

Filipino-American Historical Society of Hawai'i

# Preserving Family Collections: A Workshop Manual

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## 1

### Filipinos in Hawai'i's History

An authoritative history of Hawaii has yet to be written, for standard accounts of Hawai'i omit the contributions and perspectives of Hawai'i's many "ethnic minorities." This omission is not merely the result of neglect, ignorance or arrogance – e.g., "history legitimizes the victor" – but, more important, it is the consequence of a social research environment that remains deficient in primary and secondary resources that represent these ethnic minorities. A more accurate and comprehensive account of Hawai'i can only be written through the judicious consideration and inclusion of these neglected materials.

Filipinos, as one of Hawai'i's ethnic minorities, are provided a scant space in Hawai'i's official historical landscape. Whenever Filipinos appear in the history of Hawai'i at all, they are pigeonholed into a story of immigrants – or descendents of immigrants – contributing their labor to the survival and maintenance of Hawai'i's sugar and pineapple plantations and the modern-day tourist industry. End of story.

But the history of Hawai'i is more than a story of the rise and fall of plantations and the emergence of tourism; there are more facets to Hawai'i than its industrialization. Yet, in spite of over a century of living and contributing to the life and blood of contemporary Hawai'i, the presence, perspectives, interests and beliefs of Filipinos are absent in standard histories. Filipinos play a utilitarian but invisible role in the making of our Hawai'i. A more complete history of Hawai'i, one which includes the stories and perspectives of more than 25% of its current population, requires more information to be made available for students, researchers and new writers of Hawai'i's history.

## 2

### Writing History

Writing the history of any time or place is an ongoing task of identifying, selecting and interpreting available information. Once a project or topic is considered, the first task a historian undertakes is to identify and gather relevant information. The historian then selects and relates bits and pieces of this collected information to each other, to other collections of information and to ideas held by the historian and other writers. The historian finally weaves everything into a good story. Thus, existing bits and pieces of information are what historians use as the building blocks of a successful story – no information, no story.

#### "Usual Suspects"

Historians writing the standard history of Hawai'i use information that are collected and maintained by several public and private institutions, including libraries, museums and archives. Most of these institutions do not, however, actively collect or maintain the bits and pieces of information created and left by ethnic minorities. In fact, compounding this neglect is the institutional practice of collecting ethnic information that only reinforces and supports the accepted historical narrative. By relying on a fixed or narrowly-defined body of primary and secondary sources, standard histories are inevitably biased toward a status quo, i.e., the legacy of "those in power."

Considering a wider variety of information on ethnic groups will stimulate new insights into the accepted historical narrative. The availability and incorporation of new information will result in histories that are more accurate, nuanced, meaningful, inclusive and, in the end, useful.

### 3

## Why Preserve?

Preserving family resources, e.g., records, papers, photographs, etc., should not be done only for the convenience of historians, even though this preservation will benefit the larger community in the long run. First and foremost, family resource preservation is essential for each family's identity and that of each individual within a family. As time passes, everyone has some connection to some place and to someone else.

Preserving resources allow any family member – now or in the future – to retrace and reconstruct family histories and claims. Of course, any individual may choose to ignore the specific contents contained in the preserved resources but, if not preserved, the resources can rarely be accurately and legally recreated or recovered if they are ever needed.

### Community History and Identity

The other purpose for preserving family resources (and the primary motive for conducting these workshops) is to help the community form its own identity more accurately. What our Hawai'i community believes itself to be is currently reflected in the standard history of Hawai'i which, noted earlier, excludes the story of ethnic minorities. However, each family and each individual within a family living in Hawai'i inevitably plays a part in the creation of Hawai'i. The standard history only reflects a single storyline guided by a single set of interests and perspectives. New "community histories" – the histories of Hawai'i's many ethnic minorities – must be created and incorporated into a broader Hawai'i history that truly reflects a reality, i.e., one that is multifaceted, multicultural and diversified.

### 4

## Types of Resources

Family resources are, simply, items providing evidence of the life and existence of a family and its members. They should be identified and preserved according to their significance for each individual family. It is essential that family individuals, themselves, determine the significance of meaningful items representing the family. Their selection of resources that are preserved is, itself, a reflection of their existence in Hawai'i.

For instance, if one or several individuals within a family collected beanie babies (for whatever purpose), that collection could be an important element of that family's identity since building the collection made time, spatial and monetary demands on the family, not to mention being a focus of family conversation. By the same token, a family member's orchid collection or vacation trips might also be an important part of a family's record.

The inevitable problems associated with preserving all of a family's resources are the limitations in storage space and the life-span of some items, such as orchids. The most immediate solution for these problems is to preserve *evidence* of these collections and activities rather than the items themselves. This evidence could be in the form of photographs, inventory lists or other more permanent forms of descriptions.

As important as these resources might be for describing one's family identity, not all resources are valuable for community historical purposes. Resources that are valuable for writing community histories are commonly referred to as "records," which are often, but not always, official or formal records. Personal family records can also be very important for writing community histories.

## 5 To Keep or Not to Keep

Not everything old is precious or valuable, and many recent items will become precious and valuable over time – only time will tell. Materials commonly considered warranting preservation as part of a family’s papers, especially for community historical purposes, are:

- Letters between family and friends
- Noteworthy letters, reports, minutes, newsletters and other formal/official items relating to an individual’s business, professional or community work
- Diaries, memoirs, reminiscences and scrapbooks
- Autograph albums
- Photographs and photo albums (labelled)
- Newspaper clippings or magazine articles about family members
- Business and personal financial account books
- Citizenship, immigration, land grant, military, and other legal documents
- Birth, marriage and death documents
- Genealogical information
- Organizational minutes/reports
- Brochures and flyers
- Films, videos/audio tapes (labelled)

- A broad category referred to as “ephemera,” which includes items such as commencement programs, wedding invitations, funeral programs, programs from school plays in which a family member participated, etc.

Items that are less likely to warrant preservation – unless part of an organized collection – are receipts, bills, canceled checks, check registers, newspaper clippings on events not related to family members, greeting cards, “junk mail,” unidentifiable fragments of letters, unidentified photographs and unidentifiable account books.

When considering the “value” of collections, family resources and papers can have three types of value: 1) value to the family, 2) broader historical or “research” value, and 3) monetary value. Any single item may have none to all three of these values.

## 6 Organizing Materials

Organizing your resources is not as complicated as it might seem, even if your collection includes materials from several generations of family members. Basically, all items should be clearly labelled with relevant dates, family members and a short description of item(s).

- Letters should be organized first by recipient and then either by sender or date.
- Official documents, newspaper clippings, photos and ephemera should be organized by the family member named in them.
- Diaries, scrapbooks and autograph albums should

be organized by creator.

- Genealogical material should be kept together as a set.

## 7

### Storing Resources

After identifying and organizing your resources to be preserved, work on properly storing them. The best storage location for your books, papers, photographs, and prints is a cool, dry, stable environment, e.g., moderate temperature and relative humidity with relatively little fluctuation, clean air and good air circulation, away from light, and good housekeeping (to minimize pest intrusion). The following guidelines will help you identify the best location for your valuables:

- Avoid storing valuable paper collections in garages, attics, basements, “mini-storage” rentals, barns or sheds, all of which are commonly subject to excessive heat and/or moisture problems. Also avoid storing collections beneath or in close proximity to water sources like washing machines, bathrooms, or air-conditioning equipment. Moisture and dust encourages mold growth which stains and often causes paper to become brittle. Always keep records clean and consider what is in the room or space above your collections.
- Heat accelerates chemical processes that cause paper to become brittle and discolored. Avoid hanging valuable photos, documents, or artworks over heat sources. Books and boxed documents or photographs with long-term value should be shelved away from heat sources.

- Light (especially natural and fluorescent light) causes fading and other damage. It is preferable to store items in closed boxes. Items stored in open containers or housed in frames should be shielded from light as much as possible. Keep photographs and art (prints, watercolors, and other works on paper) in the dark or subdued light as much as possible. Don't put valuable books and papers in direct sun or bright light of any kind. Hallways or other rooms without windows are best. Install shades and put up heavy curtains where you can't avoid windows. If possible, display copies of valuable originals.
- Indoor pollution rapidly damages paper and is a growing problem in energy-conscious spaces with good insulation. Any valuable photograph or artwork on display should be protected by a preservation-quality mat and frame.
- Silverfish and firebrats are nocturnal insects that feed on cereals, wheat flour, books, any paper that has glue or paste, book bindings and starch in clothing. Even though they can live for months without food, stacks of papers, magazines and books are a savory feast for these insects. Cleaning storage areas and moving materials periodically will reveal the sleeping or hiding insects. Solitary insects can be easily killed, and insecticides could be used for large infestations.

## 8

### Archival-Quality Materials

There are actually no scientific standards defining the term “archival-quality” and, as found in catalogs and stores, this term can often be misleading. Storage enclosures should not only hold your resources but must also protect against

chemical deterioration. When purchasing enclosures, look for specific terms indicating the stability of the enclosure.

Archival-quality materials are not generally available in most office supply stores and usually cost more than regular folders, boxes and other enclosures. They will, however, help preserve valuable materials for generations to come. A list of suppliers is found at the end of this handout.

Compare catalogs to find the supplies you want for the best price. Read product descriptions; if you have questions about the composition of a product, ask the supplier for details. If you can't get that information, find another supplier.

### Paper Storage Enclosures

The ideal way to store papers is in archival-quality folders placed in archival-quality boxes (or in archival-quality folders in metal filing cabinets). It is generally accepted that archival-quality paper enclosures refer to materials that are free of the acids and lignin normally found in paper and cardboard and, moreover, impregnated with an alkaline "buffer" (magnesium or calcium carbonate) that guards against the acids present in the stored items.

Boxes, mats, folders, and other paper enclosures for preservation use at home should be "low-lignin" or "lignin-free," and "buffered" throughout. Lignin should be avoided because it is a component of paper that leads to the formation of acid. The term "buffered" refers to the process of adding a buffering agent during manufacturing. This process helps to neutralize acids that form over time in the stored materials.

"Acid-free" paper and paper enclosures do not always have a buffer added. Furthermore, they may not be lignin-free or low-lignin. Over time these enclosures may become acidic relatively quickly.

While buffered paper enclosures are generally preferred to enclosures that are only acid-free, some drawings and paintings on paper, blueprints, and some photographs may be damaged by the chemicals used as buffers. If paper enclosures are used, these items, e.g., albumen, cyanotype, dye transfer, color prints (chromogenic) and textiles, should be stored in neutral (unbuffered), low-lignin enclosures.

Storage enclosures should be durable and provide adequate physical support. Consider the following characteristics in selecting enclosures:

- (a) Enclosures should be stiff enough to protect their contents from tears, breaks, slumping, or other distortion.
- (b) Boxes should close fully (no gaps or handle holes), with snug lids to exclude abrasives, pests and other pollutants.
- (c) The size and shape of envelopes, boxes, folders, or other enclosures should closely match the object or objects they hold.
- (d) Book boxes should be custom-made to the dimensions of each book.

### Plastic Storage Enclosures

The terms acid-free, buffered, and lignin-free do not apply to plastic enclosures; look for enclosures made from specific types of plastic. Preservation-grade polyester, known by brand names such as Melinex 516 and Mylar, is the most stable. Polyethylene and polypropylene can be used if they contain no plasticizers. Acetates, which change dimension, are not recommended, and plastic enclosures made from polyvinyl chloride (PVC) should never be used.

Paper or plastic enclosures for photos should pass the Photographic Activity Test (PAT). This test ensures that the enclosure will not chemically react with photographs. Supplier catalogs should indicate whether a photographic storage product has passed the PAT.

### Metal Boxes and Cabinets

Baked enamel steel boxes and cabinets are considered archival storage containers, especially useful for photographic slides. However, while sturdier than paper boxes, metal boxes and cabinets should be periodically inspected for dents and scratches, which can result in rust.

### Labelling Folders and Boxes

Folders and boxes should not be overfilled and should be labelled with the general contents (e.g., “Samuel Medina correspondence, 1930-1960”). Avoid using nicknames, family relationships or free-standing first names to identify contents (e.g., “Sam’s letters”) because these notations may not mean anything to your great-great grandchildren. Alternative names should be included in item descriptions.

Descriptions of items should be clearly written on separate sheets using a soft lead pencil, archival-quality ink pen or a laser printer. Descriptions can be stored in the enclosure with the items or separately using a simple system that refers to the enclosures.

Digital form descriptions can be created and stored separately as above or attached to each file as embedded metadata. Several “standards” exist for create embedded metadata , including EXIF (Exchangeable Image File Format), IPTC (International Press Telecommunications Council), RDF (Resource Description Framework) and DCMI (Dublin Core Metadata Initiative). The interoperability between

different standards is not completely worked out.

## 9 Specific Media

### Paper Resources

Letters, clippings, and other documents should be stored unfolded. Folding and unfolding breaks paper along the fold lines. Storing documents in folders rather than envelopes is recommended, because envelopes can cause damage as items are removed and replaced. Valuable documents that are viewed frequently should be enclosed in Mylar or polypropylene enclosures.

Since newsprint (the paper used in newspapers) contains acid, if you want to preserve a newspaper clipping, photocopy it. Ideally, the paper used for photocopying should meet the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper for Publications and Documents in Libraries and Archives, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992 (rev. 1997). Refer to the NAPP website listed in this manual’s reference section for a list of permanent papers.

To remove staples or old paper clips from documents (especially if they’re rusty), slide a piece of stiff plastic (e.g., polyester, polypropylene) under the fastener on both sides of the document. Slide the paper clip off the plastic, or bend the edges of the staples up and pry it out with a pair of tweezers or a thin knife. The plastic protects the paper from abrasion and from damage by your tools. Do not use a staple remover, because it is likely to tear the paper.

### Photographs

The best film and print media to use for photographs

remains silver-based black and white film and paper that has been properly processed and stored. Although improvements in technology have extended the life of color prints and negatives, color materials still do not last as long as traditional black and white photographs and negatives. Most color prints and negatives fade over time. While color slide film tends to last longer than color negatives, they are also susceptible to fading.

Save your negatives; they are the originals. Negatives allow you to make new prints, and they can be digitally scanned. They should be handled carefully and should be stored in Mylar or polypropylene sleeves.

Slides can be stored in boxes, carousel trays (if kept in a sealed container), or archival-quality slide pages. If you have slides, photo CDs, home movies or videos, be sure to save the hardware needed to view them. Technology is always changing so viewing hardware is always changing.

Exposure to light degrades photographs. Dark storage is especially important for keeping color prints from fading. School photographs are usually not properly processed by studios, so they are prone to changes in colors or fading. If possible, always keep an extra copy in dark storage if you intend to display the photograph.

Inkjet color prints are not considered preservation quality, and no standards govern their longevity. To maximize the quality and durability of this type of color print, it is best to use the inks and photographic paper recommended by the printer manufacturer, rather than third-party inks or papers.

Make multiple backups of all digital photographs and other valuable media. Videotape, magnetic disks (hard drives and floppy disks), CDs, and DVDs all have a limited life

expectancy and are subject to both gradual deterioration and catastrophic failure.

Torn or defaced photographs can be restored through copy photography. In general, original photographs should be left alone. A copy negative or scan of the original can be made for the restoration of the image.

Only photographs that can be identified and labelled are worth preserving. For this reason, sometimes looking at your most recent or current photographs and working your way backwards is the best strategy. Photographs which contain unidentifiable people, places or time should be saved for last. Put your energy into photographs that can be identified.

For photographs that are printed on 100% paper, using a soft 6B drawing pencil and note down as much detail as possible on the back of each photograph. For plastic resin-coated (RC) paper, pencils cannot be used. Instead, use film marking pens and allow the ink to dry before stacking. For each photograph take note of who is in the photograph, when it was taken and what is going on. Use the full names of people, not just their title or relationship.

Photographic prints should be stored in archival boxes or photo albums. If you have a lot of prints to arrange, use boxes. Once prints are organized (subject, person or year) you can select the best and put them in an album. Albums, although more expensive than using archival boxes, allow you to display or review pictures more easily.

When storing photos in an album, use “photo” or mounting corners (available from preservation suppliers), not “magnetic” pages (which actually contain an adhesive that can stick to or react with your pictures). Choose a photo album with buffered or neutral, good-quality paper and/or

polyester, polypropylene, or polyethylene pages – not vinyl or PVC.

An existing photo album is like a diary or scrapbook of its creator so, in general, do not take it apart. Sometimes the album might contain notes or handwriting of the person who made it.

### Repairing or Restoring Damaged Items

The only safe and reliable way to repair or restore a damaged item (torn, water damaged, mold damage, etc.) is to employ the services of a professional conservator.

## 10 To Digitize or Not To Digitize

The use of the computer has made the creation and viewing of photographs and documents easier. However, a digital product presents new challenges for long-term preservation. Rapid changes in technology makes viewing or reloading older digital products difficult and, sometimes, near impossible. This obsolescence of digital formats can happen with products that are only a couple of years old.

Since the physical medium on which digital products are stored and the item's file format must be read by specific hardware and software, preserved digital products must continually be refreshed and transferred to newer hardware and software standards – unless, of course, you keep the older hardware and software (“legacy systems”) available and in working condition to access your older files.

If this were not bad enough, the physical medium on which digital products are stored (CDs, DVDs, hard drives, digital tapes, etc.) are prone to failure even when operated and

stored under the most ideal conditions. In spite of claims to long-term permanency, all physical media being used today has limited working lifespans. While well preserved paper materials are susceptible to environmental catastrophes, they do not experience digital media's problem of obsolescence.

Ideally, several copies and periodic copying (“refreshing”) of a collection should be conducted. To maintain the useful life of computer/digitalized materials, the following basic steps are suggested:

- Routinely back up all important files and store a duplicate backup copy in a location other your working location. Hard-drive crashes, heat, fire and flood will damage digital files and the machines that read them.
- Migrate your files whenever you upgrade your equipment (especially data-reading devices) or use new software. Import older files to formats that newer software can read. It might preferable to convert files to “universal” standards, i.e., ASCII/Unicode (text), TIFF (images) and PDF (Adobe portable document format). All replicated data should be migrated to newer formats. Migration runs the risk of losing some information or functionality.
- Standards for digital audio and video files are not well established, although audio files stored as noncompressed WAV or AIFF files may be read by most computer operating systems.
- The metadata created for digital resources may also be affected by changes in software. Whenever possible, metadata should be stored as ASCII or in SGML or XML, which are ASCII-derived.

- Like original materials, store digital records in environmentally stable locations.

## 11 eFIL Archives

The eFIL: Filipino Digital Archives and History Center of Hawai'i is a project of the Filipino-American Historical Society of Hawai'i. Its mission is to digitize materials on and about the Filipino experience in Hawai'i and to make these materials available to the general public via the internet. By providing access to these primary and secondary resources (some of which are out-of-print), people in Hawai'i and around the world will be able to understand more about the Filipino experience in Hawai'i and be able to contribute to a more representative history of Hawai'i.

eFIL is actively soliciting donations of family and institutional records and resources that shed light on the Filipino experience in Hawai'i. Since eFIL is a digital archives and not a repository (no facilities to permanently store materials), donated resources will be digitally reproduced and processed. The original materials will be returned to their owner. Public access to the digital forms will be discussed and an agreement between donors and eFIL will be signed.

If you are interested in donating to us, please view our website at <http://www.efilarchives.org> to examine how resources are made available to the public. Our contact numbers and addresses are also located on the website. You are encouraged to contact us before discarding any of your records and resources.

## 12 Suppliers

Conservation Resources International  
5532 Port Royal Road  
Springfield, VA 22151  
Phone: 800-634-6932/703-321-7730 Fax: 703-321-0629  
E-mail: [sales@conservationresources.com](mailto:sales@conservationresources.com)  
[www.conservationresources.com](http://www.conservationresources.com)

Light Impressions  
P.O. Box 2100  
Santa Fe Springs, CA 90670  
Phone: 800-828-6216 Fax: 800-828-5539  
[www.lightimpressionsdirect.com](http://www.lightimpressionsdirect.com)

Metal Edge, Inc.  
Archival Storage Materials  
6340 Bandini Blvd.  
Commerce, CA 90040  
Phone: 800-862-2228 Fax: 888-822-6937  
[www.metaledgeinc.com](http://www.metaledgeinc.com)

Talas, Inc.  
568 Broadway  
New York, NY 10012  
Phone: 212-219-0770 Fax: 212-219-0735  
[www.talas-nyc.com](http://www.talas-nyc.com) (searching "art care")

University Products, Inc.  
517 Main Street  
Holyoke, MA 01041  
Phone: 800-628-1912 Fax: 800-532-9281  
[www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com)

Dwayne's Photo  
Processes old still/movie films and is the only Kodak-certified lab processing Kodachrome film.  
<http://www.dwaynesphoto.com/>

Film Rescue International  
Processes old still/movie films and transfers images to digital formats.  
<http://www.filmrescue.com/index.html>

## Glossary

**AIFF** (Audio Interchange File Format) is an audio file format standard used for storing sound data for personal computers (especially Apple Macintosh) and other electronic audio devices.

**Albumen** is a substance derived from chicken eggs that was used as a substrate for light-sensitive compounds in photographic film negatives and paper. It was used until gelatin became popular in the 20th century.

**ASCII/Unicode.** ASCII (American Standard Code for Informational Interchange) codes and Unicode represent text in computers, communications equipment, and other devices that work with text. ASCII is a subset of Unicode, which includes non-Romanized characters.

**Buffered** products contain an alkaline substance with a pH of over 7.0 added during manufacturing to neutralize acids or to counteract acids that may form in the future. The most common buffering substances are magnesium carbonate and calcium carbonate.

**Cyanotype** is an old monochrome photographic printing process that gives a cyan-blue print.

**Dye-Transfer** printing of photographs resembles the mechanical printing process that magazines use to make color pictures. The dyes in a dye transfer print are very stable.

**JPEG** (Joint Photographic Experts Group) is the most common compressed image format used by digital cameras and other photographic image capture devices.

**Lignin** is a compound found in plant cell walls and provides the strength in wood. As it degrades it is responsible for paper, especially newsprint, becoming acidic and turning brown with age.

**Metadata** is “data about data” and describes an individual datum, a content item or a collection of data. It is used to facilitate the understanding and management of data.

**PDF** (Portable Document Format) is the file format created by Adobe Systems for document exchange. PDF is a fixed-layout format used for

representing two-dimensional documents that is independent of the application software, hardware, and operating system.

**Plasticizers** are additives that give hard plastics flexibility and durability. Some plasticizers evaporate and tend to concentrate in an enclosed space; the “new car smell” is caused mostly by evaporating plasticizers.

**TIFF** (Tagged Image File Format) is a file format for images, including photographs and line art, that contains image data in a lossless format, making TIFF files a useful method for archiving images. Unlike standard JPEG, TIFF files using lossless compression (or no compression at all) can be edited and resaved without suffering a compression loss.

**WAV** (Waveform audio format) is a Microsoft and IBM audio file format standard for storing an audio bitstream on PCs.

## References

Northeast Document Conservation Center  
Website has a wealth of information on preservation, storage and conservation techniques.  
<http://www.nedcc.org/home.php>

North American Permanent Papers  
For a list of permanent papers, see the NAPP website:  
<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/byorg/abbey/napp/>

U.S. National Archives & Records Administration  
For more details on preserving your family resources.  
<http://www.archives.gov/preservation/family-archives/>

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