Buildings

Nearly half of heritage collecting organizations in Indiana are without a regular building maintenance routine.

— Indiana Heritage Alliance: Connecting the Dots, 2019

The buildings that house collections are the first line of defense against harmful agents. Whether the issue is security, environmental conditions, or pests, it all starts with the facility.

Every building will have problems over time and at some point might fail to properly protect its contents. Some problems, such as leaks, occur from elements and forces affecting the outside of the building. Other problems, such as condensation on walls or windows, come from a combination of issues.

What our heritage organizations need now...

- Funding for building preservation
- Funding for preventative maintenance
- Building improvements, as needed
Is a lot of light always a good thing? Around collections the careful control of illumination is important. Light is energy, and it causes permanent damage to many objects and documents. Ultraviolet light is particularly harmful and is present in sunlight and fluorescent lighting. Photographs, watercolors, paper items, textiles, and certain plastics are especially sensitive to light.

What our heritage organizations need now...

» UV-filtering covers for fluorescent lights
» UV filters for windows, cases, and picture frames
» Appropriate lighting for collections and exhibit areas
Temperature

The majority of heritage collecting organizations lack monitoring equipment for their main facility.

-Museum Heritage Alliance Connecting to Culture: State Survey Report, 2014

Temperature changes—as well as extreme heat or cold—can cause cracking, brittleness, and deterioration. Paper items, photographic materials, textiles, and natural science specimens are especially susceptible to damage from temperature extremes.

Uncontrolled areas such as attics and warehouse can be blistering hot or part of the time and freezing cold at other times. Climates of all collections areas, including storage, need to be monitored and regulated.

- Too high temperature changes can cause mold, delamination, dry rot, and rot
- Collections can be affected by too high temperatures
- Paper, textiles, and paintings are susceptible to damage from temperature changes
- Too high temperature changes cause objects to deteriorate

What our heritage organizations need now...

» Equipment to monitor and track temperature
» Climate-controlled storage and exhibit areas
Humidity

Almost half of heritage collecting organizations do not have humidity controlled at the recommended levels.

-Heritage Malaysia Seminar on Collectors' Room Report, 2007

When levels of humidity drop too low, wood can split and laminates and veneers can peel. When indoor humidity levels get too high, fungi and other pests become active. Mildew creates stains. Rot can occur. Metals can pit and corrode from exposure to excessive humidity.

Many objects are composed of more than one material. When these materials expand or contract at different rates, bonds can break and objects can start to come apart.

- TIP: Excessive humidity caused this panel to flake. (to repair)
- TIP: Excessive humidity caused this metal to deteriorate.
- TIP: Excessive humidity caused these labels to grow on the object.
- TIP: Excessive humidity caused this lamp to fail.

What our heritage organizations need now...

- Equipment to monitor and control humidity
- Upgrades to heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems
- Alterations to the building may be necessary
Pollutants

"Analysis of dust [from the Star-Spangled Banner] ... shewed a very high percentage of blue cotton fibers—lest from blue jeans worn by visitors."


Dust and pollutants are part of the natural world and of human activity, and all are hazards for collections. Some pollutants actually alter materials chemically. Many metals corrode from airborne pollution. Other pollutants are abrasive and scratch objects. Some embed into objects and cause scaling.

Proper presentation is important because removal of pollutants can damage the object. Some effects of dust and pollutants are practically irreparable.

- TVM: Room dust can cause discoloration and spots.
- CENTER: Pollutants and other environmental factors caused this metal to become black.
- REASONS: Air pollutants caused this painting to turn black.
- BACKGROUND: Pollutants can damage objects.

What our heritage organizations need now...

- Updated ventilation systems
- Training about proper cleaning and monitoring procedures
Pests

“[Pest] damage can ultimately destroy a museum object. Therefore, it is important to constantly monitor collections for evidence of pest activity.”
—Nouveau Pest Control Company, Newsletter 34, August 2014

Pests are troublesome to all collections. Insects and rodents can quickly degrade an object as they feed and nest. Beetles, moths, and silverfish can bore through and destroy natural materials. Rodents can chew through an object. Pest debris can stain objects.

What our heritage organizations need now...

- Resources to regularly inspect collections
- Training on recognizing and dealing with pests
- Equipment to monitor and control exhibit and storage areas
Handle with Care

"Many organizations lack funding for staff training in collections stewardship; especially training in the proper conservation, preservation, and management of their collections."


Just lifting or moving an object can cause damage. Flags, rugs, and clothing are prone to tear or fall apart when handled. Photographs are easily damaged by oil from our skin when touched.

Overcrowding in displays—because of lack of space or inappropriate display materials—can result in collections damage, too. Documents and photographs get creased or folded from overloaded files.

What our heritage organizations need now...

- Sufficient and appropriate display materials
- Training on proper handling, storage, and exhibit procedures
Storage

“Sixty-two percent of heritage collecting organizations describe their collections area as 'full' or 'crowded.'”

—Canadian Heritage Information Service, Responding to Collecting Survey Report, 2005

Objects that are folded, on top of each other, or crowded into small spaces, are more likely to suffer damage and deterioration. Storage in household storage containers, such as corrugated cardboard boxes and plastic tubs, causes objects and documents to deteriorate over time. This is due to acids, solvents, and plastics used in their manufacture.

What our heritage organizations need now...

- Safe, archival storage materials
- Coated metal shelving or sealed wooden shelves
- Additional and appropriate storage space
Nearly half of heritage collecting organizations have had water infiltration problems. 

Water damage can be catastrophic to collections. Many, if not most, items in collections can be harmed from contact with water. A burst pipe or leaking basement or roof might go unnoticed, causing collections loss or the need for an extensive conservation effort.

Flooding from a natural disaster is the most extreme and devastating water damage. Prevention may be impossible, but preparation is essential.

What our heritage organizations need now...

» Funding for safe storage
» Water monitoring equipment
» Disaster preparedness training
To Protect

“A unique object lost through theft or vandalism represents a loss of knowledge for future generations.”

—Andrew Doak in The Heritage Health Index Report, 2005

Security is an issue for all collections. Small objects on display in unsecured cases or without cases can be easily stolen when no one is looking. Sadly, vandalism can occur, too.

A more common security problem is our basic human desire to touch things. Children and adults alike will be drawn to touch an object if it is available to do so. The dirt and oils from our skin will degrade objects over time.

What our heritage organizations need now...

- Resources to fully catalog collections so theft can be detected
- Secure display cases
- Electronic security systems
Make a contribution for collections care or volunteer at your local heritage organization today!

Count me IN

Saving Hoosier Heritage ... together!

“Providing a safe environment and proper care for collections is a fundamental responsibility of all institutions and individuals who care about our heritage.”


Hoosier Heritage Alliance Partners:

» Allen County Public Library
» Association of Indiana Museums
» Carnegie Center for Art and History, New Albany
» Center for History, South Bend
» Conner Prairie Interactive History Park
» Cunningham Memorial Library, Indiana State University
» Eiteljorg Museum of American Indians and Western Art
» Evansville Museum
» Indiana Historical Society
» Indiana Landmarks
» Indianapolis Museum of Art
» Indiana State Museum
» Midwest Collaborative for Library Services
» Minnetrista

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