



# SAVING YOUR Treasures

*A Website about what you can do to protect and preserve the things of importance in your life*



## **Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center Nebraska State Historical Society**

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### **THE CLEANING OF PAPER-BASED OBJECTS IN COLLECTIONS**

The cleaning of paper objects of any kind in a collection is not to be undertaken lightly. There are many serious factors to consider. A conservator and curator should be consulted in order to assess all the issues relating to the care of the object in question. These procedures should not be used on any objects that have:

- pastel media
- charcoal media
- loose or friable materials of any kind
- active or wet mold
- silk screen prints
- photographs
- chalk drawings
- extensive repairs

Objects exhibiting these conditions should only be cleaned by a conservator. If your objects are sound and do not include any of the above, you can use the following cleaning methods, provided you use the utmost care and sensitivity. Extreme care is needed to avoid doing more harm than good. The materials and techniques listed below have been tested and found to be safe and effective when used in a careful and sensitive manner.

A clean, well-ventilated work area should be provided for the cleaning process. The area should include a large, hard, smooth-surfaced, worktable, adequate light and ventilation. Clean, dry hands are needed to avoid contaminating the object. Food and drink must not be permitted in the work area.

#### **Materials:**

- clean, acid-free blotter
- clean, small, **very soft**, natural bristle brushes (such as a Japanese Hake brush)
- and for frames: a HEPA filtered vacuum with variable speed motor for control of suction and micro tool attachments.

**Procedures:**

1. Prepare an extremely clean and dry work area. Cover the work surface with a clean piece of acid-free blotter.
2. Place the paper-based object on the work surface. If the object is a book or other three dimensional object that opens like a book or a box, leave it **closed** until the exterior surfaces have been cleaned.

It is best to handle three dimensional paper objects with cotton gloves. To surface clean the exterior of the book, grasp the book firmly at the center of the fore edge with one hand. This will keep the book safely closed during cleaning. Gently brush the top of the text block from the spine to the back edge, and then brush the bottom from the spine to the back edge. Move your grip to the top of the book and gently brush the back of the text block from top to bottom. Lastly, brush the spine and the front and back boards from the top to the bottom.

3. To clean flat objects, begin cleaning by **slowly and gently** brushing the surface of the object to remove loose surface dust and debris. Brush the dust and soil onto the surrounding work surfaces. When the object has been cleaned on one side, place it on another clean work surface and use the vacuum, on **very low power**, as a receptacle to remove the loosened dust and debris from the work area.

Because of the lightweight of paper ephemera and the danger of parts being sucked into the vacuum, the vacuum should only be used after the object has been safely placed on another distant work surface. Strokes of the brush during cleaning should begin in the center and move towards the edges of the object. A very light touch is most effective. If there are any signs of loose media or support stop the cleaning immediately and contact a conservator for further instructions. After one side has been cleaned, brush the other side as described.

4. If the object is framed or otherwise behind glass, the frame and glass can be dusted and vacuumed by brushing the dust and debris towards the vacuum nozzle. It is best to cover the opening of the nozzle with cheesecloth or screening to prevent parts from being drawn up into the vacuum cleaner where they are crushed or cannot be retrieved. Neither the glass nor the frame should be cleaned with any liquids. Liquids will seep beneath the glass and cause serious staining of the object and could contribute to mold growth inside the object's housing.

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