



Storing Your Collection

The ISCA Getting Started Collecting Series

After all the time, money and energy you spend to acquire your collection, it is important to consider how to store it in a way that will preserve its condition and value for years to come. Exactly how you store your collection depends somewhat on the nature of your collection (patches vs. paper vs. mugs, for example) but some general rules will apply widely to most Scouting memorabilia.

The greatest enemies to the preservation of your collection are dirt, water, sunlight, and adhesives. When handling your collection, wash your hands and keep food and drinks away. Special collections like stamps or very old and brittle paper items may require tweezers or white cotton gloves to prevent body oils from contaminating the items. Keep your collection in a room that has moderate humidity and temperature, without wild swings in either direction. Storing it in the garage or basement might be too damp and could result in mildew ruining the collection. Keeping it in the attic or near a heater might be too hot and dry out old books and papers. Also be aware of any potential water hazards, including nearby pipes or former leaky spots in the roof that might spring up again and damage the collection. Sunlight should be avoided, especially for posters or paper products, as the sun will eventually bleach out the colors after extended periods of exposure.

You should never use cellophane or masking tape to secure patches in your collection because they will leave a residue that ruins them. If you must use some adhesive to keep a patch centered on a card or an OA two-piece set together, use a low tack removable tape such as Filmoplast P90 that is water based, acid-free, and pH neutral. Archival tapes can be found in art stores and framing shops. Although it is hard to believe, some people have used staples to secure a patch to a card. Not only does that ruin the patch by leaving holes and creasing the threads, if left in place, it will eventually rust. Remove any staples, paper clips, or other metal items that might rust and stain your collection.

In the old days, people used to store their patch collections in old shoeboxes, and you can still do so today. Instead of the old cardboard box, however, a better storage alternative is the stackable plastic shoebox that you can purchase at many retail stores. If you want to label each patch, do not write on the patch or affix a label or sticker to the front or back. Instead, put them into protective plastic zip lock bags. You can use the generic sandwich zip lock bags found in grocery stores, or purchase specialty zip lock bags from a collecting supply vendor. These will usually contain an inserted card where you can write identifying

information. Use a pencil so any stray marks can be erased. If you use ink, you run the risk of accidentally marking the item, or having the ink bleed onto it during storage.

Another way to store patches, especially OA flaps and CSPs, is to keep them in plastic pages. There are many brands available, including some sold by the BSA National Supply. However, most of these plastic pages are of low quality and not archival safe. This means that there are PVC plastics and chemicals in the page that can leach out the patch's colors if stored in them over long periods of time. Make sure you use an archival safe plastic page, such as the ones sold by UltraPro. If you would like to have a card behind the patch, use acid-free archival safe 60-lb. card stock. One advantage of using plastic pages is that they can be stored in binders or in a hanging file folder. One disadvantage of plastic pages is that it is more cumbersome to rearrange patches when you get new items, compared to keeping things in individual plastic zip lock bags.

Paper items should ideally be stored flat, although posters may be carefully rolled up and kept in an archival safe tube. A filing cabinet may also be used to organize and store loose papers. Books can be laid flat in large plastic storage containers, or even left on a bookshelf if temperature, humidity, sunlight exposure, and dust control are taken into account.

Bulky items like belt buckles, pocket knives, pins, and medals can be stored in display cases that have a foam cushion. The advantage of storing them in such a case is that you can also easily display them at a Trade-O-Ree, Scout-O-Rama, or other event. One excellent example of a display/storage box is the BoxWare available from Streamwood. Other items can be stored in storage systems created for other hobbies. For example, merit badges fit well into storage pages made for coins, and the thin silk strip badges of many foreign Scouting associations can be stored in sleeve pages made to organize 35mm film negative strips.

However you decide to store your collection, the main consideration should be to maintain its present condition for future generations to enjoy.

-- David Miura