

## About Garments

For many people textiles such as christening gowns, wedding dresses, and military uniforms are passed down through the generations and kept as treasured heirlooms. Even today new wedding dresses or baby clothes are saved for future generations. It is important to understand the proper procedures for the long-term preservation of these garments.

## Handling Garments

Because textiles may have hidden weaknesses, it is important to handle them very carefully. Do not handle these artifacts unless it is necessary. Never eat, smoke, or drink in the vicinity of an important textile. Serious consequences can be avoided with careful thought and preparation before, during, and after handling artifacts.

To protect a textile from damages like tears, or marks, remove dangling necklaces, sharp rings, protruding belt buckles, pens and pencils from shirt pockets, and tuck neckties into shirts.

Before moving an artifact, look at it carefully, find its weakness, and handle it accordingly. Prior to moving an artifact, prepare a clean, clear space to



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receive the object that is covered with clean padding as needed. When moving textiles, carry them fully supported on both arms or on a rigid support. Do not lift them by the edges.

If the textile is damaged while moving,

do not panic. Take a photograph to document the accident. Retain all pieces, however small, and place them in labeled zip-top bags. Do not attempt to put the textile back together. This is a job for a conservator.

### Materials to Have on Hand

- a HEPA filter vacuum cleaner with adjustable suction
- soft natural-bristle brush
- piece of nylon netting or fiberglass screen and twill tape
- rubber band



An important step in the long-term preservation of your garment is to clean it prior to storage. Cleaning will help to reduce the chances of mold, pests, and deterioration. One way you can reduce soil from the surface of a garment is through careful vacuuming. A vacuum cleaner can remove loose dust, mold spores, insect pests or

### Vacuuming

Secure the netting over the vacuum nozzle using the rubber band. This will stop the object or any decorative elements from being sucked inside the vacuum nozzle. Use the soft brush to direct the dirt or dust towards the suction of the vacuum. Do not place the vacuum nozzle directly on the surface of the object itself.

Alternatively, you can place the screen directly on the textile and vacuum through the screen. This will prevent the detachment of decorative elements such as beading or fringe. If you are using a fiberglass screen, stitch cot-

pest residues, and gritty particles. If, at any point, you are unsure about the condition of the garment, stop and consult a conservator. A conservator will be able to recommend the best solutions for long-term preservation. Only a trained textile conservator should wash historic textiles.

ton twill tape around the edge to prevent it catching on the fabric.



## Storing

Pad any creases and folds in a textile with acid-free tissue paper. Choose an appropriate sized box for your garment and limit the amount of folding to prevent damaging creases from forming. (see below for instructions on folding garments for storage)

When deciding where to store your textile, remember the first line of defense in proper storage is keeping your treasures in a suitable environment. The rule of thumb is that if you would be comfortable in the storage location, your objects will be “comfortable” there. Flat storage is ideal for most textiles because it provides support for the piece. Long-term storage in cedar trunks, while traditional, is not safe. The wood is highly acidic and will off-gas acting as a catalyst in deteriorating the fabric. Housing a textile object in an acid-free, lignin-free box will help to prevent damage from acids, insects, dust, water, and light. When using a box for storage, be sure the box and tissue are made of acid-free and lignin-free materials.

Storage spaces with extreme environmental fluctuations such as attics or basements should be avoided. Light can cause serious damage to textiles so it is important to limit the garment’s exposure so it does not become faded and brittle. Temperature and relative humidity are also important factors to consider when deciding where to keep your garment. Humidity that is too high can promote mold growth and insect infestation, while humidity that is too low will weaken the ma-

terials over time. The best place for storing your textile is in the living space of the home—either under the bed or in a closet. This will keep the environmental fluctuations at a minimum.

Textiles should not be stored if they are extremely soiled. Consult a textile conservator about washing soiled textiles. Older items and antique textiles should be examined by a textile conservator before being placed in long-term storage.

Prior to storage, each item should be photographed for record keeping and insurance purposes. A written description of the piece, including details about its history and importance as an heirloom are essential. One of the images of the object should be attached to the outside of the storage box. This will prevent the need to open the box and unpack the contents to see what is inside.



## Folding

Before packing, a space should be prepared for packing the object. It should be large enough to lay the item out completely. A large dining table can be used or, if necessary, a large clean floor area can also be used. The surface should be covered with a large, clean, white cotton sheet prior to retrieving the object.

In preparation for packing, remove all jewelry, watches, belt buckles, and abrasive items. Clean, dry hands are essential for safe handling of textiles. If your hands are prone to sweating or are very rough, use clean, white cotton gloves for this procedure.

A large acid-free, lignin-free textile storage box and acid-free, lignin-free tissue paper is needed. If the object is large, a minimum of two people will be required.

Start by fully laying out the object on the work surface. Determine the best way to fold the object so that the number of folds is minimized and any stiff or deteriorated elements are not located along a fold. Take advantage of existing seams. Make sure the item will fit in the box in its folded state. Line the interior of the box with two layers of tissue at right angles. Leave a tail extended outside of the box on each side. This will be folded over the top of the stored textile before the lid is closed.

Note: Textiles should be folded as few times as possible when stored; pad each fold of the item with sufficient tissue so that the folds are gradual. This will help

to protect fibers from stress and breakage along any creases. Too much tissue is usually better than too little.

Take the corners of a few sheets of tissue in each hand and crinkle the tissue up into each palm, roughly pleating the tissue and drawing it into a sausage shape. The sausage needs to be firm enough to hold the weight of the textile. More than one sheet may be needed for each sausage depending upon the garment. Place this sausage along the location of the first fold. Make enough sausages to line the entire length of the fold. Fold the textile over the sausages. Repeat this process with each successive fold until the object is entirely folded and ready to be placed in the box.

Garments can have extremely convoluted structures. All major areas should be padded out. For example, puffed sleeves should be filled with tissue sausages or balls. The object must fully fit in the box, so this may limit the amount of padding



possible.

When the item is fully padded and folded, place it in the box and fold the extending

“Note: Textiles should be folded as few times as possible when stored; pad each fold of the item with sufficient tissue so that the folds are gradual.”



tails of tissue back over the top of the item. Lower the box lid into place. If the box will be stored where there is potential for leaks or flooding, the box should be placed in a polyethylene bag that is sealed with 2" polypropylene adhesive tape.

Ideally, all textiles should be folded and stored flat. However, if the garment is in good condition, it can be hung on a padded hanger. Do not hang knitted garments! They will stretch and sag, causing

irreversible damage. If a garment must be hung for storage or display, a padded hanger will help to distribute the weight.

For full instructions on how to make a padded hanger visit:

[https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/HCD/docs/Heritage\\_Bulletins/ HB20\\_Caring\\_for\\_Textiles\\_Cleaning\\_and\\_Garment\\_Hanging.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/HCD/docs/Heritage_Bulletins/ HB20_Caring_for_Textiles_Cleaning_and_Garment_Hanging.pdf)



## Display

When displaying a textile, keep in mind that environmental factors will impact its long-term stability. Light, heat, humidity, particulate matter, and insects can all adversely affect a textile.

Light damage is cumulative and irreversible. Light not only fades dyes, but it can permanently degrade the textile fibers. Keep textiles away from direct light exposure. Use UV filtering on lights and windows. If you are framing a textile, use UV filtering glazing. Light damage can be mitigated by keeping all light levels low and rotating textiles on and off display.

As with storage, textiles are best displayed in areas with stable temperature and relative humidity. Airborne particulates can be reduced with air filters and regular vacuuming while on display. Consult a conservator if you see evidence of insects around the textile or insect damage to the textile itself. They can help you mitigate and prevent further damage.

Use a well padded mannequin or dress form to display garments. For more information on mounting garments, visit <http://www.connectingtocollections.org/mountinggarments/>.



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## Consulting a Conservator

Consult a conservator if you have any questions about storage or display of your garment. If your garment is very soiled or damaged, contact a textile conservator for assistance. Only a trained textile conservator should be consulted for washing and repair of textiles.

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## Additional Resources

American Institute of Conservation. *Caring for Your Treasures – Textiles*. Retrieved from <http://www.conservation-us.org/docs/default-source/public-relations/textiles.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

Kiefer, Kathleen and Petra Slinkard. (2013). *Mounting Garments for Display*. Connecting to Collections. Retrieved from <http://www.connectingtocollections.org/mountinggarments/>

Daly, Kathleen. (April 2014). *Caring for Textiles: Cleaning and Garment Hanging*. Heritage Bulletins. Oregon Heritage. Retrieved from [https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/HCD/docs/Heritage\\_Bulletins/HB20\\_Caring\\_for\\_Textiles\\_Cleaning\\_and\\_Garment\\_Hanging.pdf](https://www.oregon.gov/oprd/HCD/docs/Heritage_Bulletins/HB20_Caring_for_Textiles_Cleaning_and_Garment_Hanging.pdf)

Frisina, Ann. *Cleaning and Storing a Wedding Garment*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society. Retrieved from [http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/reports/wedding\\_garment.pdf](http://www.mnhs.org/preserve/conservation/reports/wedding_garment.pdf).

Keifer, Kathleen. (2000). *Conserve O Gram 16/2, Dry Cleaning Museum Textiles*. Washington, DC: National Park Service, US Department of the Interior. Retrieved from <http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/conservoogram/16-02.pdf>.

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## Conservation Suppliers

### Conservation Resources International

5532 Port Royal Road  
Springfield, VA 22151  
Toll free: (800) 634-6932  
[www.conservationresources.com](http://www.conservationresources.com)  
*Archival housing/storage supplies, photographic supplies, general*

### Gaylord Archival

P. O. Box 4901  
Syracuse, NY 13221-4901  
Toll Free: (800) 448-6160  
[www.gaylord.com](http://www.gaylord.com)  
*General conservation supplies, housing supplies*

### Hollinger Metal Edge, Inc.

6340 Bandini Blvd  
Commerce, CA 90040  
Toll Free: (800)-862-2228  
[www.hollingermetaledge.com](http://www.hollingermetaledge.com)  
*Archival housing/storage supplies*

### Light Impressions

100 Carlson Road  
Rochester, NY 14610  
Toll Free: (800) 975-6429  
[www.lightimpressionsdirect.com](http://www.lightimpressionsdirect.com)  
*Photographic supplies, housing, matting and framing supplies*

### University Products

517 Main Street  
P. O. Box 101  
Holyoke, MA 01041  
Toll Free: (800) 628-1912  
[www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com)  
*General conservation supplies, housing and matting supplies*

### Talas

330 Morgan Ave  
Brooklyn, NY 11211  
Telephone: (212) 219-0770  
[www.talasonline.com](http://www.talasonline.com)  
*Conservation supplies, photographic supplies, general*

### Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center

1326 S 32 Street  
Omaha, NE 68105  
402-595-1180  
[nshs.grfcc@nebraska.gov](mailto:nshs.grfcc@nebraska.gov)



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