



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION ARCHIVES

PRESERVATION PROTOCOLS

Collections Maintenance: Preservation Rehousing

Many collections at the Archives are deemed high priority based on their research value, frequency of use, current housing, and/or condition issues. These high-priority collections, as identified in the Collections Management System (CMS), require more extensive rehousing procedures. Preservation rehousing is often undertaken by the Preservation Team, comprised of staff, interns and volunteers, and can include activities such as the replacement of boxes and folders, proper orientation of books and documents, staple removal, humidification and flattening, the creation of custom enclosures, and preservation photocopying. Several of these activities have separate protocols; please review these when undertaking a preservation rehousing project.

General Procedures

The following procedures should be followed when completing preservation rehousing projects. Additional steps may be taken based on the current condition and future needs of the specific collection to be rehoused. Please refer to specific protocols when necessary.

Boxes and Folders

1. If boxes are physically damaged or of poor quality, they should be replaced with acid-free, buffered record storage (1 cubic ft.), document (0.5 cubic ft.), or half document (0.25 cubic ft.) boxes. If there are collections that are too large to fit into legal-size boxes, see the Preservation Team for assistance in housing.
2. All collections materials (loose documents, photographs, pamphlets, books, etc.) should be placed into folders.
3. Folders that are physically damaged or of poor quality should be replaced. If needed, the pH of suspect folders may be tested to determine if they require replacement.
4. Folders should fit the width of the box they are to be housed within. Document boxes require legal-size folders. Record storage boxes can accommodate both legal- and letter-size folders. You may choose letter-size folders to maximize the use of space in the record storage box, but take into consideration the weight of the box once filled and any contents that may be larger than letter-size. Both considerations may warrant the use of legal-size folders.
5. All folders used in preservation rehousing are stamped in the upper left corner of the front folder flap. See image below. This stamp creates a space for collection, box, and folder numbers to be recorded. Before stamping folders using wood block rubber stamps and water-soluble ink pads, each reinforced tab folder must be folded “inside out” so that the edge of the reinforced tab is on the back of the folder. All reinforced tab folders are treated this way to

prevent any potential damage from occurring when removing items from folders that may get caught on the lip of the tab.

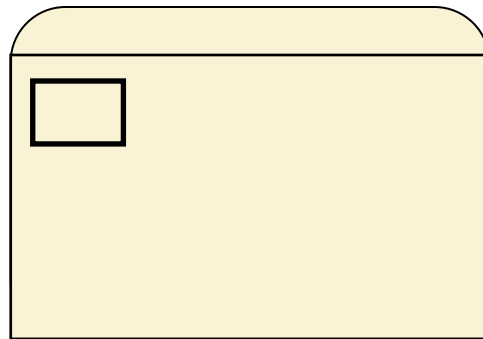


Figure 1. Each folder receives a stamp that provides a template for recording collection, box, and folder numbers.

6. Using a pencil, record the folder titles, from the original folder or finding aids, onto the new folder. Begin text on the left side of the reinforced tab. Record collection, box, and folder number within the stamped template.
7. The original score lines of the folder should be used as a guide when filling folders. Do not place more documents in the folder than can be accommodated by the broadest score line. Crease the score line of the folder, using a bone folder if needed, so that it fully supports the documents within and provides a flat edge that rests in the bottom of the box.
8. Boxes should not be over- or under-filled. Over-filling can put unnecessary strain on the box corners and documents can be damaged when removing folders from boxes. Under-filling can cause the contents to slump and become distorted. Fill boxes so that contents are fully supported and there is no excess space within the box.
9. Document spacers can be used to support the contents of a box so that the folders rest flat against the back of the box. Fold the boards along the score lines on each side of the board, creating the appropriate thickness required to fill the space within the box. Place the spacer in the front of the box.



Figure 2. Fold both sides of the document spacer to fill the space within the box.

Removal of Damaging Attachments

1. The following items should be removed during a preservation rehousing project in order to prevent further damage to the documents:

- a. Binders (three-ring, metal clasped, velobinders, etc.)
 - b. Rubber bands
 - c. Paper clips
2. Any items removed from a binder should remain together within the folder. Use a buffered paper folder insert, or create a folder from a single sheet of buffered paper, to store the contents together. Label the folder with any titles found on the original binder.
 3. Staples should also be removed, but require additional training to ensure their safe removal. Please see the Preservation Team for further information.

Enclosures

1. Negatives, photographic prints, and books may require additional enclosures within the folder.
2. Still film negatives should be stored buffered paper envelopes. Transfer any labels or notes from the original enclosure to the new buffered envelope. 35mm film strips can be stored in polypropylene album sheets to provide access to the contents. However, glass-plate, nitrate, and acetate negatives should not be stored in polypropylene enclosures.
3. Photographic prints should receive individual polypropylene sleeves or album pages if there is an evident preservation concern or the collection is frequently accessed. Acid-free, lignin-free buffered paper envelopes can also be used for black and white prints. Contemporary color materials should be stored in unbuffered paper envelopes. If the prints are stable, they can be safely stored within the folder without additional enclosures.
4. Custom enclosures for books or pamphlets may be required for support. If no added support is required, books and pamphlets should be stored spine down within the folder. Please see the Preservation Team if you suspect a custom enclosure may be needed.

Modifying Finding Aids

1. When a collection is rehoused, contents may shift. Condense collections when possible to maximize the use of space. If contents shift, document the box and folder number change on the printed finding aid.
2. If the title of the original folder differs from the finding aid, please see the Preservation Coordinator for assistance.
3. Once the collection has been completely rehoused, submit the modified finding aid to the Chief Archivist.

Last modified: May 2017