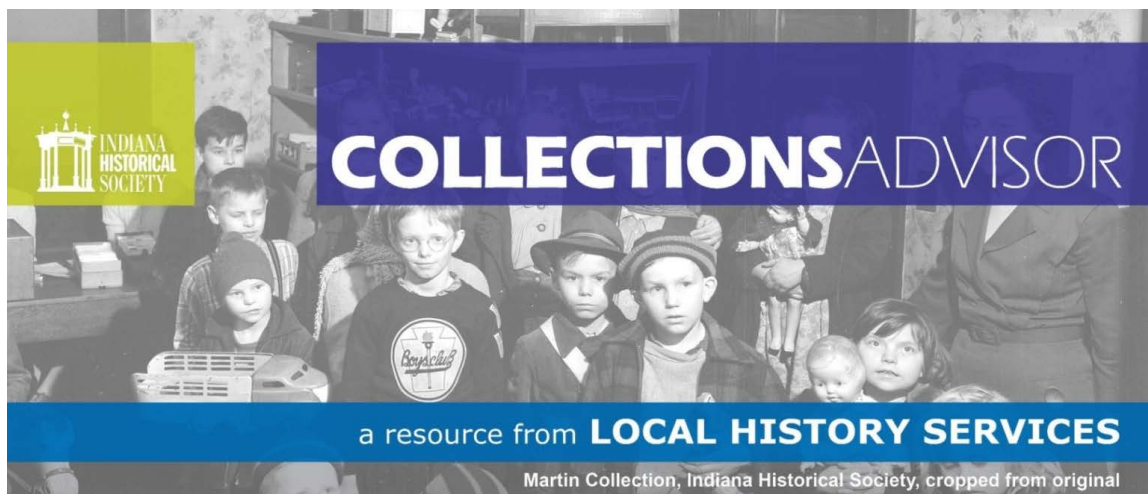




Connecting to Collections project.



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Housing Photographic Collections

by Susan Rogers, senior conservator

[Indiana Historical Society](#)

Environment

- Relative humidity is very important. Keep between 30 and 50 percent RH. Lower RH can damage the photo. Higher RH can cause chemical changes (image fading) and bio-deterioration (fungus and bacteria).
- Temperature should be kept at between 68 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Air pollution can be either particulate or gaseous. Particulates like dust and soot should be kept from collections by air filtration and protective enclosures for individual items. Do not use electrostatic type air purifiers. Keep levels of nitrogen dioxide, sulfur dioxide as low as possible by eliminating local sources, keeping RH in suggested range, and using protective housing and air cleaners.
- Keep in mind that different materials have different storage requirements; adjust accordingly. When considering photo albums, for example, 30 percent RH may be good for the photographs but too dry for the album binding leather. (Leather does not do well under 40 percent humidity.)
- Be aware that rapid changes in RH or temperature are very harmful to materials. Strive for *consistency*.
- Monitor your environment. Inexpensive and easy to use data loggers, such as the HOBO, from Onset computers, are available.

Enclosures

- All enclosures used to house photographs should meet the specifications provided in the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Standard IT 9.2-1998.
- Types of enclosures: Sleeves and envelopes of paper or plastic, Mylar encapsulation, boxes.
- Types of boxes: pre-made document boxes and custom-made corrugated boxes. Use appropriate

materials (see below).

- Each photograph should have its own enclosure. Use multiple layers of packaging. For example, a sleeved photograph may be placed in a box and placed on a metal shelf.
- Photographs housed in sleeves and envelopes sometimes need extra support to prevent curling and bending.
- Consider matting prints of high value before boxing.
- Use appropriate materials (see below).

Materials

- Paper. Advantages: opaque, porous, inexpensive and can be written on in pencil. Use acid-free, lignin-free papers for all enclosures – folders, envelopes, etc. MicroChamber papers are the best. Never use glassine. Unless specific historic processes and emulsions can be identified, always use non-buffered paper for photographs. Platinum, albumen and cyanotype prints especially can react badly in buffered storage; be sure to use non-buffered paper with these processes.
- Plastics. Advantages: contents can be viewed without removal, limiting damage from handling. Use polyester (archival Mylar, Melinex), polyethylene or polypropylene sleeves. Never use PVC, acetate or vinyl. Avoid using plastic in high humidity environments or for photographs with crumbling or flaking surfaces.
- Adhesives. Do not use adhesives in direct contact with the photo; use photo corners. Boxes may be constructed with acid-free adhesives like 3M 415 tape or without the use of adhesives. Never use tape, rubber cement, white glues, paper clips or rubber bands on photos.
- Boxes. Use boxes constructed from acid-free, lignin-free paper board *or* polyethylene *or* metal with a powder coat finish. If wood or wood glue is used for box construction, be advised that off-gassing – which can harm photos – will occur.
- Mats. One-hundred percent rag or MicroChamber/Artcare mats are the best choice; acid-free is next best. Unless specific historic emulsions can be identified, use non-buffered mats for photographs.
- Labels. Use soft pencil to label envelopes and folders. Do not use stick-on labels, felt-tip pens, ballpoint pens or ink pens of any kind on photographs. If the photo must be labeled directly, use a 4B or 5B soft pencil.
- Photo Albums. Use albums with “safe” plastic (see above) *or* acid-free paper. If using paper, choose a heavier thickness and avoid colored paper. Use non-buffered paper pages for photographs.
- Use “safe” plastic photo corner mounts on paper pages. Do not use “magnetic” photo albums.
- Be aware that labeling or decorative inks used within an album may transfer to the opposite page over time. Do not place writing opposite an image without inserting interleaving between the two pages.
- Consider the stress on the photo album binding when interleaving many pages. Do not strain bindings.

Furniture

- Use metal furniture with powder coat finishes. Do not use wood. Finished and unfinished wood may outgas peroxides and other organic vapors contributing to acid migration.

Resources

[American National Standards Institute](http://www.amnstd.org/)

[Indiana Historical Society, Conservation Lab](#)

[Indiana Historical Society, Local History Services](#)

[Northeast Document Conservation Center - *Temperature, Relative Humidity, Light, and Air Quality: Basic Guidelines for Preservation*](#)



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