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COLLECTIONS

Advisor



Martin Collection, Indiana Historical Society, cropped from original

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Labeling Objects: Tips from the Minnetrista Heritage Collection *Basic Collections Care Guide*

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Labeling your objects is a very important step in the cataloging process. It helps provide inventory control of your collections, may aid in recovery efforts in case of theft or disaster and ties the physical object to its documentation and any other information on the object.

Object labeling is not a fast process and involves several steps. Labeling should be done carefully and not cause damage to the object.

Before you label any object, be sure you know what materials the object is made from and what the most appropriate method to use for that material is. Remember that different types of objects require different types of labels. In some cases, the labels will be permanent.

Standard label placement on objects should be determined by each organization. It's important to have consistent label placement so that everyone knows where to look for the labels. This will help to limit unnecessary handling of the objects.

Remember it is important to do no harm. If you have any questions about the best way to label an object, check with a conservator before you begin.

The following guidelines are used at Minnetrista:

- On non-porous surfaces, a base coat of Acryloid B-72 should be used. Locate an inconspicuous, but easy-to-find, area on which to place the label. (The number should be easily found, but not visible when the object is on display.) Allow the base coat to dry completely. Use an archival pen to write the accession number legibly on the base coat surface. The pen should be filled with an archival ink that dries quickly, and is acid-free, light-fast and permanent. Black or white may be used, depending on the object. In addition, the ink should flow easily and be easy to use or write with on a variety of surfaces. Once the number dries, apply a top coat of Acryloid B-67. Take care to apply only to the base coat, with no overspill onto the object.
- For porous objects, such as wood, additional base coats may be necessary. Alternatively, Liquitex varnish medium can be used as a base coat. Keep in mind that the label will permanently stain the object.
- Plastic and rubber objects are unique in that labels will permanently mar the surface. Choose a non-plastic area to mark if possible. If not, consider the label to be permanent. It is recommended that you use a Berol China Marker, Stabilo All pencil or acrylic paint (using a fine brush) to mark directly onto the object; do not use a base or a top coat. Use a secondary acid-free tag.
- Paper objects may be marked using a dull, soft-leaded (No. 2 or softer) pencil. For archival material and photographs, you should mark the back of the object in the lower right corner. Make it easy to read, but not obtrusive. To prevent scratches, photographic surfaces should be protected while writing the number. Do not put pressure on the object. If components are involved, such as mats, be sure to number those as well. Photographs that can't be marked in pencil should be stored in an archival sleeve with the number on the outside.
- For cased photographic objects, such as tintypes, ambrotypes and daguerreotypes, tag the object with an acid-free tag. For additional protection, use archival polyethylene bags with a label. *Never remove the photographs from their cases.*
- For textiles, write the accession number on a small piece of Tyvek or Reemay using an archival pen with black ink, such

as a photo marking pen. Rinse the tag with hot, soapy water. While the tag is still wet, test for smearing. If there is no smearing, blot dry completely.

- Labels should be sewn on the reverse side of the textile. Do not sew through the outside layer, but rather inside the seams. For dresses, shirts, jackets, coats and other upper garments with sleeves, the tag should be sewn onto the neckband. If the label will show in display, sew the label onto an underarm seam or inside the left cuff. For vests and other sleeveless garments, sew the label into the left armhole at the side seam. For skirts, trousers and other garments with waistbands, the label can be placed at the center back of the waistband. Hats should be marked inside the band at the center back. Stockings and gloves are marked inside near the top edge. Neckwear and sashes are to be marked in the center or at one end of the underside.
- The label should be sewn with long-term storage in mind, but one should be able to easily remove it if necessary. A secondary, Tyvek or paper acid-free tag should be attached to the hanger to relieve stress on the garment when one is looking for the number. If the Tyvek comes into contact with clothing, be sure to wash and dry it before using.

Resources

- Connecting to Collections Online Community www.connectingtocollections.org
- IHS Conservation Lab www.indianahistory.org/our-services/conservation
- IHS Local History Services Lending Resource Center www.indianahistory.org/our-services/local-history-services/lending-resources
- National Park Service Museum Handbook www.nps.gov/museum/publications/handbook.html
- Northeast Document Conservation Center www.nedcc.org/resources/resources.php
- Recommendations for Applying Accession Numbers to Museum Objects www.mnhs.org/about/publications/techtalk/techtalkjuly2000.pdf

Archival supply vendors

- *Conservation Resources International, LLC* www.conservationresources.com
- *The Hollinger Corporation Catalog* www.hollingercorp.com

[com](#)

- *University Products Catalog* www.universityproducts.com
- *Gaylord Catalog* www.gaylord.com
- *LCL Company Labeling Kit* www.thelclcompany.com

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