



Conserve O Gram

July 1993

Number 19/5

Removing Original Fasteners From Archival Documents

When archival files are placed in permanent storage, any original fasteners, including staples, paper clips, string ties, rubber bands, brads, and straight pins, should usually be removed except when doing so would damage the documents. This is especially important when metal fasteners are corroded, when the attachments distort the shape of the documents, or when research use can result in damage to the documents, such as when producing photocopies. Once the fasteners have been removed, it is important to maintain the order and relationship of the documents. *Conserve O Gram* 19/6 describes methods of refastening or grouping archival documents in processed collections.

Fasteners can usually be removed by the park curatorial staff as time permits during processing. These procedures should be followed when removing fasteners from documents.

Paper Clips. If the paper clip has not rusted to the paper, and the paper is sturdy, insert fingernails under the clip ends on both front and back, pry the clip open, and lift it off. If the clip has rusted to the paper, lay the sheets flat on a table and loosen the clip by scraping very gently with the tip of a microspatula through the rust layer between the paper and the clip. If the paper is brittle or weak, use the flat side of the microspatula to hold the clip's larger curve flat against the table, and gently pry up on the smaller curve. Lift the clip off.

Staples. Unrusted staples can be left in place, provided storage conditions are appropriate to discourage future rust development. (Refer to *NPS Museum Handbook*, Part I (Rev 9/90), Chapter 4, for NPS standards for temperature and relative humidity in collections storage.)

Staples can be removed as needed, such as when photocopies are requested, rather than removing them from a whole collection in one operation.

Do not use staple removers. If the paper is sturdy, staples can often be gently removed by hand. If the paper is brittle, lay the sheets flat on a table. Insert the tip of a microspatula between the paper and the folded-over prongs of the staple. Unbend one prong at a time with the microspatula, holding the staple shank steady and flat against the table by the other prong. If the paper is very fragile, slip a strip of polyester (e.g., Mylar®) between the paper and the double prongs to prevent cracking of the paper by the microspatula. When both prongs have been pried open, insert the microspatula between the staple and the paper on the other side of the paper, then carefully pull the prongs out of the paper.

String Ties and Rubber Bands. Cut the tie or band and lift it off. Do *not* pull it over the ends of a document. If the rubber band has dried and adhered to the paper, gently chip it off with a microspatula. Watch for any cracking or abrading of the paper. If the band is soft and sticky, do not use solvents. Excess sticky residue can be gently scraped off with a microspatula. If the residue does not readily come off, interleave the sheets with silicone release paper to keep them from sticking together.

Straight Pins. If the pin has rusted to the paper, gently scrape through the rust layer using the tip of a microspatula, before attempting to pull the pin through the paper.

Grommets. Usually grommets, heavy staples, or other tightly affixed metal fasteners should be left in place. Attempting to remove them can cause irreversible damage to the documents.

Adhesives. Do not attempt to remove without a conservator's advice.

NOTE: Some fasteners (e.g., legal document ribbons, sealing wax, thread stitches, and some unusual metal fasteners) have value as artifacts or enhance the value of the documents. These should often be left in place. If questions arise, consult the Regional Curator or a professional archivist before removing them.

Sources

Microspatulas are available from most chemical, biological, and archival suppliers, and often from art suppliers.

Polyester sheets (e.g., Mylar®) and silicone release paper are available from most archival suppliers.

Reference

Ritzenthaler, Mary Lynn. *Archives and Manuscripts: Conservation, Basic Manual Series*. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 1983.

Jerri Newman
(formerly) Museum Specialist
Frederick Law Olmsted NHS
National Park Service
Brookline, Massachusetts 02146

Anne Jordan
Museum Curator
Roosevelt-Vanderbilt NHS
National Park Service
Hyde Park, New York 12538

Formerly issued as Conserve O Gram 21/4. Revised 1993.

The *Conserve O Gram* series is published as a reference on collections management and curatorial issues. Mention of a product, a manufacturer, or a supplier by name in this publication does not constitute an endorsement of that product or supplier by the National Park Service. Sources named are not all inclusive. It is suggested that readers also seek alternative product and vendor information in order to assess the full range of available supplies and equipment.

The series is distributed to all NPS units and is available to non-NPS institutions and interested individuals by subscription through the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402, FAX (202) 512-2233. For further information and guidance concerning any of the topics or procedures addressed in the series, contact the National Park Service, Curatorial Services Division, Harpers Ferry, WV 25425, (304) 535-6410.