



Minnesota Historical Society  
Historic Housekeeping Handbook

June 2000

# Minnesota Historical Society

## HISTORIC HOUSEKEEPING HANDBOOK

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

One of the primary objectives in operating an historic property is to promote the historical experience to current audiences while at the same time saving it for future generations. The comprehensive goal of preserving historic sites can be achieved in several ways. These include building maintenance, sound security practices, monitoring of building environments and mechanical systems, disaster preparedness, integrated pest management and management of collections. Contributing to the success of all of these is basic housekeeping. Cleaning is a fundamental, regular practice that can slow down, (or speed it up, if not done properly!) wear and tear of historic interiors and collections, assist in both security and pest prevention and contribute to building monitoring and maintenance.

Various inquiries from the Historic Sites staff and a subsequent survey of MHS Historic Sites in 1999, indicated a need for standards of practice in cleaning at sites. This document is meant to address that need. It provides guidelines and information that is useful to maintaining a level of care that advances the long-term preservation of collections at the Minnesota Historical Society's Historic Sites.

This **Housekeeping Handbook** functions primarily as a guide and reference for housekeeping practices. It does not address building monitoring or maintenance, grounds maintenance, security, disaster preparedness or pest management but is an aspect of each of these. It gives some guidelines, practices and resources for the regular upkeep of historic interiors and their contents. This may be used by Historic Site staff or used in developing contracts for cleaning at a site. Specifications, articles and clarifications should be added to this **Handbook** where relevant and useful to specific site needs. We hope this serves as a foundation for guiding each site in its care and upkeep of historic areas.

This **Handbook** has been developed jointly by the Society's Historic Sites, Conservation and Museum Collections Departments. It was written by Diane L. Adams-Graf, Museum Collections Site Liaison and Paul S. Storch, Objects Conservator, Daniels Objects Conservation Laboratory. Special thanks to the Alexander Ramsey House, Split Rock Lighthouse, James J. Hill House and Sibley House Historic Site staffs for their valuable assistance. Thank you to the Museum Exhibit Department for images. This **Handbook, checklists and forms are available in hard copy, on the Society's shared network drive in the Sites folder and at the Museum Collections Department's intranet site (Fletcher)**. Questions regarding content or application should be directed to the Museum Collections Site Liaison or the Conservation Department's Objects Conservator.

## II. HANDLING COLLECTIONS

Appropriate handling of collections is inherent in safe housekeeping and in providing a certain level of care for the collections. Most damage to historic collections, with the exception of disasters, occurs in improper handling. The Society's Conservation Department offers quarterly training sessions in artifact handling to all MHS staff. Make sure that all staff working with cleaning of historic areas or collections have had training in object handling either by identified site staff who have been trained or by the MHS Conservation Department. Some print-outs are appendices to this **Handbook**. Additionally, materials are presently available (soon to be accessible on the MHS web site) through the Conservation Department's Outreach Office and through various other organizations online. These include the National Park Service's *Conserve O Gram*, a series published as a reference on collections management and curatorial issues, *CCI Notes*, a series of collections management and conservation issues published by the Canadian Conservation Institute and "Tech Talk", published by MHS. A video entitled, "Housekeeping for Historic Sites" (Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1996) is also available, on loan, through the Museum Collections Department.

Although not addressed specifically in this **Handbook**, the maintenance of a stable environment, along with housekeeping, is an important part of long-term preservation. Light, heat, humidity and air pollution all have direct and immediate impacts on building interiors and their contents. Much of the damage caused by these can never be reversed, most notably, the consequences of light. It is strongly advised that light levels in historic buildings be reduced whenever possible. This may be as simple as the prudent use of shutters or blinds and the application of ultraviolet filters on glass windows. To what extent specific site environments are monitored or controlled is presently being determined on a site-by-site basis by the MHS Historic Sites Department in collaboration with the Conservation and Museum Collections Departments.

Environmental monitoring kits and instruments are available on loan to historical organizations throughout the state from the MHS Conservation Department's Outreach Office (see Resource section). These kits and instruments may be used to identify and document current temperature, humidity and light levels. Electronic monitoring systems are also available through the Conservation Department's Objects Conservator and the Historic Sites Department's Preservation and Construction Manager. Please coordinate any temporary monitoring through the Objects Conservator or Sites Preservation and Construction Manager.

In housekeeping, it is critical to distinguish between the handling of modern materials and collection artifacts. This distinction is important to make in all areas of building content, use and maintenance. It is **recommended that you have two cleaning manuals or clearly differentiated lists; one for maintenance of modern equipment and facilities** (bathrooms, non-historic spaces, public galleries, &c.) **and another for maintenance of historic spaces and contents**. Housekeeping tools, equipment and supplies should be identified for one use or the other and have separate storage areas identified solely for that purpose. In both cases, cleaning tools and supplies should be carried and placed in areas away from collections while in use.

It is important to ensure that all necessary and appropriate equipment and supplies are on hand and available to cleaning staff. Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) are to be available to all staff for all chemical products used on site. If housekeeping is contracted, certain types of supplies should be specified or prohibited in the contract. Additionally, all equipment/supplies used by the contractor should be itemized and reviewed during the contract period. A list of appropriate and unacceptable cleaning products is identified in this **Handbook**. Questions regarding specific types of equipment or cleaning supplies should be directed to the MHS Objects Conservator.

Supplies for proper handling and transporting collections are also necessary to housekeeping. Among these are gloves, cloths and brushes, carts and/or carrying containers. Plastic or metal hand carts that are lined with ethafoam can be used at sites that have large areas of storage or display. In other areas and in historic homes, a lined basket or lined, plastic-coated wire tray may be safe ways to object(s) in an historic environment where a cart is not possible. Refer to the resources identified in this **Handbook**. Also, the MHS Historic Sites Documentation Project (HSDP) conducted an inventory of all collections at sites from 1996-1997. If an accession number was not present on an artifact, it was assigned an FIC number and tagged. Make sure that tags are not removed during cleaning. As curatorial reviews are completed and numbers are physically applied, these artifacts will no longer have tags but until then, it's important that they not be separated from their temporary number assignments.

Common sense, careful observation and consistency are the keys to successful cleaning and resulting care of collections. These and the appropriate training and tools will make valuable contributions to the preservation and security of the MHS permanent collections at Historic Sites. We hope that this **Handbook** is a useful guide and we encourage you to contact other staff resources with any of your collections care questions or needs.

### **III. HOUSEKEEPING**

#### **A. Scheduling**

##### **Scheduling and Reporting**

Historic housekeeping needs to follow a specific schedule. Otherwise, some work is forgotten, overlooked or inconsistently done. Site-specific schedules should be written by site management and completed by assigned personnel (staff or contract). **All schedules should provide for reporting or include a housekeeping log that allows for reporting of any discrepancies in collection condition, insect infestation, or other changes in general conditions.** All reporting should include the reporter's name (initials) and date of entry. Site managers should review all reporting on a regular basis to confirm its completion and copy to the MHS Objects Conservator with any specific questions or concerns. At some sites, infestation reporting may already be part of an established Integrated Pest Management (IPM) program. Monitoring the objects on display and in storage, for pests, can also be part of the regular housekeeping tasks.

Damage to artifacts should be reported to the Site Liaison in the *Incident Report* form. Requests for conservation survey or treatment of a specific collection item should be submitted to the Site Liaison in the *Conservation Work Request for Collections at Historic Sites* form. Both of these are in the appendices of this **Handbook** and are available on the Society's shared network drive in the Sites folder.

##### **Sample Schedule for Historic Housekeeping**

Depending on the number of buildings, their size, number of furnishings or other artifacts and length of the visitor season, the cleaning schedule will vary. In large historic house sites, some tasks might be rotated. For instance, dusting of furniture may take place on alternating floors on alternating weeks. What is important is to establish a cleaning schedule that provides for full cleaning on a regular basis.

Each site should review its historic buildings and interiors to first identify all necessary cleaning tasks. Observe conditions. How many visitors are there on a daily basis? What areas are they in? Are windows or doors often open? What is the dust accumulation like in different areas? Walk through each building, each historic room and public space and list what needs to be cleaned. Detail these tasks in a specific schedule that can be outlined in a task list, work log and contract, if applicable. Identify necessary supplies and appropriate places to store them. Review any training needs. Determine what specific questions about particular building interiors, collections or methods remain and direct them to the MHS Objects Conservator.

The following is a *sample list* of the types of tasks that should be done on a regular schedule. It is only a sample. Every historic site should develop its own cleaning schedule based on the specific needs identified in its review.

## Daily

- Empty all trash containers.
- Dust identified historic rooms; wood surfaces, hardware (brass, &c.), marble, window frames, floor boards and all other interior horizontal surfaces within reach *so that a full rotation of the house/building is completed on a biweekly basis*. Clean all window sill horizontal surfaces when cleaning frames. Do not leave insect carcasses on the sills, as they provide food for mice and other predators. Identification of insects can be made by the Objects Conservator. Put insect in air-tight container and deliver to Objects Lab.
- Vacuum public traffic runners and non-historic carpets.
- Sweep floors and shake non-historic throw rugs.
- Enter work in housekeeping log. Log completed rooms and changes, damages and insects (pest monitoring log, if applicable).

## Weekly or Biweekly

- Dust tops of all doors.
- Wash floors and non-historic rugs.
- Clean, dust and wash building entrances/foyer. Clean doors and screens.
- Brush all window shutters, if applicable.
- Enter work in housekeeping log.

## Monthly

- Clean mirrors, glass panels in furniture and picture glass.
- Vacuum or dust walls.
- Blow dust from carved or molded picture frames.
- Vacuum historic carpets with screen on rotating basis so that all historic carpet are cleaned on a six month basis..
- Dust ceramics, glassware and light fixtures.
- Clean all window sills and frames in non-historic areas.
- Enter work in housekeeping log. Note accumulation of insects in IPM log.

## Quarterly

- Dust/vacuum books, if needed.
- Clean windows.
- Dust metal.
- Wash non-historic table coverings, curtains and other non-historic textiles.
- Rotate vacuuming of upholstery, drapes, bedspreads, tablecloths and other exposed historic textiles so that all are cleaned on a semiannual basis.
- Enter in log.

## Semi-annually

- Vacuum or dust ceilings
- Verify that all historic carpets and other textiles have been vacuumed.
- Remove and rotate all table covers, bed covers, if possible, after cleaning. Repack and store those removed.
- Dust/clean wood details with cotton swabs (rotate into room cleaning every six months).

- Wet clean all window shutters, if applicable.
- Enter in log.

### **Annually**

- Wash ceramics, as necessary. They might be washed annually, as needed, following approval and instruction by the Objects Conservator.
- Clean floors thoroughly, as appropriate.
- Remove and clean light fixtures after checking with Site Liaison. Instructions will be provided.
- Wash exposed glassware and china per instructions.
- Vacuum, wash or dry-clean (as designated) all curtains and drapes.
- Wet-clean all painted woodwork.
- Other work identified in site review.
- Enter in log.

## B. Books

Use extreme care in handling. Never pull a book out by putting your fingers over the top of the spine or by gripping the back with your fingernails. Expose enough of the spine so that you can get a firm grip on it.

Historic books can generally be vacuumed with a narrow, slender attachment (micro-attachments) to the vacuum. If the binding appears fragile, they might be gently dusted with a “Dust Bunny” or brushed with a camel hair brush (see illustration). If there is enough space above the shelved books to safely handle the vacuum attachment or brush, it may not be necessary to remove the books. If books are removed, an entire row of books should be removed from each shelf so that each book can be dusted as well as the shelf. When dusting volumes, dust away from the binding, from the bound edge to the paper edge. Observe how dust accumulates. Damage can occur easily when books are handled so clean no more often than necessary, certainly, *no more than quarterly*.

If at all possible, allow for ventilation behind the books on the shelf and behind the bookcases.

Unless books can be removed from and replaced on the shelves easily and without obstruction, there is always the likelihood of the books being damaged. Books must never be crammed tightly into shelves. There should be enough room between any volume to allow finger space on each side of it (see illustration).

Look for any signs of mold, insect infestation or other pests. Report them in the housekeeping log and/or pest monitoring log and inform the Objects Conservator in a timely manner.

Make note of loose or detached book boards (covers) and report them to the Conservation Department’s Paper and Book Conservator. Do not use string or elastic bands to hold books together. If they must be tied together, secure them with wide (one-two inches) cotton twill tape.

When displaying a book (off of its shelf), consult with the Paper and Book Conservator to identify the best manner in which to display the book. Books are not displayed open flat in MHS displays. Plexiglas “cradles”, sized for the volume, are recommended for exhibiting open books. Books with light-sensitive elements, hand-painted features or fragile bindings may not be suitable for display at all.

## **C. Carpet**

- Vacuum historic carpets with nozzle through screen (see supplies) every three to four months.
- Do not vacuum historic carpets with power head/beater brush of vacuum.
- Modern/reproduction throw rugs should be used in public traffic areas. Historic throw rugs should be cleaned as above.
- Modern carpets may be vacuumed daily, if needed.
- After each carpet is vacuumed, wash the brush attachment in warm soapy water; be sure the brush is dry before vacuuming the next carpet. This washing will prevent the transfer of insect eggs and larva from carpet to carpet. Purchase of multiple brush attachments will increase the efficiency of vacuuming.

### **Historic Carpet**

First remove your shoes before walking on a historic carpet even when your cleaning it. This will help to prevent abrasion and the grinding in of outside dirt and particulate into the surface.

Second it is often impossible to clear the visible dirt from the surface of a carpet while using a screen. Especially if some dry media like dirt, or cheerios, has spilled on it. This makes vacuuming appear to be a useless or fruitless endeavor. Subsequently no one wants to vacuum the carpeted areas.

It is not uncommon for both conservators and technicians to surface clean a carpet without the screen if the textile is in good and sound condition. In this manner the soft head of the vacuum is placed on the rug in a step by step row by row manner. The head of the vacuum should never be dragged or rubbed back and forth on the rug. Unfortunately it is necessary to do this on ones hands and knees. However being close to the surface allows you to see the dirt better and since it is only done four time a year no one should be the worse for wear.

## D. Ceramics

- Ceramics is a broad term covering porcelain and all types of pottery.
- Ceramics should be handled as little as possible. Always look carefully at the object before attempting to lift it to see if there are any repairs that could come apart or sections that could be knocked off. Always use both hands when picking up an object and make sure you have plenty of room. Never reach over one object to pick up another and always know exactly where you are moving the object. Confirm that your movement with the object to its new location is unobstructed. Never pick an object up by the handle or rim. A basket or plastic-coated wire tray lined with cotton batting or acid free tissue and/or muslin for padding is a safe way to carry ceramics.
- Remove all rings and other jewelry prior to handling or moving artifacts. Clean, dry hands, without lotion, are acceptable when handling glass and glazed ceramic objects.
- Never stack ceramics, one inside of the other, unless they are the same size (e.g. plates), are interleaved with padding, and are not stacked more than ten inches high.
- If an historic site is closed for the winter season, consideration should be given to moving artifacts to a central location (e.g. table) in each room and covered with paper "hats" (marked with accession number). This allows for cleaning of other spaces and diminishes the need for special cleaning of artifacts. Consider the risks of handling whenever considering movement, packing and/or storage of artifacts during the off season.
- Ceramics with rough bases should have felt mats with a mylar barrier to protect the surfaces upon which they are displayed.
- Do not wash ceramics without first consulting the Objects Conservator. They might be washed annually, as needed, following approval and instruction by the Objects Conservator.
- Dust ceramics with a common, natural bristle, brush monthly, during open season.
- Avoid exposing historic ceramics to food, water and excessive pressure.
- Carefully inspect ceramics when dusting (whenever handling) for structural weaknesses.
- Report any changes, damage, &c. in housekeeping log.

## E. Wood

Always use basic care in handling furniture. Refer to “Handling of Objects” attachment in this **Handbook**.

Furniture should probably be dusted at least weekly based on the findings of the initial cleaning needs review. Staff at the site should study furniture collections to identify and clearly list which pieces of furniture should not be dusted at all, which are better dusted with a hand-held brush to a vacuum nozzle (away from the surface) and which have a strong enough surface to resist dust abrasion and can be wiped with a clean, soft, cotton cloth. Consult with MHS Objects Conservator for further advice on this after conducting the preliminary assessment.

Avoid placing furniture near radiant heat or high light sources. Gilt and composite picture frames must not be hung in the direct line of forced-air ventilators.

- If furniture must be moved, observe the following: Before lifting an object, make sure that all parts to be handled are in sound condition. Identify whether any loose or removable parts need to be removed prior to any movement. Secure (tie closed with cotton twill tape) or remove any drawers prior to move. Moving even quite a small piece usually needs two people. Refrain from handling upholstery in the course of moving a piece of furniture. Stools and chairs should be carried at the base of the seat. Never carry marble and glass tops flat but raise them into a vertical position and carry them in that position. Get specific recommendations from appropriate staff if there are any concerns regarding how to remove marble or glass tops.
- Dust with a plain, clean, soft rag (cotton diaper), “Dust Bunny” cloth or, dust with a hand-held, soft bristle brush. When brushing, move brush gently across surface of furniture toward vacuum nozzle near edge of artifact.
- Never use cloths or dusters with raw edges and dangling threads.
- Wax, if needed, with Renaissance Wax after consulting with MHS Objects Conservator.
- Never polish with an aerosol polish or any polish with silicone in it.
- Inspect furniture in storage areas at least once a month. Dust as needed or vacuum with a soft bristle brush.
- Cotton swabs may be used in dusting furniture details (semiannually).
- Do not place vases with water on or near historic furniture. Do not use live plants in historic rooms.
- In normal circumstances, surfaces need a light dusting with a clean, dry cloth to keep them clean and free of dust once every two weeks, depending on environmental conditions and visitor traffic. Use caution in dusting furniture which has pieces of molding or veneer missing.
- Spring Cleaning: Thorough dusting should be done underneath a piece of furniture, around the back, inside and outside the drawers, so that every surface which can be reached is free of dust. Use the opportunity of spring cleaning to carefully review objects for any changes in their appearance. Thoroughly dust areas that are not reached in day-to-day cleaning. Wherever possible, all furniture should be moved once a year to prevent dust from becoming trapped underneath and behind it.

- Avoid contact with textiles and leather upholstery when cleaning wood sections of furniture. Leather upholstery can be carefully dusted separately. Textile upholstery can be vacuumed through a fiberglass screen (see illustration).
- For heavy grime (wood banister, &c), clean with a mixture of Murphy's Oil soap (per manufacturer's directions), water and a few drops of ammonia (2-4 drops per gallon of water). Dry thoroughly.
- While cleaning, always look out for damage such as lifting veneers or brass inlay and flaking lacquer, or structural defects such as rickety legs. Do not attempt to stick bits of furniture back into the furniture. Place any parts or pieces in a sealed plastic bag marked with furniture name, accession number and date. Complete *Incident Report* form and submit to Site Liaison.

### **Woodwork (Painted)**

- Tortoiseshell, lacquered, japanned and papier mache' surfaces should not be dusted or cleaned. Observe surface closely to determine if there is flaking or crumbling. Report changes in housekeeping log.
- Clean with solution of Murphy's Oil soap cleaner (per manufacturer's directions) and tepid, distilled or deionized water. Make the solution fairly weak and change the water often. Wash twice a year. Stubborn grime: remove with warmer water with 2-4 drops of household ammonia per gallon. Wash with clean, cotton cloth that is wrung out well.

### **Woodwork (Finished)**

- Clean with diluted Murphy's Oil soap solution (per manufacturer's directions) and 2-4 drops household ammonia per gallon of water (no more than once per year). Stubborn grime: consult with MHS Objects Conservator on major cleaning procedures.
- Touch up finish with Butcher's Wax [ White Diamond Paste Wax ] as needed. Use Butcher's Wax for banisters and heavily used areas. Use Renaissance Wax for little used areas. Do not wax more than once per year. Apply as directed with clean, cotton cloth.

### **Wood Floors**

- Dust with a dry mop.
- Wash with diluted Murphy's Oil soap (per manufacturer's directions). Wash with a string mop that is frequently rinsed and well wrung out. Change water often. If the mop snags on the floor, gently remove string by hand. Floor splinters should be bagged and reported in the cleaning log. Consult with the Historic Sites Preservation and Construction Office for further direction.
- Wax with Butcher's Wax when needed (every six-twelve months depending on use).
- Wooden floor heating grates should be avoided with the mop and cleaned by hand with clean, cotton cloth using same cleaning solution.

## F. Glass

- Glass is generally light and can be easily knocked over. Never try to carry more than one piece of glass at a time unless pieces are padded on a cart or transported in a basket/carrier unit as described earlier in object handling.
- Glass with painted or gilded decoration should not be cleaned in any way. Handle as little as possible.
- Dust with a dry cloth every two weeks (e.g. "Dust Bunny").
- Washing Exposed Glassware:
  - Once yearly in warm water and diluted Orvus (1/4 teaspoon per gallon of water). Orvus may be obtained from MHS Textile and Objects labs.
  - Pad dish pan with towels to avoid breakage, change water frequently. Never put more than one piece of glass at a time in the pan. Check to make sure that there are not any previous repairs that might separate and verify that applied accession numbers are not "floating" off. Drain on paper towels laid out on flat surface. Use a soft cloth for drying, taking care not to put excess pressure on any one area, particularly the rim or bowl. Never hold a glass by the stem when drying.
- Windows can be cleaned with a mixture of distilled water (50%), Isopropyl alcohol (50%) and a few drops of ammonia. Spray onto clean, soft cloth and wipe window with cloth. Avoid getting cleaning solution onto the putty that holds the glass in its pane. Windows covered with UV film should be dusted with a brush and wiped with a damp, clean, soft cloth.
- Avoid exposing historic glassware to food and water. Avoid exposing historic glassware to any pressure of any kind.
- Inspect when dusting or washing (whenever handling) for structural weaknesses.
- Cleaning Mirrors: Know how the mirror is secured to the wall prior to cleaning. It may be safer for two people to be present; one steadying as necessary. Clean with an Isopropyl alcohol based glass cleaner only. Avoid dripping the cleaner into the rabbet of the frame or getting the cleaner on the frame surface.
- Remove and clean light fixtures after checking with Objects Conservator. Instructions will be given or specifications provided in the case of chandeliers.

## G. Marble

- Vacuum gently every two weeks or so. Brush ( with natural bristle brush) decoration to loosen deep dust while vacuuming.
- Dust with clean, dry, cotton cloth daily (or “Dust Bunny”) at least twice a week.
- Wash once a year in a weak solution of ammonia and distilled water if recommended by MHS Objects Conservator. No more than once yearly.
- **Never** use chlorinated cleaners on marble or limestone objects or architectural features.
- Wax, if needed, with Renaissance Wax.
- Consult the MHS Objects Conservator if any stone objects become stained in any way.
- Inspect weekly for structural weaknesses, loose pieces or loose decoration. Report in log.

## H. Metal

Metal surfaces are easily scratched and worn away. Do not think of metals as infinitely durable. Never attempt to remove a patina (surface coloration of the metal object). Refer this to the Objects Conservator.

Dusting metal objects should be kept to a minimum because the dust itself is abrasive. This applies to cleaning of historic metal tools, busts, and any metal parts of composite artifacts. Never rub when dusting, just flick the dust lightly off of the surface with a natural bristle brush. Whenever possible, the dusting of metal should be limited to three times per year. Do not touch metalwork with bare hands. When dusting metal, always wear clean gloves (see illustration). Vinyl gloves are often appropriate as they create a stronger barrier between hand perspiration and the metal. See supply list for source of gloves.

- Do not polish any metal surfaces. Check with MHS Objects Conservator on specific cases.
- Wipe brass every week with soft cloth (cotton diaper).
- Check with MHS Objects Conservator prior to polishing any silver on site. Cleaning and polishing of silver and other decorative metal objects are conservation treatments and must be done under proper safety conditions and supervision. Please submit a Conservation Work Request form to the MC Site Liaison for any and all objects that you consider to require treatment. Methods for minor surface cleaning on site, will be provided by the Objects Conservator when deemed appropriate. This is sometimes possible to do on site if cleaning/polishing is warranted for the object.
- Use Corrosion Intercept bags (see supply list in this **Handbook**) for storage and to cover items (e.g. large holloware objects) overnight when on display. Corrosion Intercept bags slow down tarnishing in uncoated objects and replace the need for polishing those items already treated by the Objects Conservator.
- Metal building features such as railings, plumbing fixtures, doorknobs and other items that are subject to public handling or frequent use should be cleaned weekly with “Dust Bunnies” to remove grime. Consult with the MHS Objects Conservator for cleaning beyond that. Damage to building features should be reported to the Historic Sites Preservation and Construction Manager.
- Carefully observe metal surfaces and report any changes in the housekeeping log and to the MHS Objects Conservator.

A survey of other architectural, metal fixtures such as light fixtures, hinges, &c. will be conducted by the MHS Objects Conservator and a maintenance plan developed jointly between the Objects Conservator and the Historic Sites Preservation and Construction Manager for each specific site. This schedule of work will be determined by Historic Sites and Conservation. Until that time, general dusting of these items is appropriate.

## I. Paintings and Framed Works of Art

Some of the most basic methods of care for paintings and other framed works of art are in their method of display. When picture chains or wires do not need to be visible, confirm that two wall screws are used to hold wire. Wherever possible, within the scope of the interpretive plan and furnishings research, hang framed work above furnishings or in other places where they are most likely not to be touched or bumped by visitors. Do not hang work above radiators or a fireplace that is being used or in direct line of a forced-air ventilator. Paintings on outside walls should have corks secured to the bottom corners of the frame to isolate the picture from the exterior wall and allow circulation of air.

- Never touch the surface of a painting with anything.
- Never hold a tool or attempt to position something above a painting.
- Prohibit the use of aerosols or any sprays near paintings.
- Always remove paintings when decorating, construction or repairs are taking place in the room.
- Never hang a painting on a freshly plastered or painted wall.
- When taking down a painting, remove all ornaments and furniture below the painting first.
- Smaller paintings should be carried with one hand supporting underneath and the other hand at the side. Use two people in removing large, framed pieces. Carry it vertically, know where it is being moved to and have an unobstructed path identified before removing it from the wall. Refer to “Handling of Objects” attachment.
- Dusting frames will generally not improve the appearance of the frame. Do not attempt to dust a frame if the gilding is flaking. Do not dust with a cloth or feather duster, either of which abrades the surface. Dust top and bottom edges lightly, with natural hair brush. Make sure that dust does not fall on to the painting surface.
- Do not clean glass with any window cleaner or any liquid, including water. Buff glass with a soft, clean, dry chamois leather.
- Framing, unframing and transport should be referred to the MHS Objects Conservator.
- Temporary storage on-site should follow storage specifications. Consult with the Objects Conservator for guidelines and options regarding storage of paintings.

## J. Textiles, Historic

- Table covers should be changed once or twice a year and those on display allowed to rest in stable, storage environments (see “Historic Sites - Storage Guidelines” in this **Handbook**).
- The MHS Textile Conservator must be consulted prior to any wet-cleaning and/or steaming of historic textiles. It is possible that some sturdy, color-fast, cotton, fabrics may be approved for hand washing in warm water with minimal amount of Orvus, rinsed thoroughly with distilled water and dried flat on sheet of Plexiglas. If approved, this may be done only once a year as it is stressful to fibers.
- Never press or steam historic textiles without approval of the MHS Textile Conservator. *Do not* press textiles while on an historic table or another artifact.
- Curtains may be vacuumed (with screen) if not washable. Reproduction drapes may be dry-cleaned. Instruct the cleaners to use extreme care in handling and to use fresh solvent only. If possible (generally in the metro area), use a dry-cleaner that is approved by the MHS Textile Conservator.
- Historic non washables may be vacuumed through a screen. Upholstery should be vacuumed every three months, using nozzle and screen. Place the head of the vacuum on the screened surface of upholstery in a step by step row by row manner. Never drag the head of the vacuum across the surface. Upholstery is often extremely fragile due to wear and light degradation.
- Historic non-washables, such as heavy drapery, often collect thick layers of dust. This is especially prevalent along window valances, and bed curtains. For this level of build up it would not be uncommon for a conservator to vacuum these without a screen. The head of the vacuum would be placed in the same careful way as described before.
- Carefully vacuum fragile or damaged material only after consulting with MHS Textile Conservator.

A conservator should be consulted if any dust, plant material or frass is found to collect in, around, or under upholstered furniture or draperies as this is an indication of infestation. Upholstered objects are excellent homes for entire colonies of insects before any damage is noted on the surfaces. Therefore, careful and regularly scheduled monitoring is important.

For further details of pest management and monitoring infestations, consult the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) plan for your site and the section covering that in this manual. It is very beneficial to have the physical evidence of the infestation preserved for inspection and identification of the species involved. It is all too easy to vacuum up carcasses before one gets a good look.

Finally the benefits of dust coverings during off-seasons on all soft furnishings cannot be stressed enough. Dust covers are excellent projects for volunteers. The closing down of a house can be a timely and costly procedure, however, maintenance is less costly than conservation and dust covers can be washed and reused for many seasons.





#### **IV. INTERPRETIVE CENTER EXHIBITS CLEANING GUIDELINES**

A number of MHS Historic Sites have interpretive centers and exhibit galleries that contain items from the Society's permanent collections. It is important for these spaces to have regular cleaning schedules and practices instituted. The following guidelines are based on the cleaning recommendations and chart developed for the Minnesota History Center exhibit galleries. Regular and consistent cleaning of gallery spaces and exhibits props extends the useful life of both objects and exhibits furniture.

<b>GALLERY CLEANING CHECKLIST</b>
-----------------------------------

- Set up a regular schedule for inspection of the gallery, objects and props using the attached chart. These inspections are important for security, identification of damage and preventive maintenance. Copy this chart as needed, and set up an accessible file. A hanging clipboard for ease in regular, routine inspection may be useful. Inspections and observations must be on a regular basis and consistent, with one staff person (with a backup assigned) responsible for the task. This should be conducted at least once a week.
- Identify frequency and type of cleaning needs by making observations in the exhibit area. Are displayed artifacts in cases? Are the cases sealed? Are artifacts in open areas? Are props and other exhibit components in open areas? How much visitor traffic is in gallery? What is the level of dust accumulation?
- Set up a regular schedule for cleaning of the gallery and props. Identify specific spaces, floors, rails, cases and other exhibit sections to be cleaned and define frequency (monthly, annually, &c.). Perform routine cleaning on a consistent basis. Do not clean artifacts in exhibits unless specifically trained and instructed to do so. Arrangements and specifications for cleaning artifacts in exhibits are made with the Objects Conservator.
- Use only Conservation Department approved cleaning supplies and equipment (see supply list in this **Handbook**). Requests regarding the use of particular products by staff or contractors are to be directed to the Objects Conservator.
- Have copies of the MSDSs (Material Safety Data Sheets) for each cleaning product that your crew is using in the galleries to clean non-artifact surfaces (e.g. floors, rugs, Plexiglas, carpet) on hand at all times. Have these posted in one common book.
- Remove shoes when entering dioramas for cleaning procedures.
- Pay careful attention to where vacuum power cords are laid out in a diorama and gallery. Plan out where ladders are placed within a diorama in order not to damage the ground treatment and props. Begin cleaning from the upper areas down. Wipe down the track lighting and ceiling struts/support. Walls should be dusted at least once per year from the ceiling downward.
- Do not attempt to move any permanent collection artifacts on exhibit during cleaning. Most artifacts are attached to their mount or vitrine support in some manner, and an attempted move or removal has the potential to damage the object. Consult the Objects Conservator if it is deemed necessary to move the object off display. Clean and maintain cleaning equipment after every use. Wash brushes, clean out vacuum hoses and tubes, and change vacuum bags frequently.

- Look for chronic exhibit design problems which pose a potential hazard to people or collections or contribute to vandalism in the galleries. Report any damage to collections immediately, using the *Incident Report* form. Record chronic problems and exhibit needs and submit requests for repair or replacement to the MHS Van of Hope team.
- Look for signs of pest damage and infestation in the exhibits spaces. If your site has an Integrated Pest Management Program (IPM) in place, record the observations in the IPM log. If that is not in place yet at your site, report sightings of pests and pest remains to the MHS Objects Conservator.
- The forms included here (Exhibit Cleaning Record and Gallery Cleaning Needs) are both available at the Museum Collections Intranet site and on the shared network drive.

## V. STORAGE GUIDELINES

- Artifacts not on display at an historic site should be stored apart from non-collection items. Non-collection items are things such as cleaning supplies, props, paint, tools or office equipment and supplies. A specific area for storage of non-displayed permanent collections should be identified and used *solely for that purpose*. Do not use the basement or attic. These are inappropriate because of their temperature and humidity extremes and susceptibility to pest infestation. If there are no options other than basement or attic storage, increase the regular inspection and monitor both temperature and humidity.
- Storage area(s) must be locked and otherwise accessible only to authorized staff.
- Lights should be turned off when the storage space is not in use. External sources of light should be eliminated.
- Allow no food or drink in the storage area.
- Do not store items near furnace, radiators, pipes or other sources of water or heat.
- Do not store flammable materials near the storage area.
- Keep a fire extinguisher ready for use near or in the storage area.
- **Keep the storage area clean.**
- Identify all storage areas and appropriate storage method. Artifacts may be wrapped in acid-free tissue and boxed, covered with muslin or hung on hangers or rolled storage units. Shelves should be padded. Items that are stored in other historic artifacts (dresser drawers, china cabinets, &c.) should have barriers of acid-free tissue, board or Mylar, as appropriate, separating artifacts. Consult with the Objects Conservator for storage recommendations or to arrange for a survey of stored collections.
- Identify items that are not covered or boxed. These will need to be cleaned regularly on the site cleaning schedule.
- Inspect all stored objects regularly; at least every three months. Inspect hanging, rolled or boxed artifacts at least biennially (schedule a rotation that will accommodate all artifacts).
- Refer questions regarding storage equipment (shelving, cabinets, &c.) and supplies (acid-free boxes, tissue, ethafoam, &c.) to the Objects or Textile Conservators or to the Site Liaison.
- Requests to remove collections from the site, to any location, must be directed to the Site Liaison.

## VI. DISPLAY GUIDELINES

While it is important that our collections be presented to the public, there are guidelines for proper display practices that will help to prolong the integrity of those objects for the future.

This set of guidelines deals with the objects or furnishings in **small, temporary displays** that Historic Sites staff may set up during specific seasons or special events. Temporary displays such as this, typically do not go through a formal exhibits, collections, or conservation oversight process. Applying the following guidelines to temporary displays will help to prevent inadvertent deterioration and damage to the collections used in them. Contact the Objects Conservator or Site Liaison for further advice or help with specific questions.

- Choose objects for display that are structurally and chemically stable. There should be no loose parts or pieces, shredding of fabric, active flaking, powdering or any other indication that the artifact is not stable, whole and sound. Consult a conservator if there are questions on how to make that determination for a specific object or material. Requests to have objects for display treated by a conservator should be made on the *Conservation Work Request for Collections at Historic Sites* (see attachment) and submitted to the Site Liaison.
- The light level exposure guidelines for works of art on paper and textiles are 50 Lux maximum exposure for a display period not to exceed 90 days. Finished wood, paintings on canvas, leather, and composites of similar materials can withstand exposure levels of up to 200 Lux for a display period not to exceed one year. Inorganic materials such as stone, metals and ceramics, do not have exposure limits. Ultraviolet and infrared radiation must be limited to the greatest extent possible. Do not expose light sensitive, organic objects in display cases to sunlight from windows for any amount of time, even if the window has UV film on it. Consult the Objects Conservator to make arrangements for light level readings. Blue wool fading indicator cards, relative humidity (RH) indicator cards and electronic light loggers are also available from the Conservation Department to place inside the display cases.
- Place the case or artifact, where it is out of direct air flow from heating/cooling duct outlets, drafts and air leaks from windows. Avoid placing cases directly against exterior walls.
- Place the temporary display case, mannequin or artifact, well out of the way of traffic areas and areas of high vibration. Place collections on a sturdy table or vitrine base. Use stanchion barriers if necessary to keep visitors from getting too close and bumping into the case or artifact. Consult with the Site Liaison or Conservation Department staff if object mounts are necessary to support and stabilize a vulnerable object. Obtain Plexiglas book cradles for book displays.
- Avoid using wool felt inside display cases as the felt gives off sulfur which will tarnish metals. Nylon should also be avoided. Polyester, cotton, or blends are acceptable fabrics to use for mound coverings inside vitrines. Do not use Tygon tubing (a PVC product) or any other polyvinyl chloride (PVC) plastic with objects inside a vitrine.
- When historic artifacts are displayed directly on top of other historic artifacts (e.g. placing a dress on a bedspread; undergarments on a chair, greeting cards on a table, &c.), it's best to place a protective material (e.g. mylar, acid-free tissue) between the two objects.

## **VII. RESOURCES**

### **A. MHS Staff Resources**

MHS staff phone numbers and email addresses are available on the Society's intranet site. For those without access, contact the Site Liaison for specific numbers or addresses. The following staff are direct resources for Historic Sites in the care and management of collections at sites.

#### *MHS Conservation Department, History Center, St. Paul*

Objects Conservator, Paul Storch (651/297-5774)

Outreach Office, Bob Herskovitz (651/297-3896)

Textile Conservator, Ann Frisina (651/297-5490)

Paper and Book Conservator (651/297-5665)

#### *MHS Museum Collections Department, History Center, St. Paul*

Site Liaison, Diane Adams-Graf (651/297-8095)

Historic Sites Documentation Project (HSDP) Coordinator, Sherri Gebert Fuller (651/297-8093)

#### *MHS Historic Sites Department, History Center, St. Paul*

Preservation and Construction Manager (651/296-6654)

#### *Other MHS Resources*

Van of Hope, Aaron Novodvorsky (651/297-8226)

Van of Hope, Erik Holland (651/296-8562)

## B. Supplies - Product List

Brushes - Many useful dusting brushes of natural hair (horse, sheep, hogshair) can be found at art supply stores, hardware stores and through conservation supply companies (see suppliers list). Camel hair lens or negative brushes (with bulb), used for “blowing” dust, can be found at camera supply stores and photograph studios.

Gloves - White, cotton gloves are available through safety supply companies and museum conservation supply companies. Source of plastic gloves (blue, nitrile) shown on suppliers list.

Muslin - Can be purchased at any fabric store. Pre-wash before using it for any purpose.

Mylar - Available in art supply, conservation and museum supply stores and catalogs.

Orvus - non-ionic cleaning solution available through MHS Conservation Department.

Vacuum - see attachment, “Choosing a Vacuum for Use in Museum Collections”, *Conserve O Gram*, Aug. 1998. No. 1/6.

Murphy’s Oil soap - Most grocery and hardware stores.

Renaissance Wax - Conservation supply companies (see suppliers list).

Dust Cloths - Dust Bunny is a product name for a cloth (Tyvek and nylon) that is approved for dusting and available from University Products. “Dust-alls or dust swipes” may also be used. These are available in the grocery store or “Target” store. They work by electrostatic charge and are disposable. Be very careful not to purchase those clothes that have been impregnated with cleaners. Cotton diapers can also be used for dusting (consider diapers available from a diaper service that sells used diapers by the pound).

Butcher’s Wax - Carnuba wax. Available in most hardware stores.

Screening - Fiberglass window screening sold by the roll. Available in most hardware stores. Cut into 1-2 foot squares and edge with cotton twill tape or with artist’s masking tape (available in most sewing and art supply stores).

Corrosion Intercept Bag - Made of polyethylene film impregnated with molecular copper particles. Available in roll, pouch, or zip-lock bag form (University Products, product number 034-2024, pouch).

**DO NOT USE** -The following is a partial list of problem cleaning materials.

Lemon oil	glass cleaner on Plexiglas
Turpentine	bleach
Bees Wax	abrasive cleaners
Endust or other dusting products	feather dusters
Any aerosol products	acid-based cleaners
Saddle soap	chlorine bleach or chlorine-based powder cleansers
Plexiglas cleaner on any other surface	Vinegar

## **C. Suppliers of Conservation-Related Products**

### ***Archivart*** (Heller & Usdan)

PO Box 428

7 Caesar Place

Moonachie, NJ 07074

(800) 804-8428

Archival papers and boards

[www.archivart.com](http://www.archivart.com)

### ***Art Conservation Equipment***

1107 East Cliff Road

Burnside, MN 55337-1514

Acid-free paper, costume boxes.

### ***Conservation Resources***

8000 H Forbes Place

Springfield, VA 22151

(703) 321-7730

Archival & conservation materials.

### ***DEMCO***

PO Box 7488

Madison, WI 53707-7488

(800) 356-1200

Library materials, archival supplies, frames, office equipment.

### ***Fisher Scientific***

711 Forbes Avenue

Pittsburgh, PA 15219-4785

(800) 388-8355

Chemicals and lab supplies.

### ***Gaylord Bros.***

Box 4901

Syracuse, NY 13221-4901

(800) 448-6160

FAX (800) 272-3412

Helpline (Thursday/Friday) (800) 428-3631

Conservation and archival supplies, hygrothermographs, free brochures.

**Hollinger Corp.**

PO Box 83600

Fredricksburg, VA 22404

(800) 634-0491

Acid-free paper products, folders, tissue, polypropylene, Mylar polyester film.

[www.quiltbroker.com](http://www.quiltbroker.com) (textile boxes and tissue)

**Light Impressions Corp.**

439 Monroe Avenue

PO Box 940

Rochester, NY 14603-0940

(800) 828-6216

FAX (716) 442-7318

Technical Information: (716) 271-8960

Archival, conservation materials, framing, photographic storage materials, free brochures.

[www.lightimpressionsdirect.com](http://www.lightimpressionsdirect.com)

**TALAS**

213 West 35th Street

New York, NY 10011

(212) 736-7744

Conservation supplies and tools.

**Testfabrics, Inc.**

PO Box 420

Middlesex, NJ 08846

(908) 469-6446

Textiles for conservation.

Tek Products

5852 Baker Road

Minnetonka, MN 55345

(612) 933-4444

Plastic gloves. 9005 FF Ndex glove.

**University Products**

PO Box 101

Holyoke, MA 01041

(800) 628-19122

FAX (800) 532-9281

Questions (800) 762-1165

Archival, conservation materials, stamp storage, framing, free brochures.

[www.universityproducts.com](http://www.universityproducts.com)

## **D. Published and Online**

American Association of Museums (AAM)  
1225 Eye Street, NW, Suite 200  
Washington, DC 20005  
(202) 289-1818  
[www.aam-us.org](http://www.aam-us.org)

American Association of State and Local History  
172 Second Avenue North  
Suite 202  
Nashville, TN 37201  
(615) 255-2971  
FAX (615) 255-2979  
[www.aaslh.org](http://www.aaslh.org)

American Institute for Conservation (AIC)  
1717 K Street, NW, Suite 301  
Washington, DC 20006  
(202) 452-9545  
FAX (202) 452-9328  
<http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/aic/>

Can provide referrals for art conservators, training information, and basic conservation brochures.

American Society of Appraisers  
535 Herndon Parkway  
Herndon, VA 22070  
(703) 478-2228  
[www.appraisers.org/](http://www.appraisers.org/)  
Can provide referrals for appraisers.

Art Hazards Information Center  
5 Beekman Street #1050  
New York, NY 10038  
(212) 227-6229  
<http://artswire.org:70/>

Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI)  
1030 Innes Road  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0M5  
Canada  
(613) 998-3721  
FAX (613) 998-4721  
[www.pch.gc.ca/cci-icc/index~1.htm](http://www.pch.gc.ca/cci-icc/index~1.htm)

Getty Conservation Institute (GCI)  
4503 Glencoe Avenue  
Marina del Rey, CA 90292  
(310) 822-2299  
[www.getty.edu/](http://www.getty.edu/)

Library of Congress  
National Preservation Program  
LM-G07  
Washington, DC 20540  
(202) 707-1840  
[www.loc.gov/](http://www.loc.gov/)

National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)  
Regional Preservation Program  
8th & Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20408  
(202) 208-7890  
[www.nara.gov/](http://www.nara.gov/)

National Institute for Conservation (NIC)  
The Papermill, Suite 403  
3299 K Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20007  
(202) 625-1495  
<http://www.heritagepreservation.org/>

Northern States Conservation Center  
P.O. Box 8081  
St. Paul, MN 55108  
[www.collectioncare.org](http://www.collectioncare.org)

U.S. National Park Service  
Division of Conservation  
Harpers Ferry Center  
P.O. Box 50  
Harpers Ferry, WV 25425-0050  
<http://www.nps.gov/hfc/conservation/site.htm>

## **Books, Videos and Articles**

“Housekeeping for Historic Sites” , video. Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.  
Harrison Gray Otis House/141 Cambridge Street/Boston, MA 02114  
www.spnea.org

National Park Service, **Museum Handbook, Part 1, Museum Collections**. Revised. 1990

The National Trust. **The National Trust Manual of Housekeeping**. Elsevier Butterworth-Heinemann, 2006.

Butcher-Youngmans, Sherry, William T. Alderson. **Historic House Museums: A Practical Handbook for Their Care, Preservation, and Management**. 1996.

McGiffin, Robert F. Jr. **Furniture Care and Conservation**. AASLH. 1991.

Buck, Rebecca A. and Jean Allman Gilmore. **The New Museum Registration Methods**. Washington, D.C. American Association of Museums. 1998.

## **VIII. APPENDICES**

Copies of these are available through Museum Collections Dept., Site Liaison

*Conservation Work Request for Collections at Sites* form

*Incident Report* form

The Transport of Artifacts

The Handling of Objects

*Conserve O Gram*, “Choosing a Vacuum Cleaner for Use in Museum Collections”

# Minnesota Historical Society

## Conservation Work Request for Collections at Historic Sites

Person completing this form: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

***THIS FORM IS USED TO REQUEST CONSERVATION DEPT. SERVICES or SPECIFIC CONSERVATION TREATMENT TO MHS PERMANENT COLLECTIONS AT HISTORIC SITES. FORWARD COMPLETED FORM TO MUSEUM COLLECTIONS DEPT. SITE LIAISON AT THE MHS-HISTORY CENTER..***

Need /Work requested: \_\_\_\_\_

Date work to be completed by: \_\_\_\_\_

***All work requests require review by both appropriate curator and conservator, prior to approval. Following approval, work request for specific lab (paper, object, textile) will be completed by Museum Collections, forwarded to appropriate conservator/lab and copied to Requester.***

Present location of collection/conservation need (Site/Building/Gallery/Section/Room/&c): \_\_\_\_\_

Are Site resources available to provide for packing and relocation of artifact(s) to and from History Center Conservation labs?

Photograph attached to this request?

***Information below this line is entered by staff reviewing request:***

Collections Response ( <i>Curator Name</i> ):	Date:
Conservation Response ( <i>Conservator Name</i> ):	Date:

Work Request Approved? Yes No

Date Site

Notified: \_\_\_\_\_ By: \_\_\_\_\_

Lab Work Request Sent to (attach copy): Object Paper Textile

Date

Sent: \_\_\_\_\_ By: \_\_\_\_\_

## *Conservation Work Request for Collections at Historic Sites*

- Who completes this form?  
The Site Manager, whoever is authorized by the Site Manager, or the organization authorized by contract, to manage the site, makes the request.
- What kinds of collections can be requested for treatment?  
Any MHS collections at any site. Requests for treatment of three-dimensional collections will be reviewed by the Museum Collections (MC) Department. Requests of non-3D collections and original artwork will be forwarded by the MC Site Liaison to the attention of the Acquisitions and Curatorial Head.
- What reasons are there for a treatment request?  
The artifact is damaged. The artifact is fragile and in danger of damage. The item has been on display for an extended period of time and requires stabilization. The artifact is dirty and requires professional conservation cleaning care. Be sure to be as comprehensive and as specific as possible in describing condition and the need for treatment. Try to attach visual documentation as well.
- How long does reviewing the request take?  
You should submit your request as soon as a need has been determined (e.g. damage occurs, change in condition is observed, program date identified for special display of collections, &c.). The review process is completed and the site is notified within four weeks. Requests are reviewed according to the item's importance to the overall permanent collection, its value to the site's interpretive goals, identified site conservation priorities, need for treatment and MC and Conservation Department schedules. Not all requests are approved. Actual treatment may be scheduled within a period of up to twelve months. Make sure that you identify the date you want to have the work completed by if you have a specific need.
- Who packs and moves the collection item(s) for treatment?  
The cost of this is the responsibility of the site. Packing and relocating collections is done following established museum and conservation standards. Guidance and often, direct supervision and management of the work are provided by the Museum Collections department. The MC Department also has a limited amount of packing material and supplies that may be used in some instances depending on the volume, size and timing of the request. Contact the Site Liaison for more information.
- Is it possible that the artifact will not return to the site?  
Occasionally, an artifact may be in extremely fragile condition and the proper environmental, pest management, storage or display conditions are not available at the site. In such a case, it might be determined that the item be moved to storage at the MHS History Center. If a replacement for this object is required, it sets another process in motion.
- Where can I get copies of this form?  
This form is available at the MHS intranet ([www.intranet.mnhs.org](http://www.intranet.mnhs.org)) under *Departments and Staff/Museum Collections/Policies and Procedures*. Hard copies are available from either the Museum Collections or Conservation Departments.

Forms/MHS/Consreqfinal5-00.doc

# Minnesota Historical Society Collections Incident Report

*Form is to be completed by person most fully informed of incident as quickly as possible following incident. Copies of reports should be directed to Supervisory Curators of A&C or Museum Collections and to the Objects Conservator.*

Person completing this form: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

***FORM IS USED TO REPORT DAMAGE, THEFT OR OTHER OCCURRENCE TO MHS PERMANENT COLLECTIONS or LOANS. DIRECT COMPLETED COPY TO YOUR IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR..***

Collection(s) involved in incident (type/amount/accession/loan nos./&c): \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Occurrence: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Occurrence: \_\_\_\_\_

Person/Department Notified: \_\_\_\_\_

Time of Notification: \_\_\_\_\_

Location of Occurrence (Building/Site/Gallery/Section/Room/&c): \_\_\_\_\_

Description of Incident/Problem: \_\_\_\_\_

Present location of collection(s) involved: \_\_\_\_\_

Photograph attached? \_\_\_\_\_

Yes

No

***For Exhibits Staff Use Only:***

Staff: \_\_\_\_\_ Time

Estimate: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of work: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Completed: \_\_\_\_\_ Actual Time

Used: \_\_\_\_\_ Initials: \_\_\_\_\_

***For Conservation Staff Use Only:***

Curator/Central Registrar Notified(Name/Date): \_\_\_\_\_

Staff: \_\_\_\_\_ Time

Estimate: \_\_\_\_\_

Treatment Needed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Completed: \_\_\_\_\_ Actual Time Used: \_\_\_\_\_

forms/mhs/incident4-00final

# THE TRANSPORT OF OBJECTS

Guidelines for Packing and Shipping 3- Dimensional  
Objects for Treatment in the Laboratory

OR

Adventures in Advanced Manual Dexterity for  
Those Persons Engaged in Museum Practices  
at MHS Sites

By Professor Ignatz von Zetzenpunem, M.A., PhD., DDL,  
M.D., DWI, UFO, NRA, IOU, I.O.O.F., ETC....

Originally published in 1873 in Plotzensplatten, Germany  
by the Institute for the Advancement of Common Sense

Translated and Updated by:  
Paul S. Storch  
Daniels Objects Conservation Laboratory  
Minnesota History Center  
345 Kellogg Blvd. West  
St. Paul, MN 55102-1906  
1992, slightly revised 1995, 2000

The MHS Conservation Department...  
Helping You To Get There in One Piece

## Transport of Objects From Sites

### The proper packing of Objects: WHY?

- Prevents further accidental breakages that could be prevented.
- Helps to keep the previously broken pieces together for the conservator.
- Keeps broken surfaces from undergoing erosion from excess vibration.
- Will help to avoid the accidental transfer of foreign substances to object surfaces.
- Minimize the impact of the changing ambient environment during the moving of objects.

### GENERAL PRINCIPLES AND PROCEDURES:

- When an object breaks, examine the situation before you pick it up. Rope off the area, then document the accident with photographs and a brief written description.
- Contact the Sites Collections Curator (Collections Curator/Manager) and inform him/her of the situation, then contact the Objects Conservator for further instructions @ (651) 297-5774; FAX (651) 297-2967.
- Have the proper packing materials on hand (see below) before picking up the object and it's broken parts.
- **DO NOT** transport an object to the lab unless it is properly packed and the Objects Conservator/lab technician is expecting it's arrival.
- When you arrive at the History Center Loading Dock, do not unload the object (unless it is small enough to hand-carry to the lab). Go to the Mail Room or Physical Plant office and call down to the Objects Lab. The Conservator or a technician will come to the dock and assist you in off-loading the object and placing it on the proper conveyance for transport to the lab.

## **PACKING AND SHIPPING GUIDELINES:**

### **PACKING MATERIALS:**

#### **- DON'T USE:**

newspapers      toilet paper      paper towels      sawdust      crushed mica flakes  
acidic kraft or tissue paper      rigid plastic foams

#### **- ACCEPTABLE:**

acid-free tissue paper      ethafoam wrapping sheets      Styrofoam peanuts  
polyethylene sheeting  
clean newsprint (if not in direct contact with the object)

### **PACKING DO'S AND DON'TS:**

#### **DON'T:**

- transport an object without proper support and wrapping to protect from handling and moisture.
- transport an object through the mail or by a commercial shipper without first contacting the Objects Conservator.
- stack objects in crates or boxes on one another.
- place objects in station wagon or truck beds without padding and securing to the bed.
- place both fragile (e.g. glass) objects and heavy (e.g. bronze) objects in the same packing container.
- use dirty packing quilts.

#### **DO:**

- wrap each object and part separately. Label the containers properly.
- stabilize loose parts with ethafoam and twill tape, when needed.
- float pack fragile objects and parts.
- modify crates with ethafoam padding to properly support object parts.
- wrap larger, more stable objects in CLEAN packing quilts and support to prevent shifting during travel.

# THE HANDLING OF OBJECTS

Guidelines for 3- Dimensional objects

OR

Adventures in Advanced Manual Dexterity for  
Those Persons Engaged in Museum Practices

By Professor Ignatz von Zetzenpunem, M.A., PhD., DDL,  
M.D., DWI, UFO, NRA, IOU, I.O.O.F., ETC....

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Translated and Updated by:

Paul S. Storch

Objects Conservation Laboratory

Minnesota Historical Society

Ft. Snelling History Center

St. Paul, MN 55111

1992, slightly revised 1995, 2000

The MHS Conservation Department...  
Helping You Keep a Firm Grip on Reality

## Rules for Handling Objects: WHY?

- Prevents accidental breakages that could be prevented
- Help to preserve the information inherent in the objects
- Will help to avoid the accidental transfer of foreign substances to object surfaces.
- Minimize the impact of the changing ambient environment during the moving of objects.

## GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

- Think before you begin to pick up an object. Observe the construction, weight, components, and potential weak areas
- Quick, jerky movements are dangerous when handling objects or when working in a storage area. Be aware that frivolous activity in imitation of equine quadrupeds (i.e. horseplay) can startle someone who is working on or handling an object.
- When working with objects use pencils only. Do not put brads, nails, staples or pins through any material. Never write on an artifact or artifact tag for any reason. Make sure that Museum Collections personnel get the tags from the artifacts.
- Do not eat, drink or smoke in an area when handling objects: accidents can happen and the damage may be irreversible. Crumbs and food residue can be an attractant and food source for insects and other pests.
- Be sure that there is sufficient light when handling artifacts.
- Never pick up an object unless you have a safe and stable surface to put it on.
- Don't take the chance of damaging a heavy, awkward or large item. Get another person to help you. **ALWAYS** read the instructions on packing crates before opening and removing objects.
- When handling objects, remember that the following items can be dangerous and should be avoided if possible:
  - necklaces with pendants
  - large belt buckles
  - bangle bracelets and some rings
  - high heels
  - tie clips and pens in shirt pockets
  - identification badges
  - full, loose sleeves
  - loose or bagging smock pockets

- White cotton gloves should be worn when handling paper, textiles, costumes, leather, metals, unglazed ceramics, bone ivory, horn and wood. Body oils (which include salt and acidic oils) and soiling can be very damaging, causing usually irreversible stains and chemical changes such as rust, etc. In some instances the need for a good grip, detail work or exhibit installation makes the use of gloves awkward and even dangerous. In these cases, well washed hands (tap water will also do, if a well is not available) without hand lotion is the next best approach. Tight fitting latex surgical gloves may work if available and can be tried with non-museum objects. Obtain the non-powdered kind, since the fine powder that is used may be deposited on objects. Clean heavy weight cotton work gloves can be worn when moving heavy functional objects and transportation vehicles.
- As stated earlier, observe the object for previous repairs, new cracks, missing pieces, and safe handholds.
- Use two hands for proper support.
- Do not pick up an object by the handle, rim or other projections. Lift the item from its base or strongest point.
- Remove detachable parts, such as lids and move separately.
- Avoid carrying objects whenever possible. Place the object on a padded cart or platform dolly. When loading a cart, put flat objects at the bottom with more fragile items on top, if stacking cannot be avoided. Provide padding between the items so they can't roll into each other while the cart is in motion. Provide ramps over offset doorway thresholds to avoid bumping.
- Be careful with long objects, such as 18th century long arms. Plan your route carefully, measuring doorways, aisle widths, and ceiling clearances if necessary.
- Small and valuable objects should be kept in boxes or locked up until actually installed in a case.
- Large functional objects (LFO's) may be more easily moved if detachable parts are removed first. Contact the Objects Conservation Lab before proceeding with this.
- Smaller Paintings should be carried with one hand supporting underneath and the other hand at the side. Never carry a picture by the top of the frame or by the stretcher. Carry a larger painting to a picture truck and use that to move it any distance. Never touch the surface of the painting. Be wary of doorknobs and other projections that could tear or abrade the canvas.

## SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR GALLERY INTERPRETERS...

- Gallery interpreters/docents act as the "eyes and ears" of the Conservation Department in terms of spotting vandalism, deterioration, insect/rodent problems, etc.. Report any irregularities (i.e. moved objects, broken parts, dusty objects, etc.) using the forms provided by the Exhibits Department.
- Do not hesitate to tell a visitor not to touch an object or to stop handling a case roughly. Proper visitor behavior and enforcement of visitor rules is part of our preventive conservation program.
- If you have an object that appears to be difficult to handle or might be unstable, call the appropriate conservator for advice :

Objects:	(651) 297-5774
Textiles:	(651) 297-5490
Paper and Books:	(651) 297-5664
Office:	(651) 297-1867

After large school groups come through the galleries, please check the objects and areas that could be receptacles for candy wrappers, gum wads, saliva (no kidding!), etc., etc.. Contact exhibits and/or conservation directly to remove foreign substances from objects. In situations such as these, time is of the essence in terms of *removing the above mentioned substances from object surfaces. The longer gum or saliva remains on a porous surface, the harder it is to remove.*

## **MATERIAL CATEGORIES-Condition Problems to Check for**

### Minerals:

#### Sculpture and stone:

Can be broken or chipped from a sharp blow. Marble is brittle in cold weather.

#### Jade:

Susceptible to fracture.

#### Plaster:

Susceptible to chipping, hand soiling and water stains.

#### Iron, steel, and copper alloys:

Moisture causes corrosion. Old iron and bronze can be very fragile.

### Metals:

Most polished metals show finger marks which are hard to remove.

#### Gold

Soft; dents and scratches easily.

#### Silver:

Scratches, dents and tarnishes; if high in copper content can be susceptible to hand acids and oils.

### Categories by material:

#### Minerals (con't):

#### Medals

Susceptible to fingerprints and scratches.

Examine to see if it is a "sandwich" type medallion, if it is, then place on a support, if not handle by the edges.

#### Arms and Armor:

Always handle with gloves or a clean cloth.

Leather scabbards and other military leather objects may have stressed areas which could break if handled without additional support.

#### Ceramics:

Chipping and breakage are the biggest problems. Avoid stacking. Cracked glazes or unglazed pieces are susceptible to moisture.

#### Glass:

Don't dry dust glass, it may scratch. Contact the Objects Conservator.

## Organic Materials:

### Wood:

Easily chipped and scratched.  
Old wood is brittle.  
Water and humidity can warp and split wood.

### Baskets:

Susceptible to dirt, dryness and splits. Don't lift by edges. Don't stack baskets in each other.  
Don't fold flexible baskets.

### Lacquer:

Susceptible to finger marks. Flaking caused by temperature/RH changes.

### Rubber:

Can be brittle and cracked; can also exude a sticky material that can damage other objects.  
Lift with supports if appears to be badly cracked.

### Plastics:

Can be fragile if cracked. Susceptible to hand oils, moisture. Susceptible to light.

### Paper:

Susceptible to light, insects, dampness, dryness and body oils.

## Animal Products:

### Textiles (Wool):

Susceptible to insects, light.  
Can easily be snagged by jewelry, etc.

### Bone, Ivory:

Can be brittle and porous. Susceptible to staining from hand oils and other substances.

### Wax:

Susceptible to heat and physical shock. Brittle in some cases.

## IN SUMMARY...

- There are many items that have not been covered here. This handout is meant to serve as a quick guide.
- Thinking through the situation before acting can help to avoid accidents. Feel free to contact the MHS Object Conservation Laboratory with any questions concerning object handling procedures and problems.
- Remember, it's a lot less embarrassing to call us for help before something is broken than afterwards. We're here to help, not to criticize or punish. Thanks!

## SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR COLLECTIONS PHOTOGRAPHERS

Always examine the object first from all angles before lifting it. Identify lifting areas, loose parts, breaks, and any area that looks weak and unstable. Then ask a conservator for advice.

### **NEVER LIFT AN OBJECT BY ITS HANDLES, LIDS, OR ANY OTHER APPENDAGES!**

Get a secure purchase on a stable, large surface of the object and lift with both hands.

Always ask a conservator for advice before moving and photographing difficult or unstable objects. Don't guess whether there is a problem with an object. **ALWAYS ERR ON THE SIDE OF CAUTION.**

**PLAN! PLAN! PLAN!** Have the photography area set up **BEFORE** you set the object there. Make doubly certain that the object is stable on the stand before walking away from it. If you are having trouble in securing an object to the photography stand and are not certain as to how to pad or hold it in position, **ASK A CONSERVATOR FOR ADVICE!**

Always ask a conservator for advice before moving and photographing difficult or unstable objects. Don't guess whether there is a problem with an object!

**GET HELP TO MOVE LARGE OBJECTS!!** Several large objects have been broken in Museum Collections in the past several years because someone did not have assistance to move and/or guide a large, unwieldy object on a cart

If in doubt whether or not to handle an object with gloves, **ASK A CONSERVATOR!**

In general, don't secure or suspend an object (e.g. a wooden sign) by existing holes and eye hooks. Consult with the objects conservator before suspending a metal sign by existing holes.

Propping flat objects at a slight angle on the floor may be a convenient and efficient way to set them up for photography (e.g. framed paintings). **BE** careful to examine the outer liners of compo/gilt frames: they may be brittle and unstable. Make certain that the object cannot pitch forward and that the back support cannot fall backwards. If possible, secure the frame through the hanging wire or the D-rings.