

Basics of Archival Supplies

The RI Historical Records Advisory Board, with support funding from NHPRC, presents a continuing education and program for historical organizations throughout the state.

September 5, 2025



About Today's Workshop

- What is "archival"?
- Technical and marketing terms
- Risks from improper or inadequate or improper housing
- Storage for different types of collections
- Where to acquire supplies

Terms

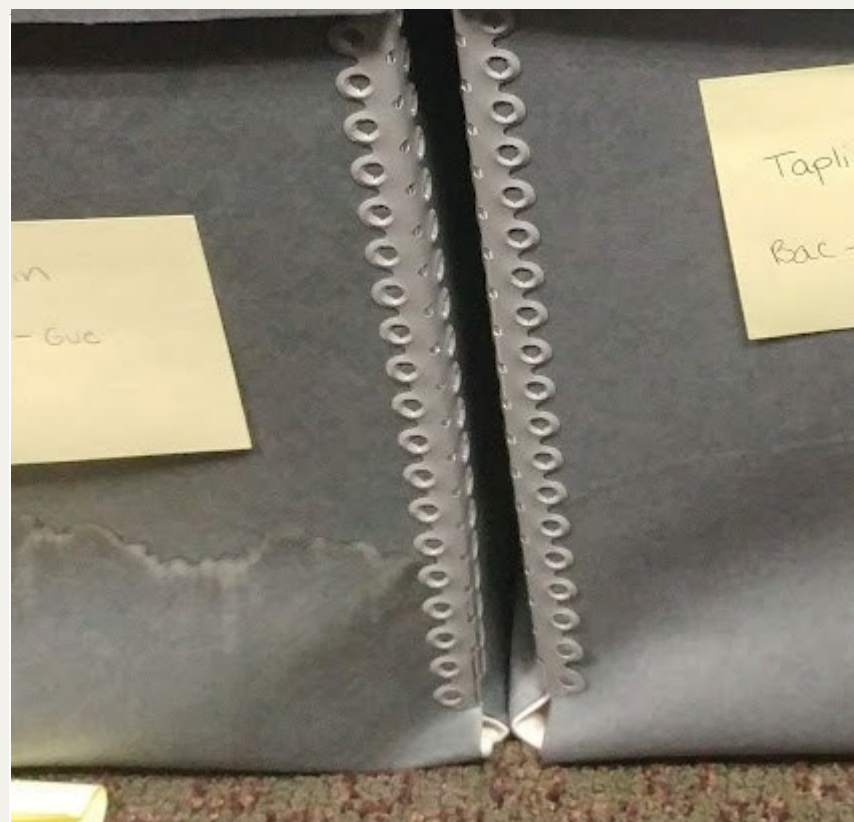
“Archival” is not a meaningful term when sourcing supplies, and it is not standardized. Instead, look for descriptive terms about the materials:

- Acid-free
- Check pH in specifications
 - You can test supplies you already have with a pH pen
- Lignin-free: Contains no wood pulp
- Buffered/buffering: Paper/board is alkaline to neutralize acidity of paper or collections items made of plant material
- PAT: Photographic Activity Test
- Brand names such as DuraShield or Tyvek

Risks



Light



Moisture



Pests

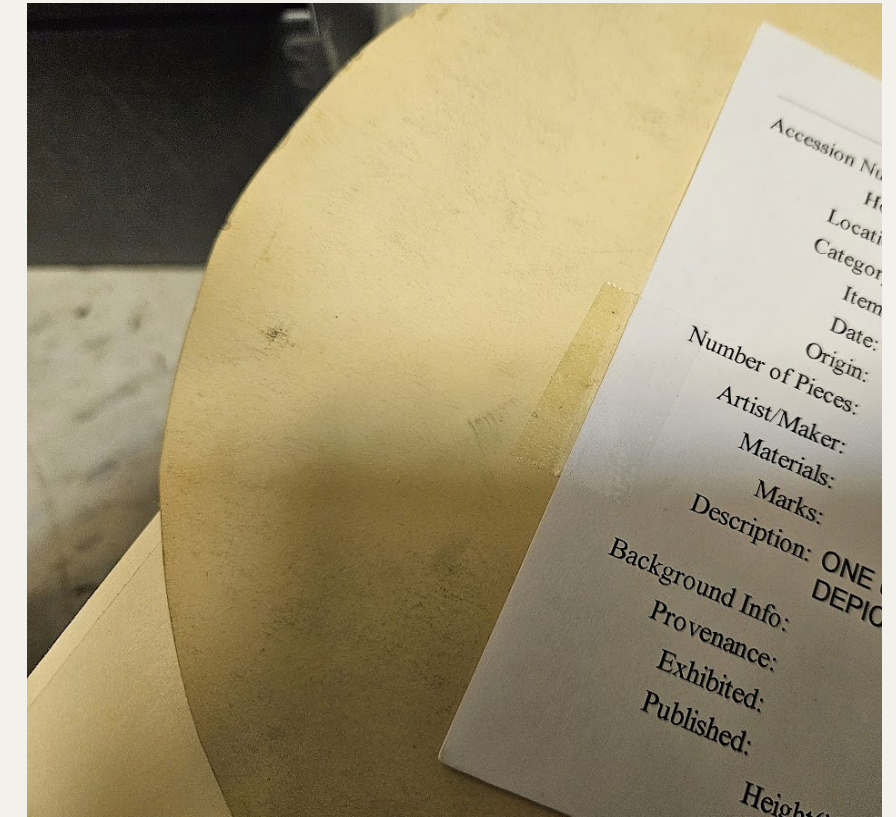
Risks



Handling/Shelf Wear



Contaminants/Reactions



Adhesives

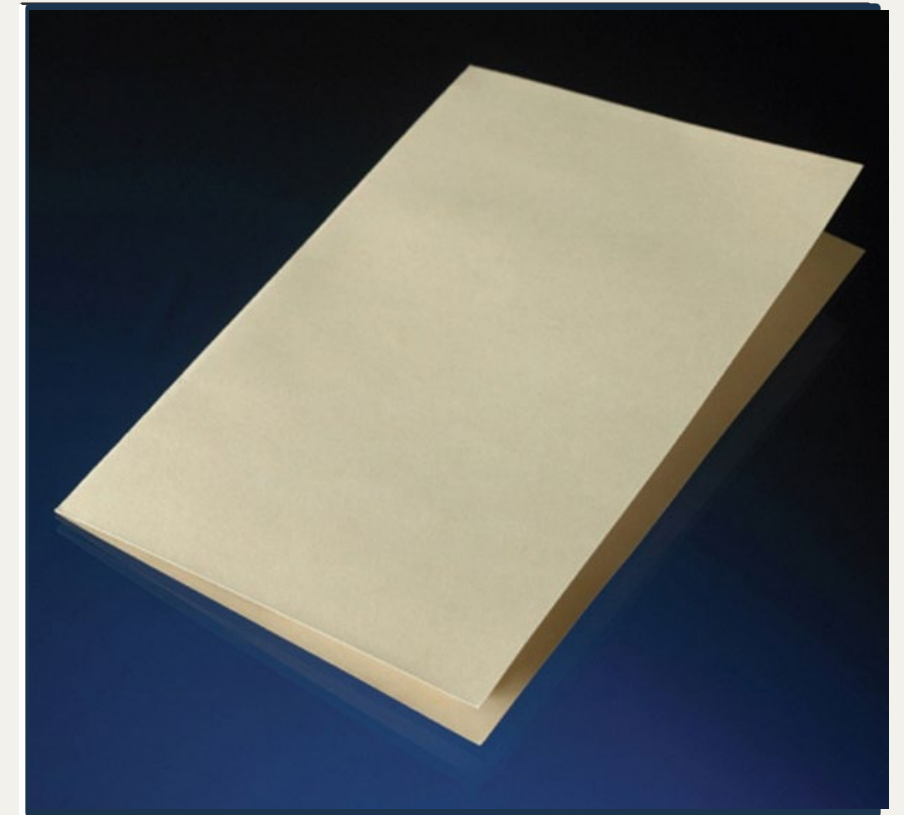
Board (buffered or unbuffered)



Barrier board



E-flute/ B-Flute board



Folder stock

Plastics

- Archival polyester/Mylar: Stiff, quite clear
- Polypropylene: Less clear, more flexible
- PVC/vinyl: will break down and damage materials over time
- It's a good idea to replace mystery plastics



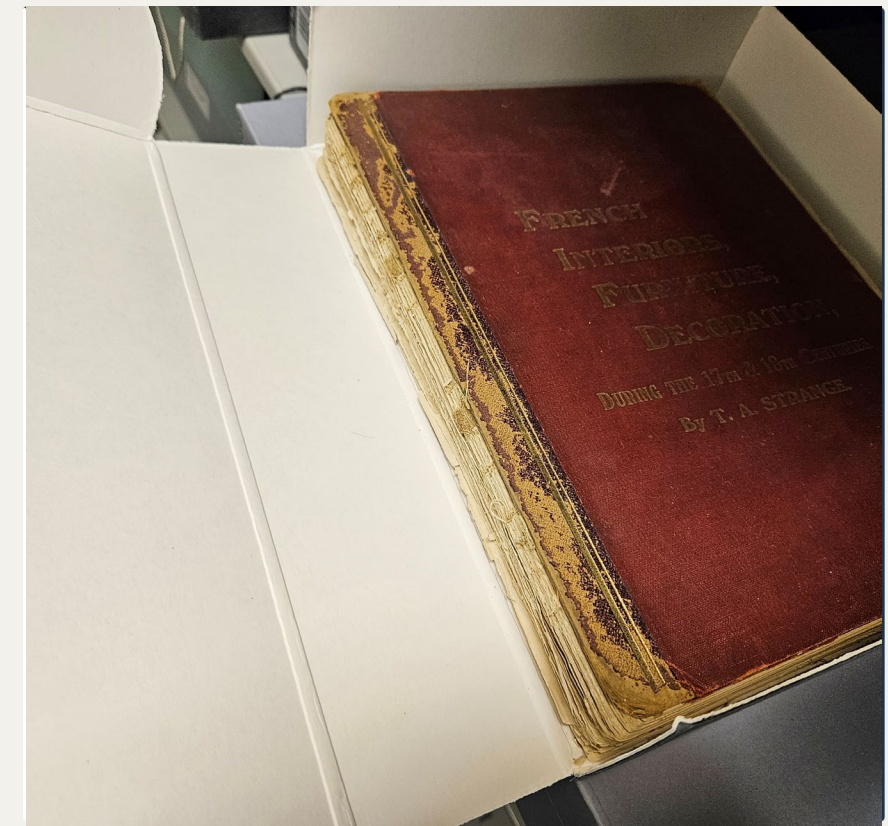
Box types



Hollinger box
Document case



Record carton
Paige box
Banker's box



Clamshell box

Photographs, Negatives, Slides

- Protect from light
- Polypropylene/archival polyester or paper sleeves
- Always wear gloves *at least* when handling negatives
- Polypropylene sleeves in a barrier board binder-box make viewing photographic materials easier to store and use
- Learn about the types of photographs in your collection and their specific vulnerabilities



Books & Bound Materials

- String, phase boxes, pamphlet binders/enclosures can protect bound materials
- Never pull books off shelves by the headband (top of the binding)
- Support bindings with book cradles when using or displaying



Plans & Large Flat Items



Drop -front box



Solander box

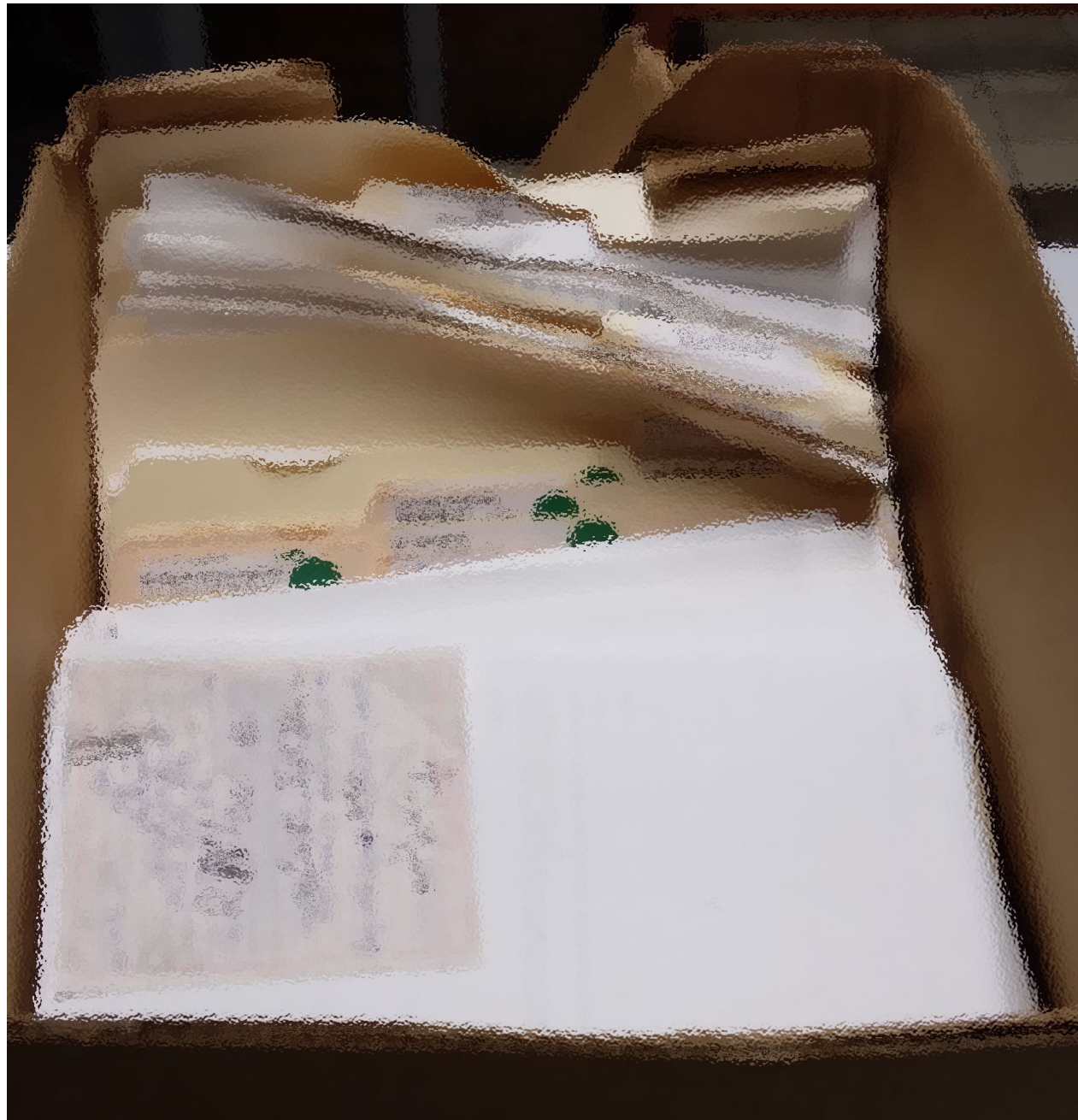
- Whenever possible, store large items either flat or rolled, not folded.
- If rolling:
 - Use an acid-free core or box, if any
 - Use undyed, acid-free string or cord (sometimes called "twill tape") to tie enclosures
 - One tie at each end can mitigate bends and tears
 - Label everything consistently and clearly!
- When using a flat file cabinet, do not overstuff drawers; use folders to prevent paper edges from catching on interior
- Folders in larger sizes are available for organizing and storing prints, maps, drawings, etc.

Unusual Items & Realia

- Support weak places and folds
- Secure from motion
- Pad from shock
- Use padding and housing materials (like acid-free tissue) that will not chemically interact with collections items
- Create handholds/space to make removing item from box/housing easier



Paper

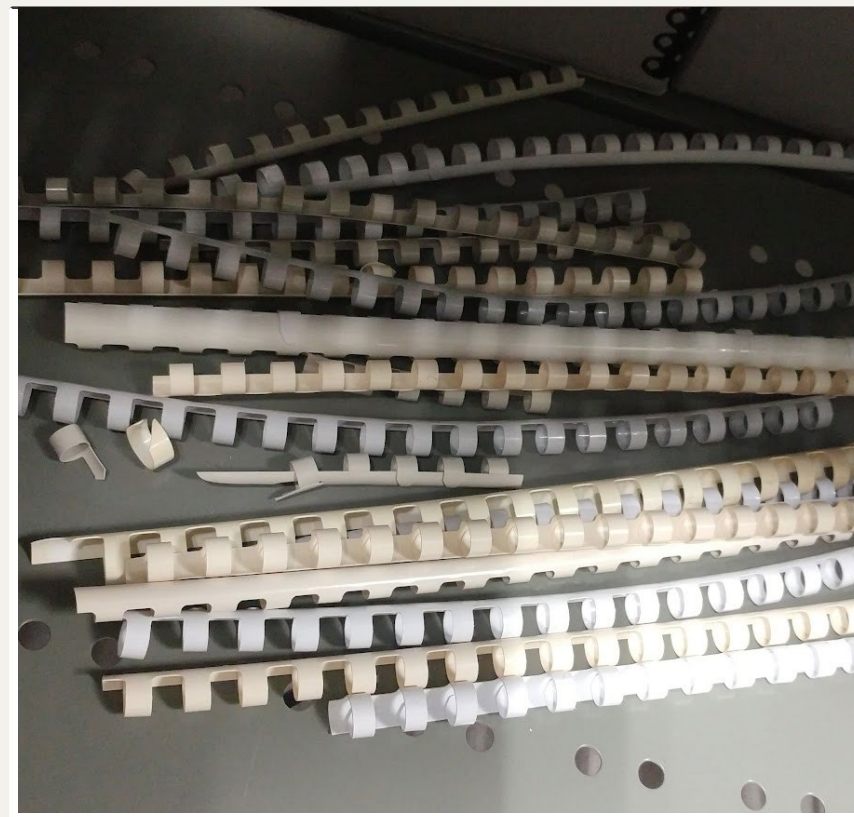


- Paper is almost always acidic, so buffered housing is the best choice in most cases. Buffering is less necessary for 20th-century and newer papers or if you have good climate control in your storage space.
- Loose papers standing upright will bend and war
 - Fill boxes completely – use a narrower box if necessary
 - In larger containers, use box spacers support papers
- Paper is susceptible to deterioration due to fluctuations in temperature and humidity; extremely acidic paper like newsprint will deteriorate first
- Gloves are usually not necessary for handling paper
 - nitrile gloves are preferable to cotton because cotton gloves can make fingers clumsier and therefore damage pages

Fastener woes



Metal clips



Comb bindings

- Rust from metal fasteners
- Pressure damage, holes, or tears from fasteners
- Danger to archivists and researchers from sharp pins binding papers together
- Old rubber bands disintegrating and sticking to materials

Fastener solutions

When in doubt, use a paper jacket; a sheet of acid-free paper can keep materials together within a folder or other enclosure



Pamphlet folders



Plasti -Klips (if you are desperate)

Labeling



Soft pencils

(pair with Magic Rub or Mars plastic erasers)



Tags

(Folder stock or Tyvek)



Foil -backed labels

What to Seek/Avoid

Look for...

- Product details, such as pH
- Proof of passing the Photographic Activity Test (P.A.T.)
- “Acid-free” when referring to paper-based products; “lignin-free” means no wood fibers at all, which is also good
- “Inert”
- Polypropylene, polyethylene, or “archival polyester”/Mylar

Avoid...

- Products lacking details about materials specs and pH
- Unknown plastics
- Polyvinyl chloride (PVC)/vinyl
- Dyed or colorful housing

Some suppliers

These are some trusted vendors of archives housing and supplies. Others are out there, and this is not an advertisement for these companies specifically.


- Gaylord Archival
- University Products
- LineCo
- Blick/other art suppliers
- Talas
- Bags Unlimited
- Hollinger Metal Edge
- Print File

Let's talk about creative storage!

Thank you for making this program a success



Thank you!

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