Case study

Preserving our legacy: The 75th anniversary of Iron Mountain

As Iron Mountain celebrates its 75th anniversary in 2026, we apply our heritage preservation expertise to our own archival collection.

Since our company's founding 75 years ago, Iron Mountain has helped organizations around the world safeguard and manage their valuable information. Our 75th anniversary presents a unique occasion to explore our past through our archived records and artifacts, using the same capabilities and care we provide to our customers.

Our legacy of protecting what matters most

In 1936, Herman Knaust bought the original Iron Mountain site—a depleted iron ore mine with 100 acres of land—and started a mushroom farm; however, he soon realized the potential of the space to protect vital information from wars or other disasters. He had previously sponsored the relocation of many Jewish immigrants who lost their identities due to the loss of their personal records during WWII. By 1951, his mushroom farm had been fully converted into a records storage facility, and Iron Mountain, as we know it today, was formally founded.

To honor our 75th anniversary, archivists from our Media and Archival Services team conducted an internal audit of our historical records. The project sought to organize 20 boxes of historical mixed-media fragments into a cohesive, accessible archive that reflects our evolution from a mushroom farm to a global information management company.

The challenge: Fragments of a story yet to be connected

We faced the same challenge that many of our customers face: a fragmented history. Archival materials, including paper, video tapes, and photographs, were unorganized and in need of grouping and contextualization. Limited documentation described the transition from a mushroom farm to a mulit-national storage services provider. While institutional knowledge resided primarily in long-serving employees rather than in an archive, the content of the audit revealed financial documents, historic photography, early advertisements, newspaper clippings, and more. One of the most exciting discoveries was a sealed and branded mushroom can dating from somewhere between 1930 and 1950. Requiring careful preservation, it is a physical representation of our origin story as a mushroom farm operating out of a mine.

IRON MOUNTAIN®

Customer
Iron Mountain

Industry
Corporate Archives

Challenge
As Iron Mountain prepared to celebrate our own 75th anniversary, we needed to preserve and digitize our 75 years of history, which was scattered across more than 20 boxes of historical materials — including a rare can of mushrooms that links our company to its origin.

Solution
Our archivists rehoused fragile documents, images, and film into archival-quality storage, and digitized key historical items for use in our 75th anniversary campaign. The images were ingested into AMPlify, our Asset Monetization Platform, so that they can be easily searched and shared for marketing campaign use. Archivists treated standout artifacts, like the sealed mushroom can from the 1930s-1950s, with specialized preservation techniques.

The solution: Professional curation & strategic rehousing

The archivists began by separating materials relevant to our company's history according to their asset type. They then rehoused all items in archival-quality boxes, folders, and sleeves. Original barcode numbers were retained for tracking continuity. Some items were already grouped—such as team photographs from the late 1980s and early 1990s—but most required careful arrangement and contextual ordering.

Historically significant materials were digitized to support broader internal access and long-term preservation, such as the 1950s news clippings detailing the company's founding. These were ingested into AMPlify, Iron Mountain's technology platform, that makes archival content searchable, shareable, and ready to activate, turning preserved history into current material that teams can actually use.

The mushroom can was treated as a primary historical artifact. The decision was made to keep the can sealed to maintain its internal environment, protecting the fragile mid-century label from modern environmental shifts. To prevent chemical degradation, it was housed in a custom-sized archival box with acid-free tissue.

The archivists also identified additional assets requiring evaluation and protection located at storage facilities around the globe. After their work identifying, organizing, and preserving the historical records, the archivists suggested that physical assets alone, such as letters and photos, could not tell the full story of our 75-year evolution. To bridge the gaps in the timeline, the team proposed an oral history program to capture employees' memories.

A corporate archive, ready for the next 75 Years:

What began as 20 boxes of loosely assembled fragments is now a structured, searchable corporate archive. Clear categorization, tracking continuity, and secure digital access through our asset monetization solution means that our institutional history is no longer dependent on the memories of long-tenured employees—it is documented, preserved, and built to scale.

- **A map of what's missing:** As valuable as what was found during the audit, what was absent was also a revelation. The significant gap between our early transition from mushroom farming to storage services, and its rapid 1970s expansion, has now been formally identified and named—transforming this initiative from a preservation exercise into an active investigation. Newly located materials at some of our storage facilities are next in line for evaluation, and the oral history program will target the institutional knowledge that no box of paper records or photos can capture.
- **Hidden stories, now part of the record:** The project surfaced artifacts that deepen our company's narrative: a photograph of the original mine, founding-era newspaper coverage, early advertising materials, and photos of our employees working from various decades. These are no longer curiosities sitting in storage—they are now documented assets actively informing the company's 75th anniversary campaign and supporting external academic research into business culture and steps taken during the atomic age to preserve our country's legacy.
- **Proof of the work we do for customers:** Perhaps the most unexpected outcome was the gained empathy for the challenge our customers face documenting and ensuring their history is sustained. We navigated the same dispersed and fragmented records, historical complexity, and institutional blind spots that organizations face every day—which validates our peer-to-peer credibility.

We are not just celebrating our past—we are actively preserving it to inform our future. In doing so, we demonstrate the very principles it delivers to customers every day: protect what matters, uncover what's missing, and ensure that history is never left to chance.

> Preservation is not simply about looking backward. It is about ensuring that the knowledge, experiences, and stories that shaped an organization remain accessible to inform what comes next. By turning the lens onto our own archive, we strengthened our understanding of our own history while reinforcing the value of the work we do for customers every day.
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> **Hillary Howell, Director, Premium Archival Services**

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