865 diary.

Photo: npsgnmp.wordpress.com/2012/05/03/conserving-artifacts-for-museum-display/



Rotating objects after a certain length of time on exhibition.

Photo: blog.mam.org/2017/01/24/14007/

Setting a Realistic Budget

- 💰 Break budget into categories
- 💰 Prioritize funding for:
 - Conservation (cleaning, mount-making)
 - Environmental protection (UV filters, silica gel)
 - Display materials (archival cases, mounts)

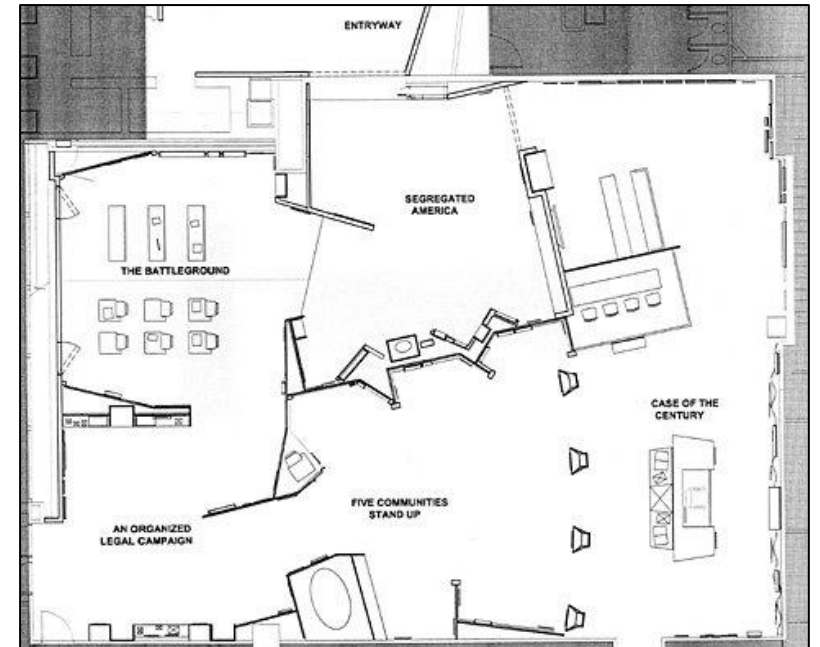
Setting a Realistic Budget

Cost-saving ideas:

- Repurpose existing cases or furniture
- DIY solutions using safe materials
- Investigate alternate sources for materials
- Apply for grants; partnerships

Preservation in Exhibit Planning

- Create/use floor plans
- Know what cases are available and what is needed
- Monitor light and climate long before installation

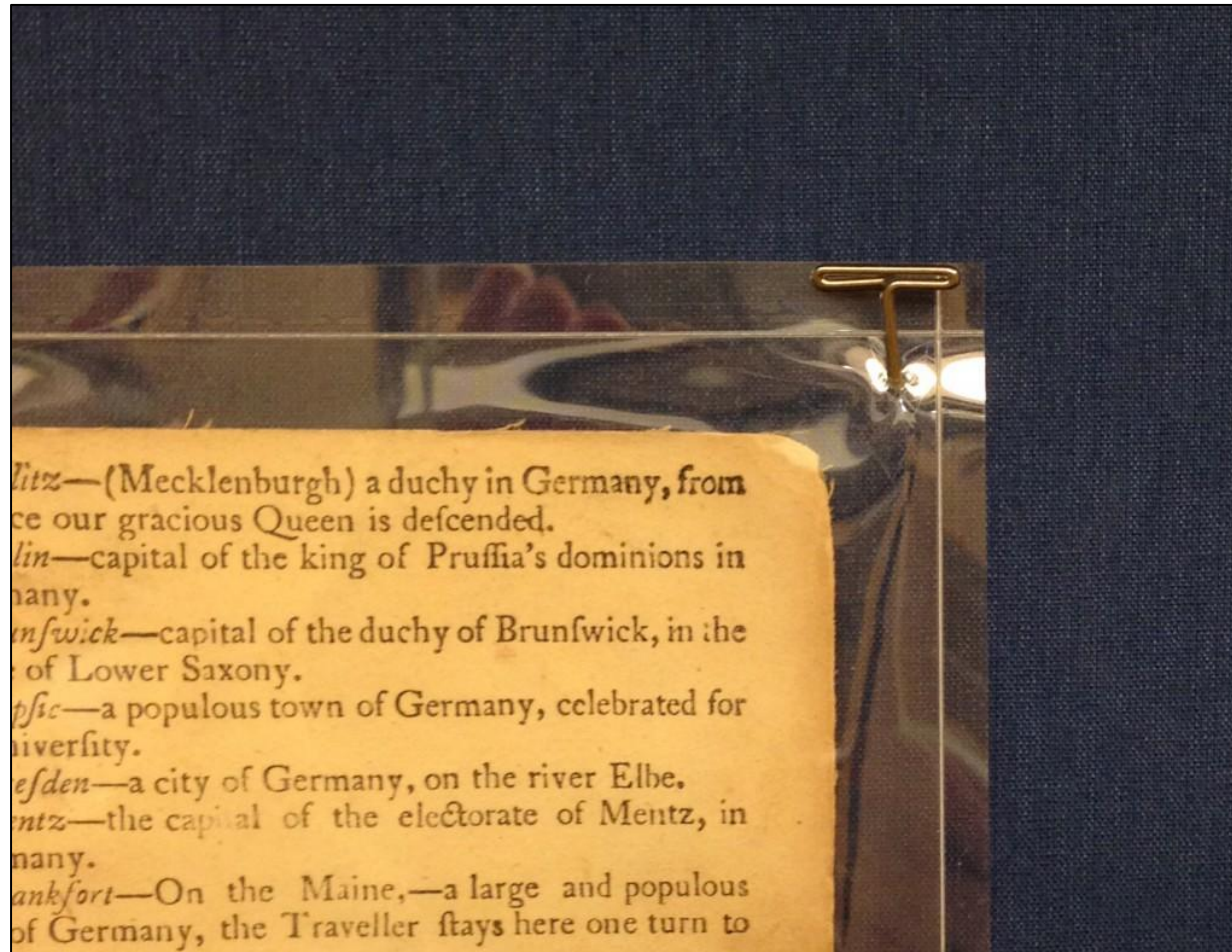


Prioritize Preservation in Exhibit Design

- Use reproductions of paper and photographs
- Ensure proper mounting and object support
 - Choose safe materials
 - Use rare earth magnets for paper or light textiles



Reproductions mounted with pushpins.

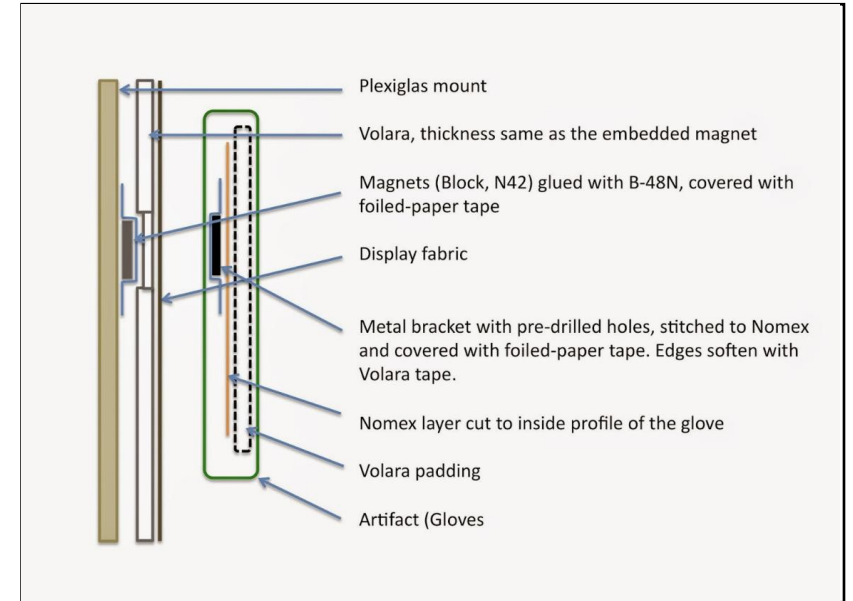


Pin the plastic enclosure, not the document, to a vertical display.



Magnets on both side of the matboard hold the photo in place.

Photo: Smithsonian Institution Archives, [youtube.com/watch?v=tNzAo2i9Q44](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tNzAo2i9Q44)



Magnets inside the gloves
mount them vertically.

Sample Timeline

 **Planning ahead helps preservation!**

 Sample timeline:

- 6+ months: Research & budgeting
- 3–6 months: Exhibit design & mount-making
- 1–3 months: Object prep & installation


 Rushed setups lead to more damage risk.



Photo: lenaweehistoricalsociety.org/

Utilizing Cost- Effective Display Solutions

DIY/Repurposed Cases

- 🔨 Build custom acrylic boxes and stands
- 🔨 Repurpose old furniture, retail cases, or bookshelves
 - Neutralize harmful materials
 - Ensure UV protection and ventilation
 - Add archival mounts/supports



A handyperson can build custom UV-filtered acrylic boxes for displays.

Photo: makesharelearn.wordpress.com/2014/09/13/diy-project-acrylic-display-case/



Retail display cases can be donated or purchased secondhand.

Photo: Allegany County Historical Society



Bookshelf retrofit with doors, glass shelves, and lighting.

Photo: eaglenewsonline.com/publications/cazenovia-republican/2024/09/09/library-commemorates-cazenovia-college-with-new-display/



Muslin lining the case to protect from acidic wood.

Photo: carleton.edu/news/stories/lily-burrows-explores-career-museum-curator-rice-county-historical-society/

Choosing Store-Bought Mounts

 Find affordable displays online, big box stores

 Search terms:

- jewelry stands
- display easels
- doll stands
- frames
- craft show display stands
- acrylic risers
- shadowboxes
- sports memorabilia cases

Product Name	Price	Retailer	Rating	Special Features
Wire Easel with Adjustable...	\$2.39	Displays2go	4.5 stars (45)	
Lzerking 10 Packs Display Stands...	\$16.99	Amazon.com		
Aluminum Telescoping Eas...	\$87.00	ULINE		
6 Pack Acrylic Book Stand, Cle...	\$7.90	Amazon.com		Free returns
Heavy Duty Aluminum...	\$195.00	ULINE		
Black Mission Style Easel by...	\$5.99	Michaels Stor...	4.5 stars (326)	CURBSIDE, Pick up today

Google search for easel stand options from various retailers.



Acrylic stand for a photo – doesn't need to be custom.

Photo:
[instagram.com/mooresvillelibrary/p/DCnTv7pq8Ey/?img_index=6](https://www.instagram.com/mooresvillelibrary/p/DCnTv7pq8Ey/?img_index=6)

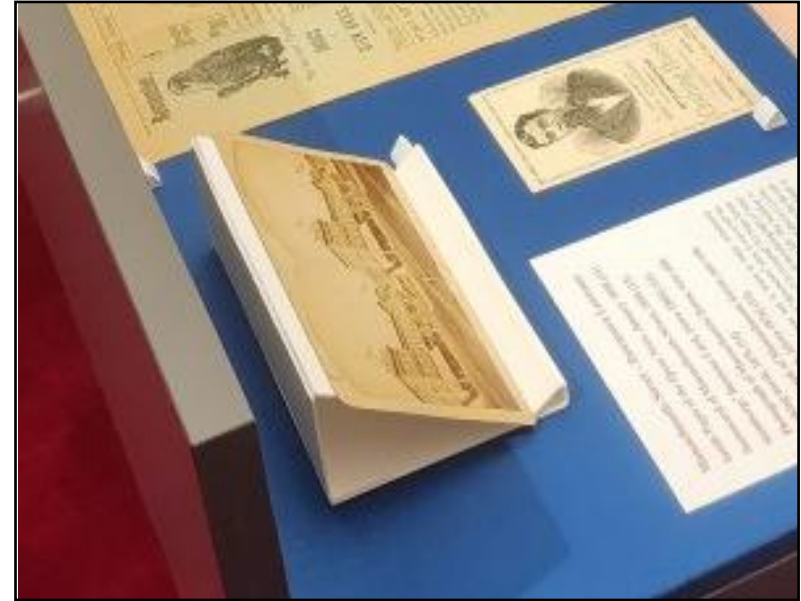


Objects mounted on support boards with Mylar bands

Photo: <https://prangecollection.wordpress.com/2023/06/11/exhibition-making-in-archives/#jp-carousel-12865>

Creating DIY Mounts

- ▤ Paper documents: Use Mylar, slant boards
- ▤ Books: Create cradles from foam or board; Mylar straps for open pages
- ▤ Textiles: Sew onto archival boards, padded hangers.
- ▤ 3-D objects: Cut Ethafoam blocks for custom cradles



Slant board made of archival matboard for paper objects.

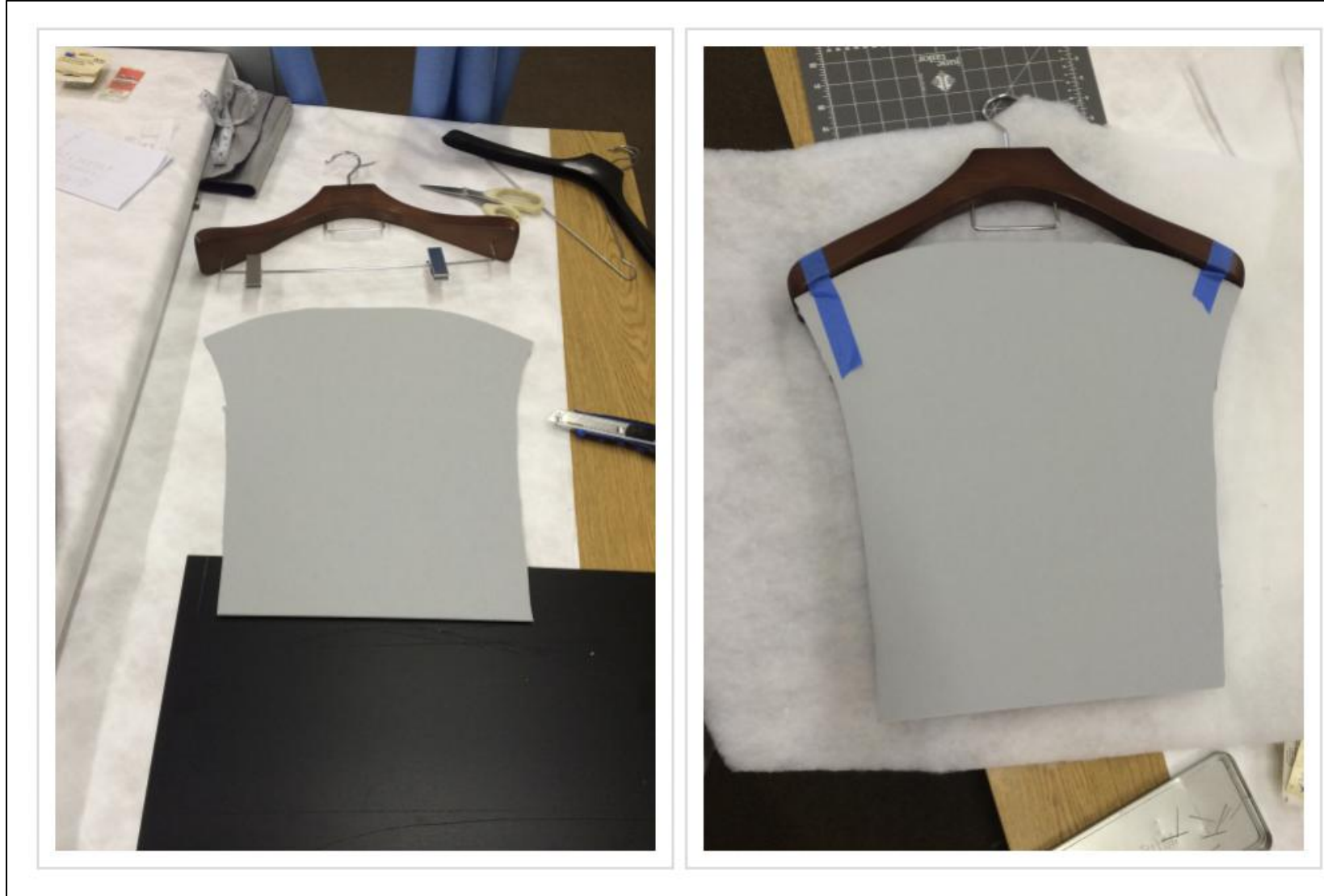


Fabric-covered corrugated slant board.

Photo: collectionsconversations.wordpress.com/2012/08/21/slant-board-mounts/

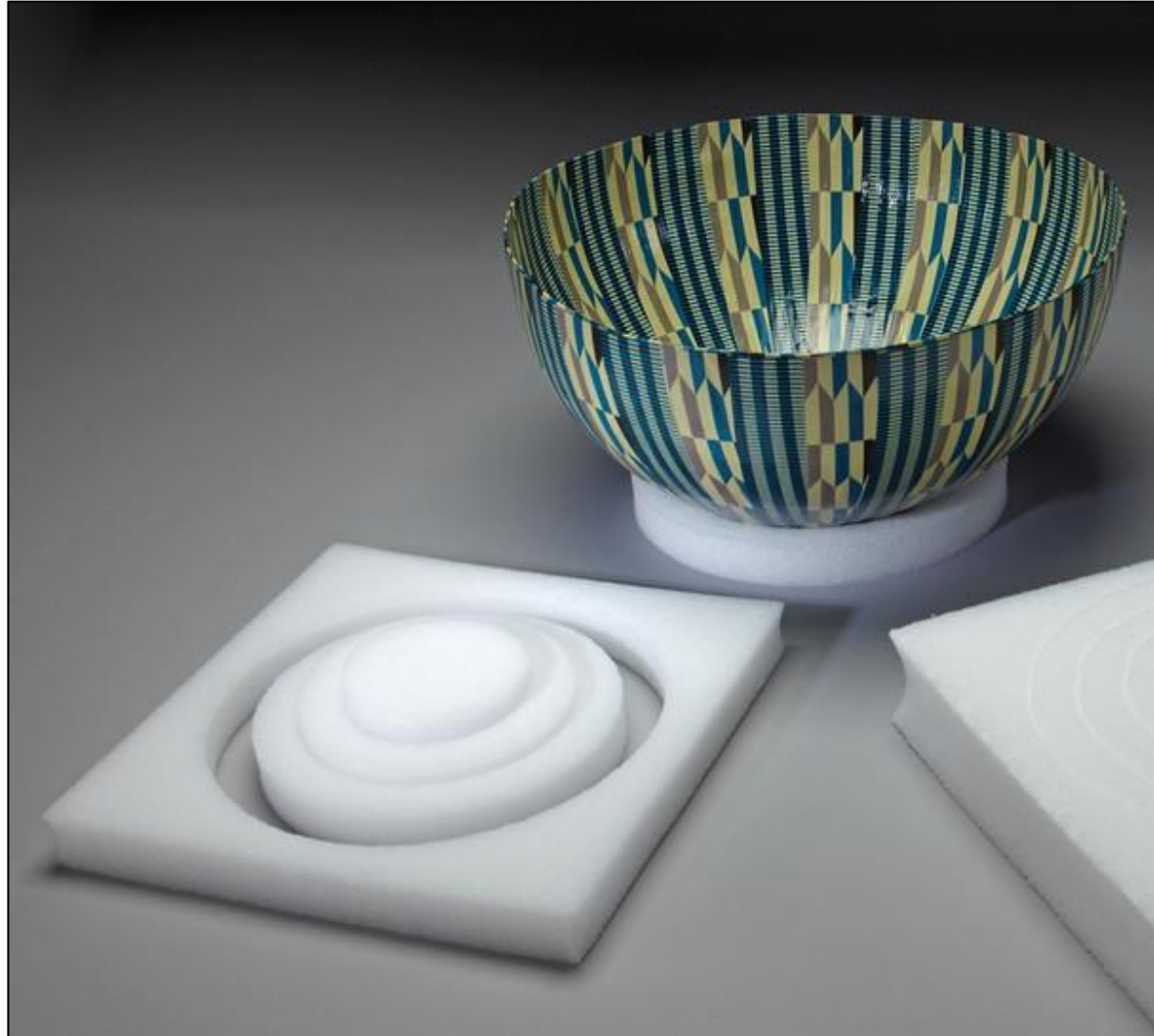


Book cradle from matboard with Mylar straps.



"Bones" of a hanging costume form before batting and fabric covering.

Photo: lacouturieresauvage.wordpress.com/tag/costume-mounting/



Ethafoam ring mounts – can cover with fabric or tissue.

Photo: hollingermetaledge.com/ethafoam-ring-mounts/



Custom cradle for a cased photograph.

Photo: spec.lib.miamioh.edu/home/preservation-measures-exhibit-preparation-and-installation/

Best Practices for Object Preservation During Display



Photo: Manitoga/The Russel Wright Design Center

Controlling Light Exposure

- 💡 Light exposure -> fading, discoloration, and material degradation
 - especially for paper, photographs, textiles, organic materials
- 💡 Ultraviolet (UV) light is particularly harmful

Controlling Light Exposure




- 💡 Strategies to Reduce Light Damage
 - Use LED bulbs
 - Limit light levels based on material sensitivity
 - Add UV-filtering film or acrylic to display cases, windows
 - Use timers, motion sensors, or dimmers
 - Rotate light-sensitive objects out every 3 months



Tracking light levels in exhibitions is critical.

Photos: blog.mam.org/2017/01/24/14007/, gaylord.com, onsetcomp.com/products/data-loggers/ux90-006

Managing Temperature and Humidity

-  Fluctuations cause stress: Expanding and contracting materials (wood, paper, textiles) can lead to cracking, warping, mold
-  High humidity ($>60\%$) $>$ mold and pest infestations
-  Low humidity ($<30\%$) $>$ brittleness and cracking (especially in paper and leather)

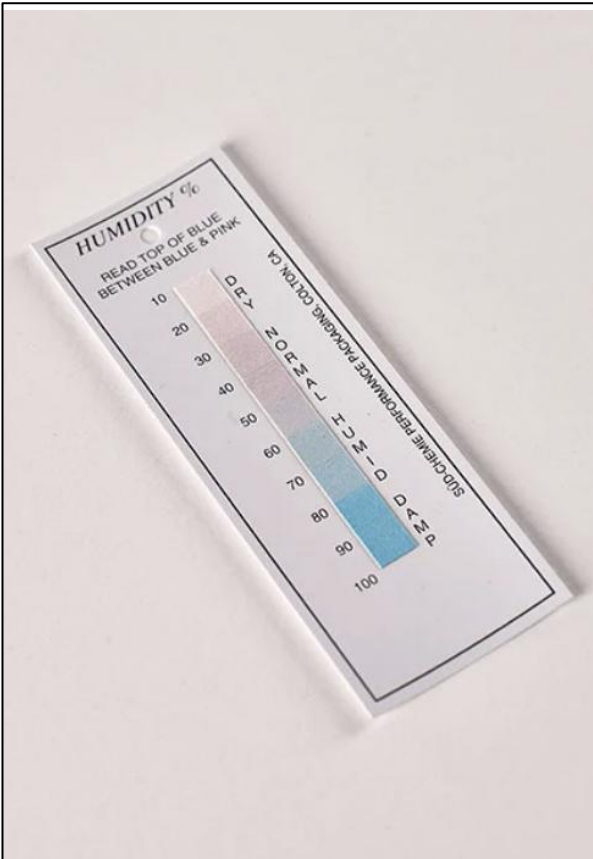
Managing Temperature and Humidity

 Keep temp and RH stable - 65–70°F with 40–50% RH

- Avoid placing objects near HVAC vents, doors, or windows

 Use passive climate control solutions:

- Silica gel inside cases
- Weatherstripping on doors and display cases
- Room humidifiers or dehumidifiers



Monitor temperature and humidity in the exhibit.

Photos: archivalsurvival.com, amazon.com, talas.com, onsetcomp.com/products/data-loggers/ux90-006

Protecting Against Pollutants

- 🧐 Common airborne risks
 - Dust, soot, and chemical pollutants can cause staining, corrosion, and deterioration
 - Wooden cases, adhesives, and some plastics off-gas harmful chemicals
- Pests also a risk

Protecting Against Pollutants

- Use archival-safe materials: Avoid acidic woods (e.g., oak); use sealed MDF, powder-coated metal, or acid-free boards
- Regularly clean with HEPA-filter vacuums (never use feather dusters or spray cleaners near artifacts)
- Use archival storage enclosures inside cases to further buffer objects from air exposure

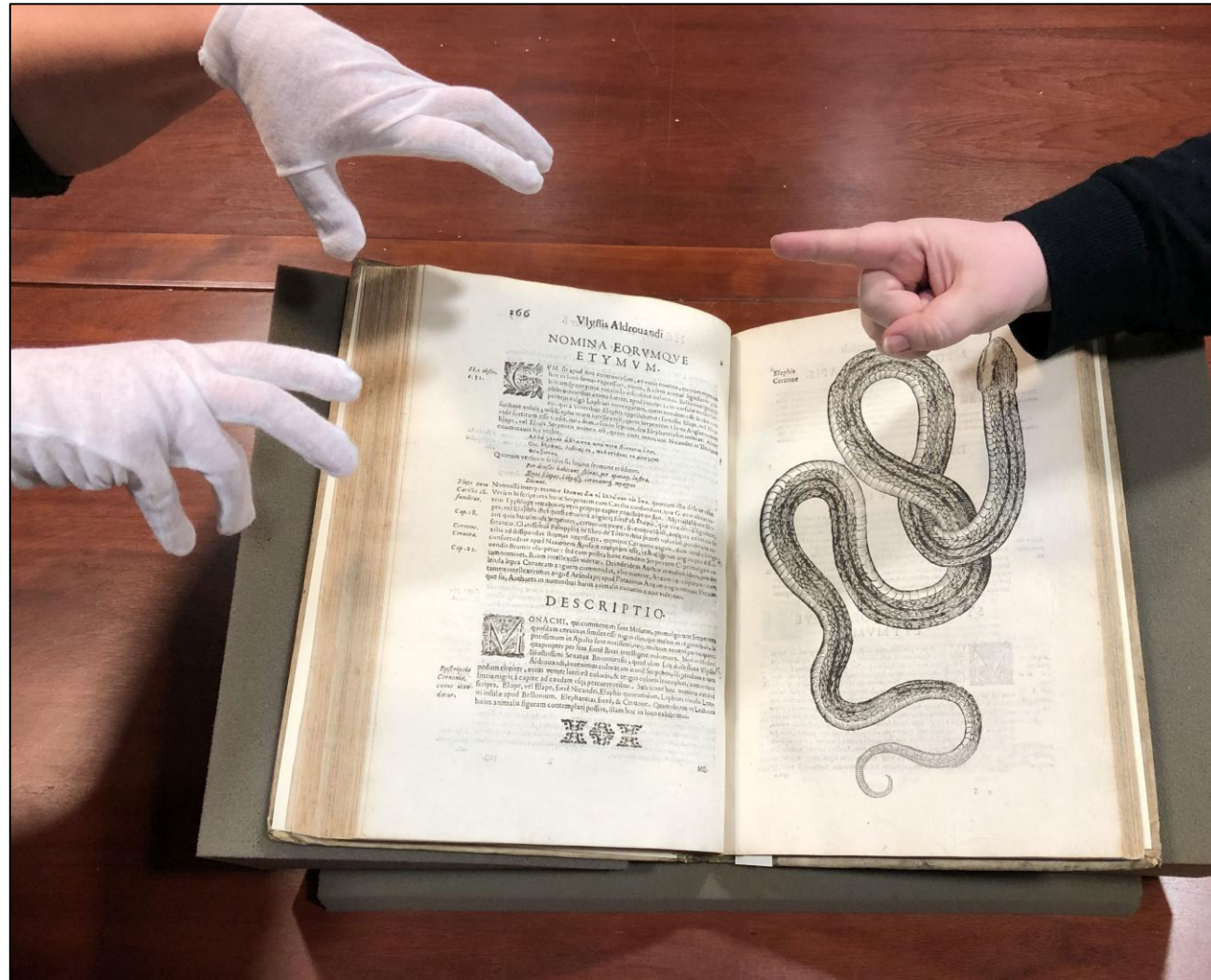


Variable speed vacuum with HEPA filter for cleaning.

Photo: [instagram.com/nypcollectionmanagement/p/C-c6Ui4u0eM/?img_index=1](https://www.instagram.com/nypcollectionmanagement/p/C-c6Ui4u0eM/?img_index=1)

Safe Handling

- ! Gloves for photos, metal, leather, textiles
- ! Clean, dry hands for paper, books
- ! Support objects fully—never lift fragile items by handles, edges, or bindings
- ! Use trays or padded carts for transporting objects



No gloves needed for books and paper.

Photo: blog.library.si.edu/blog/2019/11/21/no-love-for-white-gloves-or-the-cotton-menace/



Carts are excellent for safe transportation of objects.

Photo: fieldmuseum.org/science/research/area/conserving-collections/preventive-conservation

Object Security

- 🔒 Ensure stability to prevent objects from shifting or toppling inside cases.
- 🔒 Cases and frames should be closed/hung securely; ideally locked
- 🔒 Rope off areas with objects out in the open
- 🔒 Update security procedures for new exhibit space.



Use ropes to prevent visitors from getting too close.

Photo: plainvillehistoricalsociety.com/museum.html



Be vigilant about collection safety when doing renovations.

Photo: plainvillehistoricalsociety.com/museum.html

Emergency Preparedness

- If any objects on display are on the priority list for saving, update the list with how to access them
- If any objects on display are loans, they become the first priority for saving

Summary

- Plan early & prioritize preservation
- Modify store-bought displays safely
- Control environmental factors for long-term safety
- Engage with preservation experts & museum networks



Photo: Waldwick Museum of Local History

Q&A



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