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TEXTILE PRESERVATION TIPS

Handling textiles

1. Remove jewelry to avoid snags.
2. Do not eat, drink or smoke around textiles.
3. Wear cotton or plastic gloves or handle textiles with very clean, lotion-free hands.
4. Use two hands and support the textile completely. Avoid pulling and dragging.

Environment

1. Store items in rooms that have heating, air conditioning, and good air circulation. Avoid extreme changes in temperature and humidity levels.
 - Optimal temperature: 70 - 72°
 - Optimal humidity levels: 50 - 55%
 - Optimal conditions: cool, dry air with good circulation
2. Keep storage areas clean.

Cleaning

Always start with the gentlest method.

1. Vacuuming

- A. Prepare a clean, padded work surface, such as mattress pad covered with a clean white sheet laid on a table.
- B. Use a hose vacuum cleaner with reduced suction to lightly vacuum textiles. A HEPA filter vacuum is best.
- C. Make sure the end of the hose is padded so as not to damage the textile.

D. Use a piece of plastic screen on top of the item to protect any trims, fasteners, or loose pieces. Tape the edges of the screen to avoid snags.

E. Turn the hose at a 45 degree angle to the item to further reduce the suction force. For garments with nap (velvets, pile rugs), vacuum in direction of nap. Lift nozzle and move it next area. Do not "scrub" back and forth.

2. Washing. Test textiles for color-fastness before washing. Wool, silk, and some dyed cottons should not be washed in water.

A. Soak the textile in plain, room-temperature water. A lot of soil can be removed this way. Consider using distilled water available at grocery and discount stores.

B. Support the textile on plastic sheeting or by sewing it between two pieces of plastic screening. The textile should rest gently in a tub or sink. Do not agitate the water. Water can be pushed through the fibers by gently pushing straight down with your hand. If using a plastic tub, the tub can be rocked gently from side to side. Remove the textile from the soiled water, drain the tub, and refill with clean water. Place the textile in the clean water and repeat the process until the water in the tub remains clear.

C. If using soap or detergent, use a dilute solution of a mild cleaner such as Orvus Paste, mixed with water. Rinse well as described above in order to remove all traces of soap or detergent. Commercial soaps and detergents can be harmful to old textiles. Orvus Paste is available in some quilt shops and co-ops. Use 1 tablespoon to one gallon of water.

D. Do not starch garments to be stored as this can attract pests.

E. Lay washed textiles on clean white towels to dry in a room with good air circulation. Smooth out any wrinkles by hand. Do not iron; heat is damaging.

3. Dry Cleaning

Dry cleaning is usually not recommended for antique fabrics

A. Considerations before:

- a. Type of soil- gray, grimy, greasy, or oily soil usually best cleaned by a dry cleaner; yellow-brown stains, rings, or tide lines usually best cleaned with wet cleaning. Oxidized brown stains are difficult to remove with any type cleaning.
- b. Textile fabric and construction: is it made from one or more fabric and what is the fiber contents; is it dyed; what trims or embellishments are there and what are they made from
- c. What is the condition of the textile; are fibers strong and intact, or weak and damaged; any holes, splits, or frays, or worn areas

- B. If you decide to dry clean a textile:
 - a. See if the dry cleaner will spot-test with the cleaning solutions it uses to test for color-fastness.
 - b. See if they will clean it when they are starting with a fresh batch of chemicals, as they recycle the solvent for several loads.
 - c. Mend broken seams. Cover weak areas, closures, and trim or special fasteners by basting a light weight white cotton cloth over them. Removing buttons and special trim might also be done.

Storage

The best storage for textiles is flat and unfolded, but this is not always practical.

1. Flat textiles can be rolled on tubes for storage.
 - A. Use an acid-free tube or cover a regular cardboard tube with several layers of acid-free tissue paper to act as a barrier. The tube should be at least 4 inches longer than the width of the textile.
 - B. Roll a leading tissue on the tube leaving the end free.
 - C. Lay the textile face down on the leading tissue and roll. Lay in sheets of tissue to protect textiles with beads or other embellishments
 - D. Cover the roll with a clean muslin cover that wraps around 1 ½ times. The ends of the cover should tuck into the tube ends. Secure the cover with cotton twill tape or strips of torn muslin.
2. If a textile must be folded in storage, pad folds with acid-free tissue paper or unbleached muslin that has been washed and well rinsed in hot water. Store folded textiles in acid-free boxes, unbleached muslin sacks, or clean, white cotton pillowcases. Avoid using plastic storage containers and cedar chests.
3. Hang garments on hangers padded with quilt batting and covered with laundered, well-rinsed unbleached muslin or surgical stockinette. Consider sewing in suspender-like straps at the waist to support the weight of a skirt. Pants and skirts can be hung from a hanger by sewing in a muslin waistband to which is attached suspender-like strips of muslin or twill tape.

On line tips

The Textile Museum brochures
Washington DC

<http://www.textilemuseum.org/care/care.htm>

National Park Service *Conserve o grams*

http://www.nps.gov/history/museum/publications/conserveogram/cons_toc.html

Sources

(acid-free un-buffered tissue paper, acid-free boxes, Orvus Paste, cotton gloves)

Gaylord Brothers

<http://www.gaylord.com>

The Hollinger Corporation

www.hollingermetalede.com

1-800-862-2228

University Products

www.universityproducts.com

1-800-628-1912

Talas

330 Morgan Ave

Brooklyn, NY 11211

<http://www.talasonline.com>

Local sources:

Orvus paste:

Halbert's Veterinary & Pet Supply

2675 W. 6th, Fayetteville

521-3852

The Rabbit's Lair

114 S. 1 St., Rogers

636-3385

Feed Seed & More

410 E. Huntsville, Springdale, 756-9337

2000 North Crossover, Fayetteville, 582-5512

(Will order it for you)

Also available through online sources

White cotton gloves:
Collier Drugstore
100 W. Dickson Street, Fayetteville
\$2.95/pair

Museum gift shops - some carry limited supplies of tissue and boxes

Conservators

Gentle Arts
1833 Jena Street
New Orleans, LA 70115
Email leigh@gentleartsnola.com
Phone 504-895-5628
Fax 504-895-6047
www.gentleartsnola.com
(Prices for cleaning \$150-\$400 or \$75/hour)

Textile Conservation Services
928 N. Alabama
Indianapolis, IN 46202
Email hmail@textileconservation.com
Phone 317.266.8398
Fax 317.266.8399

From the American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works:

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