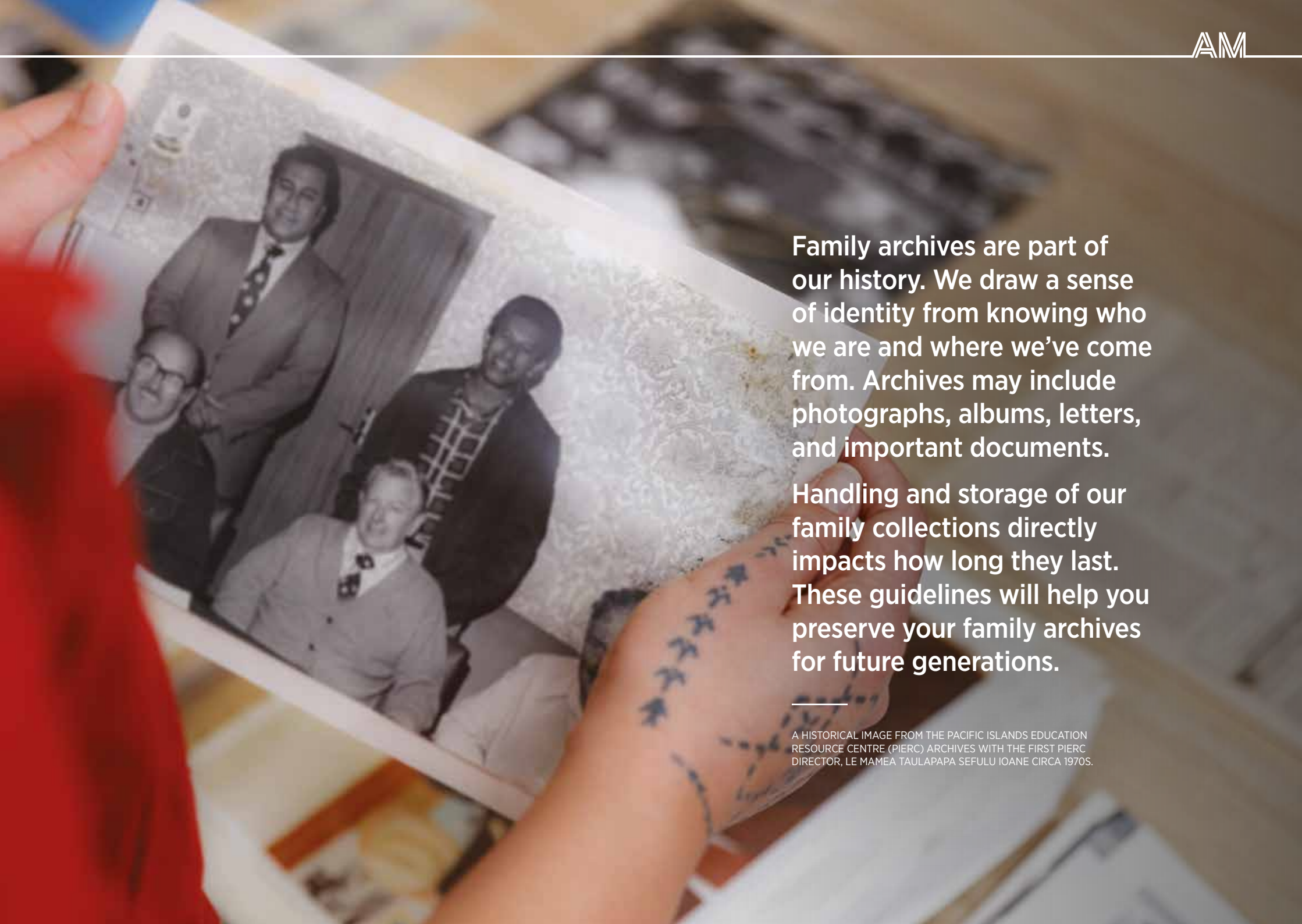


ENGLISH

# CARING FOR FAMILY & PERSONAL ARCHIVES





Family archives are part of our history. We draw a sense of identity from knowing who we are and where we've come from. Archives may include photographs, albums, letters, and important documents.

Handling and storage of our family collections directly impacts how long they last. These guidelines will help you preserve your family archives for future generations.

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A HISTORICAL IMAGE FROM THE PACIFIC ISLANDS EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTRE (PIERC) ARCHIVES WITH THE FIRST PIERC DIRECTOR, LE MAMEA TAULAPAPA SEFULU IOANE CIRCA 1970S.

# What can cause damage to my family archives?

Many of our personal and family archives are made from organic materials (cotton, flax, wood, leather, gelatine, etc). As they age, they become more fragile and easily damaged. Here, we explain what can damage your archives and how you can prevent it.

## Handling

Accidental damage while handling items can cause tears, creases, broken book spines, or cracking in photographs. The oils in our skin transfer during handling, attracting dirt to paper and permanent marks on photographs.

**What you can do:** Handling collections carefully helps to prevent physical damages. Make sure your hands are clean and dry when handling and try to wear gloves when touching photographs or film negatives. If you don't have gloves, only handle photographs on the edges and avoid touching the surface of the image.

Open books slowly to prevent cracking the spines and use your hand or other supports to keep fragile books open to a 90°-120° angle.

## Light

All organic materials are damaged by light, particularly the ultra-violet (UV) spectrum. The largest source of UV is the sun, but fluorescent and halogen light bulbs also produce damaging UV. Light can fade inks and dyes and discolour paper.

**What you can do:** When not in use, keep items in a box to protect them from light. On display, keep originals out of direct sunlight and in rooms with lower light. Keep light levels low by closing curtains and blinds. Where possible use LED lights as they emit less UV than other types of bulbs. You may also consider using UV-filtering picture-framing glass, window film, or light fitting filters to minimise UV exposure.

## Climate and temperature

Changes in temperature and humidity affect archival materials. Extreme temperature changes can cause severe damage over time as materials expand and contract at different rates, causing them to crack, lift, or tear.

Many parts of Aotearoa experience high humidity of over 65%. This increases the risk of mould growth which affects not only our health, but also reduces the life of archives.

**What you can do:** Storing collections in spare rooms or closets with stable, moderate temperature and humidity can reduce damage. Cooler is better, but consistency is key.

Avoid spaces prone to temperature fluctuations and high humidity like basements, bathrooms, kitchens, attics, and garages.

Keep collections off the floor, away from heaters, plumbing, and outside walls. Use a dehumidifier (with windows closed), or open windows and use a fan to increase airflow. Moisture absorbers in storage containers and cupboards will help keep humidity below 60%. Consider purchasing a small hygrometer to monitor the humidity levels in a room.

## Dirt and dust

When it gathers on archival items, dirt and dust can scratch surfaces like sandpaper. Dust also attracts moisture, which causes mould growth.

**What you can do:** Check your collections regularly for dust and mould. Remove loose dirt and dust with a soft brush. Keep collections covered to prevent dust settling on surfaces and use clean hands or gloves when handling your collections.



WITH CLEAN HANDS, VISUALLY INSPECT YOUR FAMILY ARCHIVES FOR SIGNS OF DAMAGE.

## Pests

There are several pests that can eat your collections, including clothes moths, silverfish, borer beetles, dermestid beetles, and rodents. Mice and rats chew on paper, silverfish and booklice graze on surfaces, and borer tunnel through books.

**What you can do:** Check your collections regularly to catch any pest attacks before they cause serious harm. Keep storage spaces as dry as possible and keep food and drink away from your collections. Seek assistance if you have an infestation.

## Non-archival storage materials

Some materials are not intended for long-term archival preservation because they are low-quality, acidic, or deteriorate quickly.

- Many paper materials (brown cardboard boxes, newsprint, and recycled paper products like kraft or printer paper) are acidic or become

acidic over time causing yellow/brown staining and weak fibres.

- Wood is acidic and can stain and weaken the paper fibres.
  - Metal paper clips and staples rust over time weakening fibres.
  - Tapes, glues, rubber bands, Blu Tack®, Post-it® notes, and self-adhesive 'magnetic' photo albums can cause irreversible staining and permanent damage.
  - Certain plastics can damage collections, including PVC, coloured plastics, and cellulose acetate.
  - Lamination is the heat-sealing of paper between plastic and/or adhesives. Some will shrink and release acids, and some may cause bleeding of dyes and inks. Lamination is often irreversible.
- What you can do:** Substitute these storage materials for archival-quality items. Avoid laminating valuable documents.

# How can I safely store my family archives?

Storing your collections in boxes provides a protective barrier against environmental factors. The following storage methods can help ensure your family archives last for as long as possible.

## Invest in quality storage materials

Storage materials are often described as 'archival', 'acid-free' or 'museum-quality', but these terms can be misleading. Look for the following information when choosing storage materials:

- 'Acid-free' & 'lignin-free'. Look for both terms for good-quality paper products.
- 'Pure 100% cotton' or '100% alpha cellulose' are the best quality papers.
- 'Buffered' means that an alkaline pH substance has been added as a 'buffer' to counteract acids that cause damage. Most paper documents, photographs, and negatives can be stored in buffered materials.
- 'Unbuffered' means that no 'buffers' have been added. Cyanotypes and blueprints must be stored in unbuffered material to prevent the blue from fading.
- For photographs, look for storage materials that have passed the Photographic Activity Test (PAT).
- 'Inert' plastics such as polyester, polypropylene and polyethylene are good. PVC (polyvinyl chloride) is an unstable plastic. Avoid plastics that contain PVC, even if labelled 'archival' or 'archive-safe'.



USING QUALITY STORAGE MATERIALS CAN ENSURE YOUR FAMILY ARCHIVES ARE PROTECTED.

## General storage guidelines

- Keep similar items together. Mixing photographs with documents or newsprint can lead to discoloration and deterioration. Newspaper is highly acidic and unstable. Photocopy the original clippings onto acid-free paper rather than risking damage.
- Boxes should be acid-free and the right size for the collections you are storing. Too big and items can shift; too small and they will be cramped causing creases, tears or items sticking together. Brown cardboard boxes, shoe boxes and wood boxes are all acidic. You can use these, but line them fully with acid-free 'buffered' paper and change it every few years.
- Paper deteriorates faster when folded. Store paper documents flat or use a limited number

of folds. Large items like maps can be rolled and stored in acid-free tubes.

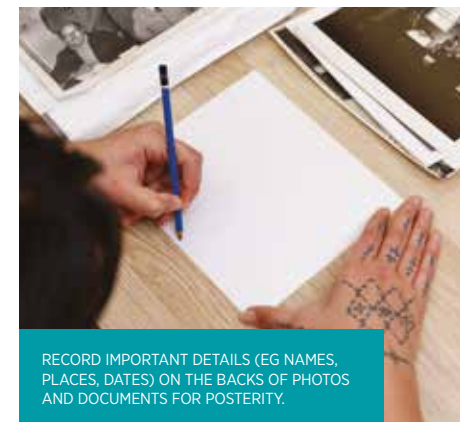
- Choose folders instead of envelopes to reduce damage to the edges and corners of your collections.
- If you are storing your collections on wooden shelving, line or seal it first to prevent acids in the wood transferring to the paper.
- Do not use magnetic or 'self-adhesive' albums or scrapbooks. Choose photo corners or pocket albums instead.
- Use a soft 2B or 4B pencil to write on documents and photographs instead of ball point or felt pens, which cause indentations and bleeding of dyes. Write on the edges of photos rather than the middle. If you're mounting them in an album or scrapbook, consider writing on the page next to the photograph.



GROUP AND STORE SIMILAR ITEMS TOGETHER.



OPEN FRAGILE BOOKS AT A 90° - 120° ANGLE.



RECORD IMPORTANT DETAILS (EG NAMES, PLACES, DATES) ON THE BACKS OF PHOTOS AND DOCUMENTS FOR POSTERITY.



SOME PLASTIC ENCLOSURES ARE DESIGNED FOR STORING NEGATIVES AND SLIDES



CAREFULLY HOLD SLIDES AND NEGATIVES ALONG THEIR EDGES.

### Storing books and albums

When on display, place your items vertically and use bookends where possible. Letting books lean on an angle can distort their bindings. Large or heavy books should be stored horizontally. If permanently stored on open shelves, remember to dust the tops regularly to prevent mould growth.

Store books and albums spine down or horizontally in boxes. When books or albums have broken bindings, use cotton tying tape/ribbon to hold pages together. Avoid using rubber bands – these will degrade and leave stains.

### Storing photographs, film, and negatives

Photographic materials are vulnerable to deterioration. Keeping them cool, dark, dry and dust-free is key.

Paper and resin-coated photographic prints:

- Black and white photographs typically have a long storage life (100+ years)
- Colour photographs, negatives, and film may begin to fade within 20 years due to unstable dyes. If possible, store in cool/cold temperatures.

Film and negatives have three main types of plastic film bases:

- Nitrate film (1889–1951) was produced in sheet format and 35mm motion picture film. It is a fire hazard and dangerous if not stored properly. As it degrades it releases nitric acid.
- Cellulose acetate film (1925–present) can deteriorate very fast with high humidity and heat. As it degrades it shrinks and produces acetic acid. We call this 'vinegar syndrome' because of the familiar vinegar odour.
- Polyester film (1955–present) is very stable.

If you detect smells or shrinking film, it is important to store these separately to prevent harmful acids degrading your other collections. If you believe you have nitrate film or degrading acetate, seek assistance for identification and safe storage.



STORE SMALL GROUPINGS OF ITEMS IN ACID-FREE FOLDERS BEFORE PLACING INTO ACID-FREE STORAGE BOXES.

When choosing enclosures for prints and negatives look for products that have passed the 'PAT' (Photographic Activity Test). Prints can be interleaved with acid-free paper. Store loose material in small groups in files or folders, and place inside good-quality acid-free boxes.

Plastic enclosures can also be used to store negatives but remember that in humid environments plastic also increases the risk of moisture getting trapped inside, causing damage.

### Storing modern media (including VHS, CDs, DVDs, HDD)

Magnetic media like cassette tapes, floppy disks, and hard disk drives often have short lifespans of only 10–30 years. These shouldn't be stored near microwaves, televisions, computers, or other devices that produce a magnetic field. Store tapes vertically, wound all the way to one end, and rewind every five years.

Do not bend or touch the surface of any magnetic media or optical discs (CDs, etc). Electronic formats corrupt easily and become

obsolete quickly. Consider printing or backing up any valuable information onto multiple devices.

### How can I display my family archives safely?

Displaying family photographs and documents is a great way to celebrate them, but it does expose them to damage. Hang high-quality copies instead of originals, then store originals to protect them from deterioration.

If professional picture framing is an option, ask the framer to use conservation-grade materials. They cost a little more, but they will not damage your collections. Always ask the framer how they plan to mount your items. Avoid using sticky tapes or dry-mounting items of value. Instead, use photo-corners, edge strips, or reversible conservation adhesives.

Ensure air circulation around items on display: bring books forward on shelves, use bumpers on picture frames, and keep collections off the floor and away from corners. Remember to regularly dust collections on display.

## CAN I DIGITISE MY FAMILY ARCHIVES?

Yes! Digitising your family archives is a great way to keep originals safe while keeping them accessible. See the DigitalNZ resource below on digitising family history and whakapapa.

### Where can I buy materials?

Quality storage materials can often be found in arts and craft, scrapbooking, or stationery stores. In NZ the following companies specialise in conservation-grade materials:

#### Conservation Supplies Ltd

Website: [conservationsupplies.co.nz](http://conservationsupplies.co.nz)  
Email: [info@conservationsupplies.co.nz](mailto:info@conservationsupplies.co.nz)  
Phone: 06 211 3991

#### Port Nicholson Packaging Ltd

Website: [pnp.co.nz](http://pnp.co.nz)  
Email: [sales@pnp.co.nz](mailto:sales@pnp.co.nz)  
Phone: 04 568 5018

#### Triptych Ltd

Website: [triptych.co.nz](http://triptych.co.nz)  
Email: [info@triptych.co.nz](mailto:info@triptych.co.nz)  
Phone: 06 378 6616

### Where can I find professional help?

For more advice on caring for family archive collections, contact Auckland Museum or the National Preservation Office

#### Auckland Museum

Email: [info@aucklandmuseum.com](mailto:info@aucklandmuseum.com)

#### National Preservation Office, Wellington

Email: [preservation@dia.govt.nz](mailto:preservation@dia.govt.nz)

If your collections show signs of damage, seek advice from a trained Conservator first before attempting to repair or restore them yourself. Conservation treatment can often extend the life of fragile objects. To find a Conservator near you, visit the **New Zealand Conservators of Cultural Materials Pu Manaaki Kahurangi** website [nzccm.org.nz](http://nzccm.org.nz)

## FURTHER RESOURCES:

### National Library of New Zealand

[www.natlib.govt.nz/collections/caring-for-your-collections](http://www.natlib.govt.nz/collections/caring-for-your-collections)

This resource provides advice on caring for many different collections including archives, artwork, and digital collections.

### DigitalNZ

[www.digitalnz.org/make-it-digital/creating-digital-content/digitising-family-history-and-whakapapa](http://www.digitalnz.org/make-it-digital/creating-digital-content/digitising-family-history-and-whakapapa)

DigitalNZ provides guidelines on how you can digitise your own family archives at home.

### National Services Te Paerangi

[www.tepapa.govt.nz/learn](http://www.tepapa.govt.nz/learn)

Te Papa Tongarewa and the National Services provide further advice and resources on caring for cultural materials to the public, community groups, iwi, and other museums in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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**Tennyson.**  
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Centre for  
Pacific Languages

For a full list of online resources, visit Auckland Museum's website: [aucklandmuseum.com/discover/care](http://aucklandmuseum.com/discover/care)



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TAKING ACTION TO PRESERVE YOUR  
FAMILY ARCHIVES WILL SAFEGUARD  
THESE TREASURES FOR YEARS TO COME.