

TEXTILE PRESERVATION METHODS

For the American Sewing Guild, Central Iowa Chapter
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Introduction



How to start

- How do decide how to best preserve a textile?
- What are its needs and priorities?
- What is its condition – now and in the future?
- What is it made of?
- What resources do you have to preserve it? (ex. space, money, time)
- How often will it be used/ worn/ accessed?



“Artifact-Safe” Materials

- **What is “Artifact-Safe”**
- **“Acid-Free” doesn’t mean much. Instead, look for Lignin-Free materials**
- **Buffered vs. Unbuffered**

Usually in reference to tissue paper and particularly important in textile preservation. “Buffered” tissue has an alkaline substance, usually calcium carbonate, to buffer or counteract acids that may form in the material in the future.

 - **Use buffered materials for:** cellulose fibers such as cotton, flax, linen and jute, as well plant-based specimens.
 - **Use unbuffered materials for:** materials with animal proteins, including wool, silk, leather, and items such as pearls. When textiles have both cellulose and protein fibers, or if it is unknown, choose unbuffered material.

“Artifact-Safe” Materials

- Unbleached cotton muslin & stockinette
- Polyester
- Polypropylene
- Polyethylene
- Mylar/Milnex
- Ethafoam
- Lignin-free items
- “Resin-free
- Tyvek



Unsafe Materials

- ❑ Polystyrene
- ❑ Scotch Tape
- ❑ Most adhesives (do your research)
- ❑ “Fancy” padded hangers with unknown materials
- ❑ Anything with unknown materials
- ❑ Air-tight storage containers
- ❑ Wire hangers!



Hanging Garment Storage



Not every garment should be hung. The dress shown here has a sheer top, but may be in good enough condition to support the very lightweight garment.

Garments should have substantial shoulder support, be in good structural condition, and not be too heavy.

Hanging Garment Storage

- Muslin or tissue buffer inside garment
- Pad sleeves and other structural areas as needed
- Additional support can be added by sewing unbleached cotton twill tape into the waistband to add additional hanging straps.



Hanging Garment Storage



When using padded hangers it is important to take your available space into consideration.



Hanging Garment Storage

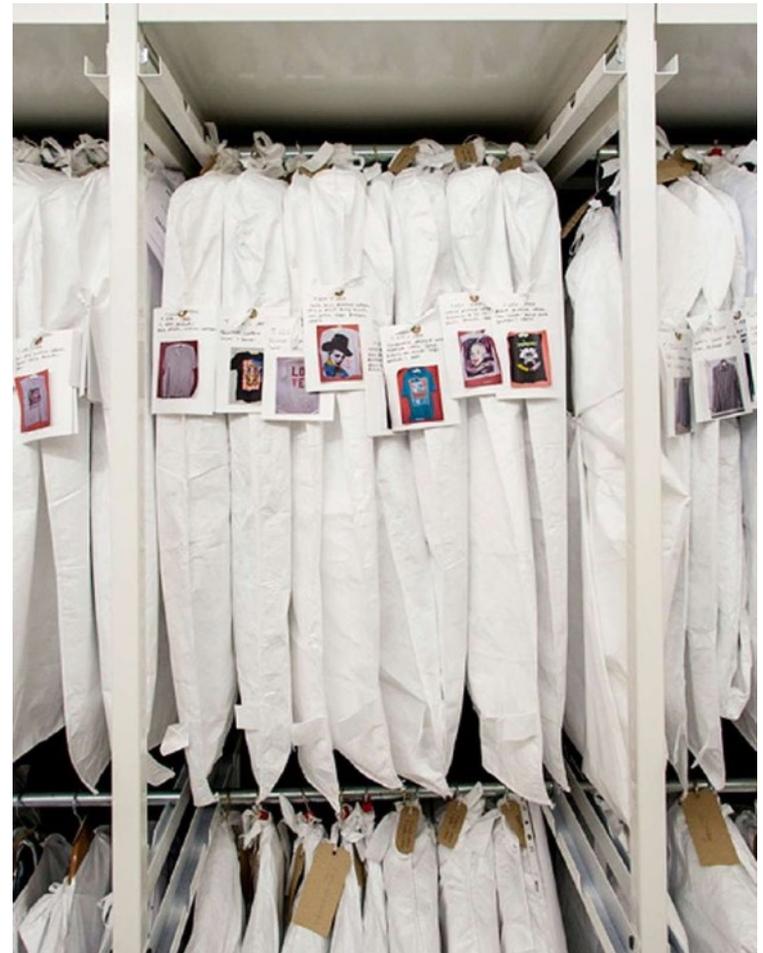


It is very important to make sure you pick the right size hanger for each garment.

Garment bags don't need to be costly.

Dust Covers

- Dust covers are meant to not only protect a garment from dust, but to also protect it from wear or loss of details such as buttons, beads, etc.
- Whether you sew a custom garment bag, drape fabric over an entire rack or poke a hole in a clean bed sheet and stick it on a hanger, dust covers don't need to be aesthetically pleasing to work well.



Dust Covers



Dust Covers



- Know your garments, know your space, and know your environmental conditions when prioritizing which items need covering first.

Hanging Quilt Storage



- When hanging quilts or similar items on a rack like this one, support is key.
- For newer quilts, something like this is fine but I would want the bars to be padded and wider to alleviate weight and pressure.
- Add a tube, covered in “artifact-safe” materials (discussed next) to spread out the stress.

Hanging Quilt Storage

- To hang a quilt like this, sew a band of muslin across the entire back and then slip the bar through the entire width of the item. This spreads out the weight and alleviates pressure.
- This method of storage (display) is fine for newer quilts but as with any textile, they should not be “on display” forever. The fibers will need to rest and you will need to remove it from light from time to time.
- Museums will display fragile textiles on low light for 3-6 months, then rotate an artifact out with a similar piece.



Rolled Textile Storage

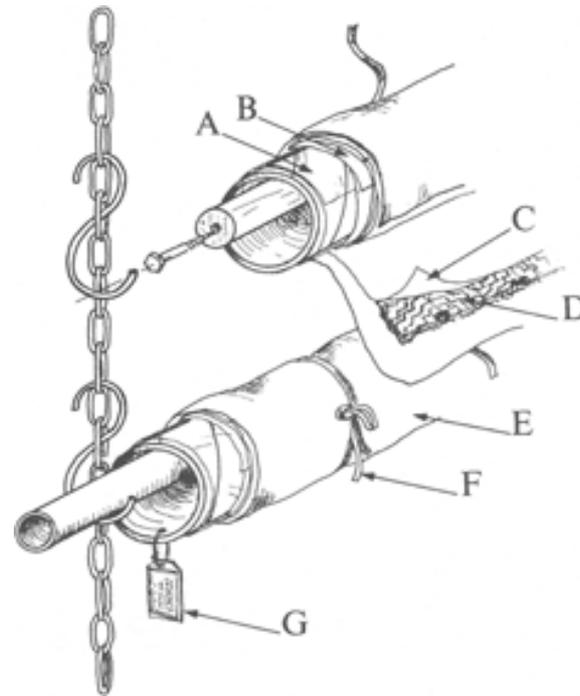


A simple pipe and chain set up provides easy access at a minimal cost. This could be implemented in an extra closet if necessary.

Rolled Textile Storage



Another easy, space-saving system is to hang pipes from a support with angled hooks.



Rolled Textile Storage

- Use cardboard tubes covered in tyvek to keep the textiles away from the cardboard
- Tubes should be a minimum of 3" in diameter
- Roll with the outside of the textile facing out.
- Line textiles with muslin to serve as a buffer to itself.
- You can store multiple items this way.

Flat/Boxed Textile Storage



Flat storage is often an ideal way to store a variety of textiles but requires a lot of space. Flat storage is often the more expensive method as well.

Flat/Boxed Textile Storage



Flat storage can also be vital to the preservation of fragile garments and other textiles that are not strong enough to be hung or rolled.

To properly store items flat, you may need to use lignin-free tissue and/or unbleached muslin to pad out folds, sleeves, skirts and other areas so they maintain their original shape without added stress.

Flat/Boxed Textile Storage



Notice how the garment is folded and padded using the appropriate kind of tissue. This is to absorb the weight to avoid creasing.

<http://www.mdhs.org/costumeblog/>

Flat/Boxed Textile Storage

- Padding is important
- You can use tissue or make pillows from muslin or tyvek to support folds, sleeves, skirts, etc.
- This alleviates pressure on weaker areas.
- Use muslin as a tray to lift items out of the box.



<https://ellencarrlee.wordpress.com/2013/12/16/artifact-storage-tips-and-tricks/>

Mixed Media

- Many textile items are mixed media, meaning you may have a silk dress with a brass button and glass beads. This makes preservation difficult.
- To protect fabric from buttons or similar items, you can wrap the embellishment in lignin-free tissue to provide a buffer.
- If items can be removed, they can be placed in polyester or milinex bags and hung from a hanger with twill tape or stored alongside an object in a box.
- As previously discussed when mixed media is involved, opt for **unbuffered** tissue paper to preserve and protect an item.



Accessories

- Textile-based accessories are usually best stored flat or in specialty boxes.
- Items related to the primary item (think wedding shoes stored with a wedding dress) should use similar preservation techniques but should be stored separately.
- Large collections of items should either be bagged or secured in a box so they are not damaged. Here, a collection of fans are secured using twill tape stuck to ethafoam.



Environmental Concerns

- Textiles should be stored somewhere dark, cool, and constant.
- Light damage can happen very quickly.
- Ideally 60-65° with a relative humidity of 50%
- Avoid fluctuations in temperature and humidity.
- Check garments from time to time for pest or other miscellaneous damage.
- Avoid placing textiles (and anything, really,) in air-tight bins for long periods of time, especially older items.
- Even “artifact-safe” materials need to be replaced over time (after many years) so keep that in mind for the future.
- Pest management is best controlled before it’s a problem.
- If you choose to use moth balls or other chemicals, make sure they are not touching the textiles. Cedar chests need a buffer too and don’t help as much as one would like them to.

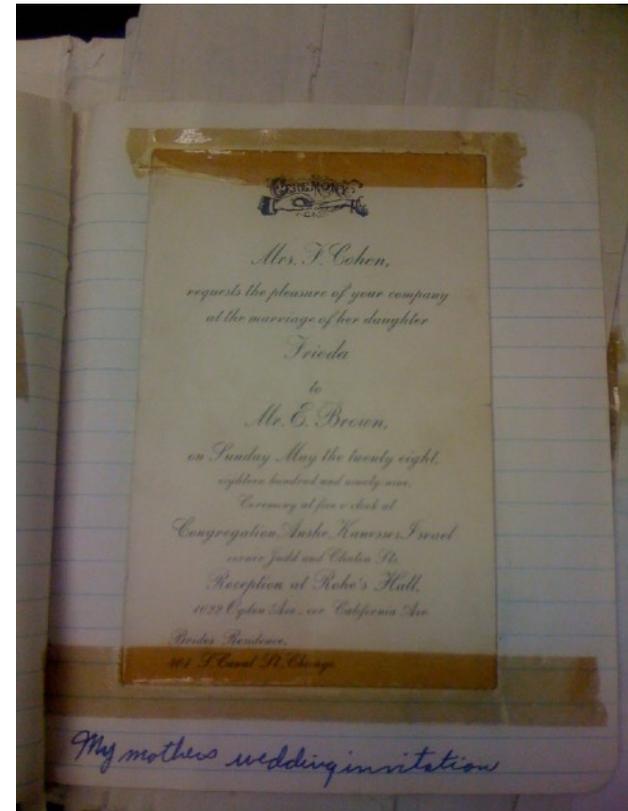
Cleaning Textiles

- The older and more fragile the garment, the more careful you need to be.
- Use soap free of fragrances and dyes
- Orvus
- Vacuuming and other techniques



Other Items

- Once you know the basics, you can preserve almost everything!
- Different items may have slightly different needs but usually 65° and an RH of 50% is good.
- Cool, Dark, Dry, and consistent
- Lignin-free materials are important.



THANK YOU!

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Please contact Lindsey at 630-220-0730 or at shop@hangerbee.com with any questions.