

# Fact Sheet: HELP TO RESTORE FAMILY HEIRLOOMS FOLLOWING A FLOOD

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Lincoln-NE – Heirlooms and keepsakes are not always lost to a flood. By being patient and prompt and using professional tips, irreplaceable objects such as photos and documents may be salvaged.

The Heritage Emergency National Task Force, a public-private partnership between Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Smithsonian Institution, offers recommendations on cleaning water-damaged belongings:

- Damp items that cannot be dealt with immediately should be put in open, unsealed boxes or bags.
- Heirlooms can be fragile when wet. Separate damp materials by removing the contents from drawers, taking photos from damp albums, removing paintings and prints from frames and placing paper towels between pages of wet books.
- Inhibit the growth of mold and mildew by reducing humidity. Increase airflow with fans, open windows, or air conditioners and dehumidifiers.
- Gentle air drying indoors is best for all heirlooms. Sunlight and heat may be too intense, causing splits, warping and buckling.
- Loosen dirt and debris on fragile objects gently with soft brushes and cloths. Avoid rubbing, which can grind in dirt.



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- Clean photographs by rinsing them carefully in clean water. Air dry photos on a plastic screen or paper towel or by hanging them by the corner with plastic clothespins. Do not let the images come into contact with other surfaces. Wet photographs and negatives stuck together should never be pulled apart. Soak them in clean water until they separate on their own. Rinse again in fresh clean water.
- If objects are broken or begin to fall apart, place all broken pieces, bits of veneer and detached parts in labeled containers. Do not attempt to repair objects until completely dry or, in the case of important materials, until you have consulted with a conservator.
- Rinse metal objects exposed to floodwaters, mud or silt with clear water and dry immediately with a clean, soft cloth. Allow heavy mud deposits on large metal objects such as sculptures to dry. Caked mud can be removed later. Consult a conservator for further treatment.

To help Nebraskans cleaning up heirlooms after the flood, you can download the Gerald R. Ford Conservation Center guide at <http://netnebraska.org/basic-page/television/saving-your-treasures>.

The Heritage Emergency National Task Force and Heritage Preservation strongly recommend that professional conservators be consulted regarding the appropriate method of treatment for historic objects. To find a conservator you can visit:

Nebraska State Historical Society Foundation  
Kinman-Oldfield Suite  
128 N 13th, #1010  
Lincoln, NE 68508

TEL: 402-435-3535  
EMAIL: [LFattig@nshsf.org](mailto:LFattig@nshsf.org)

You can also locate a conservator using the American Institute for Conservation's (AIC's) Find a Conservator tool, at



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<https://www.culturalheritage.org/membership/find-a-conservator>.

On June 1 the Durham Museum in Omaha will host a free workshop to assist residents with guidance on preserving and safeguarding their heirlooms, such as photographs, documents and books that were damaged by flooding or need to be protected.

Here are a few tips from the Heritage Emergency National Task Force for preparing for natural disasters that could threaten your most prized possessions:

Be Prepared: Whether you work at a cultural institution or just want information on ways you can salvage your stuff after the flood, consider downloading the free FEMA fact sheets “After the Flood” and “Salvaging Water-Damaged Family Valuables and Heirlooms” at <https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/113297>.

Get Advice: The National Heritage Responders, a team of trained conservators and collections professionals, are available for advice to anyone who needs it 24 hours/7 days a week at 202-661-8068.

For more information on preserving your family heirlooms go to the Smithsonian Cultural Rescue Initiative website: Resources for the Public and Historic Property Owners: <https://culturalrescue.si.edu/hentf/resources/resources-public-and-historic-property-owners/> or

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/how-save-family-heirlooms-natural-disasters-180960726/#oM4jfwPcwB8tLdT3.99>.

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