Historic Housekeeping

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What is museum housekeeping?

In terms of collections management, housekeeping is:

• All of the ongoing actions to preserve museum objects, archives and museum records
  – Prevent damage, minimize deterioration
• Planning and monitoring as much as hands-on care
  – Knowing when NOT to clean is equally important as knowing when and how to clean
  – “Express your museum housekeeping attitude through careful, thoughtful and gentle actions.”
Importance of Housekeeping

- Preventive conservation
  - Simple, inexpensive
- Extends life of objects
- Promotes respect and care of the collections
- Provides healthier environment for staff/patrons
Things to Consider

- Material type and condition of objects
- Cleaning supplies and methods
  - Dependent on material
- Signs of deterioration
Museum Housekeeping Plan

• Framework for consistent care of collections
• Should be written by staff member(s) knowledgeable in preventive care of objects
  – Collections Manager or Curator
• Institutionalizes preventive conservation program
• Shared responsibility – teamwork is important
Museum Housekeeping Plan

- Considers type and condition of collections
- Identifies location of collections
- Identifies routine tasks and special projects
- Identifies equipment, materials and methods to carry out tasks
- Identifies staff responsible for carrying out tasks
- Establishes a schedule for completing tasks
- Records completed tasks
Cleaning Schedule

• Organize tasks by frequency
  – Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Quarterly, Semi-Annually, Cyclically, As Needed

• Use a chart to format your schedule

• Provide space for initials next to each task

• Include a list of supplies required for each task

• Note any objects that have condition issues

• File completed charts chronologically for reference
# Sample Cleaning Schedule

**Ohio History Connection**

**Staff: Lesley Poling**

**2014 3rd Quarter**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weekly</th>
<th>1</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clean plex display cases</td>
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<td>Dust car in Welcome Lobby</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dust objects on History Mall</td>
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<td>Dust objects in Gallery 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Check pits in History Mall – vacuum if needed</td>
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</table>
Cleaning Schedule: Considerations

A variety of factors should be taken into account when forming a cleaning schedule or plan.

• Visitation
  – When are visitors least likely to interfere?
    • Or: do you want it to be an educational opportunity?
  – Foot traffic: how much does the area receive?
    • Daily, weekly, monthly, etc.

• Staff availability
  – When will the staff responsible be regularly available?

• Keep a log to know where/how often dirt, dust, and pests accumulate

• Dedicated consistency is the key to success
Cleaning Schedule: Considerations

Prioritize areas where dirt enters the building:

- Windows/sills
- Doorways
- AC/Heat vents
- Carpet runners
- Staircases
Cleaning Schedule: Considerations

Exterior areas to remember:

- Parking lots
- Porches
- Sidewalks/paths
Historic Cleaning/Modern Home

In your own home...

• Goal: cleanliness, “sterility”
  – Not conservation or preservation, generally speaking
• Can be quick and rushed
  – Doesn’t require pre-planning
• Chemicals often used
• Removing clutter, polishing/shining
• Damages typically reversible or to replaceable objects
Historic Cleaning/Modern Home

In the historic house or museum, **housekeeping** is a facet of **maintenance** to encourage **preservation**

- **Goal**: preservation
  - Objects will not pass the “white glove,” squeaky-clean, test
  - Removing obvious debris, dust, or dirt that can accelerate deterioration

- **Requires cautious, deliberate work**
  - Much slower pace

- **Requires pre-planning**

- **Necessary to train and supervise staff**

- **Generally speaking, no chemicals are used**
Object Cleaning – General Guidelines

DO:

• Think critically when deciding how often to clean
• Dust with unscented, lint-free cloth
  – Electrostatic cloths like Dust Bunny®
• Clean from the highest point down
• Use a HEPA-filter or canister vacuum cleaner on low suction
• Inspect object for signs of pest or deterioration while cleaning
• Exercise caution when selecting cleaning tools and solutions
• Establish cleaning schedules and designate staff to carry out these tasks
Object Cleaning – General Guidelines
DON’T:
• Routinely clean deteriorated objects
  – Remove from exhibit or seek advice from conservator
• Use commercial cleaning solutions
• Dampen or wet clean objects on a regular basis
  – Introduces moisture, damage over time
• Use collections as storage for cleaning supplies
Vacuums

A very good investment for museum housekeeping

• Use a canister style rather than upright
• HEPA filtration
• Hose/attachments
• Low suction, variable speed (i.e. 0-100% power)
• Do not empty near collections/period rooms
Cleaning Methods: Textiles

Always assess condition and materials before cleaning

• Use a low-powered vacuum setting
  – Attachment: brush or hose, covered with muslin
  – Fiberglass screen in a wooden frame for large pieces
  – Do not pull, rub, or scrub
  – Step by step, row by row

• Dust that gathers in 3D/flocked elements:
  – Loosen with soft, natural bristle brush
    • Sweep toward the vacuum attachment hose

• Do not view as laundry objects (modern)
  – No wet or dry cleaning

• Consult a conservator about stains or damage
Cleaning Methods: Wood

Wooden floors

• Dust regularly with Dust Bunny or dry cotton mop
• Use a hand broom to reach dust that gathers in corners
• Monthly washing with a gentle solution of water and diluted Murphy’s Oil Soap is okay
  – Spot test before beginning a new routine
• Avoid sweeping with a push broom
Cleaning Methods: Wood

Wooden objects and furniture

• Wood furniture can be regularly dusted using a microfiber cloth or Dust Bunny
• Use a soft natural bristle brush to gently remove dust from crevices and carvings
• Be careful around detail areas
  – Veneer, gilding, inlay, metal
• Do not use commercial liquids or creams
• Renaissance Wax can be used on finished wood
  – Wax infrequently; every 2-4 years
Cleaning Methods: Glass Objects

Do not submerge glass objects in water or liquid

- Record numbers first
  - Objects can become “un-labeled” if numbers were not properly applied
- Plain, clear glass:
  - Mild solution of distilled water/diluted Orvus paste
  - Gentle rinse with clean cloth and distilled water
  - Dry with lint-free cloth or linen
- Glass with gilding, paint, etc.
  - Spot clean with clean cotton cloth and water/ammonia or Orvus paste mixture
- Mirrored glass:
  - Clean with gentle mix of distilled water and isopropyl alcohol
  - Avoid letting this liquid touch any of the frame
Cleaning Methods: Display Cases

Know the difference between glass and plexiglass

• Glass cases:
  – Commercial glass cleaner
  – Soft cloth, rag, or paper towel
  – Spray cleaner to towel, not directly to glass

• Plexiglass barriers or cases:
  – Do not use glass cleaner
    • Can result in plexiglass becoming scratched/cloudy
  – Use concentrated plexiglass cleaner
    • Spray cleaner to towels, not directly to the plexiglass
  – Dust with anti-static cloths to prevent buildup
Cleaning Methods: Metal

Metal does not always equal strong!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TOUGHNESS</th>
<th>BRITTLENESS</th>
<th>DUCTILITY</th>
<th>MALLEABILITY</th>
<th>CORROSION RESISTANCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Copper</td>
<td>White Cast Iron</td>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>Gold</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nickel</td>
<td>Gray Cast Iron</td>
<td>Silver</td>
<td>Platinum</td>
<td>Platinum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Iron</td>
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<td>Magnesium</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Bismuth</td>
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<td>Copper</td>
<td>LM</td>
<td>LM</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Metals/alloys are ranked in descending order of having the property named in the column heading.
Cleaning Methods: Metal

Always use gloves when handling metal objects

• Use soft, natural bristle brush to remove dust
• Do not rub or use a cloth – dust particles can scratch the surface of an object
• Do not attempt to remove layers of corrosion (rust)
• Tarnish = a protective barrier
  – Only remove when object displayed
  – Calcium carbonate with distilled water as a paste
• Remember: Polishing always removes a layer of original metal
Cleaning Methods: Books

Examine physical condition before cleaning

• Expose enough of spine to get a firm grip
• Keep book firmly closed when dusting
• Vacuum with micro-attachment, or dust with a lint free cloth or natural bristle brush (fragile books)
• Dust away from binding: bound edge to paper edge
• For unstable books, use gentle air jet
• Clean bookshelves with a magnetic cloth; change frequently
Cleaning Method: Books

- Dust no more than quarterly
- Do not sweep floors near bookshelves
- Do not use rubber bands to hold books together
  - Cotton twill tape, 1-2” wide
Cleaning Method: Carpets (Historic)

- Remove your shoes
- Use HEPA filtered vacuum on low suction
- Vacuum through fiberglass screen
  - Weak/loose spots use gentle lifting motion
  - Use tweezers to pick up any leftover debris
- If in good condition, vacuum without screen
  - Step-by-step; row-by-row
Cleaning Method: Carpets (Historic)

• Do not attempt to wash or spot clean
• Do not vacuum like you would at home
• Do not drag or rub the brush attachment along the carpets
Cleaning Methods: Ceramics

Identify the type of ceramic before cleaning

- Glazed=Hard, glossy surface; secure glaze
  
  *porcelain, stoneware*

- Unglazed=Soft, porous; flaking glaze
  
  *earthenware, archaeological artifacts*
Cleaning Methods: Ceramics

- Remove jewelry before handling
- Use gloves when cleaning unglazed ceramics
- For glazed pieces, clean and dry hands are acceptable
- Dust monthly with natural bristle brush or lint free cloth
  - Stable pieces with smooth surfaces

If the debris is particularly stubborn....

- Damp wipe porcelain and stoneware
  - Except on pieces with cracked glaze or over-glaze decoration
- Mild cleaning solutions mixed with deionized or distilled water
  - Orvus, Vulpex
- Test on small area
- “Rinse” object with distilled water applied with cloth or cotton balls to get rid of any residue
- Air dry
Cleaning Methods: Paintings

• If no obvious signs of deterioration, gently dust 1-2 times per year
• Use soft-bristle artist brush
  – Brush slowly, gently in one direction (across or down) and then reverse direction for the second brushing
• If framed with glass, buff with clean dry chamois
• Don’t attempt to dust paintings with loose or flaking paint
• Don’t dust frames if gilding is flaking
• If a painting is particularly fragile or in need of a thorough cleaning, consult a conservator
Cleaning Methods: Ceramics

*Please don’t*

- Clean your antique ceramics in the dishwasher
- Immerse the following in liquid:
  - antique ceramics, unglazed ceramics, objects having gilt/luster/painted surfaces, deteriorated objects or those with chipped/cracked/scratched glaze, repaired objects (they may still have cracks)
- Damp clean archaeological objects, low-fired or unfired pieces
Thank You!

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