

Heirloom Textiles 3/6

Storage of Costumes in Boxes

Hello and welcome to the Textile Conservation Lab of the Minnesota Historical Society. We have created a series of podcasts to assist you in the storage of heirloom textiles. In this podcast we'll be discussing how to safely store your costumes in boxes for long-term preservation.

Now a quick note, there are many terms used to describe costumes, garments, and regalia are two. Within the museum community, we refer to them generally as costumes, which is the term used here.

Boxes are great because you can stack them high on shelves making good use of all available storage space. Boxes are also enclosed blocking out light and dirt, as well as acting as a barrier to pest infestation. Finally, boxed storage is a great way to store costumes that cannot be hung on a padded hanger.

Materials

Boxes come in buffered acid-free board or Coroplast plastic, both materials were reviewed in the earlier Storage Materials podcast. Other supplies necessary include washed cotton or cotton polyester un-dyed muslin, and acid free tissue. When choosing acid-free tissues for storage, please refer to the earlier podcast on the differences between buffered and unbuffered tissues.

It's important when starting this project to choose a box large enough to accommodate your costume and still fit on your shelf. Before making any purchases fold some of your costumes to make sure they will fit inside the size box you want. Also important refrain from plastic film windows on the box tops. Plastic windows are often found on wedding dress storage boxes.

These windows are fragile and puncture or rip easily, allowing dust, dirt, light, and pest infestation easy access to your costumes.

Handling costumes

Before handling costumes you must remove all jewelry to prevent pulling or snagging any part and be aware of fragile areas. Secondly, always wash your hands to minimize any transfer of dirt and oils. Finally, costumes with sequins are extremely fragile. Early sequins dating to the late 19th and early 20th century are often made with gelatin. Simply touching one will leave behind a fingerprint. So when handling costumes with sequins it is necessary to wear cotton or nitril gloves.

How to fold your Costume

Un-dyed muslin or acid-free paper slings are extremely important when boxing costumes. Slings allow you to safely move costumes in and out of your box without extra handling. To create a sling simply cut your washed un-dyed muslin to size so that it extends on both sides, not unlike a layer of tissue in a nicely wrapped present. When removing items from a box simply grab the sling on both sides and pick up taking care to have a place next to the box to place the bundle down.

Before you begin handling a costume examine it overall and check for fragile materials, areas of weakness, and staining. Next, carefully examine the interior and back of as well. If there are large areas of loss or embellishments like beads falling off you may choose to place the costume in a shallow container and wait for someone with more experience to assist you.

Once you have identified that the costume is strong enough to be handled position your costume on the table and align it so that it is straight and nothing is distorted or twisted. If you have a bustle that will not lie flat it may be best to lay the costume face down.

Support folds with softly scrunched acid free tissue such as bodice sides, and arms. Arms on 19th century costumes are often shaped and inserting

scrunched tissue prevents them from being distorted. Once the bodice is stuffed line the folds of the skirt with supportive tissue as well. In short each time a fold is made it needs to be supported with tissue. Supporting folds prevents them from becoming fossilized creases, which will fracture if the fabric becomes stiff and brittle.

Also important line embellishments like beads, hooks, and bars that could snag or abrade the surrounding textile with a layer of tissue.

Ideally we would all like to put one costume in a box at a time. However, this is unlikely so when placing more than one item in a box remember to place heavy items on the bottom. Don't crush or overfill a box. Take care to pad out empty areas preventing any shifting of contents while a box is in transit. Finally mark your boxes identifying their contents.

Properly storing costumes in boxes is a costly time consuming process. However, in the end it is a great way to protect historic costumes while in storage. Please refer to the conservation page of the Minnesota Historical Society's website for more information on preservation.

Minnesota Historical Society

www.mnhs.org

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Podcast Series 3

Storage of Costumes in Boxes

Material list

Acid-free paper materials

Buffered Boxes, Acid-free

Buffered Tissue, Acid-free

Unbuffered Tissue, Acid-free

Plastic Materials

Coroplast, Polyethylene Boxes

Fabric materials

Un-dyed Muslin, Washed in either cotton or cotton polyester blend

Conservation Suppliers

University Products 1-800-628-1912

www.universityproducts.com

Gaylord 1-800-448-6160

www.Gaylord.com

Talas 1-212-219-0770

www.talasonline.com

Light Impressions 1 800-828-6216

www.LightImpressionsDirct.com