



THE OREGON  
HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY  
FOUNDED 1898

### Caring for Clothing and Quilts

Good housekeeping and periodic checks for evidence of pest activity are essential to the preservation of textiles. Chemical solutions for pest control are not generally recommended. By the nature of their composition and application, many chemicals that might deter pests will also stain or break down fibers. Most chemicals designed for moth control are unhealthy for humans to contact. Freezing infested clothing is an option. In some cases, the best method of stabilization is dry-cleaning by a reputable company that works regularly with vintage fabrics. It should be noted that while dry-cleaning can kill a moth infestation, it does not act as a deterrent if the piece is later stored in a susceptible environment.

Textiles to be stored should not come into contact with rubber bands, rubber cement or other adhesives, or self-adhesive labels, since these will break down over time, discoloring the surface of the stored piece. Packing materials such as bubble wrap, rubber, polyurethane foam rubber, and newspaper will also react negatively with stored textiles over time. Acid-free boxes and tissue should be used instead. Use boxes that are large enough to accommodate the size and shape of the piece – avoid overcrowding. For instance, if you can, buy a box that will allow you to store a dress fully laid out. Folding will irreversibly crease some materials, causing breakage in the fibers over time. If you must fold the article to be stored, use rolled tissue or ethaform to make a curved pad instead of a sharp fold. To store a wedding dress, for example, stuff its sleeves, bodice, and skirt to help preserve its shape.

Clothing, if sturdy, can be hung on padded hangers and placed inside muslin garment bags. The shoulder seams are the stress points for clothing stored on hangers.

Avoid displaying quilts in direct sunlight. If you use quilts on beds, do not tuck them under mattresses. If you display a quilt on a quilt stand, refold the quilt periodically in a different manner to prevent permanent creasing. Depending on the fabric and the weight, you can sometimes hang quilts with velcro strips or by sewing a sleeve to the reverse of the quilt and using a rod. Unless you know exactly what kind of fabric and batting a quilt is made of, avoid washing it. Dry-cleaning may be an option. To store a precious quilt, pad the folds with rolled tissue or ethafoam to prevent permanent creasing. Use the biggest box you can to minimize the number of folds.

The "Catch-22" with textiles is that they are made to be used, yet use leads to deterioration. In deciding how to treat your personal treasures, first determine your objectives. If you buy vintage clothes to wear, then enjoy wearing them, and if you like using quilts for traditional purposes, by all means place them on your beds. Common-sense decisions regarding use, storage, and cleaning will help you to preserve your treasures and to be aware of the inevitable trade-offs.

If you have questions, never hesitate to consult a professional.