PRESERVING THE AFOS FLAG

In honor of the 50th anniversary of the Armed Forces Optometric Society’s founding earlier this year, the Archives & Museum of Optometry staff used the milestone as an excuse to do some preservation work on the flag presented to the AOA in 1970 by AFOS’s first officers.

The 5’ by 8’ cotton DETTRA brand flag presented to the AOA in 1970 was flown at the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. It has remained folded, wrapped in butcher paper and hidden in a box for 50 years.

Ideally, textiles should be stored flat to reduce stress on the fibers, but most museums don’t have that kind of space. One way to properly store a large flag is to roll it around a tube made of archival board and protect it with unbuffered or buffered tissue. But first, the AMO staff carefully unfolded the flag and inspected for damage, bleeding colors or insect infestation.

Completely unfurled and inspected, we made sure tissue was placed on top and below (interleaved) to prevent abrasion or bleeding when stored. Because the flag is so large, we compromised and made a fold along a seam to reduce the length of the finished tube.

Once the flag was rolled, carefully beginning at the hoist end, we used unbleached cotton twill “tape” (ribbon) to secure the roll. Now, the flag can be stored in archival shelving safely for many years to come!
In 1970, the AFOS gift to the AOA was accompanied by framed memorandum commemorating the occasion. Unfortunately, the memo was adhered to the acidic, cardboard matting. The adhesive eventually failed, but not before bleeding through and leaving residue. The acidic backing material also caused discoloration along the edges of the memo. Our preservation measures included removing the memo from the frame, encapsulating in clear polyester and making a digital copy to minimize use.