

Storage of Heirloom Textiles 5/6

Storage of Quilts and Coverlets 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 the how to safely store your quilts and coverlets in boxes for long term preservation.

Boxes are great because you can stack them high on shelves making good use of all available storage space. Boxes also are 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 quilts and coverlets safely.

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 quilt or coverlet and still fit on your shelf. Before making any purchases fold some of your quilts and coverlets 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 textiles.

Handling textiles

Before handling quilts and coverlets you must remove all jewelry to prevent pulling or snagging any part also be aware of fragile areas. Secondly, always wash your hands to minimize any transfer of dirt and oils.

How to fold your textile

Un-dyed muslin or acid-free paper slings are extremely important when boxing quilts and coverlets. Slings allow you to safely move quilts and coverlets 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.

Prior to folding a quilt or coverlet you must prepare a table surface large enough support the textile overall. Once your textile is laid out examine it overall and check for fragile materials, areas of weakness, and staining. Next, carefully examine the back of the textile as well. If there are large areas of loss or the textile is fragile overall you may choose to place the quilt or coverlet in a shallow container and wait for someone with more experience to assist you.

Finally you must always examine a quilt or coverlet textile for former fold lines. Most textiles are folded in halves, quarters, then eighths. Constant folding along the same areas develops areas of weakness due to the stress of folding and unfolding. It is not uncommon to see faint fold lines even after you have wet cleaned a flat textile, their memory is that strong. Because of this the conservation community almost always folds quilts and coverlets in thirds or along strong areas that do not appear to have been folded.

Now prepare sheets of acid-free tissue by lightly scrunching it up into loose bundles. Position the prepared acid-free tissue along the fold lines then gently fold the textile over them. If you are working with a large textile you may need an additional person to assist with the folding. Finally gently insert

your arm in between the textile next to the tissue and be sure that it is positioned next to the fold and supporting the textile. Repeat the process on all other folds taking care that it will fit into the box you have prepared.

Ideally we would all like to put one quilt or coverlet 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 quilts and coverlets 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

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Podcast Series 5

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Material list

Acid-free paper materials

Buffered Boxes, Acid-free

Buffered Tissue, Acid-free

Unbuffered Tissue, Acid-free

Plastic materials

Coroplast, Polypropylene boxes and boards

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