



CREATING AN AT-HOME FAMILY ARCHIVE

This is a starter's guide to building an archive of your family's precious papers and documents in your home. Whether it's old birth certificates and marriage licenses, naturalization papers, or letters, you want to protect these old pieces of your family's history for future generations. Paper documents carry a lot of information, however the medium is susceptible to decay over time. This list of start-up tips will help you take proper care of your family's papers and build a safe place to store your precious documents.

TIPS FOR HANDLING:

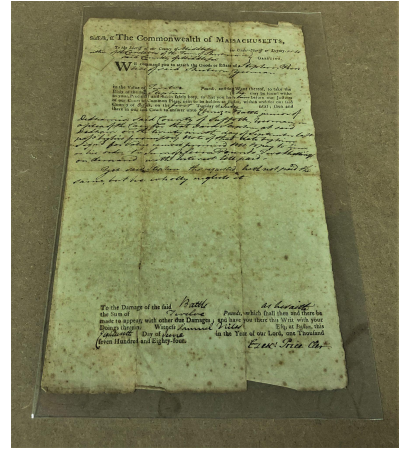
- Make sure that your hands are clean. You do not need to wear cotton gloves when handling old paper materials, however it is important to wash and dry your hands thoroughly before handling any delicate materials.
- Keep food and drink away. A small splatter of water, oil, and/or crumbs from food can have dramatic impacts on aged paper or vellum. Prevent unnecessary damage and do not have food or drinks of any kind near the papers while they're being handled. If you are going to take notes, follow the universal rule of every librarian: use a pencil. Remember, no pens or markers should ever be anywhere near your old documents.

PREPARING AND PROTECTING THE DOCUMENTS:

- Before filing the document away into an organized storage system, you want to make sure there is nothing on the paper that could damage it over time. Metal, such as staples, tacks, or paperclips, can rust over time and not only discolor the paper but also cause the paper to disintegrate where there's

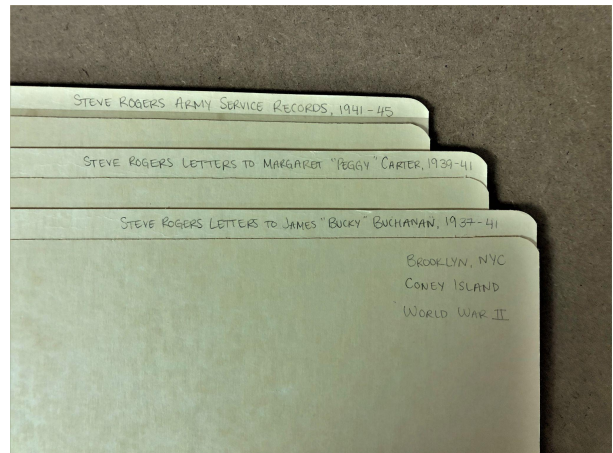
contact. Any bits of metal touching the papers should be removed where possible.

- Plastic envelope sheets are an excellent way to protect documents, however, you want to make sure you're using a stable plastic. Stable plastics, like polyethylene or polypropylene won't discolor or warp over time the way unstable plastics and PVC can. The document should be able to sit flat inside the stable plastic sheath and be completely covered with minimal excess space on the edges. Envelopes that unfold open to expose the document are preferable to those that you need to slide the document into, as the sliding motion can cause tearing or other lateral damage.



ORGANIZING AND STORING YOUR DOCUMENTS:

- Once your documents are properly protected in a mylar envelope, they can be organized into groups and stored in acid-free folders. You can group your documents however you see fit, but make sure to label the manila folder with its contents and any important tags (names of people represented, dates or big events, places, etc.) you want to record. Try to keep a uniform system of labeling your folders. Once you've assembled your folders, you can put them in an acid-free box (more on choosing your box below). Label the box with a description of the contents inside.



- Proper storage is all about fit. You want to keep things flat (either vertically or horizontally) as best you can. In order to let the papers sit flat, you want a

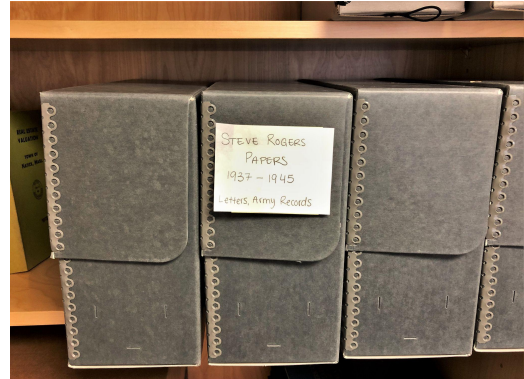
box that fits the folders inside just right. Just as you choose a plastic protector for the document based on the size of the document, you want to choose a box based on the size of your folders.

- If you're storing your documents vertically, look for a hollinger box with slightly larger dimensions than the folders that are going inside. There should be enough room for the folder to be placed inside without bending or rotating, but not so much space that the folder can slide around inside the box when it's moved. If the hollinger box is deeper than you need (there is excess room behind the vertical folders), try adding some cardboard or other lightweight, stable material to take up the extra space and give support to the vertical folders so they don't have space to droop.



- If you're storing your documents horizontally, look for a flat drop-front box with slightly larger dimensions than the folders that are going inside. Again, there should be enough room for the folders to be placed inside without bending or rotating, but not so much space that the folder can slide around inside the box when it's moved.
- The environment in which you store your materials affects the condition of your documents over time.
 - Extreme humidity (either too low or too high) is not good for paper. Too low (below 25%) and the paper can dry out and become brittle, too high (above 65%) and the environment is good for mildew to grow or insects to find a home.

- Similarly, the general temperature of your storage space impacts the documents. The lower the temperature, the slower the rate of chemical decay in the paper. Keeping the temperature below 75°F should be safe.
- Most people don't have at-home humidity sensors, however, so just as a general rule: store items out of damp basements and garages or hot attics. Keep them away from potentially leaky pipes, windows, or roofs, and keep them on a shelf off the floor.



With these tips your family's papers should remain in good condition and future damage can be easily avoided! To learn more about conservation basics, or the documents we have in our collection, visit the Natick Historical Society or natickhistoricalsociety.org. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to us at contact@natickhistoricalsociety.org

Thank you for reading!