

Storage and Display of Heirloom Textiles in the Home

Preserving our Past and Present for Future Generations



Have you read "Collectibles" 4H•HLTH•402 and 4H•HLTH•403 and 4H•HLTH•404? If you haven't, take a step back and read them because the information below builds upon their content.

This fact sheet was originally printed by the Oklahoma Cooperative Extension Service as C-1411 Heirloom Textiles: Storage and Display in the Home.

Consider the following questions. "Do I display, use, and enjoy my heirloom textiles and probably shorten their life. "Do I carefully pack them away and have them for a longer

period of time?" If the item is very fragile and already in poor condition then store it carefully and try to preserve it for future generations. If the textile is a sturdy item in good condition you could display it. This will give others a chance to enjoy its beauty.

As no two textiles are exactly alike, it is difficult to give specific directions for their care and storage. However, there are general guidelines for the care of textiles that are delicate because of age and fabric characteristics. Please see 4H•HLTH•403 and 404 Preserving Vintage Clothing and Textiles parts 1 and 2.

Storage

Be sure to clean and repair an heirloom textile before either storing or displaying it. Some general "dos and don'ts" of storing textiles include the following:

1. Don't keep heirloom textiles in an attic or basement.

The ideal temperature should be a moderate 65° F with a relative humidity around 50%. Heat accelerates

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
- Wash, unbleached and undyed muslin
- Polyester batting
- Distilled water - does not have chemicals and minerals which can stain or damage

textile deterioration and humidity promotes growth of mold and mildew.

2. Do protect textiles from exposure to light.

Ultraviolet rays in sunlight and fluorescent light bulbs cause colors to fade and fibers to weaken.

3. Don't store items in plastic bags, styrofoam, wood and non-acid-free products, such as cardboard or regular tissue paper.

Never wrap or store fabrics in dry-cleaning plastic bags. They hold moisture which promotes mildew and create static electricity which attracts dust and dirt. Chemical reactions may also cause yellowing.

Use washed, unbleached muslin, old sheets or acid free tissue paper for covering or wrapping historic articles. Use acid free cardboard boxes for storage.

4. Don't allow your textiles to come in direct contact with wood or wood products.

The acid in these items causes a chemical breakdown of the textile fibers. If you store the textile in a drawer, trunk, or on a wooden shelf, seal the wood with several coats of polyurethane varnish. Line drawer with washed unbleached muslin or acid-free paper. Don't store fabrics in unlined cedar chests. The acid in the wood is harmful to fibers. Wrap items in washed muslin or acid-free tissue.

5. Don't starch or iron textiles before storage.

6. Do check storage areas periodically.

Check for fabric discoloration, insect or rodent damage and general dust accumulation. Wash all muslin covers and wrappings at least once a year since cotton muslin also produces acid with aging.

The method of storage is an important consideration. There are three ways to store textile heirlooms: **flat**, **rolled** and **hanging**. The type of textile, the condition of the fabric and the space available determines the best method to choose.

Flat Storage

Use flat storage for delicate textile heirlooms because it is less strenuous on the fibers. Use flat storage for.

- flat textiles,
- garments which are too fragile to hang,
- garments which are fragile on the top and heavy on the bottom and
- knit fabrics.

If possible, store all textiles unfolded. If folding is necessary, however, pad crease points with sausages made by filling tubes of washed muslin with polyester batting. Every six to twelve months refold the textile into new fold lines so the folds won't break or crack (Figure 1). Linen and silk especially have a tendency to crack when left folded for long periods of time.

Very fragile textiles may need support before storing. Baste the textile to a flat support fabric such as voile, nylon chiffon, organza or nylon tulle. First, launder the support fabric and stretch it on a frame. Then follow directions for attaching an heirloom textile to a mounting fabric which is found under the display section.

If you must stack textiles on top of each other, never place a larger or heavier textile on top of one that is smaller or more fragile.

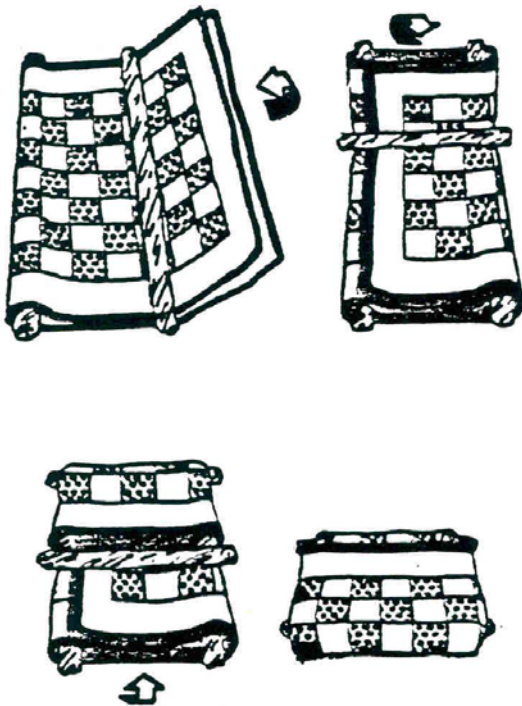


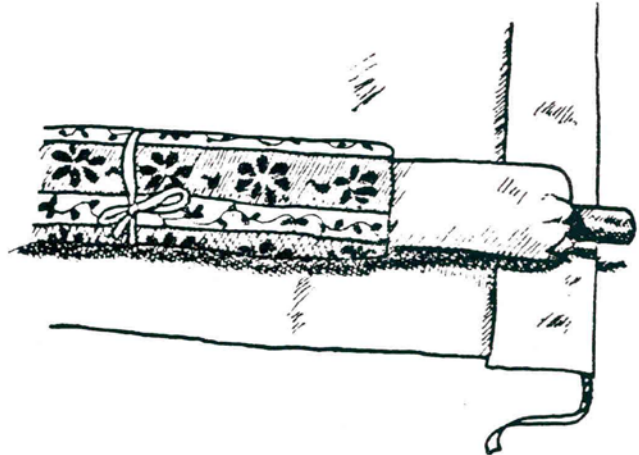
Figure 1.

Separate each item with acid-free tissue or washed muslin. If the textile contains metallic yarns, sequins, or beads, separate the metallic areas from the rest of the textile. Use acid-free tissue or washed muslin to protect the other parts of the fabric from the tarnishing (oxidizing) effects of the metal.

Rolled Storage

Use rolled storage to store textile items that are extremely large/heavy or very fragile. Order acid-free tubes from special sources or cover cardboard tubes with acid-free tissue or washed muslin. Large rollers from carpet dealers are available for the large, heavy textiles. Mailing or fabric tubes are useful for small, lightweight textiles.

Roll textiles loosely and take care not to crease the fabric (Figure 2). Roll them on a table or other flat surface the width of the textile to maintain even, proper tension throughout the roll. For textiles with metallic threads,



Large heavy textiles may be stored by rolling on cylinders.

Figure 2.

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sequins, beads, special dyes, or finishes cover the historic fabric with acid-free tissue or washed muslin before rolling. Roll out the two layers at the same time so that the muslin or tissue is sandwiched between each layer of the heirloom. Periodically wash the muslin cover and interlinings to reduce acid build-up.

Pay special attention to multi-layered, pile or thick textiles such as coverlets, quilts, tapestries and carpets. Rolling these items causes a different tension on the face than it does on the back and can cause quilting threads to break. Rolling can also produce strain on one side and wrinkles on the other. Instead of rolling, store these textiles flat, with

any necessary folds loosely padded with washed muslin sausages.

Do not stack fragile, rolled textiles. Store these fabrics by placing a wooden dowel, conduit or heavy gauge pipe through the cardboard tube and suspending it. Periodically rotate a rolled textile to prevent prolonged pull and stretching on any one fabric area.

Hanging Storage

Garments are generally hung rather than folded flat, unless they are very fragile. Hang garments on wooden or metal hangers that have been generously padded. (For pattern sources see last page.)

Make padded hangers by wrapping a wire hanger with polyester fiberfill and then basting washed, unbleached muslin over this batting. Wrap the fiberfill over the entire hanger (rather than just around the top wire) to simulate the outward curving upper chest and shoulder blades of the human body. If the wire hanger extends too far into the sleeves and creates stress against the sleeve fabric, bend back the ends of the wire hanger (about two inches toward the center) before padding it.

Garments which are heaviest on the bottom need extra protection against shoulder damage. An example of this is a dress with a lightweight bodice and a velvet skirt. Strips of seam binding can be sewn inside the garment, to the front waistline seam allowances, extended up over the shoulder of the hanger and then sewn to the back waistline seam allowances. This lifts the weight of the skirt off the garment shoulders by hanging the weight on the seam binding suspenders.

Hang historic skirts and trousers by distributing the weight of the garment evenly along the waistband. Use skirt hangers with two narrow strips of wood that fit over the waistband. Shirt hangers of this type are preferable to trouser hangers because skirt hangers are wider. Since the wooden strips of the hanger will produce acid with aging, cover each piece of wood with washed muslin. Periodically remove and wash the muslin to remove built up acid.

Stuff garment sleeves with acid-free tissue or soft netting. Support the collar/ neckline area with tissue if necessary. Do not use clothes pins or straight pins, tape or staples to support garments. Place each garment in a clean muslin or sheeting bag that you have made or loosely hang sheeting over the closet rod. This will protect the clothes from dust

and light. Arrange garments in the closet so they won't get crushed by other items.

Insects and Microorganisms

Proper cleaning and storage is a must to protect textile heirlooms from moths and other insects. If there is evidence of infestation, however, there are several possible solutions:

1. Dry-clean the textile.
2. Freeze the textile for approximately two months.
3. Microwave (small items) at a high setting for three minutes.
4. Vacuum the textile and then treat with commercial products.

Older mothballs consisted primarily of naphthalene, but due to naphthalene's flammability, modern mothballs use dichlorobenzene. Dichlorobenzene (PDCB) is more effective for killing moths.

Use PDCB or moth crystals with care since the chemical is toxic to humans. The chemical should not come in direct contact with the fabric. Hang it above the textiles so the fumes can penetrate down through the area to be treated. Do not store textiles in PDCB permanently. Treat the infested items in a sealed container or closet. Use a high concentration of PDCB for two months rather than a small amount continuously. At the end of the two month period, air items thoroughly and return them to a storage area. Clean and check the area on a regular basis.

Display

Certain precautions should be taken when displaying heirloom textiles. First decide where to display the item; second, decide how to display it. Base these decisions on the condition and size of the heirloom textile. Textiles may be framed, mounted, hung or placed on dress forms.

If the textile heirlooms are very fragile or in poor condition, do not display them. The stress of being mounted or exposed will cause them to deteriorate further. Due to the pull of gravity, a textile framed and mounted on the wall will have more strain than one displayed on a shelf or table top. Reduce strain on framed textiles by tilting the bottom of the frame slightly away from the wall with a small block of wood.

Use the methods discussed 4H●HLTH●405 for displaying sturdy fabrics. Many of the guidelines for storing heirloom textiles are similar to those for displaying them. Temperature should be moderate (65° F) with a constant

50% humidity. The mounting and backing materials that touch the heirloom textiles should be clean and acid-free. To reduce fabric and color deterioration during display. Avoid

- direct sunlight, fluorescent lights or a location where mirrors or light colored walls reflect light.
- areas where family members or guests smoke.
- outside walls, where temperatures fluctuate with the seasons.
- heaters, air conditioning vents or fireplaces.
- bathrooms, kitchens and laundry rooms.

Framing

Framing an heirloom textile can prevent damage from dust and abrasion. Stretch a mounting fabric over some type of support frame and then carefully sew the heirloom textile to the mounting fabric. Always attach the mounting fabric to the support frame before sewing the heirloom to the mounting fabric. The heirloom textile itself should not be stretched. Stretch the mounting fabric tightly over the open frame. Staple or tack the fabric along all four edges on the back of the support frame (Figure 3).

Mounting Fabric

Select a mounting fabric that is compatible in color and texture with the heirloom textile. A velvet or velveteen (pile surface) fabric will support the heirloom textile with less strain than a slick or smooth surface. Synthetic fabrics such as nylon will produce less acid build-up than natural cellulosic fibers like cotton or linen. Wash and thoroughly rinse mounting fabrics to remove excess dye and finishing chemicals.

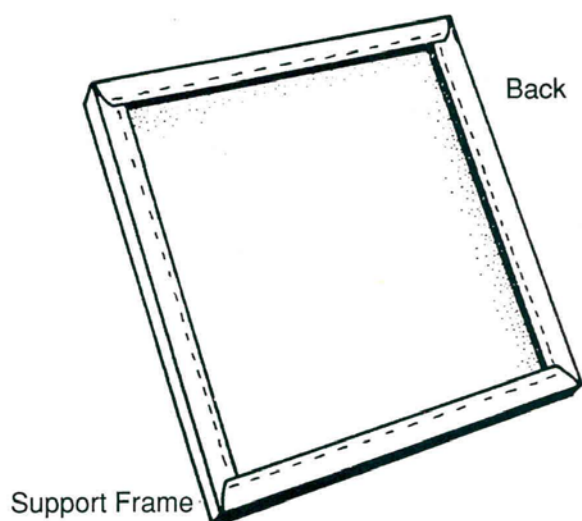


Figure 3.

Attaching the Heirloom Textile

Smooth the heirloom textile on the mounting fabric. Never stretch the heirloom textile. Pin it only if necessary. Place the textile in a horizontal position for stitching.

Select a thread that is compatible in size, color and strength with the textile. A fine cotton thread would be suitable for a medium weight textile. Use threads raveled from a compatibly colored fabric when mounting sheer, lightweight textiles. Do not use polyester and nylon thread. They are too strong and may cut the textile fibers. The size of the needle used is determined by the size of the thread. Use as small a needle as possible to avoid large holes in the fabric.

The color of the thread should match the color of the textile as closely as possible since it will be visible. Use a running basting stitch to attach the textile. This type of stitch will not stress the fabric as much as a catch stitch or back stitch (Figure 4). Stitches should be at least 1/4 inch in length. Sewing through the fabric creates holes, so smaller stitches mean more holes.

The Frame

The cross-section shows how to assemble the different parts of the frame. The textile should touch only the mounting fabric and it should have room enough for air to circulate freely around it (Figure 5).

- **Frame** - If the frame is wood, seal it with several coats of polyurethane varnish. It should be deep enough to accommodate all the layers listed below. The style of the frame should be in keeping with the textile.
- **Glass or Plexiglas** - This will protect the textile from dust, dirt, and damaging elements such as smoke and

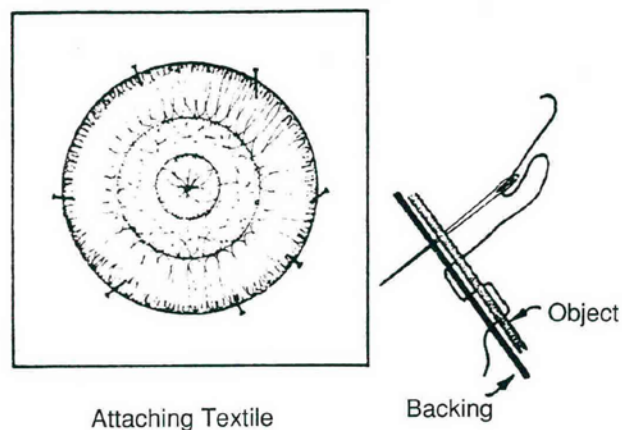


Figure 4.

other impurities. It is best not to use glare-proof glass as this often gives a distorted appearance to the textile. The fabric must not touch the glass or Plexiglas.

- **Mat (optional)** - Use acid-free, 100% ragboard.
- **Spacers** - Use commercial spacers (wooden or 100% ragboard strips) to provide air space and prevent the textile from touching the glass or ragboard. If the antique textile touches the glass, moisture condensation occurring on the inside of the glass will transfer to the object. This could cause staining and discoloration and create conditions that encourage growth of mold and mildew. Seal wooden spacer strips with several coats of polyurethane varnish.
- **Textile Stitched to Mounting Fabric**
- **Support Frame Covered with Mounting Fabric**
- **Backing** - If you use glass or Plexiglas in front of the textile, use a backing fabric that is stapled or tacked to the frame to allow air to get into the framing unit. Hang the frame with a space between it and the wall to allow for air circulation. If glass or Plexiglas is not used, then use a ragboard or heavy paper as the backing.

Appliquéing

Sturdy textiles may be appliquéd and displayed as part of a pillow, coverlet or quilt. These items, however, are subject to wear and deterioration since they are functional as well as decorative items.

To attach the heirloom textile, center the item on the base fabric and smooth the fabric gently without stretching it. The base fabric should be colorfast and thoroughly washed. Stitch by hand with long running stitches. Do not stitch the textile by machine. Complete the pillow or coverlet, being careful not to damage the heirloom textile. Do not starch the textile as it will turn yellow with age.

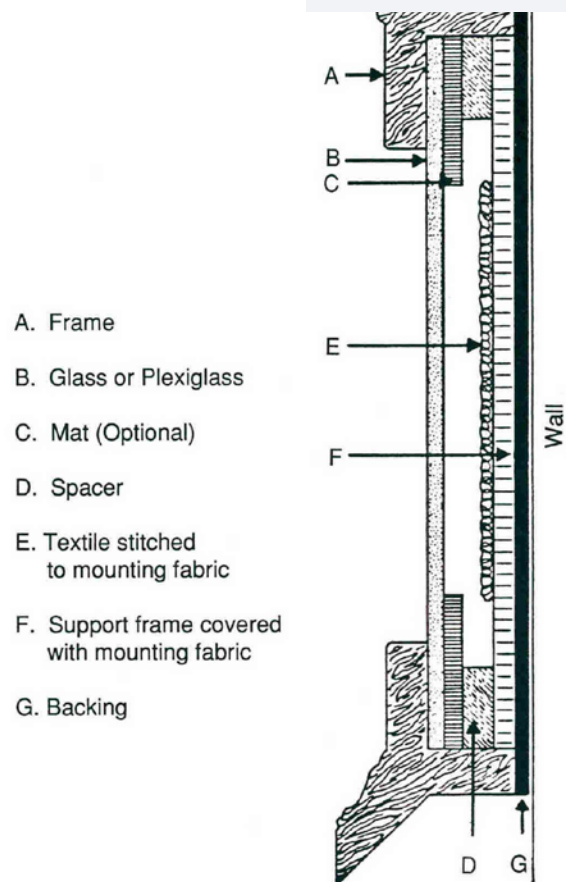
When displaying a coverlet or quilt over a rack, protect it from the wood or metal by covering the rack with unbleached washed muslin or acid-free tissue paper. Every three to four months change folds and re-roll position of the quilt or coverlet. This will distribute the weight. Adjust wrinkles and reduce the possibility of stretching.

Hanging

Large heirloom textiles, such as tapestries, can be displayed as wall hangings. The two most common methods for hanging large historic textiles involve the use of either Velcro strips or wooden dowels.

Buffered ragboard - Buffered ragboard is made of 100% cotton fibers and has the same high quality level as the normal museumboard. Also the ragboard has the addition of a very special sort of calcium carbonate to the cellulose results in an acid-free buffered ragboard with an alkaline reserve.

Non-buffered ragboard - Is also made of 100% cotton fibers, is specially made to store or frame old black and white photo's which can not endure an alkaline environment, because a buffering with calcium carbonate gives a reaction with the silver oxides of black and white photo's, that's the reason why it's unbuffered.



- A. Frame
- B. Glass or Plexiglas
- C. Mat (Optional)
- D. Spacer
- E. Textile stitched to mounting fabric
- F. Support frame covered with mounting fabric
- G. Backing

Frame Assembly

Figure 5.

Velcro Method

The Velcro method involves attaching the hook side of a Velcro strip to a backing fabric that is attached to the back of the heirloom textile. The loop side of the Velcro strip is stapled or glued to a piece of wood attached to the wall. For

heavy fabrics or quilts, attach a second Velcro strip or dowel casing halfway down the length of the fabric. This reduces strain on the top edge of fabric by lifting the weight of the lower half of the fabric.

Prepare Backing Fabric

The backing fabric protects the textile, it does not give support. Select a muslin or colorfast fabric and launder it thoroughly. Cut the backing fabric larger than the heirloom textile to allow for hem allowances.

Turn, press, and machine stitch hem allowances so that the backing fabric is slightly smaller than the textile heirloom. Cut a strip of Velcro tape equal to the width of the backing fabric. Machine stitch the hook side of the Velcro tape about 1/2 inch below and parallel to the upper edge of the backing fabric. Stitch around all four edges of the Velcro tape.

Attach Backing Fabric

Apply the backing fabric to the wrong side of the textile heirloom. The Velcro should face outward or away from the historic fabric. Hand baste the backing to the heirloom.

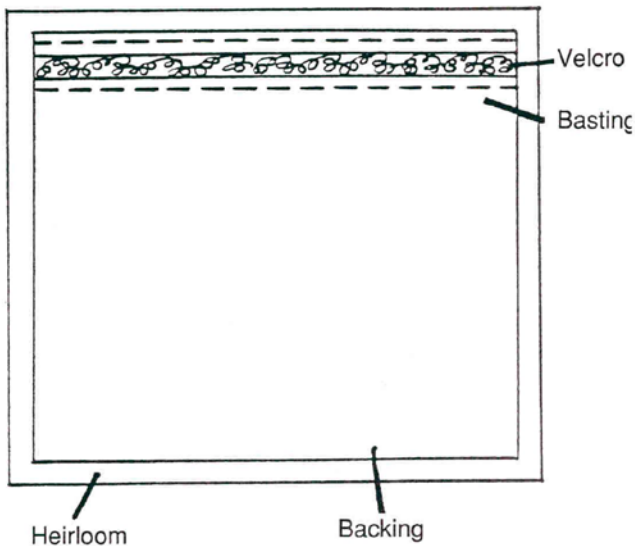


Figure 6.

Stitch above and below the Velcro strip with thread that matches the color of the heirloom textile. The hand basting stitches must go all the way through the heirloom fabric and show on the right side. Small and shallow stitches can cause a historic fabric eventually to tear along the sewing line (Figure 6).

Attach To Wall

Select a strip of wood equal in length to the Velcro strip on the backing fabric. Seal the wood with several coats of polyurethane varnish. Attach the hook side of the Velcro to the board using non-rust staples, tacks or glue. Attach the board to the wall with decorative hangers that show above the hanging or with invisible screws (Figure 7). Attach the heirloom textile to the board on the wall by pressing the two Velcro pieces together.

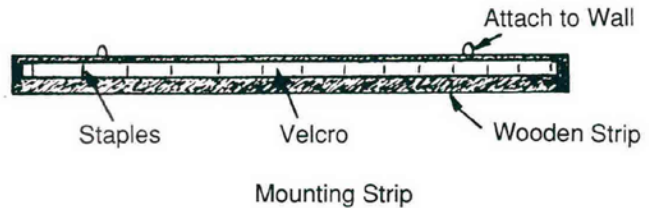


Figure 7.

D

Dowel Method

Prepare backing fabric as instructed earlier but do not use Velcro at the top of the backing fabric. Instead make a fabric casing for the insertion of a wooden dowel or rod.

Prepare Fabric Casing

Cut a strip of muslin the same length as the width of the backing fabric. Measure the width of the casing. Allow for a 1/4 inch seam allowance and make the casing one inch larger than the circumference of the dowel. Sew the two long sides of the muslin strip together to form a tube. Machine stitch the tube casing to the top of the backing fabric so that the casing lies flat against the backing fabric, but forms a rounded arch for the dowel.

Attach Backing Fabric

Attach the backing fabric to the wrong side of the heirloom textile following the same directions for the Velcro method (Figure 8).

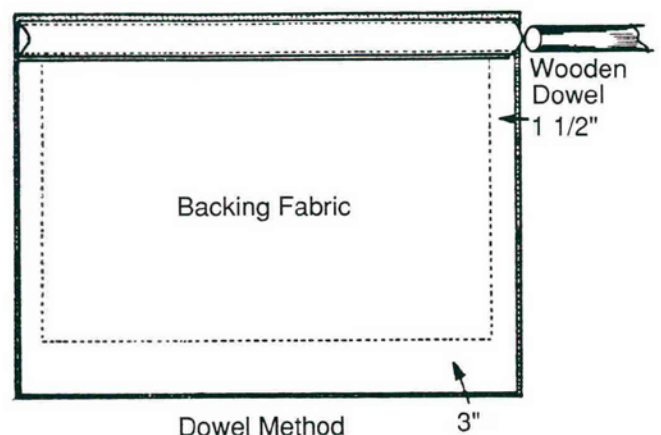


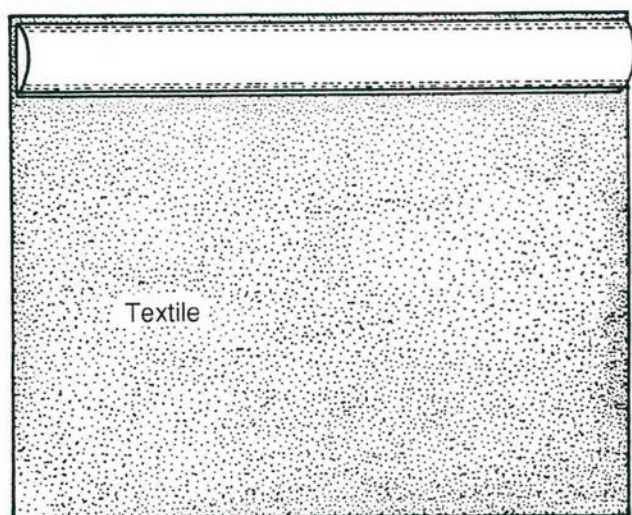
Figure 8.

Attach To Wall

Select a wooden dowel equal in length to the length of the fabric casing. Seal the wood with several coats of polyurethane varnish. Insert the dowel through the fabric casing. Hang the textile by attaching each end of the dowel to the wall or ceiling.

Modified Dowel Method

You can use a modified version of the dowel method for temporary display of very sturdy textiles. Instead of attaching the fabric casing to the backing fabric, attach a double layer casing by hand directly to the heirloom textile. Form a tunnel casing as before. Use four rows of hand stitching to attach the casing, two at the top and two at the bottom of the casing. This method does not protect the heirloom textile from chemical contaminants in the wall materials (Figure 9).



Attach Casing to Textile

Figure 9.

Dr

ess Forms

When displaying heirloom garments provide as much internal support as possible to prevent undue stress on any part of the fabric. A dress form is ideal for displaying clothing because the form will fill out and support body curve areas in the garment.

Avoid using a form that is too large, however, because tugging to close buttons and snaps will damage the fabric.

A dress form covered with a slightly fuzzy fabric (flannel) will provide more support through friction than will a form covered with a slippery fabric (nylon tricot). The fuzzy fabric will stick to and lift the weight of the garment.

Do not hang a historic garment on a wall peg (no matter how well padded). The fabric will eventually acquire a rounded and stretched hump at the point that rested on the peg. Do not drape garments over an antique trunk, chair arm or other furniture. Draping puts stress on the fabric in a bias direction, causing the garment to stretch off-grain and become warped in appearance.

Conclusion

When faced with decisions about the well-being of a treasured heirloom textile, remember to consider:

- the characteristics of the textile fibers,
- the age of the heirloom item,
- the environmental conditions.

Careful attention and care can significantly slow deterioration and extend the life of the fabric for enjoyment now and in the future.

Be sure to clean and repair heirloom textiles before either storing or displaying them. For information on cleaning and repair refer to 4H●HLTH●403 and 404 Preserving Vintage Clothing and Textiles parts 1 and 2.

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

References

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- Kline, 3. (1984). Care and Storage of Textile Heirlooms. North Carolina: Cooperative Extension Service, Clemson University.
- Maxon, R. and Berry, M.A. (1984). Family Textile Heirlooms: Preserving the Past. Oklahoma Families Stillwater: Oklahoma State University.
- Finch, K. and Putnam, O. (1977). Caring For Textiles. New York: Watson-Ouptill Publications.
- Farrell- Beck, 3. (1985). Hlistoric Clothing: Guide To Collecting, Wearing, and Care. What's New In Home Economics, 1, pp.

References and Resources:

American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works -
<http://www.conservation-us.org/about-conservation/caring-for-your-treasures/textiles#.VtiWE3SnIV>

Preservation Education Curriculum -
<https://www.nedcc.org/curriculum/lesson.introduction.php>

National Park Services Conserve-O-Grams - Conserve O Grams are short, focused leaflets about caring for museum objects, published in loose-leaf format. New topics are added as needed and out-of-date issues are revised or deleted. Semiannual supplements will be issued for an indeterminate period.
www.nps.gov/history/museum/publications/conservoogram/cons_toc.html

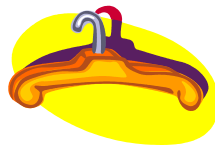
Smithsonian's Museum Conservation Institute
4210 Silver Hill Road
Suitland Maryland 20746
http://www.si.edu/mci/english/learn_more/taking_care/
Telephone: (301) 238-1240
FAX: (301) 238-3709

Museum Textile Services
PO Box 5004
Andover, MA 01810
<http://www.museumtextiles.com/>
Telephone: 978-474-9200

Textile Conservation Services
928 N. Alabama
Indianapolis, IN 46202
<http://www.textileconservation.com/>
Telephone: 317.266.8398
FAX: 317.266.8399

Williams, D. and Jaggar, L. Saving Stuff – How to Care for and Preserve Your Collectibles, Heirlooms, and other Prized Possessions. Simon & Schuster, 2005. ISBN 0-7432-6416-9

Katz-Schwartz, J. Protecting Your Collectible Treasures: Secrets of a Collecting Diva. Martingale & Company, 2001. ISBN 1-56477-388-4



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