

# Cultural Stewardship Program

## Conservator Hack: Caring for Old Newspapers

*By Jane Dalley*

Many museums have collections of local newspapers, especially in rural areas. Some of these newspaper collections are enthusiastically collected by a museum as part of the local history. In other cases, a museum may feel obliged to take them so that they don't end up in the landfill. Whatever the circumstances of their acquisition, newspaper collections can be hard to store and handle. They can take up considerable storage space due to their size. The paper used for newspapers is rarely of good quality and often becomes yellow and brittle. These large, brittle pages can tear when handled and this reduces their availability for research or visitor access. It also adds to the stress level of museum staff who want to exhibit and make accessible a historical source of local events without having it fall apart in the process.

Newspapers are best stored unfolded and flat. Placing them in polyester sleeves will support the weak paper. If you purchase a ready-made sleeve, make sure it is PVC free. If it is sealed on 3 or 4 sides, slit the folds open so that it is sealed on adjoining sides, in the shape of an "L". This configuration is easier to get the newspaper in and out of. Remove any attachments such as paper clips and staples beforehand as the metal can tear, rust and stain the paper. Avoid using self-adhesive tapes and de-acidification sprays as they can do more damage. It is not necessary to repair newspapers if they are stored in sleeves as the static charge from the polyester sleeve will keep tears in place.

It is possible to copy popular pages such as the genealogy section onto good quality paper. This will ensure that the information will always be available for research and use. Guidelines for photocopying can be found at

<https://www.archives.gov/preservation/holdings-maintenance/photocopying.html>.

Newspapers are susceptible to light damage, so storage in a box or folder is important. It is possible to make a folder out of two pieces of acid-free, 1-ply matboard. If you plan to exhibit a newspaper, consider making a colour photocopy as the original will darken and embrittle if exposed to continuous light.

You may wish to determine if your local newspaper collection is the only copy available. The University of Manitoba Archives & Special Collections has copied a number of historical newspapers and a list of the titles can be found at the [UM Digital Newspaper Collection](#).

The Manitoba Legislative Library has been collecting and microfilming historical community Manitoba newspapers for several decades. Its collection contains many rural publications, dating back as far as 1859. A downloadable PDF of newspapers in its collection is available online at [Manitoba Newspapers](#). If you don't have internet access, the Legislative Library's Manitoba Newspaper Checklist 1859-1986 is available at most libraries in Manitoba, and you can request a copy of any microfilmed newspaper

through interlibrary loan. If your local publication isn't in the Legislative Library holdings, you can contact them at [Legislative Library@gov.mb.ca](mailto:Legislative_Library@gov.mb.ca) to see if they are interested in copying it to add to their collection.

If you have any questions about preserving or exhibiting newspapers, please email me at [conservator \(at\) museumsmanitoba \(dot\) com](mailto:conservator@ museumsmanitoba.com). I would be happy to help.