INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
COLLECTIONSADVISOR
A RESOURCE FROM IHS LOCAL HISTORY SERVICES

LOCAL HISTORY SERVICES | INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY | PAST ISSUES | FOLLOW LHS ON: 🐦 f

Issue 88 | March 2019

ENCAPSULATION VERSUS LAMINATION
By Karen DePauw, coordinator, IHS Local History Services

I'm going to start off by pulling a Shakespeare at the beginning of *Romeo and Juliet* and spoil the ending right off the bat … DO NOT LAMINATE! The only time lamination is okay in a museum setting is when the item came off the office printer. Nothing from the collection should ever be laminated. Ever. Now, let me explain.

Lamination is a fairly standard way of protecting highly-used items out in the world, so it stands to reason that to protect highly-used items in a historic collection the same technique could be applied. However, lamination is a process by which two sheets of adhesive-covered plastic are heated and pressed on either side of a document. The adhesive permeates the document, making the process irreversible. This puts the process of lamination in direct conflict with the idea that conservation of historical items should be reversible if necessary.
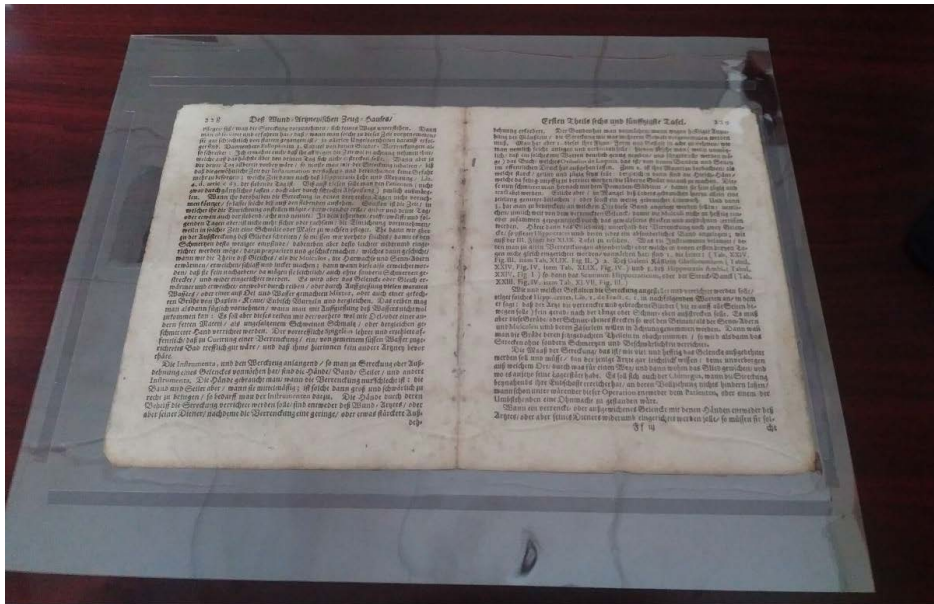
Fully encapsulated document.

So what is there to do when a fragile or often-used manuscript needs protection? There are a few different routes to take for protecting individual documents. The simplest is to put the item in a protective polyester L-sleeve. Made of archival, inert materials, it works like a folder that is sealed on two sides. The small amount of static electricity formed by the sleeve helps to hold the document in place and prevent it from sliding. L-sleeves can be a great option for items like folded letters that would need to be removed to fully research or digitize them.

If even more protection is required, particularly with extremely brittle items or those in multiple pieces (such as a letter that has split in two down a horizontal fold), full encapsulation might be an option. Encapsulation sandwiches an item between two archival polyester sheets that are sealed along the edges. Although some worry encapsulation creates a micro-environment for the

ONLINE RESOURCES

Polyester Encapsulation Conserve O Gram (National Park Service)

Preservation Measures: Encapsulation (Walter Havighurst Special Collections and University Archives)

Lamination vs. Encapsulation (Preservation Self-Assessment Program)

Encapsulation (Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists)

UPCOMING TRAINING AND PROGRAMS

Museum Boot Camp
March 4 –
Indiana Historical Society at Carnegie Museum of Montgomery County.

Moving and Renovation: Collection Concerns
March 7 –
Northeast Document Conservation Center webinar.

Planning for Natural Disaster Damage in Botanical Collections
March 12 –
Connecting to Collections Care webinar.

item, archival polyester is permeable, meaning air can flow through the polyester sheets to the item.


Polyester sheet and archival double-sided tape.

The best way to create an encapsulation is by using polyester sheets and a machine that welds the pieces together using ultrasonic, thermal or laser welding. This machinery is often expensive. Therefore, if encapsulation is necessary but funds are an issue, the same goal can be accomplished with archival double-sided tape and two pieces of polyester. Polyester can be purchased as either pre-cut sheets or as a roll. While a roll can be more expensive initially, it provides the flexibility in size if the items needing encapsulation vary. It is important to note that this technique can pose a risk to the item inside, because the adhesive from the tape can attract dust and break down over time. Make sure to leave a gap between the item and the line of tape to help prevent the item from encountering the adhesive. Another way to help prevent the item from shifting and touching the adhesive is to store encapsulated items flat.

Below is a brief description of the steps for full encapsulation.

1. Measure the document and add an inch on all sides. And, if the document is smaller than a standard size piece of paper simply use a standard size so the encapsulated document is the same size as the other documents stored with it.
2. Cut two pieces of polyester to the above dimensions.
3. Place the item being encapsulated in the middle of one polyester sheet.
4. Place double-sided tape around the item leaving a quarter- to half-inch gap between the edge of the item and the tape. While placing tape around the edges, make sure to leave quarter-inch gaps between the pieces of tape at the corners. This will allow for even more airflow.
5. Peel the backing off the tape and place the second polyester sheet on top. Press firmly

along the tape lines.
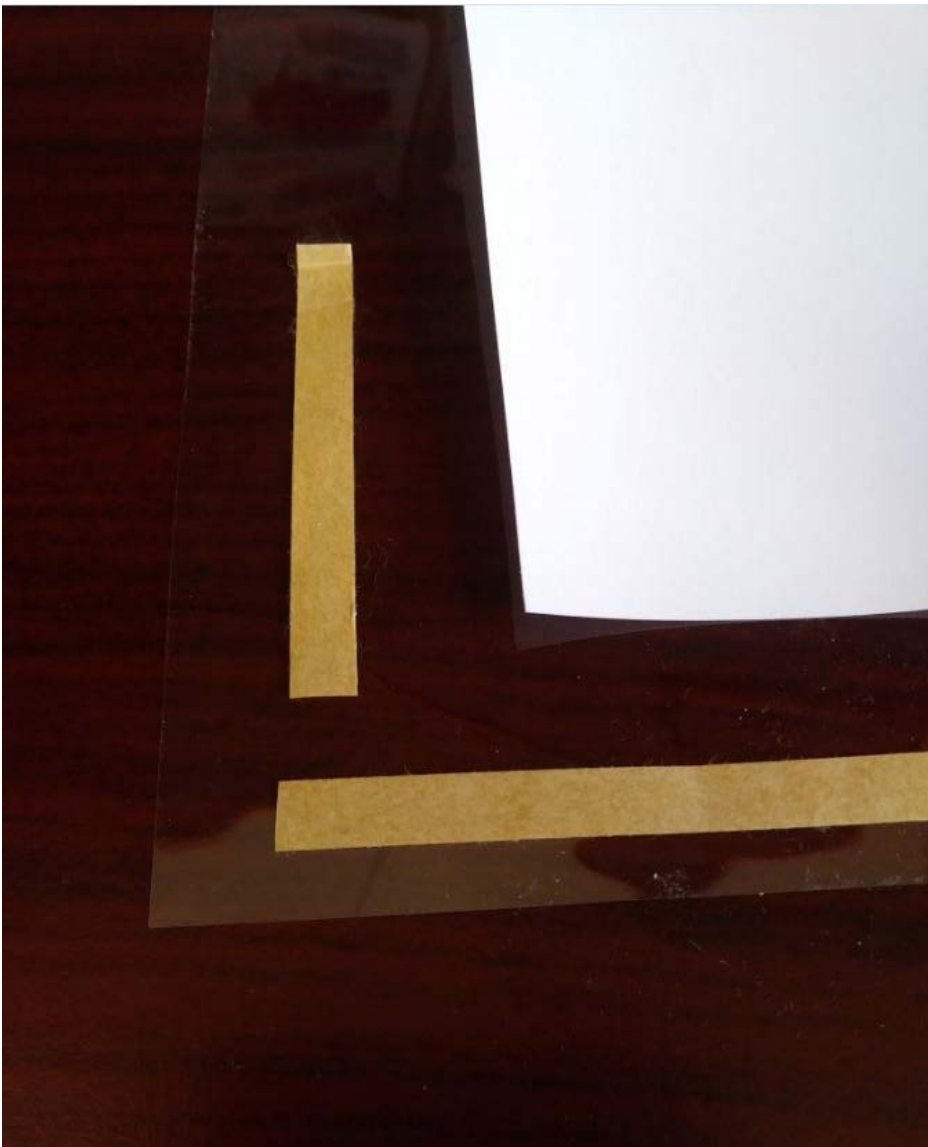
Gap left between tape to allow additional air flow.

If the item is single-sided, it can be a good idea to place a piece of buffered paper behind the item when encapsulating it. The buffering agent in the paper will help to neutralize any acid the paper naturally produces as it ages. To remove the item from encapsulation, carefully cut the polyester sheet just inside the adhesive line on all sides and remove the item. Items that are encapsulated or in L-sleeves can easily be scanned without removing them as the polyester does not usually cause a glare.

When using either L-sleeves or encapsulation, be mindful of the media used on the paper. Friable media (such as pastels, charcoal, pencil, chalk, or any flaking media) should not be protected with polyester sheets because the static-electric charge can draw the media away from the paper and ultimately result in damage to the item. These items should be placed carefully inside archival folders. It is also a good idea to avoid encapsulation with photographs, which are best protected in polyester or polypropylene sleeves.

Both L-sleeves and encapsulation are 100 percent reversable, making them appropriate choices for historical collections. For more information about encapsulation, check out the resources listed to the right.

Indiana Historical Society, 450 West Ohio Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202
(317) 232-1882 |

WE DO HISTORY.
INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Smithsonian Affiliate

PROUD MEMBER OF THE
International Coalition of
SITES *of* CONSCIENCE

Indiana's Storyteller™, Connecting People to the Past