

Preserving Vintage Clothing and Textile Products - Part 1

Preserving the Past and Present for Future Generations



Have you read "Collectibles" 4H•HLTH•402. If you haven't, take a step back and read it because the information below builds upon the content of "Collectibles."

Getting Started

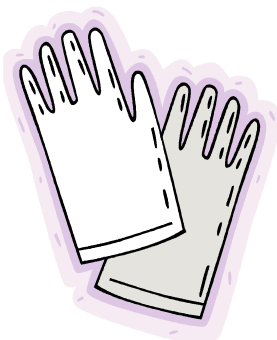
Textile heirlooms are treasured keepsakes of the past. Many families use them to serve as records of the family history, to strengthen family and cultural ties, and to remember special events. They may include garments or objects made of textiles.

If you are lucky enough to have textile heirlooms in your family, you need to decide whether to use and enjoy them during your lifetime or pack them away for someone else in your family to enjoy at a future date. Regardless of your decision, you need to carefully examine the items to check their condition and then properly store them in order to preserve them for future generations.

HANDLING - Avoid unnecessary touching and handling as it can cause damage to delicate textiles weakened by age. Wash hands before touching and remove jewelry; roll up sleeves with buttons and remove anything that might catch on the textile.

No drinks, food, candy, gum, pencils, pens or smoking should occur anywhere near the item. Drinks, include water which can stain and disfigure a textile.

First, examine the piece. Wear white cotton gloves and be sure the piece is well supported so there is no strain on the fibers. Oil and soil from the hands and weight of the textile can cause further deterioration and damage.



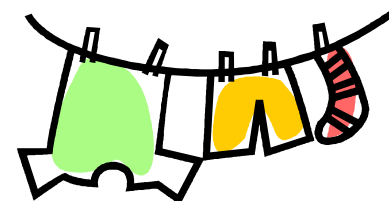
The textile should be laid on sizing free cotton sheet, washed undyed muslin, polyester batting or acid-free paper.

Several environmental conditions are harmful to textiles. These include light, high temperature, high humidity,

Preservation Supply Kit:

- White cotton gloves
- Appropriate containers for storage of textile
- Bound nylon screen and vacuum with attachments and suction control
- Appropriate needle and thread
- Appropriate fabric for repair
- Acid free tissue paper
- Washed, unbleached and undyed muslin
- Polyester batting
- Distilled water - does not have chemicals and minerals which can stain or damage

radical changes in temperature and humidity, sealed environments, acids in wood sources (wood, paper, tissue, boxes), abrasion, soil, dust, insects and rodents.



CLEANING – All textile heirlooms should be kept as clean as possible to prolong their life. It is not always necessary to wash and clean historic pieces.

Before deciding to clean a textile heirloom, look carefully at the article. The type of soil, fiber content, dye and condition of the textile must be considered when deciding what cleaning procedure to use. If an item is very fragile, and the dye is not color fast, or if the fiber will be damaged by water and should not be wet cleaned. Sometimes the only possible cleaning method is airing and/or vacuuming.

Always test a hidden or well concealed area of anything you intend to clean or launder. This will tell you a lot about the fabric, fiber and dye. See 4-H.HLTH.412 for details.

Airing is the gentlest procedure. Air outdoors, away from direct sunlight and protected from birds. Do not beat or shake. If the item is heavy be sure to provide even support.

Do not hang item over a line, as this causes severe stress on one area. Instead, hang it on a well-padded hanger or rod and air textiles on a mild day. Airing is a safe treatment for very fragile items, such as silk.

When using a vacuum be sure to reduce the suction as much as possible. If you cannot reduce the suction then be very careful with fragile fabrics, since strong suction may break weakened threads. Some fragile, beaded and embroidered fabrics should not be vacuumed. Before using this method of cleaning, read 4-H.HLTH.412 and practice the process before applying it to the heirloom.

Wet cleaning and/or spot and stain removal of heirlooms requires patience and study. Before attempting these procedures, research the proper techniques and procedures. Using inappropriate methods or cleaning products can do extensive damage to the heirloom. This includes dry cleaning.

RESTORING – If the garment has holes from insects, environmental decay, tears, etc., research and apply the technique best for the textile and its end use.



Environmental Conditions

LIGHT - Ultraviolet rays in all types of light cause textile fibers to weaken and dyes to fade. This includes sunlight and artificial light sources. Light intensity and duration of exposure will cause damage.

TEMPERATURE - High temperatures cause brittleness of fibers. Temperatures between 65 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit are best.

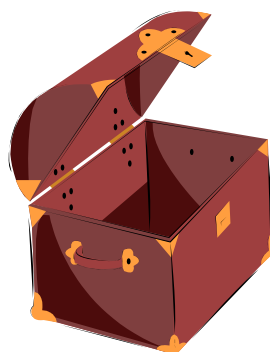
HUMIDITY - Humidity over 55 percent promotes the growth of mildew. Mildew stains may become permanent, and cause fiber damage.

AIR - Textiles need to breathe, so be sure not to place them in a closed environment, such as a plastic bag or box. Be cautious of Abrasion which can occur along folds and creases.

INSECTS - Insects can be attracted to textile items, especially if any food or beverage is on the article.

Storage

After spending time cleaning and restoring an item, be sure to



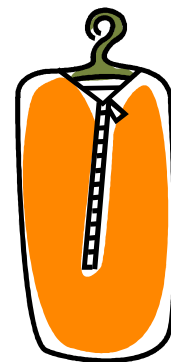
store it properly. Select and apply appropriate conservation practices.

- Store free from detergent and starch.
- Store clean and un-ironed.
- Store fragile items flat or rolled using as few folds as possible. Select acid-free tissue paper or washed undyed unbleached muslin to cushion folds.
- If sturdy, hang on a padded hanger.
- Do not store in plastic bags or boxes, as they hinder air circulation and trap moisture. Fresh air deters mold and mildew.
- Cover in a cotton or linen sack, hanging bag or acid-free conservation box. Synthetic fibers create static electricity and attract dust. Cotton muslin is a safe fabric for garment covers. Wash to remove starch. Do not use bleach or a detergent with bleach. Tyvek is spun bonded olefin material that is inert, gas permeable, non-abrasive, water proof and dustproof which is recommended by conservators.
- Keep temperature 65 to 75 degrees F and humidity 45 to 55 percent constant.

Kent State University Museum (2009) offers the following suggestions for your textile heirloom:

Vertical storage (hanging):

- Select a sturdy hanger that is the right size and shape to fit the garment. To avoid a sharp crease at the shoulder, pad the hanger by winding strips of polyester batting around it to shape and cushion the shoulder area. Secure with thread.
- Cover the padded hanger with a cloth cover. Wood and plastics (such as polyester) often release acids that create yellow stains on the fabrics they touch, it is best to use a shield over them. Undyed, washed and unbleached cotton muslin is cheap, safe and can be used for hanger shields as well as garment covers.
- For gowns make a cotton cover that completely encases and protects it from light and dust. The outer dust cover and hanger cover should be washed yearly to neutralize the fabric.



- Make sure the garment sits on the hanger without putting strain on the shoulders, collar or sleeves.

Horizontal Storage (boxed):



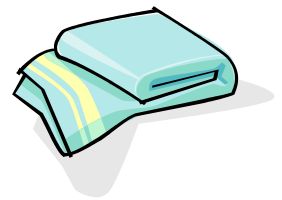
- If the garment is delicate at the shoulder area, if the weight of the skirt and train is heavy or if gravitational strain will distort the piece, the garment should be boxed. The box should be made of acid-free materials. A few commercial services offer packaging services but the

archival quality of their materials is often questionable. If, for instance, boxes have a cellophane window, the cellophane should be removed or tissue paper should be placed between the window and the garment. Mold and mildew grow easily where fabric touches plastic, cellophane or glass.

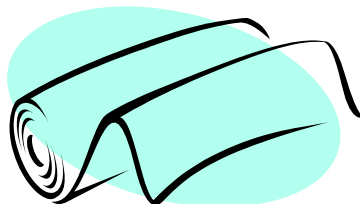
- You will need new acid-free tissue paper, clean cotton fabric and a sturdy acid-free cardboard box, large enough so that the garment will require few folds and deep enough to prevent crushing of the folded garment. If you have a choice between the two types of acid-free tissue available for archival storage, use the acid-free paper that will best suit the fabric in the garment: buffered acid-free paper remains acid-free for a longer period of time and is used for cotton and linens. Unbuffered acid-free paper is used for silks and woolsens.

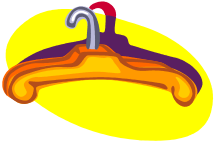
If one cannot afford archival products, non-acid-free tissue paper can be used but one should monitor the garment more closely and change the tissue paper yearly. Non-archival boxes should be monitored closely and be extremely well lined with undyed, washed cotton muslin so that the off-gassing will affect the cotton sling before it does the textile/garment. *Acid free papers, boxes and other supplies can be obtained by searching the web "archival supplies" or archival storage."*

- Line the box with undyed and washed cotton muslin so that the cotton fabric completely envelops the garment. This cotton sling can be picked up instead of the garment when handling the contents of the box. Arrange the costume to minimize folds. Place crumpled tissue along major folds to prevent formation of hard creases. Cover the top of the garment with tissue or cotton fabric before closing the box.
- Boxes should not be sealed. Fabrics are frequently made out of organic materials which require air circulation.
- Some items do not age well and should be isolated from historic garments by wrapping them with acid-free tissue or stored separately. Such items include plastic and metal buttons, pins, buckles, headpieces and veils with metal parts. Remove rubberized shields and foam padding for they deteriorate with age and may stain the fabric.
- You should take your garment out of storage each year. Remove the cotton cover or open the box to check for evidence of darkening as a result of unremoved soils. A number of colorless soils or stains turn dark as they age and oxidize. Change the position of the folds, replace all of the tissue paper if necessary and wash any cotton fabric used in lining the box. This inspection should be done whether you packaged the garment yourself or it was done commercially. This part of successfully storing historic garments cannot be overemphasized. Do not wait 20 years to look at the garments. By then, stains will be more permanent, insect, mold, and mildew damage may be irreversible, and folds will have become permanent creases.



Note: Trade names used in this publication are for information only and do not imply endorsement of products.





Related 4-H Project Areas: Fabrics and Fashions, Health, Recreation, Arts and Hobbies, any project area of interest can become a hobby for collectibles.

Other Related Project Materials:

4H•HLTH•402 Collectibles

4H•HLTH•403 Preserving Vintage Clothing and Textile Products – Part 1

4H•HLTH•404 Preserving Vintage Clothing and Textile Products – Part 2

4H•HLTH•405 Storage and Display of Heirloom Textiles in the Home

4H•HLTH•406 Preserving Photographs, Books and Paper Documents

4H•HLTH•407 Preserving Metal, Wood and Plastic Collectibles (not available)

4H•HLTH•408 Preserving Memorabilia

4H•HLTH•409 History Mysteries Part 1– Recording and retelling the history of 4-H and its people through stories

4H•HLTH•410 History Mysteries Part 2– Writing the Story – your treasures - from Clues

4H•HLTH•411 Documenting and Cataloging Collectibles (not available)

4H•HLTH•412 Displaying Collections and Collectibles (not available)

4H•PDL•111 Personal Development – Documenting our Heritage 4H•HLTH•413 Authentication Card