

*A Simple Tip for Making Working Copies
of Badly Deteriorated Archival Materials*

Betsy Palmer Eldridge

In short, the method is to make a facsimile copy by sandwiching the material between Mylar sheets and using a photocopier to improve the contrast and to enlarge the text for better legibility.

EXPLANATION

The main value of archival material usually lies in its content. Accessing this content can be extremely difficult, however, as the material is often badly deteriorated. The paper is brittle, fragmented and greatly discolored, and the inks are faded and worn away. In addition, the script is often minuscule and written on both sides of the sheet - even double written with the first horizontal and the second vertical. In sum, they are hard to handle, hard to decipher, and hard to know what to do with.

A simple, quite satisfactory solution is to make a facsimile copy by sandwiching the material between two sheets of Mylar (the static electricity helps to hold the fragments temporarily in place without repair strips that would obscure the text) and then using a photocopier to improve the contrast of the ink with the paper and to enlarge the text for easier reading.

The advantages over photographic reproduction are that it is easier, quicker, less expensive, and can be done on a variety of archival papers. These facsimile copies can then be used in place of the original for research, transcription, and the making of other copies. It can even be used for documentation in conservation work as the copier picks up details that are hard to show in photography.