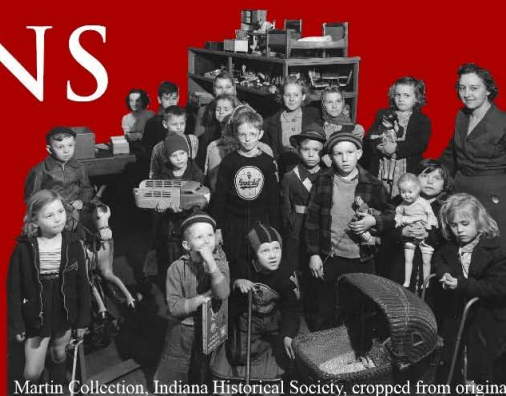


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COLLECTIONS

Advisor



Martin Collection, Indiana Historical Society, cropped from original

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A Few of My Favorite Things – Collection Care Tips and Tricks

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I've spent a lot of time in the past few years caring for objects in small museum collections. As I've talked to colleagues and consulted conservators about my collections conundrums, I've learned some interesting and creative tips and tricks along the way.

Here are a few of my favorites.

Firearms permits

- Check with local law enforcement agencies to determine if you need to obtain permits for firearms in your collections. Permits may be necessary for certain classes of weapons even if they are in museum collections.

Taxidermied animals

- Some early taxidermy processes used arsenic to help preserve the animals. White powder around the eyes or at the base of the object may indicate the presence of arsenic. Check with conservators and local OSHA representatives about testing and handling taxidermied objects.

Old medicine bottles

- Check with a pharmacist before emptying old medicine bottles. The contents may be hazardous and should not be touched or poured down a sink. A pharmacist will be able to advise you how to properly and safely dispose of the medicine.
- Ask a conservator how to properly clean the bottle so that you can preserve any labels.
- Wear gloves when handling old medicine containers. Wash your hands after you have handled the containers.

Doorstep donations

- Open any boxes in a place that is isolated from your collections storage and exhibit areas. Whatever comes out of that box will be in your museum. If moths fly from a box of textiles, they will be

perfectly happy to inhabit your textiles. Silverfish will dine on your archives. Isolating the box will minimize the chance that pests will be introduced to your collections.

- Unpack carefully. The box may contain harmful materials like old medicines, rusty and sharp tools or live hand grenades. (I've talked to people who have found sweating dynamite and loaded guns. I found a live hand grenade at the bottom of a box of police procedural manuals.) Potential donors may not even know what is lurking at the bottom of the box.
- Examine all of the packing materials. Don't assume that anything is empty. Small objects and jewelry may be wrapped in bits and pieces of paper that could easily be thrown out.
- Wear disposable gloves when handling the objects in the box. Throw the gloves away when you have finished unpacking the box. You may also choose to wear a mask.

White cotton sheets and pillow cases

- Ask local hospitals, nursing homes and hotels for their discarded linens. Wash the linens in a dye-free, unscented detergent and then run them through an extra rinse cycle to remove the detergent residue. The linens can be used in lots of ways to help care for your collections.
- Drape sheets carefully over furniture as dust covers.
- Cut a hole in the top of a pillow case and place it on hanging textiles to help keep them clean.
- Wrap padded hangers in cotton strips to create a barrier between the padding and the textile.
- Use a sheet to help support large textiles if you need to move them short distances inside your institution.

Socks on chair and table legs (one of my very favorite tips)

- Use white cotton socks on the legs of chairs if limited storage space means you have to stack the chairs or tables. The socks keep the bottom of the legs from scratching other objects.

Remember to talk to other museum folks and be sure to share your own helpful tips and tricks!

Resources:

- Canadian Conservation Institute notes www.cci-icc.gc.ca/publications/notes/index-eng.aspx
- Connecting to Collections Online Community www.connectingtocollections.org
- Conserve O Grams www.nps.gov/museum/publications/consveogram/cons_toc.html
Indiana History Society Lending Resources Center www.indianahistory.org/our-services/local-history-services/lending-resources

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