Archival 101 & Working with Vendors:

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What Does Archival Mean?

- Not Quantifiable.
- Can mean different things for different materials
- Storing / treating an item with the most sound appropriate material in the proper environment.
- Implies long term storage

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Types of Materials

- Manuscripts: Letters, documents…
- Photographs / Prints / Maps
- Books / Pamphlets
- Ephemera: Broadsides, announcements...
- Textiles: Quilts, clothing...
- Objects: You name it.
- Records: official records with retention period. Discarded thereafter.

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Issues & Problems

- Poor environment (too hot / humid…)
- Poor storage materials
- Handling
- Disaster preparedness
- Quality of artifacts: Acidic, brittle, torn, fragile, sensitive

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Solutions

- Proper storage
  - “Archival” materials appropriate for artifact.
    - Boxes, folders, binders, albums, enclosures, raw materials…
- Proper environment
    - UV filters, hygro-thermographs, desiccant
- Repair / Conservation
    - Adhesives, tapes, papers, board, cloth, erasers, tools

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Buffered / Unbuffered

- Buffered vs. unbuffered vs. acid-free
  - Buffered preferred for most materials except some photographs and textiles.
  - Materials will absorb acids from air/dust/… for a longer period of time than unbuffered. Eventually will become acidic though too.
  - Have higher pH and $CaCO_3$ Reserve.
  - Acid-free means neutral pH (7.0ish) at time of manufacture. Has no buffering.

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Lignin free

- Lignin free
  - Lignin is a component of plants used to make paper.
  - Can be removed when pulp is extracted chemically but remains in groundwood papers such as newsprint.
  - Responsible for rapid aging and yellowing of newsprint.
  - Not desired for most materials.

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Plastics

- Plastics safe for “archival” storage.
  - Mylar: Crystal clear, rigid, inert film.
  - Polypropylene: Like Mylar but not as stiff.
  - Polyethylene: Inert, but less clear and stiff.
- PVC: BAD!!! Will off-gas chlorine which forms hydrochloric acid and will cause serious damage. Common in cheaper sleeves / albums.

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Newspaper

- Newspaper
  - Made from poor quality groundwood paper.
  - Very acidic.
- If in good condition deacidify and store in buffered enclosure or sleeve.
- If in poor condition, make photocopy onto acid-free paper and deacidify original before putting into sleeve if need to keep.

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Adhesives

- Tapes / Glue sticks...
  - Objects can be difficult to remove and tape/glue can cause damage
  - Try to avoid if possible. If you have to use tape use Filmoplast. Has buffered paper carrier with acrylic based adhesive.
- Instead use archival photo corners.
  - Inert materials won't react with photos…
  - Easy to remove, no adhesive touches materials

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How long do they last?

- How long will items last when put in archival materials?
  - It depends. Variables such as temperature, humidity, condition and usage will make a difference.
  - Most archival paper materials designed to last 500 years under optimal conditions.
  - Plastics almost forever.

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PAT: Photo Activity Test

- Tests the reactivity of materials with photographs.
  - Performed on paper, board, plastics…
  - Usually requested by mfg. or seller.
  - Indicates that material is safe for use with photographs, though caution is called for.
  - PAT should be indicated in catalog.
  - Most paper/board/plastics sold by archival vendors safe, though not always indicated.

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Expensive?

- Why so expensive?
  - Cost of raw materials. Archival quality materials cost more to produce as “ingredients” have to be of a higher/purer grade.
  - Market forces and perception.
    - Made for a select group. This is changing as more vendors begin to make and label products as archival. Costs will go down, as “archival” becomes a commodity.

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Undifferentiated Product

- Archival supplies have become commodity items.
  - Products come from the same range of suppliers.
  - Composed of same raw stock and made with same equipment.
  - All geared towards same standards.
  - Quality relatively uniform, though some vendors better at some things than others.

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Differences

- May be some visual/tactile differences between boards. DO NOT affect performance.
- COST
  - shop around.
  - request catalogs from others.

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Custom Orders

- Most vendors happy to make custom sizes
  - Binders / folders / enclosures easy.
  - Boxes more complex.
    - Require dies (avg. cost $400/box design).
    - Can be worth it for large quantities.
    - Ensure “perfect” fit.
  - If it’s made with one board, can be made with others.
    - Metaledged designs ok as well as some ship-flat.
    - Corrugated cheaper than blue/gray, than tan...

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Custom Orders

- Many items in the catalogs are made to order due to low sales volumes.
  - If you need a special size, ask for it. There may be minimums. You could also substitute materials. Tan for Gray…
  - Works best with binders, folders, most mylar enclosures.

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Buying Tips I

- Compare pricing!
  - Pay attention to quantity price breaks.
  - Sales flyers. Most archival vendors now offer promotions.
  - Request bid pricing rather than ordering straight from catalog.
    - Requires larger quantities.
    - Combine orders with other organizations / bulk buying.

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Buying Tips II

- If you have questions about:
  - Specific product: ask customer service.
  - Pricing : customer service / bid department / your sales rep.
  - Usage / specifications…
  - Regional preservation people (SU, Cornell, Colgate).
    - NEDCC

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Buying Tips III

- Read the catalog.
  - Catalogs have “tech tips” in relevant sections.
    - Show how to use.
    - Indicate for what types of materials suitable.
    - Most by preservation professionals.
  - Most product specifications indicated next to product.

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Be Flexible & Creative

- Materials can often be adapted for different purposes.
  - Use slide/photo pages for ephemera like buttons.
  - Put clippings in photo pages rather than adhering to album pages (back with acid-free paper).
  - Look at North American Permanent Papers. The copier/printer paper you're using may already be permanent. (Abbey pH pen helps).
    - See learning more.

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Be Flexible & Creative

- Glue-in binders problematic.
  - Hard edge of cloth can cause problems with brittle or valuable materials. Solution: Fold piece of good paper around pamphlet, sew, then glue in.
- Make own envelope binders by sticking archival envelope into glue-in binder.
- Make own “envelope sling.”
  - Fold piece of paper around brittle material, then insert.

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Learning More

- A wealth of information is to be found on the Internet:
  - CLRC Preservation Resources Page
    - <http://clrc.org/progs/preserv.shtml>
  - Conservation OnLine
    - <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu>
  - Northeast Document Conservation Center
    - <http://www.nedcc.org>

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Learning More

- Ellen McCrady , Abbey Publications, Inc., 7105 Geneva Dr., Austin, TX 78723
  abbeypub@flash.net
  512-929-3992
  Also online at CoOL. pH pens available from most vendors.

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