

Keep Your Autograph Collection From Fading

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Keep Your Autograph Collection From Fading Q: Part of my autograph collection is framed and on display in my home. What can I do to preserve the ones that are starting to fade?

A: There are several ways to limit fading and prolong the life of your collection.

Since light fades many writing inks and deteriorates paper, it is best to limit exposure to light. Display the autographs no more than one to three months per year in a dimly lit area. Replace the exhibited items regularly with others from your collection or with high quality photographic reproductions, which look like the originals when framed.

If any of the inks begin to fade, exhibit reproductions of those signatures instead of the originals. Always store valuable paper documents in alkaline-buffered boxes and folders when they are not on display.

Avoid displaying your collection in bright light. Both visible light and ultraviolet light can fade inks and darken paper. Sources that emit high levels of ultraviolet light include sunlight, halogen lamps and most fluorescent lights. Incandescent bulbs emit the lowest levels of ultraviolet light but like halogen lights and sunlight, they can cause displayed items to become excessively warm if the lights are placed too close. Spotlights are too intense to use for displays of light-sensitive materials.

For exhibit, place your collection in museum-quality mats made of alkalinebuffered rag mat board or conservation mat board, using archival photo corners. Instead of regular glass, choose ultraviolet-filtering Plexiglas or ultraviolet- filtering laminated glass.

In general, the inks that are most likely to fade include felt tip pen inks, colored inks and dye-based inks. Pigment- based inks, such as India ink and archival pen inks, are resistant to fading.

To build a collection of long-lasting autographs, ask people to write their signatures on a sheet of alkaline buffered paper or archival cotton bond paper using an archival pen such as a Pigma Micron pen.

Temperature and relative humidity play a major role in preservation. High temperatures and high humidity speed the deterioration of paper and inks. Excessive dampness can cause some inks to bleed and will encourage mold to grow.

It's best to keep paper collections in an environment comfortable for people, with a temperature of 65 to 75 degrees and a relative humidity between 35 and 55 percent. Humidifiers, air conditioners and dehumidifiers can be used to control the humidity.

The use of deacidification sprays to preserve writing inks can be problematic. Some writing inks exhibit color changes, decolorization or fading when deacidified. It is best to leave this type of treatment to conservators and preserve your collection through the methods described above.