

Children's Corner

Creating a Child's Personal Archive at Home

Children can develop a sense of their history by creating a timeline of their lives starting with their birth, and progressing through significant events such as starting school, getting a new pet, moving to a new house, learning to ride a horse, dancing in the Nutcracker—anything they consider important.

A natural expansion of that activity is documenting those important events by creating a personal archive. The *Encarta World English Dictionary*, 1999, defines archive as “a collection of documents such as letters, official papers, photographs, or recorded material, kept for their historical interest.”

Use items relating to each important event on your child's timeline. For example:

- The child's birth—a birth announcement or certificate, a baptismal record, a news clip about the birth or perhaps a birth photograph
- Beginning school—a first-day-of-school photo, a teacher's report or report card, a class photo, schoolwork.
- Adopting a pet—a photograph of the pet when new to the family.
- For a move—house photographs, copies of address listings from phone books (with dates) showing the change.

Clearly this is a long-term project. Add to the record annually. A birthday or new year's are good occasions to reflect on what of significance has happened and what might be added.

This can be broadened into a family archive including the same documentation for others. In addition to photographs and printed materials, objects can be included: a wedding gown, family-made quilt, needlework, military medals, items from a family business, etc.

It is important to keep some basic storage tips in mind:

- Keep items out of direct sunlight, in a dark place.
- Avoid exposure to temperature shifts or high humidity.
- Do not store items near plants which may draw insects.
- Separate types of items. Isolate news clips from other materials. Store items with their own kind; do not mix photos and printed matter, textiles and metal items, etc.
- Protect fragile items.
- Don't use tape, glue or staples, or encapsulate items.
- Don't eat or drink near the collection.

If you are interested in learning about options for optimal, acid-free archival storage, or have other questions, feel free to contact the Museum for resources.

Once the archive has begun to grow, don't just ignore it and let it sit there. Remember that items from the archive can be used in a number of ways to make meaningful holiday cards and gifts for family! Consider creating a family history calendar using a different photo for each month of the year, or use a wedding photo to create a unique anniversary card.

You might create a family history wall at home, using reproductions of original photos so light exposure is not a concern. Look at the *Curator's Choice* column in this newsletter to see one way in which a family history collection was used as the basis for an interactive art project.

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