



Step-by-step photo documentation:

Preserving an archival collection at the Leo Baeck Institute



Material from private collections typically encompasses a mixture of letters, photographs, IDs, and vital documents in varying degrees of organization



Professional archivists make an initial assessment to determine whether there are urgent environmental and preservation issues, such as mold, insects, or moisture, which may require quarantine of the materials or treatment in the Werner J. and Gisella Levi Cahnman Preservation Laboratory at the Center for Jewish history.

- A preliminary survey of the scope and content of the collection is undertaken while preserving the original order of materials, and a preliminary catalog record is created to enable tracking of the donation throughout the processing of the collection.
- Materials are transferred to acid-free folders and boxes. Materials containing sensitive personal data (e.g., financial papers, tax documents, social security cards, etc.) are taken out and either returned to the donor or discarded.



An archivist arranges the collection according to categories such as date, family branch, or genre. Whenever possible, the original order of papers is preserved, since the arrangement of the materials may provide information that helps to interpret the contents



The screenshot shows the website interface for the 'William and Charlotte Engel Levison Collection'. At the top left is the 'CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY' logo. Below it is a navigation bar with links for 'Home', 'Repositories', 'Collections', 'Subjects', and 'Names', along with a search icon. The main heading is 'William and Charlotte Engel Levison Collection'. To the right of the heading are two icons: 'Citation' and 'PDF Finding Aid'. Below the heading, it says 'Collection Identifier: AR 25001'. There is a breadcrumb trail: 'Leo Baeck Institute | William and Charlotte Engel Levison Collection'. Below that are three tabs: 'Collection Overview' (selected), 'Collection Organization', and 'Container Inventory'. The 'Scope and Content Note' section contains the following text: 'The William and Charlotte Engel Levison Family Collection documents the personal and professional lives of William and Charlotte Engel Levison as well as their family histories. Among the papers of this collection are official papers, correspondence, diaries and daily calendars, biographical and memoir material, military and professional papers, and notes.' Below this text is a link: 'Prominent in this collection are the papers of ancestors of William and Charlotte...See more >'. To the right of the text is a search box with the following fields: 'Search Collection', 'From year', 'To year', and a 'Search' button.

The archivist then creates a Finding Aid, which is a standardized inventory of the materials in the collection that includes a detailed description of the contents.

The catalog entry is enhanced with a link to the Finding Aid as well as subject headings and other metadata that will allow users to discover the collections via a search, and the catalog record is made public.



The collection is digitized, either at the Gruss Lipper Digital Laboratory at the Center for Jewish History or by a trusted external vendor.



The original materials are placed in climate-controlled storage, either at the Center for Jewish History or off-site.

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