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TIS THE SEASON FOR COLD WEATHER, HOLIDAY PARTIES AND...PESTS?

By Karen DePauw, coordinator, IHS Local History Services

In *National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation* a squirrel hitchhikes into the Griswold's house on their beautiful, fresh-cut Christmas tree. Although this was an extreme and humorous, situation, it is not uncommon for the holidays to bring uninvited pests to our homes and museums, and I'm not talking about the person who drank too much eggnog...



[December 25, 1905](#). (Indiana Historical Society)



ONLINE RESOURCES

[Five Surprising Holiday Traditions That Invite Critters and Bugs Inside](#)
(Orkin)

[Five Tips to Keep Your Holidays Free of Unwanted Pests](#)
(Pest Management, Inc)

FROM OUR LENDING RESOURCE CENTER

Technician's Handbook:
A Guide to Pest Identification and Management
(Richard Kramer)

Pest Management in Museums, Archives, and Historic Houses
(David Pinniger)

Integrated Pest Management for Collections:
Proceedings of 2001: A Pest Odyssey
(Helen Kingsley, et al, eds)

Find the resources above by visiting the Lending Resource Center [website](#).



Below are some tips for how to mitigate the introduction of pests into the museum during the holiday season.

- When decorating, use fake greenery whenever possible. The quality of fake greenery has increased substantially in recent decades and it is now possible to find items that are deceptive almost to the touch. Add a few pine-scented air fresheners and no one will be the wiser. If you feel wedded to the idea of using real pine boughs to make your holiday sing, remember to transition them to the indoors. The reason is that you want to warm them up outside of your museum space. By first bringing them into a controlled warm space (like a sealed plastic container in the environment, or another room that is away from collection areas or in a different building all-together), you allow time for any hitchhiking pests to wake up from their hibernation and crawl out of the greenery before you put it into the museum environment. A tub can be especially helpful. After 24 hours you can take the tub outside, remove the greenery, give it a good shake to release any hitchhikers and then empty anything from the tub. This will not entirely eliminate pests coming into the museum, but will reduce the risk.
- If you use wood in your decorating, like logs by a fireplace, place the logs you want to use in a plastic tub and, like the greenery, bring it first into a warm space that is not the museum. If the temperature is below freezing or will get there overnight, place the tub outside after it warms up so it will freeze again. This way, any insects that came out of hibernation in the warm space will die off because most cannot hibernate again so quickly. Still bring the logs into a warm space once more to warm up after the freeze before finally bringing them inside the museum.



[Children Hanging Ornaments.](#) (Indiana Historical Society)

- Open decorations outside first. Most of us store our rarely-used holiday decorations in areas of the museum that are not the best storage areas. This is usually because the best storage spaces are designated for collection items, so decorations get squirreled away in basements, attics and even sheds. Open up boxes outside or in the storage space before bringing them into the main section of the museum. More times than not pests will find their way into storage boxes and it is better to find them outside of gallery spaces than inside.
- Winter is a great time to check for drafts. If air can get in, so can pests. Take the opportunity provided by the cold weather to feel for cold air coming in around doors, windows or other cracks. If you can't have them fixed right away, use weather stripping to help seal the cracks, thus keeping out the cold and pests and keeping in the warmth.



[Parker Family's Christmas Decorations.](#) (Martin Collection, Indiana Historical Society)

- The cold weather will drive pests indoors to hibernate, find warm homes and locate food. Try to mitigate hiding spots (when possible, we are collecting institutions after all) and food as much as possible.
- Have someone stationed at the front door to greet guests and also monitor the door. The lights inside can attract moths and other flying insects, so keeping the door closed as soon as everyone gets inside is important.



[Bledsoe Coal Company Party at Terre Haute House.](#) (Martin Collection, Indiana Historical Society)

- Clean up from the event immediately. It is tempting after a long holiday event to think "oh, we'll clean up tomorrow" but between tonight and tomorrow you may just be inviting dozens of unwelcome critters into your museum. It may be difficult to rally the cleaning troops after a long night, but remember "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure!" Easier to clean tonight then deal with a pest infestation in the morning.

This is a free publication. Anyone may subscribe.

[Local History Services](#)

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