





# INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS ADVISOR

A RESOURCE FROM IHS LOCAL HISTORY SERVICES

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## ROUND COLLECTIONS, SQUARE BOXES

By Alan Rowe, Heritage Support Grants coach, IHS

When I am on the road with the Local History Services department, the folks who run local history organizations often ask "What boxes, folders and supplies should we buy?" The question originates in the uncertainty surrounding how to house existing objects in the collection, and new objects after they are accepted. The great variety in shapes, sizes, materials and formats of objects can make the purchase and stockpiling of archival containers difficult. Often it seems that our collections are proverbial round pegs that just never seem to fit into the square holes of storage containers. Thankfully, we have a tool at the Indiana Historical Society that can reduce this uncertainty. This tool, known as the *Storage Guide to Archival Collections*, is a constant point of reference when preparing a new archival collection for public access.



[Anderson Box Company Chicken Boxes](#). (Indiana Historical Society)

What is the *Storage Guide to Archival Collections* and how did it come about? I turned to Ramona Duncan-Huse, IHS's senior director of conservation for a little background on the guide and what it is intended to do. Ramona reported that several years ago, a conservation technician was providing housing for collection items and wanted to know how to store items and more about the types of housings available and why. This led to the idea of a reference manual that listed basic questions to ask about the object, like type and size. In Ramona's words, the end result was a "Manual that helped describe an existing storage model which helped interns and processors consider consistent questions about a collection which [the Manual] would answer." In short, the *Storage Guide to Archival Collections* anticipates the wide variety of items that are typically part of a new batch of materials donated to the historical society and provides clear directions on how



### ONLINE RESOURCES

[Round Collections, Square Boxes](#)  
(Indiana Historical Society)

### UPCOMING TRAINING AND PROGRAMS

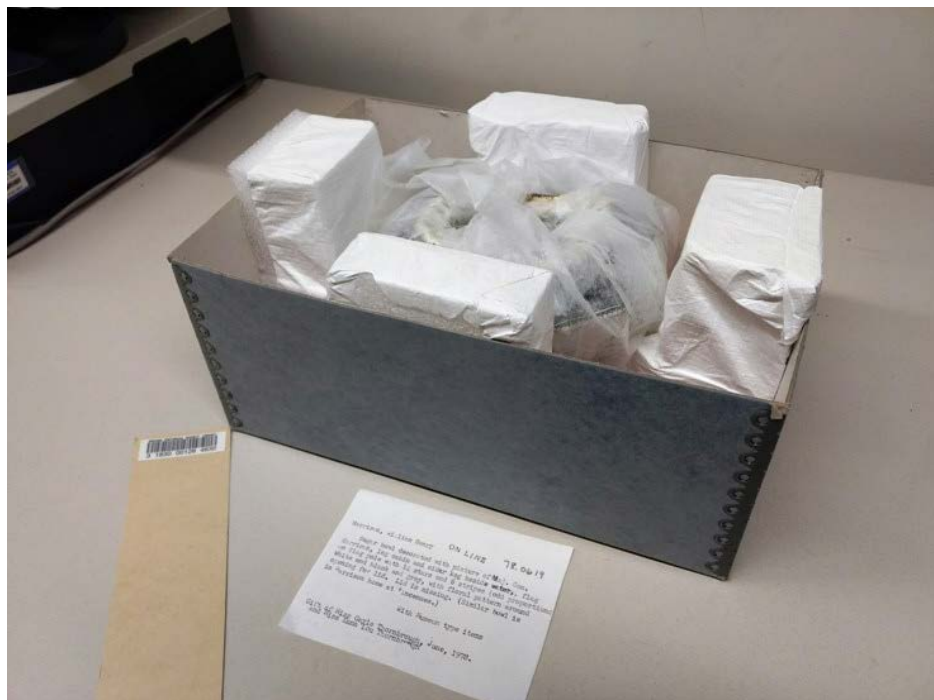
[Basics of Archives](#)

June 4 through July 9 -  
American Association for  
State and Local History  
online course.

[Making Your Case with  
Parent Organizations](#)

June 7 -  
Texas Historical  
Commission webinar.

to select the folders, boxes and sleeves best suited for the long-term preservation of the items in question.



A round sugar bowl in the IHS collection fits nicely into its rectangular box.

Although the focus of the *Storage Guide to Archival Collections* is on paper, books, photographs and audio/visual materials found in archives, the idea could be adapted for organizations with a more object-focused collection, as well. With a storage guide in place at your museum or historical society, guesswork surrounding how to best house an object could be reduced by comparing dimensions and materials of the object to a predetermined list of appropriate archival containers. Having a list of typical boxes, folders and sleeves available would also take the guesswork out of ordering supplies, since the most commonly used containers would be a known factor. While not every oddball object could be covered using this system, the aim here is to prepare ahead of time for the majority of the items that come your way, and make time to adjust to the out-of-the-ordinary objects that might require a customized container to store them.

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*Storage Guide to Archival Collections* Table of Contents.

To create a storage guide for your museum, approach the task in terms of developing a storage model for your collection. Ask yourself what are the main classifications of objects that typically come into the collection, what are the steps you would need to take to house them, and what materials would be required to take those steps? Does your institution typically collect books and paper items? Or do you most often collect clothing, furniture or tools? What steps and materials would be necessary to have on hand to properly store items that fall into those classifications? If your museum accepts objects of widely ranging sizes and types, develop a system to build custom boxes and housings as you need them, and have those materials in stock and ready to use. The sample page from the *Storage Guide to Archival Collections* shows how this process works for manuscripts (letters, diaries, ledgers, minutes), starting with the question "What to Consider" when getting started, "What You Need" in order to store the items, and finishing with instructions on "What to Do" to move the documents into their final, fully supported and protected state.

**Manuscripts – Final Processing & Survey**

**What To Consider :** Size  
Metal fasteners & rubber bands  
Manuscripts  
Space reserve  
Support boards  
Final storage

**What You Need :** Acid-free spacer boards  
Microspatula  
Legal size folders  
Document case storage box  
Survey database

**What To Do :** Size - Letter and legal size documents are stored in legal size, acid-free folders.

*Metal Fasteners* - Remove all metal fasteners by gently prying the ends up with a microspatula. Use small scissors to cut and remove all rubber bands or ties. Use a folded sheet of acid-free bond to keep gatherings together.


*Fragility of Document* - Place fragile documents within a polyester (Mylar) folder or L-sleeve. For single sheets use a polyester (Mylar) folder; for folded documents written on both sides of the sheet use an L sleeve. Place polyester (Mylar) folders within a legal size, acid-free folder.

*Quantity in Folder* - No more than **15** documents in a folder.


*Quantity of Folders in Box* - Will vary. Reserve space within the box for accompanying bound volumes. **Do not overfill.**

*Manuscript Condition Survey Database* - Make specific notes about the presence of tapes or the fragility of the document. List folder numbers to aid retrieval of document by conservation department for future treatment.

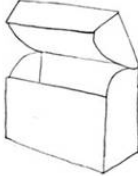
*Curator* - Assigns treatment priority.



Manuscript



Normal orientation in folder - use polyester (Mylar) sleeve if fragile



Document case

3.2

Storage Guide to Archival Collections Manuscripts page.

If you would like to see a copy of the *Storage Guide to Archival Collections*, please contact me at [\[email protected\]](#)

This is a free publication. Anyone may subscribe.

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