



INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS ADVISOR

A RESOURCE FROM IHS LOCAL HISTORY SERVICES

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KEEPING COOL AS THE TEMPERATURE RISES

By Karen DePauw, coordinator, IHS Local History Services

August in the Midwest can certainly be hot and humid. While some museums and historical sites are blessed with HVAC systems to keep everything at a nice and happy temperature, others are not. So, how do you keep it cool as the temperature rises?



[Children Eating Ice Cream.](#) (Indianapolis Recorder Collection, Indiana Historical Society)

- Keep the air flowing. For human comfort, moving air helps people cool off by forcing away moisture from the skin and allowing cooler air to settle around the body.
- Close windows and doors. Although it seems tempting to let in a cool breeze, if the air outside is warmer than the air inside, then the warm air will flow in and push the cool air out until the inside of the building is the same temperature as the outside. It is better to rely on fans for a breeze.
- Check for and fix structural issues letting in heat. Fill cracks in and around windows and doors, because as the warm air forces its way in the cool air is forced out.
- Make use of original architectural features. If the museum is housed in an older structure, know that the original occupants did things to keep the building cool before air conditioning. Opening the transom windows between interior rooms can help circulate warm air.
- Use dehumidifiers. Dehumidifiers can pull extra moisture from the air. The key thing to remember is to empty the water chamber frequently. This is especially important if the dehumidifier does not have an automatic shut-off when the water chamber gets full,



ONLINE RESOURCES

[Back to Basics](#)
(Collections Advisor, Aug 2016)

[Thermodynamics for Idiots](#)
(Networx)

FROM OUR LENDING RESOURCE CENTER

[The Care of Historical Collections](#)
(Pur E. Guldbeck)

[Getting a Handle on the Museum Environment](#)
(Beth Doyle and Bob Herskovitz)

[Keep it Clean: Housekeeping in Museums and Historical Agencies](#)
(Cherie Cook)

UPCOMING TRAINING AND PROGRAMS

[Efficiency in Digitization](#)
Aug 8 - LYRASIS webinar.

[Caring for Photographs](#)
Aug. 9 - Texas Historical Commission webinar.

otherwise an overflow could cause a water issue in the museum.

- Stock-up on silica gel. Silica gel can be used in small spaces, like exhibit cases or closets, to lessen humidity in particular parts of the museum. They are best for small areas, rather than relying on them to keep the entire museum dry.



[Sunbathers at Westlake Beach.](#) (Indiana Historical Society)

- Shut lights off. If the museum relies on light bulbs and fixtures that produce heat, such as florescent lights, it can be helpful to keep them off or put them on a motion timer for when visitors are not in the museum. By simply shutting off the lights the museum can stay cooler.
- Draw the curtains closed. By using light-blocking curtains, or any window covering, the sun's rays will not heat up the interior of the building as they would if the sunshine was streaming in the windows. If the museum is in an old house with functioning shutters, they can also be closed to reduce the amount of sunlight.
- Have water and chairs available for guests. Some visitors might feel the effects of a warm museum more than others. Supplying some stools for people to take breaks and water bottles available in a pinch can go a long way in visitor comfort.
- Cool the building gradually. If an HVAC system is available, remember to cool the building gradually when the temperature gets too hot. Objects do much better when they have time to acclimate to their environments. Rather than cranking up the air when the building has become too warm, adjust the temperature slowly. This will help prevent things like cracked wood or split leather.



[State Fair Crowds Enter the Johnny J. Jones Exposition on the Midway in 1937.](#) (Indiana Historical Society)

Creating a comfortable environment for both visitors and objects is important in the long-term for museums. Although keeping window shades drawn and doors and windows closed might feel un-inviting to museum visitors, do not be afraid to use it as a teaching moment regarding how our ancestors used the same techniques to stay cool on a warm summer day.

COLLECTIONS ADVISOR NEEDS YOUR STORIES!

This October we will again be featuring "horror" stories of working with collections. If you have a collections "horror" story you think others would enjoy hearing/learning from, please share! Whether you are an educator or curator, paid staff or volunteer, most of us have had an oh-no moment when working with collection items. If you would like to share a story, please email kdepauw@indianahistory.org and include: the story (in 125 words or less), the lesson you learned from it, your title at the time and your name (don't worry, only titles will be included in the newsletter to protect the horror-stricken!). Please send submissions **by Sept. 8**. Need some examples? Check out the last "Collection Horror Stories" edition [here](#).

This is a free publication. Anyone may subscribe.

[Local History Services](#)

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