



**Bank Street**  
ANTIQUE MALL

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## **CONSERVATION OF OUR FAMILY TREASURES**

In a conversation with my brother who lives in Washington state he gave me a wonderful idea. Apparently there is a real entrepreneur in the area of Portland. She does home assessments and teaches individuals how to conserve their family treasures.

Yes, one man's trash is another man's treasure! How do we keep it so we can enjoy it and preserve it for our heirs? There is no clear-cut answer. What I am going to try to do is divide our treasures into categories and tell you the best ways to keep them from deteriorating.

We maintain a reference system at Bank Street Antique Mall of trained and knowledgeable people in the North Alabama area that can help you with preservation and restorations.

### **Glass and China**

- Do not stack glasses inside each other
- Dishwashers cause a film on glass and often allow glass to bump against other pieces in the trays causing chips. Dishwashers also cause the finish on china to be worn away and/or become dull.
- Wash in warm soapy water – do not go from hot to cold water. This may cause glass and china to break.
- When flowers decompose biological elements cause staining of the glass surface
- Coffee filters are a good liner between stacks of plates
- You can remove stains from china with the developer used by hair stylists to lighten hair. Be careful and ask for specific instructions from a reputable antique glass dealer.

*This information is provided courtesy of Bank Street Antique Mall, [www.bankstantiques.com](http://www.bankstantiques.com).*

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- Chips in glass can be ground and polished. Broken glass can be put back together some of the time. Do not try to do this yourself – seek a trained glass restoration expert. Once the glass edges are exposed to the glues they become less likely to bond when a restorer tries to do the repairs.
- Broken china and porcelain can be repaired – a trained china restoration expert is also advised.
- Knives and sharp eating utensils can scratch the surface of the glass or china. There is a real talent to being able to cut meat and not scratch a plate!
- Storing glass and china in an attic is not advisable. The drastic heat and cold changes can cause breaks. If storage is a must keep the china and glass in a special storage box or use the boxes they were bought in for storage. Butler's closets and pantries are wonderful additions to the dining or kitchen area.
- If you display china be sure the plate grove is padded with felt
- Plate hangers should not stress the glass or china. This may cause a break.

### **Paper, Photos, and Pictures**

There are two culprits that cause damage to all three of these P's – sunlight and moisture. Find ways to keep these villains at a minimum. Again the excessive heat of attics and the moisture in most basements is damaging.

What to do? Acid free mounts for pictures and photos are a must and readily available. You can purchase acid free boxes and albums to store paper and photos. If prints or photos are in direct light use a special glass that will filter the UV light .

Store all paper materials flat. Do not roll or fold. If I cannot find an acid free box to use, I line the boxes with several layers of acid free tissue.

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Conservators handle very old or museum quality paper with cotton gloves. You can buy them at any hardware or paint store. At least make sure your hands are clean and dry.

### **Books**

I separated books because they are handled a little differently. Moisture is a real culprit.

If you store books on a bookshelf be sure the shelf is wide enough to make access easy. You do not want to pull on the spine of the book. Stress on the spine causes pages to loosen, spines to warp, and covers to become torn.

Old books are a treasure and often the book jackets or covers are works of art. Be sure if displaying them that they are positioned to prevent damage.

I clean books with dryer sheets to get dirt off covers, edges, and pages. I also use a soft clean paintbrush.

If there is writing in a book you want to remove, try artist gum erasers. I have never tried to remove ink – I just live with it.

Use special library tape to repair pages. Seek advice at your library for any major repairs.

### **Linens**

I hang most of my tablecloths, pillowcases, and runners. I use old cotton cloth to cover the paper tube on hangers since I have never found acid free ones. I line drawers or shelves with acid free paper if I stack linens. I sometimes roll linens on tubes. I have a few acid free tubes, but I generally cover the tubes with acid free tissue or cotton fabric and roll the cloth, lace, etc. Rolling and hanging prevents creasing. It also decreases damage to the cloth and or discoloration.

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There are products available to take yellowing out of antique and vintage materials. These products are available at specialty sewing shops and from antique dealers specializing in linens.

I store large linens wrapped in old clean cotton sheets or inside white cotton pillowcases.

### **Vintage and Antique Clothing**

Plastic bags generally cause deterioration of cloth over time as the elements of the plastic disintegrate. There are some special storage bags – usually available at cleaners and at vintage clothing or bridal stores.

Acid free boxes are also available for storage. I do not use wood, metal or plastic hangers unless they have a cotton or acid free cover for long term storage of clothing.

Never store clothing that is not clean. Moths and critters love body oils and food stains. I clean purses, hats, and shoes before storing them away. Use acid free paper to maintain form in shoes, purses, and hats.

Extreme heat and moisture is not good for clothing. Be sure there is adequate air circulation in closets. Do not pack those clothes in too tight!

There are also unique and different things that do not fit into these categories. Ask the people who handle these things all the time how to care for them. Come by and talk with us. We can usually refer you to someone locally who can help with your problems and/or answer your questions.

Some of the things we treasure most are insignificant to others. I recently was going through some things my husband had brought from his parents home. There was a nondescript box that was being relegated to the throw away pile. I emptied it. I cleaned it and found it was an old chalk tin from the 1930's. I thought no this is a keeper. As I was going through the contents of the box I found this note "Glenn had this box

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when we got married.” And I bet it was full of his special treasures! It sits in a bookcase in our bedroom – how could we throw that memory away.

I also have a special note from our son preserved in a frame and displayed in our home. It was his last note to the tooth fairy. It does not mean anything to anyone but us – but it is our treasure and a great story to go with it too!

I bet you have some of these things too. We keep them, get them out and share them, and display them in special places in our homes. That is what makes our houses a home. So lets be sure we preserve them for our future generations. So many things have passed through my hands that I have wondered – what is the story of this or that. Have you not wondered too?