

To Jasper **With Love**

The Care and Handling of Fire Salvaged Belongings




Vicky Karas and Marni Wilson

Hello,

For those who don't know us, we are two homegrown Jasper girls with backgrounds in cultural heritage conservation and hazardous materials handling. We feel heartsick for our friends and family who are now doing the difficult job of fire recovery. Rubicon crews worked with Jasperites to recover their belongings; we want to support this process by offering basic salvage guidelines for next steps in the safe-keeping what is recovered. We hope the guidelines below will help you to mend the tangible history of your lives and to keep alive the memories and meaning tied to them.

Vicky Karas & Marni Wilson



This guide is intended to help Jasperites stabilize their recovered belongings to a state where the items, and you, can relax until time, resources, space and expertise (if needed) are available for you to continue. The stabilization process is very similar to triage: first assess what you're dealing with and then try to stop or slow further damage.

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Prepare Yourself

Prioritize your own personal safety when handling recovered items. Belongings may be covered or saturated with contaminants like mould spores, toxic dust like asbestos and lead (Pb), and other potentially harmful substances. Please protect yourself during handling and cleaning.

Clothing

- Anything from protective disposable coveralls to an old button-down shirt or apron. Your choice of protective clothing will depend on the state of contamination and number of items being cleaned.

Hands

- Nitrile or latex gloves for your protection (and if you are recovering photographs—for their protection). Most drug stores will carry nitrile/latex gloves.

Face & Eyes

- Face masks, and eye protection if you are creating any kind of dust. Keep in mind that a lot of hazardous particulate may have been deposited on your belongings including particulates of asbestos, and lead (Pb) dust in the ash.
- When handling material contaminated or suspected to be contaminated with asbestos dust, a half-face respirator with P100 filters is required

Disposable N95 facemasks (not dust masks) are recommended for the other hazardous particulate mentioned above, including lead (Pb) dust. The N95 mask is designed to filter out at least 95% of airborne particles that are 0.3 microns in size or larger. If water has been used to put out the fire, mould may also be an issue. A disposable N95 respirator is adequate at filtering out mould spores.



Nitril gloves



Half-face respirator with P100 Filters



Disposable N95 respirator

Prepare a Workspace

Until you are ready to start handling your recovered belongings, it is best to place items in supportive boxes or plastic containers until you can obtain further advice or are ready to begin cleaning yourself.

Access to a workspace with air extraction is probably unlikely, but it is possible to minimize exposure to dust by setting up a worktable in a well-ventilated room or garage or outdoors if possible.

Supplies

Basic items such as:

- Soft brushes
- Blotting paper
- Paper towel
- Plastic Zip-loc type of bags—all sizes. Polyethylene.
- Plastic totes with lids
- Plain kitty litter (very helpful non-chemical way to absorb heavy smoke odor. An open tray of litter can be placed in a small space with belongings with heavy smoke odour. Change out the litter periodically.)
- Soot Sponges (see page 4)
- Vacuum (see page 4)
- Mild detergent (see page 5)



Common household items, like Ziploc bags, paper towels, plastic bins, and kitty litter, can be used to help stabilize and clean your belongings.



General Handling Advice: Soot & Ash (Dry)

Dry, burned belongings will be fragile. Weaknesses may be difficult to detect due to ash and soot on the surface. Surfaces may look structurally sound but be weakened from within. Stabilizing involves putting the objects in a safe place protected from fluctuations in temperature and humidity, lifting them with rigid (padded) supports, and gently cleaning with vacuum, soft brushes (if on a nonporous surface), and soot sponges. This will stabilize your belongings until you can access professional expertise for repair or restoration if desired.

- Less is more. It is important to reduce the amount you handle or touch damaged items. The very fine particles in soot stick to everything and every touch will grind it further into the item you are trying to save.
- Soot and ash are very abrasive and will further damage your item through scratching.
- If your items were exposed to both heat and water, they will be even more fragile.
- Lift your objects carefully and avoid weakened areas; for example, support ceramics from the base rather than lifting by their handles.
- Wear nitrile or latex gloves when handling objects as the greasy residue in soot can be permanently fixed to absorbent surfaces by skin oils.
- Avoid placing pressure on blistered or lifting surfaces, such as on paintings or photographs.



When You are Ready to Stabilize/Clean

- It will be tempting, but do not use water—or any other cleaning solution before you vacuum. Water will drive soot and ash further into the surface of your item and they will become impossible to remove.
- As soon as possible, vacuum the soot and ash off your DRY item.

Vacuuming

Any good quality barrel or canister style vacuum is suitable, but it is preferable to have adjustable suction and a HEPA (High-Efficiency Particulate Air) filter. A HEPA filter will prevent fine dust from being distributed out the back of your vacuum and is essential when dealing with mould-affected materials. Please note that some vacuums are sold as having ‘HEPA bags’ or ‘HEPA style filters’, but these are not the same as true HEPA filters.

- A mini tool set. These are available from many vacuum cleaner stores. The fittings should come with adaptors for most vacuum hoses.
- Various sized natural soft bristled paintbrushes.
- Do not allow the nozzle to touch the surface. This may smear or press soot and ash into the surface of your object.
- If using a soft brush, gently brush dust and debris toward the vacuum suction.
- Vacuum all exposed surfaces before opening out folded items such as textiles or books.

Soot Sponges

If you want to remove further residue after vacuuming, and the object is strong enough, then soot sponges can be carefully used on most surfaces (textile, paint, ceramic, leather, glass, etc.). This is a soft sponge made of vulcanized rubber that picks up soot and ash particles and holds them in its surface pores. Dab, do not rub, the sponge on areas to be cleaned. As the sponge accumulates soot and ash, periodically trim off its dirty surface to expose a clean edge. These sponges (often called dry cleaning sponges) are available at hardware stores and from Amazon.



Soot sponge

Some Important Considerations

- Shelved books may be charred on the outside but intact inside. Vacuum the edges before you open the books—don't worry if some of the charred bits come off.
- Photograph albums may be stuck together—do not try to open them by force. You want to take them to a conservator for advice.
- Heat can make glass, ceramic, and metal items very brittle—remember to handle carefully.
- Fabrics in particular might look intact but may fall apart without very careful handling.



Wet Cleaning

If you have vacuumed and used the soot sponge, but are not confident to wet clean, please reach out to a conservator who can advise on wet cleaning. This may involve combinations of solvents and or detergents specific to soot and ash damage. For items that you feel are strong enough to withstand wet cleaning at this point, then the next step would be to use a mild cleaning product like Orvus paste available at quilting and fabric stores. A description of Orvus, its uses and instructions can be found here:

<https://conservationsupportsystems.com/product/show/orvus-wa-paste/detergents-soaps>



Long-term storage in water can promote biological growth—change water as regularly as you are able.



General Handling Advice: Water Damage

Unfortunately, fire damage includes water damage. The information below provides first-aid treatment for water-damaged objects only.

Conservation advice should be obtained where necessary.

What is the difference between Dry/Damp/Wet?

Wet means fully saturated--sitting in standing water. Consider everything else as damp (or dry).

A rule of thumb is to package and store objects in similar condition to how they were found OR to slowly acclimate them to the condition in which they'll be stored.

- If it's dry: keep it dry.
- If it's damp: slow drying is often best, but it depends on the material. If you can't start slow drying then keep the belongings damp and cool.

What is meant by slow drying?

Slow drying is air drying, this can be done using ambient air (if it's not humid) and/or using cool air from electric fans or the cool setting on a hairdryer. Using absorbent materials, such as blotting paper (available at art stores), or paper towel, and gently circulating air to gradually remove water from the item.

If you're unsure of what to do, keep materials wet and store them in a cool, dark place until you can contact a conservator.

General Points

Read these guidelines before proceeding, and keep in mind the health hazards associated with mud and mould.

- It is important to act promptly as wet or damp paper can develop mould in warm conditions.
- Wet paper tears easily, so handle with care at all times.
- Water-soaked materials should be kept as cool as possible by good air circulation, so keep area cool and ventilated while drying. Do not be tempted to speed up drying by using heat.
- A fan or hairdryer on a cool, gentle setting may be used with care to aid drying of individual items.

Wet Photographs, Books and Papers, Audio or Video Tapes, DVDs and CDs

PHOTOGRAPHS

- Remove from any frame or mountings.
- Where photographs are stuck together consult a photograph conservator. **DO NOT ATTEMPT TO PEEL APART.** Keep them wet by placing in a clean polythene bag or in a container of water for no more than 48 hours until you can seek professional advice.
- If not stuck together, immerse photographs in cold water. If they are wrapped, leave in wrapping (take off later after immersion).
- Wash colour prints in cold water for 15 minutes. Wash black & white prints, and colour and black & white negatives for 30 minutes.
- Remove from their wrappings and lay out flat, image side up on blotting paper or absorbent paper towels.
- Ensure the drying environment is kept cool and as dust free as possible.
- If photographs are valuable, consider consulting a conservator.

If there are too many for immediate attention, either:

- Keep them wet by placing in a clean polythene bag or in a container of water for no more than 48 hours. Air-dry as above as soon as possible.
- Freeze. If possible, interleave each photo with waxed paper.
- Consult a photograph conservator.



Photographs:
Neil and Mary Wilson family collection

BOOKS

If it is possible to buy replacements, this may be easier than trying to dry them. Books with only wet edges can be dried successfully. Very wet books will require specialist treatment.

- If book cover is wet and soiled it may be possible to rinse it carefully, holding book closed.

Superficially wet or damp books can be dried by standing book open at 45-90° angle on bottom or top edge. Splay pages and leave to air-dry at a cool room temperature.

Very wet books if open, should be laid flat on a clean surface. Interleave with absorbent material such as blotting paper and close (adding no more bulk than 20% of the book thickness). Replace interleaving when damp.

IMPORTANT – DO NOT TRY TO OPEN VERY WET BOOKS IF THEY ARE CLOSED

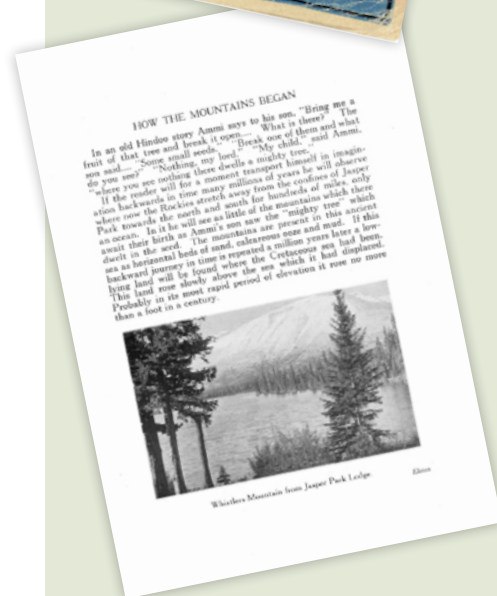
Soft bound books, magazines or pamphlets can be dried in the same way. If books or papers are valuable, or if it is not possible to dry them because they are too big, too thick, too wet and closed, or there are too many of them to dry in 48 hours:

- place books in individual polythene bags put in a freezer, supporting books spine downwards
- if freezing is not possible, chill in a fridge to slow mould growth
- consult a conservator

Books with coated papers (look shiny) may not air dry very easily and pages are likely to stick together. It may be advisable to freeze the book and consult a conservator.

PAPER

- Air-dry flat as individual sheets, or small piles up to 0.75cm, interleaved with absorbent material such as blotting paper. Do not use textured kitchen roll as the texture may transfer to the paper.
- Replace blotter when damp.
- Do not unfold or try to separate individual wet sheets.
- If too many items for air-drying:
 - ✓ Interleave (by groups or individually) with waxed paper if time permits.
 - ✓ Pack papers or files into sturdy containers, to prevent further damage.
 - ✓ Freeze
 - ✓ Consult a conservator



Booklet:
The Geological Story of Jasper National Park; Published by The National Parks of Canada, Department of the Interior, 1929.

AUDIO OR VIDEO TAPES

If it is possible to replace them, this will be easier than trying to dry them.

- Check whether the tape inside the cassette is wet. If so, place in a polythene bag for treatment by a conservator.
- If cassette is dirty or wet and tape is only superficially wet –rinse cassette in clean lukewarm water
 - ✓ Carefully unravel the tape and hang to dry at room temperature.
 - ✓ Re-assemble and copy to a new tape.
- If too many items for air-drying:
 - ✓ Prevent tapes from drying out by placing in a polythene bag or a bucket of cold clean water.
 - ✓ Contact a conservator.



DVDs or CDs

- Rinse carefully in cold clean water.
- Do not rub disc, even gently, or use anything chemical or abrasive.
- Blot gently or air dry.



Please keep in mind that, while things might look irretrievably damaged, there may well be treatments that will salvage these items. Do not despair, and please seek conservation advice.

How to find a conservator in Alberta

This document is intended to provide general guidance only and is in no way a substitute for professional conservation services. Professional art conservation treatments can involve many nuances and may require more than one approach. Please reach out to the resources below.

Follow this link from the Canadian Association of Professional Conservators:

<https://capc-acrp.ca/en/conservators?keywords=education-and-training>

Here you can search by city for Conservators who are accepting private work.

Conservators are awesome people, please reach out locally to those through the link above or through these resources for advice:

- Royal Alberta Museum (RAM)
<https://royalalbertamuseum.ca/>
- The Provincial Archives of Alberta
<https://provincialarchives.alberta.ca/who-we-are/we-preserve>

Please feel free to contact us too!

- Vicky Karas can be reached at karas.basiliki@gmail.com

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