

INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS ADVISOR

A RESOURCE FROM IHS LOCAL HISTORY SERVICES

Issue 167 | September 2025

Building Projects and Collections Stewardship

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Museum building projects are big undertakings with a lot of moving parts – working with architects and contractors, thinking about external communications, and planning for operational changes to name just a few. For collecting institutions there's the extra layer of developing strategies for changes to collections stewardship.



Moving Day for the Home of Huldah Cornelia (Marsh) Hawkins (Indiana Historical Society)

Schedule onsite meetings with contractors to talk about collections stewardship and your expectations for how they and any employees will work around objects that may remain onsite. Give clear guidelines and rules for how the work will progress around any collections in work areas or pathways used to move people and equipment. Be clear about who will have

access to particular areas of the building and figure out how you will handle any increased or different security needs.

As you're developing your building project budget, estimate any costs associated with temporary collections storage. You may need to rent offsite spaces for your objects, and some of those objects may require climate-controlled storage. Add time for moving objects into your project timeline. Develop check lists and a system for tracking objects as they move to temporary locations and back again after the building project is complete.

Develop a timeline and task list for checking the offsite storage areas. Be sure to have information about how any problems will be reported and managed. Call your insurer and ask about insurance coverage for objects that are offsite.

You might need to build boxes around objects that can't be moved. For example, a large bureau may not fit through the doors anymore. In that case, you'll need to create a storage envelope that protects the furniture from construction work while still allowing you to do periodic condition checks.

Moving or shifting objects to protect them provides you with a good opportunity to do a quick inventory as well as to check and revise your condition reports. Grab your camera and take some photos, especially of parts of the objects that aren't easily accessible while they're in their normal places. Consider whether you can undertake some rehousing projects before the objects are moved to and from storage or while they're in temporary storage.

Take changing environmental conditions into account. Some building projects will require your HVAC system to be turned off and on for various periods of time. Windows and doors may have to be removed, and plywood put in their places. Plan for object acclimatization if possible. Objects may be exposed to different levels of light. Consider how you'll shield objects for excessive exposure. Think through how you will monitor and manage those environmental variations.

Museum building projects are inherently stressful. Making plans for how you'll care for your collections can alleviate some of that stress as well as ensure that your collections stay safe and happy.

Resources

- [Museum Collection Storage](#) (National Park Service)
- [Protecting Collections during Renovation](#) (Northeast Document Conservation Center)
- [Protection of Collections during Retrofit or Renovation](#) (Smithsonian Institution Archives)

Further Resources

- [Collections Advisors](#) (Indiana Historical Society)
- [Timely Tips](#) (Indiana Historical Society)

Collection Trainings

[Silver Secrets: Practical Preservation for Small to Mid-Sized Collections](#)

Sept. 16 (Connecting to Collections Care)

[From Chaos to Clarity: Centralize your Collection with a Digital Platform](#)

Sept. 16 (Conservation Center for Art and Historical Artifacts)

[AASLH History Hour: Preserving Collections](#)

Sept. 23 (American Association for State and Local History)

Webinars

- [Recorded](#) – (Indiana Historical Society)

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