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# Officials Fear NJ Historical Papers May Be History If No Help Is Given

*Associated Press*

There's a flaky, sepia-colored dust in the aisles of the New Jersey archives — crumbs of irreplaceable documents that have been ravaged by time and are crumbling beneath their caretakers eyes.

Officials say the documents, some dating to the 1660s, are in danger of being lost forever and that if lawmakers do not act quickly, within a few years they will be sweeping out the remains of centuries of New Jersey records.

"We have one of the worst facilities in the country. We've reached the point where time has run out," said Caesar Iacovone, director of the Division of Archives and Records Management.

"We are going to lose a substantial portion of our holdings if we don't have a building in place, and an active conservation program," said Iacovone. "If we don't, within the next decade or so we will be the holders of dust."

"These holdings are probably worth \$1 billion, and they're sitting in a basement," he said. "If you can sell a Van Gogh for \$40 million, then what's the ratification of the Bill of Rights worth?"



AP Laserphoto

**HISTORY RESTORED — Karl J. Niederer, chief of the N.J. archives bureau, leafs through a restored copy of historical records at the state library in Trenton.**

These are probably the most valuable historical assets that exist in the state of New Jersey."

For years, the fading and decaying records were stored carelessly in the basement of the State House; some were damaged by fire in 1885 and others have been

stolen through the years.

"They were languishing in the basement of the State House with pipes overhead and roaches on the floor," said Karl Niederer, chief of the archives bureau. "These are the raw material of historical research."