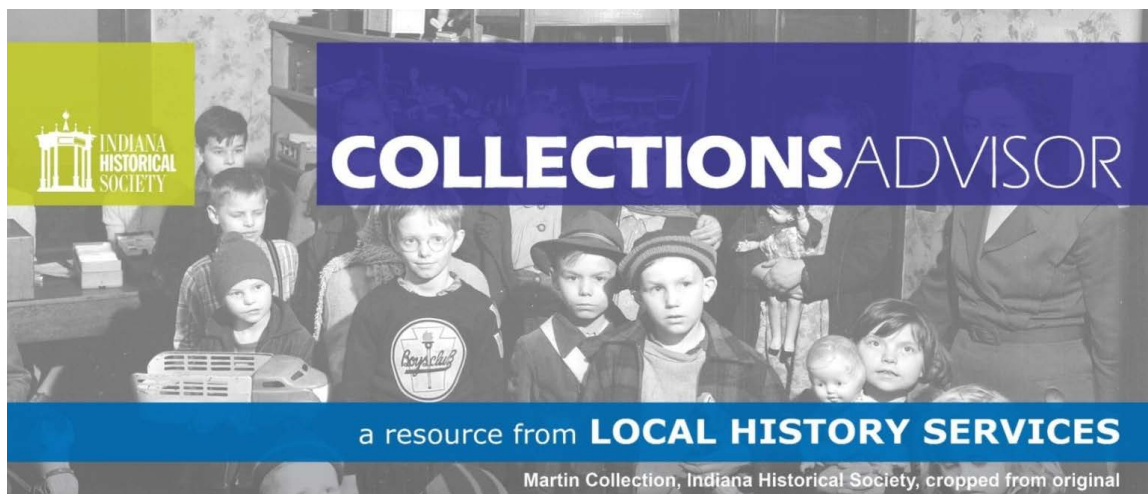


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Planning for Collections Storage Cabinetry

by Karen Butler-Clary, registrar, [The History Center](#) (Fort Wayne)

Museum staff and volunteers are often masters of making do where collections storage furniture is concerned. In the continuum of collections care from basic to advanced, answers to storage conundrums may be found anywhere from obtaining surplus medical records cabinets from defunct hospitals to building ingenious systems using recycled wood and metal. But when funding to purchase purpose-built collections storage furniture comes your way, how should you plan and prepare?

Planning for new storage cabinetry can be a daunting task, but with proper preparation it goes quite smoothly. The History Center recently received a grant to purchase cabinets for our collection of firearms and a second grant for wardrobes to store hanging garments. For both collections, we were working with limited space. After carefully considering how best to use the space, we then calculated how much storage furniture to buy. The previous garment storage system totaled 77 linear feet of hanging space, but in the exact same area the new cabinets provide 104 linear feet of hanging space. Shelving space for boxed textiles is also incorporated within the garment cabinets. Moving artifacts formerly stored on shelves into uniformly sized boxes uses shelving space more efficiently and allows for lower stacks of



Garment storage area at the beginning of the project.



Painting and plaster repair completed before the new cabinets are installed.

boxes that leave enough clearance to meet fire code. Additionally, carts and movable stairs may now be used in the storage space due to the smaller footprint of the new cabinets.

In choosing storage furniture we planned for the long term by selecting durable cabinets that can adjust to meet future needs. The cabinets purchased for the firearms collection are manufactured by Delta Designs, Ltd. (DDLX series) with a mix of drawers that are 5 $\frac{3}{8}$ and 3 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inches high. Depending on future storage needs, the drawers could be swapped for shelves, garment rods or rolled storage racks. More cabinets could also be added to absorb the displaced drawers. The DDLX cabinet also allows vertical shelf adjustments on 1-inch centers, so height can be set exactly where needed but easily changed if objects are moved. For added security, the cabinets can be locked.

The storage units for our hanging garment collection have both garment hanging rods and shelves. The rods and shelves can be moved vertically within the units on 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ - inch centers to adapt to the length of the hanging garments. The cabinets are constructed of powder coated steel and enclosed on all sides but the front. This is a vast improvement from our previous plywood and angle post shelving units. To keep cost and weight down – since these were installed on the third floor of our 122-year-old building – we opted to close the front with a curtain hanging from a tension rod. Curtains were made in-house from Tyvek. However, hinged doors or roll-up doors could always be added in the future.

Here are a few helpful tips to keep in mind when planning for new storage furniture:

- Examine your storage space and explore layouts that allow for maximization of space. You may have more space than you think!
 - Work with your vendor to determine what storage furniture will best fit your needs and develop possible floor plan options.
 - Think about how staff moves within the space and allow enough room for maneuvering collections objects as well as ladders, rolling stairs and carts.
- When you have settled on the plan make sure it works for you:
 - If you are free to work around your current set-up, use painter's tape to mark out the floor plan.
 - Make sure you can comfortably move through the space.
 - Double check that the new layout does not prevent doors from opening all the way or prevent a cart from moving through the aisle.
- Inspect your storage area and plan ahead for maintenance and repairs. Set aside time to give the



Installing the new garment storage units.



Garment storage units following installation.



Hanging garments in their new storage units.



New cabinet for firearms storage.

room a fresh coat of paint or fix crumbling plaster while there are no objects or furniture in the way.

- Do a thorough cleaning of the entire space while it is empty of collections.
- Use this as an opportunity to inventory collection items in the storage area – two birds with one stone! The inventory may add time and planning to your project but it will be well worth it when you are finished.

Resources

[Delta Designs, Ltd.](#)

[National Park Service Museum Handbook: Chapter 7, Museum Collection Storage](#)

[National Park Service Conserve-O-Gram 4/1: Museum Storage Cabinets](#)

[National Park Service Conserve-O-Gram 4/10: Determining Museum Storage Equipment Needs](#)

[Northeast Document Conservation Center: Storage Furniture, A Brief Review of Current Options](#)



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