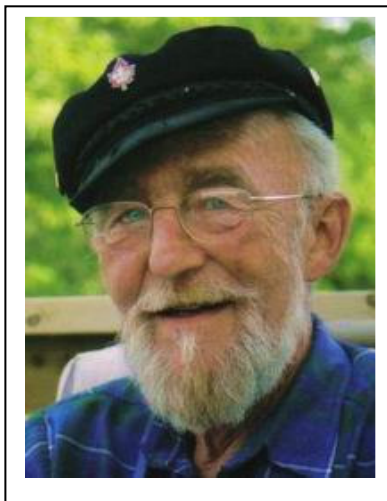


Protecting Fragile Documents



I always approach my morning e-mail session with keen anticipation and I am rarely disappointed. One morning recently I heard from June Moodie who was wondering about the appropriateness of lamination to protect a fragile document. She obviously had some reservations and they were well-founded.

Generally speaking, laminating is not an appropriate treatment for an archival document for several reasons, the most important of which is that it is not reversible. If something happens to the document or if a new treatment becomes available for a pre-existing condition, there is nothing you could do about it.

A better process is called ‘encapsulation’. It protects the document and lets you handle it with relative safety. The document is sandwiched between two sheets of a polyester, called Mylar, with a bit of space for breathing. These two sheets are joined by two-sided tape and can be separated if some other treatment becomes necessary or available.

Mylar comes in several thicknesses. Letter and legal size documents can usually be handled by a 3 mil thickness, while larger and/or heavier documents (maps, etc.) would do better with 5 mil.

The process is fairly straight forward and the materials required are relatively easy to obtain. There are several different approaches but the one below is based on the U.S. National Park Service practice.

1. Select or cut a piece of the Mylar film about 4cm (1 ½ “) larger in both directions than the paper object. I use a utility knife, flexible steel ruler with a cork backing, and a self-healing cutting board but you can place a strip of masking tape on the film, draw a line on it and use scissors. Lay the film on your work surface, wipe it free of lint with a cloth and place a weight in the centre of the film. An unopened bag of sugar or coffee works fine.
2. Place the double-sided tape along or near all four sides of the film. Leave the paper backing on the tape. Remove the weight.
3. Place the paper object within the tape boundaries, making sure that it does not touch the tape. If the tape is too close, remove the object, then the tape, and reapply it.
4. Wipe your second sheet of Mylar (of the same size) with the clean lint-free cloth and lay it over the object. Once you have all the edges aligned, place your weight over the whole package.
5. Lift one end of the top sheet and remove the paper backing from the tape at that edge. Gently relay the film over the tape, which will anchor it in alignment.
6. Move the weight to the taped end, lift up the top sheet of film and remove the remaining tape backing. Gently lay the sheet over the remaining tape in a rolling motion.
7. Using the cotton cloth, gently press in the direction the film is closing to push air out of the package. Rub the tape until adherence is complete. You can also use a wallpaper seam roller to do this if you have one handy.
8. I like to round off the corners with scissors or a nail clipper to prevent snagging on the sides of containers.

If you would like to see these steps illustrated go to:

http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/conservoogram/cons_toc.html . This gives you a list of Conserve O Grams and the ones about paper are near the bottom of the list. You may also find a number of other Conserve O Grams that interest you. You can print them out directly from your monitor.

One of the most popular Canadian suppliers of material for encapsulation is Carr Mclean. You can visit (and order from) their website at: www.carrmclean.ca/ . Select ‘Products’, then ‘Archival Supplies’, then ‘Encapsulation Materials’.

Happy preserving.