

Journals, Sketchbooks, Diaries and Field Notes

April Second Saturday, 2020



Selection from the personal notebook of York Artist Lewis Miller circa 1879

There's never been a better time to start a journal!

Here at the history center, we have many journals, diaries and sketchbooks. Newspapers and official documents are useful for learning the facts about an event. Journals, on the other hand, can help us understand the thoughts, feelings and motivations of the people who lived through it.

We

From the Archives

I asked Dr. Adam Bentz, Assistant Director of the Library and Archives here at the history center, some questions about journaling.

How and why are journals so important to the History Center?

AB: Journals are primary sources, which are really the basic building blocks of any history and the closest anyone can get to the time period. In addition, the local ones that we have in our collection are usually unpublished, making them priceless.

Can you share your favorite example from our collection?

AB: We have a number of journals in our collection, but what I worked with most recently were several different letter collections from the Civil War. I would say that letters and journals, at least from the mid-1800s, are similar in nature in that people wrote them to carefully reflect their observations at the time and tell of their experiences, often in detail. Cassandra Small lived on Market Street and wrote a series of letters during the war, as did Judge James William Latimer, who wrote about the thinking that went on among the York elite before they turned over the city to Confederate occupation.

How can we preserve our journals, so that future historians can use them?

AB: Ideally, people should be using acid-free, high-quality materials so that they last for generations without degrading--that's for handwritten journals like your project. Anything precious, like diaries, letters, or photos, should be kept in cool, dry environments, never in basements or attics. They should transcribe their journals electronically. If digital copies are kept, we could certainly add them to our files here as part of the Share Your History program.



Lewis Miller, circa 1878

What should you put in your journal?

Well, the short answer is whatever you want! Your journal is *your* place, and you make the rules. The people who wrote the journals in our collections recorded events, saved newspaper clippings, wrote stories and poems, drew pictures, pressed flowers, and kept photos between the pages. Some of them even included locks of their loved ones' hair!

You are in charge of what goes in your journal, but sometimes it can be hard to know where to start. Here are some questions you might consider when you create your first entries.

- 1) Where do you live? What does your home look, sound, smell or feel like? Where do you spend your time when you're home?
- 2) Who do you live with? What do they look, sound and smell like? How do you feel about them? How do they feel about you?
- 3) What do you do every day? What do you only do sometimes? What are some of your favorite things to do, and what are some things that you don't like at all?
- 4) Do you have a window in your home? When you look out the window, what do you see? If you stand by your window and listen closely, what do you hear? If you open your window and take a big breath, what do you smell? Can you see any living things, like people or animals or plants, out your window?



A page from Elizabeth Bonham's Scrapbook circa 1880

Activity



Journals are wonderful for a lot of reasons. They are very helpful to the person writing the journal, and they can also be helpful to future historians. Here are instructions so you can create your own journal, notebook or sketchbook. You can choose to share it, or keep it private. Who knows- a hundred years from now it might just end up in our archives!

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Stiff cardstock or thin cardboard for the cover. You can use a cereal box, file folder, poster board or even the cover of an old book.
2. 3-5 rubber bands, about the same size; string or even ribbon will work in a pinch, but stretchier materials will hold the pages in more tightly.
3. Scrap “filler” paper . You can use lined paper, graph paper, printer paper, leftover paper from an old notebook... Really, any thin paper with space to draw or write will work. Try to choose paper that is about twice as long as you want your finished journal to be.
4. Decorations! Anything you like: stickers, markers, ribbon, paperclips- even pictures cut from magazines or advertisements!

You will also need scissors, and if you choose to make a cover for your journal you will need some tape. Any kind of tape will work, but masking tape or washi tape seems to work best.

Instructions



- 1) Decide on the size of your book. This will mostly depend on the rubber bands you are using. If the cover is too large for the rubber bands they will bend the cardboard and may even snap. If they are too large then the pages might fall out. It may take a few tries to get the size just right- when in doubt, cut it a little bigger and then take off a little at a time.



- 2) Stack your filler paper on top of the cover, then trim it all to a uniform size. It should be just a little smaller than your cover. Carefully fold each page in half “hamburger style” so there is a crease down the center.

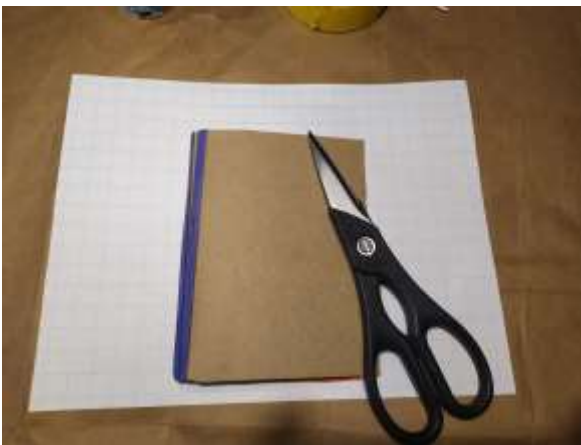


- 3) If you try to fold all your pages into one big group, it will make your book impossible to close and the ends of the pages will not match up. Instead, sort them into groups of three or four pages each- called signatures.

** optional: If you would like a sturdier book, you can use a hammer and nail to pre-punch holes in the signatures, then use a needle and thread to stitch them together. Just be sure to ask an adult first!



- 4) Use rubber bands to secure signatures to the cover. As you fill your book, you can remove and replace the signatures with fresh paper (just be sure to keep the finished pages someplace safe!)



- 5) Decorate! Technically your journal is now complete. All that's left is to decorate! You can use crayons, markers, stickers- whatever you like! If, like mine, your book doesn't want to stay closed you can use ribbons, string or a large rubber band to keep it shut.



**optional: fold a cover for your journal

Folding a cover is totally optional- but it will give your journal a little more durability, along with looking nice. Any paper that's big enough will work- though glossy paper has the benefit of being somewhat water resistant. I used a park map for mine. Magazines, newspapers, paper bags, and wrapping paper all work well.

Lay out your paper, cut small chips out near the spine, to leave room for the rubber bands, then simply fold and tape.



FINISHED!

Now it's time to fill those pages!

If you feel inspired, you can email your creations to ajschenck@yorkhistorycenter.org and we might just share them online!

