

Storage, Packing & Collection Access

When to Hang ‘Em, When to Fold ‘Em, & When to Roll ‘Em!

Proper storage will protect your textile collection from light, acids, too much moisture or too much dryness, pests & folds and creases and provide you accessibility to collection items without excessive handling.

STORAGE SPACE: The optimum storage space for clothing and textiles is:

- Climate controlled (or at least regulated) without temperature and humidity extremes, and with good air circulation—use fans and/or dehumidifiers if necessary.
- Light controlled with natural light from windows blocked by UV filters, blinds or curtains and artificial light limited to work areas and aisles.
- Physically secure and out of the line of constant traffic—the more people that tromp in and out, the more danger of insects, pollen, and other environmental pollutants. When it comes to pest control or dust, there is no substitute for good housekeeping practices.
- Physically accessible without straining either the objects or the staff—having to get heavy boxes down from high shelves is bad for both the objects and the staff!

HOLDING AREA: Never allow un-inspected items to come into your storage area! Set aside a holding area for new donations. Be sure that you have inspected, and vacuumed all artifacts before placing them in your collections area. New donations can harbor all kinds of nasty, microscopic critters, not to mention mold spores that will destroy your collection!

If you suspect that there might be insects or larvae, here are two low-tech solutions:

- **For small items:** Place the object in a clean microwave oven along with a cup of water (should be in an oversized dish to avoid boiling over) and microwave on high for 4 – 5 minutes. This will kill any larvae. This works especially well on ethnic weavings.
- **For larger items:** Wrap the artifact in a piece of plastic, and place in a chest style deep freezer. Freeze for 48 hours, remove for 24 hours, refreeze for another 24 hours. Remove from the freezer and allow the artifact to come to room temperature before vacuuming and storing.

WHEN TO HANG ‘EM: The main advantage of a hanging garment system is that it is the most efficient way to house a large number of garments that are sturdy enough to be hung in a relatively small space. And, if properly organized, hanging storage allows curators and researchers excellent access to the collection because they can view items on the racks to get an overview of the collection holdings by date or category, thus cutting down on the amount of handling the garments must undergo when being retrieved or put away.

Hanging Racks: There are a number of options for hanging rack systems but all rods for hanging garments should be placed high enough from the floor to accommodate a long evening dress with at least a foot clearance from the floor.

- **Built-in:** Sturdy metal rods suspended from the ceiling or attached to metal or wooden uprights secured to the floor. Consider having at least one rack double hung for short garments like jackets, etc. Will need dust covers for the clothing.
- **Rolling Racks:** Sturdy metal racks with a shelf at the bottom are best. Rolling racks can be used for permanent storage or in conjunction with built in racks or cabinets when transporting garments & dust covers are needed to protect the clothing. Commercially available versions are readily available.
- **Cabinets:** Metal cabinets with rods for hanging—affords good protection from dust.

Hangers: Hangers must be adapted to properly support the garments. Avoid:

- hanging any garment that is so heavy that strain is placed on the garment’s shoulder seams, such as a 1920s beaded chiffon dress.
- any hanger whose ends will extend beyond the shoulder line of the garment.
- any hanger that is not shaped to accommodate the shoulders of the garment.
- commercially available plastic hangers as they disintegrate and off gas harmful chemicals.

Adapting Hangers: Adapting wooden and wire hangers with padding is one of the ongoing jobs of collection management—perfect for volunteers—just be sure to give them some fun jobs, too!

- **Wire Hangers:** Contrary to what Joan Crawford screamed, you can use wire hangers—as long as you pad them well with quilt batting & cover them with muslin. Two or 3 wire hangers tied together

makes for a sturdier support & you can bend them to the shape of the garment—also everybody has extra wire hangers & you can get them for free!

- **Wooden Hangers:** All wooden hangers must be well padded with batting and covered with muslin. Small, flat wooden hangers with shaped shoulders are the best hangers for 19th century women's clothing. These hangers were previously made for boys' suits, and are no longer available commercially but look for used ones in thrift stores. For children's clothing, the ends should be cut off to the size of the garment's shoulders. Straight wooden hangers work well for sleeveless, collarless dresses. Large shaped wooden hangers (made for men's suits) work well for men's clothing and adult outerwear.
- **Skirt/Pants Hangers:** Both clip and camp style skirt/pants hangers can be used—the clamp style distributes the weight of the garment better but will take up more room on the rack. Protect the garment with a strip of quilt batting covered by cotton over the waistband. If there is a train, use a separate hanger to bear the weight. Loop the fabric over the bottom bar of a second hanger that has been heavily padded and covered with cotton fabric. Knit fabrics are ideal for this as they have a bit of “grip” that helps keep the train from slipping off.

WHEN TO FOLD 'EM: Many garments can not be hung because they are too fragile and many others--tee shirts, petticoats, men's vests, etc are efficiently and effectively stored on shelves in boxes or drawers; this also applies to accessories like beaded purses & fans. Items should be packed as described below & pictures of the items attached to the outside of the container so the contents are not unnecessarily disturbed.

- **Boxed Storage:** Sturdy metal shelving units are needed to hold boxed storage. Coordinate the size of the boxes you need and the size of the shelving units. Ideally artifacts should be stored in acid-free boxes large enough to accommodate each object without folding. But this is usually not possible because there is not the storage space, or the shelving units available to accommodate the boxes are not of a compatible size, and/or the boxes are not affordable.
- **Drawers:** Custom-made museum storage metal drawer units are a godsend for many clothing artifacts. Heavy but fragile items such as 1920s dresses and beaded purses are best stored flat in drawers, as access to them is less problematic than if they are stored in boxes.
- **Retrofitting a Non-Acid-Free Container or Wooden Drawer:** An inexpensive alternative to acid-free boxes and custom cabinets is retrofitting boxes with lids such as florist boxes, boxes used to ship paper, rigid sided suitcases, or wooden drawers. Thoroughly vacuum the container and create a barrier against acid by lining the container with sheets of acid-free museum board, or acid-free artist's paper, cut to fit the bottom & sides. You can also create a very effective barrier by completely lining the box with a layer of aluminum foil. Then add an extra lining made of new washed cotton fabric. Pack your artifact as per guidelines below, cover with the cotton, then a layer of the museum board or foil and put the top on. .

Packing for Boxed Storage:

- Three-dimensional objects (clothing and accessories) should be stuffed with crumpled tissue or with tubes made of cotton knit stockinet stuffed with batting. Creases or folds can cause the fibers to break so it is important to cushion them with paper or padded tubes.
- Small flat objects can be stacked between sheets of acid free paper—be sure to place the heaviest objects on the bottom.
- Large flat textiles such as quilts can be folded as long as the folds are well padded with crumpled tissue or fabric tubes.

ROLLED STORAGE: Flat, delicate items such as lace, shawls, and silk scarves, etc. can be rolled on tubes. The tubes must be an inch or so longer than the artifact and the larger the piece, the larger the dimension of the roll diameter should be. Special acid free tubes are made for this purpose—or you can adapt cardboard tubes from fabric stores, paper towels, gift wrap, etc. Cover the cardboard with a layer of aluminum foil and either cotton, or acid free tissue. Roll the item loosely between layers of tissue and cover the whole with a cotton fabric. If the textile has heavy embroidery, then pad the layers with quilt batting to cushion the raised ornament. Put a picture of the object on the outside of the roll.

Do Not Roll: Quilts—*the outside fabric stretches while the inside fabric gets lots of tiny crease.*

Folded Textiles--*the stress on the fold will cause the fibers to break.*