

The Destructive Power of Newspaper!

Published by George G. Morgan
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Photographs capture our lives, and those of our ancestors. They are fun to look back upon, to relive the past, and learn about our own heritage. Unfortunately, photographs, newspaper clippings and other memorabilia, if not stored properly will deteriorate, and history will be lost. Even those with the best of intentions could, unknowingly cause deterioration of their precious heritage. For example, did you know that having a photograph and a newspaper clipping on the same page in a scrapbook can cause the photograph to deteriorate?

The following is an excerpt from a wonderful article written by George G. Morgan. For the full transcript, please see <http://www.ancestry.com/learn/library/article.aspx?article=5318>.

Never underestimate the power of the newspaper. A newspaper can destroy people's lives. At, least, it can certainly destroy details about their lives. George can testify to this fact.

George received a package of materials from a relative who thought he would be interested in them; especially he is the family genealogist. These materials belonged to his aunt and grandmother and he was excited at the prospect of delving into them. When he opened the box, his anticipation quickly turned to horror when he saw the condition of the contents. Inside were a number of envelopes and file folders, all of them yellowed with age. George's relatives had conscientiously clipped articles and obituaries from the newspapers and placed them together with letters, photographs, and other documents. As he began to examine the various articles, he realized that all of materials had been stored in this same box for many years, and that the damage was extensive. The newspaper clippings contained acids and lignin. The photographs and the other documents with which they had had direct contact bore the vivid brown silhouette of their outlines. Further, the clippings' own self-destruction had contaminated the other items and their paper, too, was disintegrating.

George immediately realized that he had a substantial preservation and conservation job ahead of him if these treasures were to be salvaged for posterity.

Clarifying the Terminology

PH Levels - pH is a measurement of the acidity or alkalinity of a solution or other damp substance. Newsprint contains a certain degree of dampness from the time of its manufacture. As the newsprint dries out, a byproduct of alcohol is produced and emitted. This alcohol can be acidic and damaging to surrounding materials.

Lignin - Lignin is a primary component of wood. When lignin is exposed to bright light, humidity or dampness, and certain pollutants in the atmosphere, it helps to promote the acidification process and pH changes in the paper.

Acid Migration - The acidic content of newsprint certainly may damage other materials. It really is possible for acidity to transfer from one source to another, even if there is no physical contact. For example, a newspaper obituary clipping pasted on the same page as a photograph, even though they

are not physically in contact with one another, may contaminate the photograph and cause it damage. Why? Because of the vapors emitted by the newsprint as its pH level is changing.

Dyes - Papers containing dyes or color pigments may also be damaging to other materials. Their own chemical composition may contain acids, too, and that means that colored newsprint can be an even more dangerous villain than the ordinary stock.

So What Can You Do?

There are steps you can take and products you can purchase to protect and preserve your materials. Let's examine some steps you can take.

De-Acidification of Papers - Consider the newsprint AND the paper products that have already been contaminated with the acidity. Just like with a virus, both items are 'infected' and both will continue to deteriorate if left unchecked. There are products you can purchase containing a mild alkaline solution that can be applied to neutralize the acids. (Light Impressions Direct at www.lightimpressionsdirect.com sells a product called Bookkeeper for this purpose.)

Photocopies - Unfortunately, nothing will reverse the damage already caused. You may therefore want to make copies of the damaged materials and store them in an archival safe environment, and place the originals in polypropylene sheet protectors in a separate location away from your 'archive' so as to prevent additional damage. When making copies, locate and use acid- and lignin-free photocopy paper (also available from Light Impressions Direct and other suppliers). You might want to scan already damaged photographs, use a graphics program to color-correct damaged hues, and print a 'new' image for your collection. Make sure you select archival quality Kodak or Fuji photo papers.

Storage Binders and Sheet Protectors - Store paper materials upright in archival quality binders using acid-free and lignin-free paper mountings and/or archival quality polypropylene sheet protectors. Beware! Not every binder, scrapbook or album sold is archival quality. If it is not labeled acid-free, lignin-free, and/or archival safe, keep looking.

Photograph Storage - The same rule applies for the storage of photographs. Look for archival safe albums and storage boxes. There are many stores selling attractive storage boxes, most of which are not archival safe. They may be great for storing your cancelled checks, your seashell collection, or your ex-spouse's pictures (which you may not care about). However, look specifically for storage boxes labeled acid-free, lignin-free, and/or archival safe.

Resources

Your local office supply store and professional photographic supply store may be able to help you obtain the archival supplies you need. However, there are plenty of places on the Internet to locate great supplies. These include:

Light Impressions Direct
www.lightimpressionsdirect.com

Gaylord.com
www.gaylord.com

Archival Products
www.archival.com

The Shops @ Ancestry.com
shops.ancestry.com
(Click on the Preservation Shop)

Creative Memories
www.creativememories.com/home.asp
(You will need to locate a consultant to order merchandise)

All of these companies provide excellent products, and some are even used by libraries and archives for their preservation and conservation needs.

Consider what your newspapers are doing in the way of damaging your own ancestors' lives, and take steps to stop them dead in their vicious tracks. You are the family archivist, whether you planned it that way or not. Invest some time and energy into preserving your family's past for the future.

Full article can be found at <http://222.ancestry.com/learn/library/article.aspx?articled=5318>
For more information, visit George G. Morgan's website at ahaseminars.com/atl