## COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY—COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

## Caring for Your Textile Heirlooms

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by improper methods

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repairing, using, or

displaying the heirloom

Heirlooms are treasured keepsakes of the past. They serve as records of family history, strengthen family and cultural ties, and bring to mind special events. Heirlooms might be photographs, books, souvenirs, mementos, or objects used by ancestors. Often these heirlooms include textile objects, either an art form such as a woven or embroidered wall-hanging or an article of clothing such as a christening gown or wedding dress.

Original cost is not the crucial factor determining whether your item is an heirloom. Your textile may be

an heirloom whether it is a common household item or a more expensive article used only for special occasions. Many common, everyday objects have a great deal of meaning and may reflect more clearly the customs and culture of a particular age than an expensive item used only once. Furthermore, such items are less likely to have been saved, making them all the more valuable. Although clothing from special occasions is often treasured and saved in a family, great grandfather's

tool apron or leggings, grandmother's favorite apron or smock, everyday tea towels, and monogrammed linens can spark intimate recollections also.

## Textile Heirlooms Are Perishable

Heirlooms made of fabric are perishable and need special care. Serious damage to textiles may be caused by improper methods of cleaning, storing, repairing, using, or displaying the heirloom. Even today's textile treasure deserves proper care and attention in order to be preserved as tomorrow's heirloom. As the caretaker of this precious object, it pays to learn proper procedures to lengthen its life. Even though the aging process of a textile cannot be completely stopped, it can be slowed considerably by understanding and controlling conditions that may harm the heirloom.

Types of Damage

Light, high temperature, high humidity, sealed environments, abrasion, soil and dust, insects, and rodents are all harmful to textiles.

**Light.** The ultraviolet rays in all types of light cause textile fibers to weaken and dyes to fade. Both direct and indirect sunlight are harmful, as well as light from artificial lighting sources, such as indoor incandescent bulbs and fluorescent light tubes. Therefore, a dark storage spot is best. Limit light exposure while objects are on display,

and avoid direct sunlight completely.

High temperature. High temperatures cause brittleness of fibers and often are accompanied by excess dryness. Avoid any storage area where fluctuations of temperature occur, as fragile fibers will expand and contract as the temperature changes. Attics are generally not a proper storage location for textiles. Temperatures of 65-70°F are recommended for storage.

**High humidity.** Humidity over 55 percent promotes the growth of mildew. These spores are always present in the air but only grow under conditions of high humidity. Stains formed from mildew may become permanent; the mildew itself causes fiber damage.

Avoid storage in basements or other places where high humidity and poor air circulation are found. When mildew already exists on the fabric, kill the growth by exposing the textile to gently moving warm dry air and to warmer temperatures. Shaded outdoor airing for two to three hours on a warm day will kill mildew fungi. Then it can be removed by careful hand vacuuming (see Cleaning Procedures). If a stain persists, you may wish to follow later suggestions for wet-cleaning.

**Closed environments.** Textiles need to breathe. If textiles are sealed too tightly, condensation may occur or

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harmful fumes may form. Avoid plastic bags completely, as they often give off harmful by-products as they age. Another disadvantage of plastic containers, boxes or bags is the static electricity they generate, which attracts dust. Instead of plastic bags, use well-washed unbleached muslin fabric or old, freshly laundered white sheets to cover items. Muslin allows the textile heirloom to breathe but must be laundered periodically when used for wrapping. Tissue paper also allows for air circulation but should always be the acid-free type, available from museum supply sources.

Abrasion. To avoid abrasion, handle your textile heirloom carefully. Avoid flexing it in worn areas. Eliminate conditions which may cause snagging: Remove jewelry from your hands before handling textile heirlooms, and avoid rough edges on storage shelves or drawers. Always work on a padded surface; place an old sheet down over a work table. Damage may have occurred already, such as from repeatedly tucking in a quilt. In cases of extreme wear, a damaged textile may need reinforcing in weakened areas before storing. Follow the steps outlined in the Reinforcement section of this publication.

**Soil.** Always have clean hands when touching textile heirlooms to avoid transferring dirt, body oils, and perspiration salts. Use only pencils for note taking; never work around the textile object with ink or ballpoint pens. Make sure work surfaces are clean and dry.

**Insects.** Preventive maintenance is the best way to eliminate damage from silverfish, clothes moths, and carpet beetles. Silverfish are attracted to textiles containing starch, sizing, glue, or paste. Insecticides with residual action, such as diazinon, are effective when sprayed along baseboards, corners, and floors. Never spray insecticides directly on the textile.

Clothes moths and carpet beetles are especially attracted to wool, furs, and feathers. Vacuuming will effectively remove these insects and their eggs. Treatment with paradichloro-benzene moth crystals is somewhat effective. Enclose the textile with the crystals for two months in a sealed container—since the fumes are toxic to humans—but do not allow the crystals to touch the

fabric. Place the crystals above the textile being treated, as the vapors they give off are heavier than air and will fall, not rise. Do not use moth crystals around leathers, feathers, and some plastic products. Other solutions to larvae infestation include freezing for two months, dry-cleaning, or treatment in a microwave oven for four to five minutes. If you use a microwave, make sure no metal items such as zippers, buttons, and/or hooks and eyes are present.

**Rodents.** Never store textile heirlooms close to a food storage area because mice like to chew textiles. Snap traps with bait are effective rodent controls.

Overall damage control. Inspection of textile heirlooms on a regular basis at least every four to six months is important so that problems can be identified and solved. Place a clean sheet of laundered, unbleached muslin in the bottom of your storage area so you will quickly notice pest droppings. Lots of small, dislodged fibers are signs that insects are eating your heirloom.

## Analysis of the Textile Heirloom

A careful examination of a textile heirloom should be done before any decisions on care or storage are made. You need to know the fiber content, location and type of any soil, and physical condition of the object.

**Fiber content.** To identify fiber content, use a burning test. Remove a short portion of yarn from both warp and filling directions in an inconspicuous spot in the hem or seam allowance. Be certain to test each fiber type in the garment, including the lining. Use tweezers to hold the yarn over a flame. A cellulosic fiber such as cotton, linen, or rayon will burn quickly even when removed from the flame source and will leave only a very small amount of fine gray ash. Protein fibers of silk and wool, in contrast, have a strong odor like that of burnt hair from a blow dryer and usually extinguish themselves when removed from the flame source. They leave a black, crushable, bead-like ash. Man-made fibers such as acetate, nylon, polyester, and acrylic most often burn slowly with a somewhat chemical odor and produce a hard, melted bead which is tan in color.

**Soil.** The terms *dust*, *dirt*, and *stain* refer to somewhat different conditions, and it is helpful to distinguish among them. Dust is made of dry, light, loose particles that can be removed by vacuuming. Dirt, however, is embedded soil in slightly larger quantity than dust. Stain is an unwanted color on a textile, formed when some foreign substance comes in contact with the fabric. Soil causing the stain may have already been removed, leaving a stain behind.

Dust should always be removed, as even tiny particles lodged in fabric may cause abrasive action and harm its structure. Stored objects should be covered with a dust wrap, but not plastic wrapping, as plastic generates static electricity which attracts dust.

Dirt and soil also should be removed by either vacuuming or vacuuming combined with wet-cleaning procedures outlined under the Care section of this publication.

The location of soil and stains on the article should be recorded so that later you can determine how successful you were at removal. Photos or a sketch of both front and back views of the article is most helpful. Consider taking before and after photos for comparison.

Physical condition. Weakened areas with broken yarns, frayed fabric, or missing stitches should also be identified and sketched. Then you may choose to reinforce the damaged area, as outlined in the Reinforcement section. Gentle repair is sometimes needed to maintain a weakened textile heirloom, especially if it is to be displayed. Still, caution is advised. The rule museums generally use is to not replace whole sections of fabric, but only support and reinforce existing fabric. This philosophy may be a helpful guideline for you also. The goal is not to make the heirloom appear new but simply to maintain it in a safe manner.

## Reinforcement

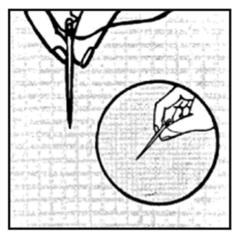
Many museum conservators are purists and insist upon using cotton fabric to repair cotton heirlooms, wool for wool, and silk for silk. You can be less restrictive and select support fabrics based upon appropriateness of fabric weight, color, and texture. For instance, silk is costly and often difficult to obtain, but nylon may be as sheer, more plentiful, cheaper, and certainly stronger over a longer time than silk.

Whatever fabric you select for reinforcement, certain guidelines should be followed:

- Always launder the new fabric twice before applying it to the heirloom. This removes unwanted sizing, excess dyes, and finishes. Do not use fabric softener or dryer sheets.
- A frayed area may need either a covering over the surface, or both support and covering as a sandwich-type reinforcement.
- A supportive fabric may need to be almost as heavy as the original. However, never select a support fabric that is heavier than the frayed original because the added weight could cause damage.
- A covering fabric often needs to be sheer and transparent so that it will not obscure the fabric it protects. Suitable for use are cotton batiste, voile, nylon chiffon, silk crepeline and organza. Tulle is quite good, but nylon net is too stiff and will cut fibers.
- A beige color may be neutral enough to blend over a frayed printed area of many colors.
- Reweaving is generally not recommended.
- Turning under the raw edge of a sheer, protective fabric to form a hem is not necessary. Unlike a normal patch, a hem is not really needed in this instance and only makes the sheer fabric more visible.
- Select appropriate stitching thread. Never use a nylon monofilament thread as it is too stiff and cuts fragile fabrics. A thinner thread of smaller diameter is best. Silk, cotton, cotton-wrapped synthetic or long-staple, polyester thread may be chosen. Yarns unraveled from the selvage of the support fabric may also be used for stitching. They match in color and are smaller in diameter.



**Figure 1.** A tulle patch is applied to frayed areas of the quilt. Turning under the raw edge is not necessary. A tulle patch is barely visible.



**Figure 2.** When patching or mending a quilt or other heirloom, always insert the needle at a right angle to the fabric. Go between yarns to avoid breakage.

Use a small needle for stitching. Large needles leave large holes.

- Hand stitch with the needle held perpendicular (at right angles) to the fabric, taking one stitch at a time. This way you will not bend or split the yarns. Enter the fabric between the yarns in the weave (that is, in the spaces).
- Make stitches ¼-inch long. Shorter (less than ¼-inch) stitches place strain on one or two yarns and may cause breakage and damage; a ¼-inch stitch distributes the stress over several yarns.
- Stitches made in the same direction as warp yarns or filling yarns will show less than those made on a diagonal or bias.
- Never knot the thread, as the knot will pull through, leaving a hole and damaging a fragile fabric. Rather, secure stitching with two or three gentle back stitches at the beginning and end.
- If the object is truly a collector's item, it remains more valuable if all frayed fabric is left intact. An example would be to apply new sheer binding over the frayed, old binding of a valuable quilt.

## Cleaning Procedures

It may be best to leave stains alone. Sometimes discoloration is permanent, and if it has been present a long time, the stain has probably already weakened the fibers. Trying to remove the stain may be worse than just leaving it—you may create a hole. This is especially true of

stains formed from oxidized iron such as rust and blood stains. Keep in mind that a permanent stain may appear even darker than before if the item is wet-cleaned and this cleaning whitens the background. If the stain is stiff or otherwise appears as though some original soil is there, then it is best to remove the soil, through vacuuming and possible wet-cleaning, as the soil may attract insects.

You may wish to consider the stain a part of the heritage associated with that textile heirloom. For museums, a blood stain on a flag carried in battle has a special significance. Your stain's appearance may not really be an eyesore but a piece of history interwoven in a much loved and used item.

The guiding principle to cleaning an heirloom textile is to start with the least damaging or gentlest of cleaning procedures and work your way up only if necessary! In most cases, the simplest procedure is sufficient for achieving an acceptable appearance. Usually wet-cleaning or drycleaning are unnecessary for textile heirlooms. Often, airing alone or airing and vacuuming are the only safe treatments for very fragile items like silks.

**First: Airing.** Airing should be done indoors to avoid potential light damage from the sun. Never leave the item in direct sunlight. Support the heirloom on a flat, horizontal surface, rather than allowing it to hang. Neither should the textile item be shaken or beaten, as undue stress can damage the fabric by breaking yarns and pulling lose any weakened stitches.

**Second: Vacuuming.** Dust and dirt are abrasive, damage fibers, stain fabric surfaces, and may attract insects. Loose surface dirt may be removed most easily by using a soft upholstery-brush attachment with a hand vacuum. Low-powered suction is desirable; strong suction might break loose any weakened yarns. Therefore, whenever vacuuming, always protect the fabric by first placing over the textile surface a rectangular piece of flexible window screening of polypropylene or fiberglass, never metal. Screening can be purchased at your local hardware store. Prewash screening and to prevent snagging, cover the sharp, raw edges of the screening with bias tape that is machine-stitched in place. Remember to vacuum both the front and reverse sides of your textile, as well as in sleeves and facing corners. Vacuuming should follow the grain line of the fabric. Avoid applying suction where painted-on gold or pigment forms the design and might be lifted away by suction; never attempt to clean these items.



**Figure 3.** Cover heirloom textile with fiberglass window-screening before using a hand-held vacuum with low suction and a brush attachment.

Third: Wet-cleaning. Never launder a textile heirloom; instead, "wet-clean" it. Wet-cleaning implies several things: soaking, not agitation; water only, not water with detergent; a long soak time of 30 minutes to one hour; and not one soak but many soaks—three to five or more, until water appears clear and is no longer discolored by dirt. Water is the most universal solvent, and by itself is effective in removing most dirts, except oily ones. A lukewarm temperature of 90°F is appropriate. Never launder a textile heirloom in a washing machine, even on a gentle cycle. Spot-cleaning is not recommended as it may leave watermarks.

The purpose of wet-cleaning is to remove any soil left after airing and vacuuming. Three things must be determined before the wet-cleaning is even attempted: colorfastness of dyes, fiber content, and location of the dirt.

Colorfastness. To test for the colorfastness of dyes, use an eyedropper to apply several drops of water to a colored area in an inconspicuous location such as an inside hem or seam allowance. Let the fabric soak a minute or two, then blot with a white tissue to see if any color is removed. Remember to check each color in the article. If any color bleeds or comes off onto the tissue, wet-cleaning should not be done.

*Fiber.* Although wet-cleaning is potentially very damaging if not properly done, it can provide a clean, healthy textile. Cottons and linens usually benefit from wet-cleaning. Old silks seldom can be wet-cleaned because of the dyes and metallic salts added to weighted silks. Rayons, introduced in 1910, are greatly weakened and



**Figure 4.** Use an eyedropper to test each color of a textile for colorfastness of dyes.

distorted when wet, so extra care and support should be given. Woolens may be wet-cleaned, but only at room temperatures and with no agitation, in order to prevent felting and shrinking.

**Dirt.** Slight agitation (an up-and-down palm motion of the hand) above the most soiled areas is sometimes needed to assist the water in soil removal. More severe concentrations or oily dirts may need the addition of detergent to water. Since most dirt is acidic, often a mildly alkaline detergent may encourage its removal. Follow precautions in the later section about detergent soaking.

#### **Preparations for Wet-Cleaning**

- Determine appropriateness of wet-cleaning by identifying colorfastness, fiber, and dirt, as described previously.
- Repair any seriously damaged areas before cleaning.
- Use a large, flat area for cleaning, such as in a clean sink or bathtub or a specially made temporary basin constructed from 2 x 4-inch boards and lined with plastic sheeting. Plan ahead for draining, too, since several rinses will be required.
- Use a support of fiberglass screening to lift the article out of the water each time. Textiles absorb a great deal ofwater and become quite heavy when wet: A 1-pound cotton item will weigh nearly 4 pounds when wet. By using a support screen to lift out a wet textile before draining, soiled water will not filter down through fabric and resoil it.

- Temporarily remove fragile decorations or those made of metal, which might rust, and replace them carefully when you are finished cleaning.
- Sandwich a very fragile textile item between two layers of screening and baste the screens together loosely, at least 1 inch from the outer edges of the heirloom. This method will prevent the item from floating around and receiving unnecessary abrasion.
- Clean the item in soft water, if possible. Distilled water
  may be purchased and is preferable for at least the last
  rinse. Beware of collected rainwater; although soft, it
  may contain a great deal of dust from air pollution or
  roofs. Tap water is often hard water, containing some
  dissolved minerals, but it is preferable over discolored,
  soft rainwater.



**Figure 5.** Improvise a tray of boards and plastic sheeting to use for wet-cleaning. The boards do not need to be nailed together. Center-front board slips out for easy drainage.

#### The Wet-Cleaning Soak

- Support the textile item with fiberglass screening when lowering it into and lifting it from the water.
- Avoid agitation; never scrub. A gentle up-and-down motion with the palm of your open hand above the textile surface in the most soiled areas will help move soil gently through fibers of the heirloom.
- Soak item a minimum of three to five soaks of 30 minutes to an hour each. If the water becomes discolored during soaking, replace and repeat the soaks until the water remains clear.

#### The Detergent Soak

Remember, this step is usually not necessary. Most traces of dirt will be removed with several clear-water soaks. The decision to use a detergent soak should be made only after a series of three or more water-soak cycles have been completed and some traces of dirt still remain on the garment.

Soaps and detergents are two different types of cleaning compounds. Do not use soaps with hard water, as soaps form a scum or "bathtub ring" when they combine with minerals in hard water. This scum will coat textile fibers.

- Use a mild, non-ionic, neutral detergent such as Orvus WA Paste (often available at horse tack shops) or a very mild dishwashing liquid. Do not select heavy-duty detergents designed for family wash; they are much too harsh for textile heirlooms. A fragrance-free detergent is preferred as highly perfumed or colored detergents may leave traces of odor or color behind.
- Choose another cleaning product if the one you selected leaves the water cloudy when it desolves. Mild detergents clean very well in either hard or soft water and will not form scum. A clear solution means no scum will resoil fabric surfaces.
- Use a concentration of .2 (0.002) percent detergent to water; that is, use the amount recommended by the manufacturer for low levels of soil. Generally 2 tablespoons of liquid detergent to 4 gallons of water equals a 0.2 percent solution.
- Soak in detergent for at least 30 minutes. The soak may be repeated several times if the water continues to be discolored due to soil removal.
- Use a gentle up-and-down movement with the palm of the hand over the soiled areas; never use vigorous agitation.
- Use cool or low-warm water temperature no higher than 90°F. Cleaning products dissolve most thoroughly in hot water, however, so you may use a small amount of hot water to dissolve the detergent completely, then cool the soak to the correct warm temperature before the textile heirloom is immersed.
- Rinse thoroughly to remove all traces of detergent from fabric. This means at least five rinse-soak cycles of 20 to 30 minutes each.
- For the final rinse, use distilled water.

#### Drying

- Hasten drying by selecting a dry day for your project and by using a fan to circulate air in the room. Never let the air blow directly on the object, however.
- Use clean, dry towels as blotting surfaces to remove excess water, replacing as necessary.
- Select a drying space large enough to lay the textile out flat.
- Remove wet towels and air-dry on a flat Formica surface or on dry towels in a well-ventilated room.
- Gently line up warp and filling yarns; shape the heirloom back to its original form while it is still wet, if necessary.
- Stuff the gathered portions of the object with nylon tulle before drying if necessary.
- Avoid tumbling in a clothes dryer or even using a hair dryer to dry the textile.
- Avoid ironing a textile heirloom. An iron's intense heat, pressure, and weight can damage fragile fibers.

Fourth: Dry-cleaning. Because commercial dry-cleaning involves a lot of tumbling in a large machine, it is the least recommended procedure for cleaning delicate fabrics. The process places a great deal of strain on fabrics. Avoid sending weak and fragile heirlooms to be dry-cleaned; wet-cleaning is much safer for textile heirlooms. Dry-cleaning removes natural oils and waxes that keep fiber flexible, so when used on very old or brittle fabric, dry-cleaning solvents tend to dry out the fibers even more than they were.

Dry-cleaning solvents may leave very small crystal deposits on a garment, only visible under a microscope, but abrasive nonetheless.

Dry-cleaning is usually best for removing oil-borne stains such as waxes, tars, cooking oils, and fats. It is also good for fabrics which might shrink a great deal in water, or for fabrics with dyes that run or bleed. Under any one of these three circumstances, you may opt to dry-clean.

If, after recognizing both the disadvantages and advantages of dry-cleaning, you decide that this is the best way to clean a textile heirloom, locate a cooperative and knowledgeable dry-cleaner. Ask him to clean the item in the "first run" of that batch of solvent. Most dry-cleaning

solvents will be used several times before being changed or filtered for reuse. Dirty solvents may, in fact, put more soil into your heirloom than was there originally. You may wish to request that your item not be pressed after dry-cleaning. The steam and heat from this procedure is harmful.

## Storage

- Choose a storage area that is cool, moderately dry, and dark. The ideal temperature is 65–70°F and the ideal humidity is 40–50 percent.
- Clean items before storing. Storing a soiled textile item may attract insects and set permanent stains.
- Store textiles flat whenever possible to avoid strain from weight and gravity on certain areas such as shoulder seams and waist-bands. In a flat position the fibers can relax without undue stress.
- Store textiles loosely covered in order to allow air circulation and to prevent dust accumulation and accidental snagging.
- Avoidwrapping textiles in plastic bags, as air circulation is cut off and moisture may condense. More important, plastic bags gradually age and release harmful acidic fumes. The printing on cleaner bags will also come off and permanently stain objects.
- Avoid wrapping textiles in newspapers or even tissue paper, as all paper products gradually decompose and release acidic fumes. Blue tissue paper, although unbleached, is still acidic and should not be used.
- Consider storing textiles in special acid-free tissue paper, cylinders, and cardboard boxes. These can be purchased from museum supply houses but are expensive. You may wish to contact them for samples and prices.
- Use old, freshly laundered cotton sheets and pillowcases or unbleached muslin to wrap textile heirlooms.
- Seal all wooden surfaces of drawers or shelving used for textile storage. Raw, unsealed wood surfaces contain naturally occurring acids, which are continuously leaching out. Textile fibers, especially cotton and linen, are harmed by acid fumes. Sealing the wood surfaces with two coats of a polyure than evarnish—not shellac—helps to prevent the escape of these fumes.



**Figure 6.** To avoid sharp creases, stuff folded edges when folding cannot be avoided.

- Seal metal surfaces. Metal surfaces may oxidize from air and moisture to form harmful rust. Protect your textile from direct contact with metal surfaces by lining metal surfaces with laundered unbleached muslin or sheeting. Never use straight pins, safety pins or metal hangers because they quickly rust and cause permanent staining.
- Avoid folding textile heirlooms if at all possible, as creases damage and may break already fragile fibers and yarns.
- Stuffthe folded edge with crumpled pieces of laundered muslin, sheeting, nylon tulle, or acid-free tissue to prevent sharp creases if folding cannot be avoided.
- Air out stored items periodically and refold on new lines rather than old ones, so that eventual strain and breakage of fibers in one spot is avoided.
- Roll flat textiles onto cylinders for storage, thus avoiding folding and creasing. Make sure the cylinder is slightly longer than the textile item to be rolled. If acid-free cylinders are not available or affordable, wrap a cardboard cylinder with several layers of washed muslin or acid-free tissue paper before rolling the flat textile onto it. Carefully avoid forming any folds while rolling. Always use a muslin dust cover. Secure it loosely to the rolled item with white twill tape or a strip of muslin, never tight string or rubberbands.
- Avoid rolling a textile item which must be folded or has fabric folds as part of its design, such as a pleated garment. Rolling sharpens any creases or folds and breaks the yarns.
- Avoid storing heavy textile heirlooms on top of lighter weight, more delicate items. Put the heaviest items in the bottom of the drawers or boxes. Place muslin pieces between each item.

- Store all costumes and accessories flat rather than hung if possible. If folding them becomes necessary, follow the natural body seamlines, such as waistlines and armholes. Padding with soft, laundered muslin may be necessary to keep the garment smooth in certain areas. Remember to stuff folds to prevent sharp creases.
- If hanger storage of costumes is unavoidable, use well-padded hangers, not thin wire ones, which may rust. Fiberfill batting secured with muslin covers around wire hangers does quite well. Basted-in loops of twill tape at the waistline will support the heavy skirt of the dress. Be wary of plastic hangers, since many decompose and release harmful fumes. Often they become brittle after four to five years and snap under the weight of a garment.



## How to make a padded hanger

- 1. Trace pattern slightly larger than the hanger. Add ½-inch seam allowance.
- 2. Cut out two pieces, making V-cut at top for hook to protrude.
- Begin stitching at one end and go around side to other end. Leave bottom of cover open. Turn rightside-out.
- 4. Stuff each corner of cover with polyester fiberfill.
- 5. Insert hanger before stuffing further.
- 6. Continue stuffing, first placing fiberfill between top of wire hanger and cover.
- 7. Fold under raw edge at bottom of cover.
- 8. Pin, baste, and stitch.



Display

One of the best ways to enjoy your textile heirloom is to place it on display. Unfortunately, displaying is far more damaging—even under the best conditions—than properly storing the item in a dark, dry, protected place. Flat textiles such as quilts, quilt pieces, flags, samplers, handkerchiefs and dresser scarves are most suitable for mounting and display. Displaying three-dimensional items such as clothing is very difficult and is not recommended. The following guidelines will help you to properly display your heirloom so that damage is minimal.

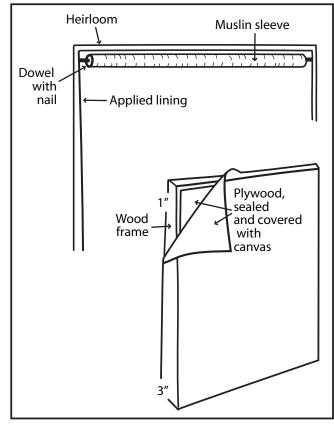
- Always hang the textile on a continuously shaded wall.
   Never place it in the path of direct sunlight or near a frequently used lamp or spotlight, since fading and fiber damage will occur.
- Avoid leaving a textile on display for an extended time. Rotate it with other art pieces. The longer it is displayed, the greater the likelihood of damage.
- Avoid using an adhesive to secure a textile item.

Methods of displaying textile heirlooms vary according to their size, as explained in the following section.

#### Small Heirlooms

- Small heirlooms are best displayed by mounting them to a backing fabric. Use laundered, unbleached muslin, canvas, or linen for the backing, which serves as a support for the whole weight of the object.
- Seal wooden stretchers completely with two coats of polyurethane varnish before mounting the backing fabric to them. Stretch the backing over the stretcher and secure it to the backside of the frame using rustfree staples.
- Then, carefully stitch the heirloom to the backing fabric, using the same guidelines mentioned under Repair. Place enough stitches across horizontally in the central area to help support the item's weight when hanging.
- Use acid-free matting board to prevent damage from paper decomposition and acid fumes.
- Mount small textiles behind glass or acrylic sheeting to prevent dust and household fumes from collecting on the surface. Glass is preferred, as static electricity produced by acrylic sheeting attracts dust.

• Don't allow glass or acrylic sheeting to touch the textile, because moisture may condense on the inside, causing the fabric to mildew. Space is needed between fabric and glass for air circulation. Place spacers inside the frame to separate the glass from the heirloom.



**Figure 7.** Above: Back view of textile heirloom hung from muslinencased dowel. Below: A cant or sloping board for displaying large heirlooms.

#### Large Heirlooms

- Any free-hanging, large textile, such as a quilt, banner, or tapestry, should have a muslin lining stitched to it.
   The lining serves as a protective barrier between the heirloom and the wall behind it.
- Keep in mind that many textile items are not perfectly square or rectangular because they are hand-woven or handmade. One side may be longer than another. Hang the item so that warp grain lines (those parallel to selvages) are perpendicular to the floor, even if this means one side is ½–1 inch higher than the other side.
- For large, flat items, use one of the following two methods of hanging: (1) using hook-and-loop fasteners, such as Velcro®, at the top, or (2) inserting a dowel.

- The "soft" or loop side of the fastener can be stitched to the lining, and, if necessary, through the textile heirloom itself. The "burr" or hook side can be attached with rust-proof staples to a mounting board. Inch-wide strips are good for lightweight fabrics, and 2-to 4-inch-wide fasteners can be used with heavy fabrics.
- Handstitch from the backside through the fastener, the
  attached muslin lining, and the textile. Remember to
  stitch into the "open" spaces between yarns. Stitches
  should be ¼-inch apart on the front, but they may be
  ½-inch apart on the back.
- When using a wooden dowel for hanging, first seal it with two coats of polyurethane. Then make a sleeve of muslin, like a casing, for the dowel. Stitch across the top and bottom of the sleeve, through both the lining and the textile item. The sleeve and dowel should both be 1 inch shorter than the width of the textile hanging. Nails can be inserted into each end of the dowel in order to fasten a wire for hanging.
- For heavier wall hangings and banners, a *cant* or slanted board helps to relieve the weight and stress due to gravity. Build a sloping frame with the top one inch and the bottom three inches away from the wall. Use plywood as a face over the entire frame. Seal all wood surfaces with two coats of polyurethane, then cover with heavy prewashed cotton duck or canvas. Pull the fabric around to the back side and secure to frame with rust-free staples. Next, using a curved needle, mount the textile to the fabric backing of the surface.

## Recording Information about Your Textile Heirloom

- Record valuable information about your own textile heirloom. The fond memories you have regarding the maker of your quilt or baby sweater may not be known by anyone else. Even other family members may forget.
- Written information should include a description of the textile, including fiber content, style, and color; the maker of the textile heirloom; the name and age of the wearer of the item; when and where it was worn; and any special events related to the heirloom.

- A recipe card with details written in pencil, not ink, would be appropriate for this information. Remember, paper ages and becomes acidic, so do not place the card directly on the textile. Neither should straight pins, safetypins, or adhesive tape be used. One method used by museums is to write the information in indelible ink (a laundry pen will do) onto a piece of white twill tape or muslin and loosely baste to the heirloom.
- Always make a record of any special care given the heirloom, such as the wet-cleaning or detergent cleaning procedures, and keep that with the garment also.
- A sketch of front and back views with comments on any worn, damaged, or stained areas is quite helpful.

### As Makers of Tomorrow's Heirlooms

Here is a suggestion to those of you currently doing handwork for yourself, family members or friends, whether it be knitting, needlepoint, rug hooking, quilting, appliqué, or textile painting. As the artist who made these lovely items, get in the practice of signing and dating your work. An old quilt or coverlet heirloom signed and dated by the maker is now very valuable and serves as an indisputable record of its age, maker, and region. For you, it may be as simple as working your name and date inconspicuously into the design, stitching it on the back with embroidery thread, or using an indelible ink pen to write on cotton twill tape which is then basted to the object. Another nice way of identifying the object is with printed labels saying "handmade by (your name)," to which you might want to add the date and place you live.

With a little special care, your textile heirloom of yesterday or tomorrow will be preserved for many years to come. Your conservation efforts will reward you and future generations with a treasured link to your family's heritage.

#### Resources

For special help or advice, write to:

#### **Museum Reference Center**

Consumer Information Program Smithsonian Institution Washington, DC 20560

#### The Textile Conservation Center

800 Massachusetts Avenue North Andover, MA 01845 Telephone: 617/686-0191

For archival and acid-free storage products, contact:

#### **Gaylord Brothers**

P.O. Box 4901 Syracuse, NY 13221-4901 www.gaylord.com

#### The Hollinger Corporation

9401 Northeast Drive Frederiscksburg, VA 22301 www.hollingercorp.com

#### **Further Reading**

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