Detective Techniques: Preservation

How to: Preserve papers, books, photographs and textiles.

Mission: Save them before it's too late.

Briefing: Learn how to protect fragile family treasures. When it comes to preserving and maintaining your family's treasures, the guidelines are very simple. It's putting them into action that takes a little work.

You can't turn back the clock, but you can protect your treasures for the future. Deterioration is natural: papers contain natural acids that cause them to crumble, photographs degenerate at different rates depending upon their chemical processing, and then there's good old fashioned wear and tear. Books are read, photo albums are perused, clothes and quilts are used. None of this can be avoided. What we can do is help slow the aging process down.

The enemies, whether you have precious photos, old letters, books or textiles are the same: light, temperature, humidity and insects.

Unfortunately, the places we usually store things are usually the least friendly for them. The attic, garage and basement all experience too many extremes of temperature and humidity. The ideal place for your newly boxed and refreshed items is a dark closet with a temperature range of 50-65 degrees with low humidity.

We have put together a list of suggestions on how to improve the state of your old goods. Care is relatively simple, it just takes a little bit of time, but the pay off- a longer life for your important things--is well worth it.

That said, it's important to realize when the job is too much for you to take on. This is when you should turn to the services of a professional conservator, who can come to the rescue with their training and tools.

History Detectives Tips

- Keep your objects away from ultraviolet light.
- Avoid handling, store in archive boxes.
- Consider a dehumidifier or humidifier for a perfect climate in your storage area.
- Photograph your item and store separately for insurance purposes and family records.
- Help out future history detectives: Record the history of the object and store together.