

# INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS ADVISOR

A RESOURCE FROM IHS LOCAL HISTORY SERVICES

[LOCAL HISTORY SERVICES](#) | [INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY](#) | [PAST ISSUES](#) | FOLLOW LHS ON: [Twitter](#) [Facebook](#)

Issue 120 | October 2021

## CHANGING SEASONS, CHANGING OBJECTS

By Karen DePauw, manager, IHS Local History Services

One of the easiest ways to help preserve collection items is to make sure those on exhibit are rotated on a regular basis. Besides temperature and relative humidity, a major cause of object deterioration is light. Light can lead to various types of damage within objects sensitive to it, such as photographs, textiles, archives, and artistic works on paper.



[Bed with Toys at "New House" of Charles Wright Milhous.](#) (Indiana Historical Society)

It is common to hear the phrase "let objects rest" when talking about object rotation on exhibit. However, as much as that may call to mind images of decadently relaxing beds, spa days, and rejuvenating walks in the forest, no amount of "rest" will counteract the damage to an object. Light damage is a cumulative and irreversible type of damage to light-sensitive objects. When objects "rest" it merely means their lives are being extended because for a period of time they are not exposed to a damaging environment.

The first step in making sure objects get rotated is to identify the items in an exhibit susceptible to damage from display (check out this [Collections Advisor](#) for information on sensitive items). This list does not

[APPLY  
FOR A  
HERITAGE  
SUPPORT  
GRANT](#)

### ONLINE RESOURCES

[Collections  
Advisors](#)  
(Indiana Historical  
Society)

[Chapter 7: Using  
Museum  
Collections in  
Exhibits](#)  
(National Park  
Service)

[The Environment:  
2.4 Protection  
from Light  
Damage](#)  
(Northeast  
Document  
Conservation  
Center)

[Give it a Rest -  
Thoughts on  
Exhibiting Light-  
sensitive Objects](#)  
(Registrar Trek:  
The Next  
Generation)

[Light Exposure for  
Artifacts on  
Exhibition](#)  
(Conservation  
Center for Art and  
Historical  
Artifacts)

[Limiting Light  
Damage from  
Display/Exhibition](#)  
(Library of  
Congress)

[What is a  
Rotation?](#)  
(The Postal  
Museum)

### TRAINING

need to include items in exhibits that will be up for six months or less but should focus on longer-term exhibits.



[H.P. Wasson Company Glamour Window Display](#). (Indiana Historical Society)

After creating the list, consider if the object is an illustration of the story or the story itself. For instance, a case explaining life in the mid-1800s and exhibiting a dress from the 1850s could easily be rotated with any other clothing item in the collection that illustrates fashion during that period. Even though the item's specific story is told, any dress from the right period could also fit the exhibit needs. On the other hand, if a case tells the story of life as a soldier in Desert Storm, it would be imperative that the current uniform be rotated with another uniform that also tells a soldier's story during Desert Storm.

Once these things have been identified, it is time to determine when the objects will be rotated. It is advisable to rotate objects every six months unless the object is particularly sensitive or the lender has requested something different. Start by looking at the institutional calendar. Is there a time when it makes the most sense to rotate items? Does the gallery shut down right around the winter holidays? If there is a natural time in the year when galleries are closed to the public, that would be a prime time to rotate objects. If there are not those opportunities, however, take a look at the open schedule for the galleries. Perhaps they are closed on Mondays and every Monday in the month of October you could rotate items in a few cases at a time.

## AND PROGRAMS

[Beyond the Dinosaur Hall: Welcoming Young Children and Their Grown-Ups into Your Museum](#)

Oct. 7 -  
Texas Historical Commission  
webinar.

[Care of Painted Surfaces](#)

Oct. 13 -  
Connecting to  
Collections Care  
webinar.

[Webinars Recorded - Indiana Historical Society](#).



[Moving of Indiana Oxygen Building, 1995.](#) (Indiana Historical Society)

Finally, make sure to keep track of what items were on exhibit at what time. Whether using a spreadsheet or collections management software, these records are vital for the preservation of the objects. This is especially important if the exhibition will be up for multiple years and the object being rotated tells a specific story that only a few items can tell. In this case, it might be necessary to put that item back on display later in the exhibit's run. If this is necessary, try to identify at least three items that can rotate in that space. This way each item can be on display for six months and off for twelve months, greatly decreasing the overall damage done during the entire run of the exhibit.

By identifying objects sensitive to exhibit environments, choosing additional items to fill those roles, and creating an object rotation schedule, the museum can greatly decrease the potential damage to items on exhibit. One last thought, having trouble remembering to change objects? Try doing it twice a year with the change of seasons, each fall and spring or winter and summer.

---

This is a free publication. Anyone may subscribe.

[Local History Services](#)

Indiana Historical Society, 450 West Ohio Street, Indianapolis, IN 46202  
(317) 232-1882 | [localhistoryservices@indianahistory.org](mailto:localhistoryservices@indianahistory.org)

**WE DO  
HISTORY.**  
INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Smithsonian  
Affiliate



PROUD MEMBER OF THE  
International Coalition of  
**SITES of CONSCIENCE**

Indiana's Storyteller™, Connecting People to the Past