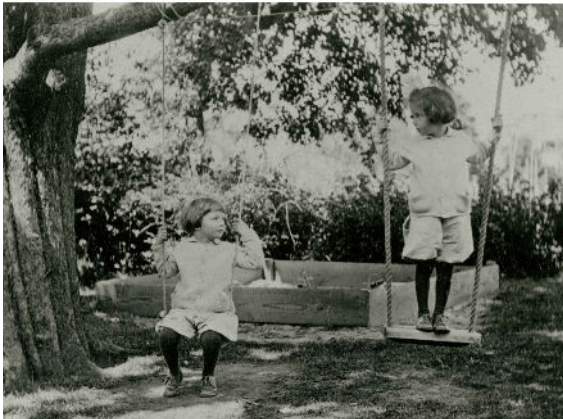


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## Where Can I Learn More?

More resources about caring for family history are available from organizations like the National Archives and Records Administration and the New England Document Conservation Center. You can also reach out to the Greenwich Historical Society at (203) 869-6899.



## Contact Us

The Library and Archives are open for research by appointment. Please contact the Curator of Library & Archives, Christopher Shields, with any questions or inquiries.

[cshields@greenwichhistory.org](mailto:cshields@greenwichhistory.org)  
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## Caring for Family History Collections

The basics of preserving historic objects and documents



# History in our Hands

Many of us maintain family history collections, passed down from generation to generation. Whether in the form of family photo albums, boxes in the basement, antique furniture in the attic, or any number of other objects and documents, family history helps us understand and learn from the past. These items can also require special care to ensure their preservation.

While caring for historic collections can seem daunting, there are simple steps that everyone can take to ensure the longevity of their family's history. Reading this guide to home collections care is already a great first step – remember, forewarned is forearmed! The most important thing to know is that any amount of action is better than none when it comes to preserving objects and documents. No one is able to create the most perfect conditions for maintaining every piece of history, but even minor changes can seriously slow degradation.

The factors that tend to be most damaging to family history collections are **humidity**, **temperature**, **pests**, and **water**. These four factors also exacerbate one another: a space that is warm and humid will be even more inviting to pests like bugs and rodents. To ward off deterioration, here are some basics to start with:

- Transfer historic objects and papers out of old cardboard boxes or suitcases and into non-PVC plastic cartons with tight-fitting lids. These storage cartons will keep out pests, water, and dust. Consider placing historic papers and photographs in file folders to prevent creasing and tearing.
- Basement and attic spaces experience the most extreme changes in temperature and humidity, making them less ideal places to store collections. If possible, move family treasures out of these spaces – linen closets and under beds can be good alternatives. If a basement is the only space available, store collections several inches off of the ground in case of flooding, and away from pipes and vents. Check frequently for pest or mold activity.
- Label objects, folders, and storage cartons with as much information as possible. That way, if disaster does occur, the family will know what an item is, and have a better chance at repairing it.

# Digital Preservation

When people think of family history collections, they typically imagine the family photo albums, handmade quilts, and train tickets that were saved in the 19th and 20th centuries. But one day, our descendants will look back at the digital photographs and home videos we leave behind with the hopes of learning about their own history. The guiding principles of preserving digital and physical collections are largely the same: ensure that items are stored safely, well-labelled, and check in on them frequently.

- Back up important files and photographs regularly. Ideally, this would mean backing up to more than one location, such as a cloud-based storage service, an external hard drive, or even a flash drive. In the event that a computer or phone dies, back-up files can save the day.
- Label digital objects and collections. Descriptive file names, putting related items in folders together, and organizing folders logically can make collections more findable and preserve essential identifying information.