

# Preserving Damaged Family Treasures

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*Poor advice on how to handle water-damaged historical documents has been found in some older extension materials. One such recommendation suggested using a microwave oven to dry water-soaked paper. DO NOT DO THAT! If you have any information that suggests this, please discard it and replace it with the following information.*

*For advice or a list of conservators who can help, you may call the American Institute for Conservation at 202-452-9545*

Always ask yourself, "Is it easier to replace rather than restore an item?"

If you decide to restore, National Archives experts in restoring and preserving historical documents offer the following tips for salvaging water-damaged family papers, books, and photographs.

If you can., remove the items from hot, humid, stagnant air and darkness. (Do not place them in an oven.) Lower the temperature and humidity.

Dry the items immediately or freeze them. Freezing buys you time, but

does not dry the item. Never freeze photos or negatives. Unfortunately, they are too fragile.

As you dry the item, observe the following procedures:

■ Remove the mold:

— Brush away any dry and powdery mold outdoors.

— Don't try to remove fuzzy or slimy mold. If the mold remains after freezing, it can be exposed to one to two hours of sunlight to dry out or to set it. Mold does not die easily and may reappear.

■ Clean the materials carefully:

— Handle soggy paper gently. Support single sheets with dry paper towels or something stronger.

— Remove caked-on mud and dirt from wet items by gently dipping the papers in a bath of clear water. Wear rubber gloves to avoid contaminating yourself and damaging the paper. Dirt is easier to remove after the paper has dried.

— Don't wash images that are blurred, feathered, or faded from water or flood damage; they may fade totally.

■ Air-dry your items:

— Place wet items on paper towels or unprinted newsprint paper.

— Use fans to circulate the air around —but not directly at the documents.

— For loose materials, spread them in single layers.

— For bound glossy materials, use waxed paper between every page. The book will distort, but the pages will not stick together.

— For a book, place regular paper towels inside the covers and then intermittently throughout the book. Open the books and stand them on edge. Replace the inserted paper as it becomes soaked and invert the book. Some distortion and staining is probable.

— Most photos, negatives and slides can be air dried face up. Place blotting material beneath photographs. Avoid touching the surfaces. Photos that are stuck together may separate by soaking them in cold water. However, once they are dried, they may not be separated. You may have to reprint them.

■ Framed items should be removed, backing first, from the frames. If the items are not stuck to the glass, air-dry them. If the materials are stuck, then dry them intact with the glass-side down.



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