

Alaska State Museums Bulletin 50

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How to Organize Your Yearly Spring Cleaning

By Lisa Bykonen, Sheldon Jackson Museum, Protection and Visitor Services Supervisor

Now that Spring is officially here (yes it started March 20th), it's time to take a look at planning for annual spring cleaning. The "who, what and when" begins with staff and/or volunteers who are properly trained in the handling of artifacts.

(For more information on proper training see "Handling", in Conservation Wise Guide. P.9-10.
http://www.museums.state.ak.us/documents/wise_guide.pdf)

The "what" entails exactly that – what areas and artifacts will you be cleaning? And the "when" involves scheduling and availability of people who oversee and do the actual work.

At the Sheldon Jackson Museum, Security staff and volunteers have been doing the gallery artifact cleaning from about the mid-1990s. I say gallery artifacts, but this also includes all of those areas surrounding the artifacts as well as where the artifacts live. We clean light wells, remove and damp-wipe UV covers, and also clean exhibit case glass inside and out. Cleaning glass solution is 1 part white vinegar to 4 parts water in a spray bottle. Only spray on the cloth not the window of the exhibit case; this keeps the cleaner from possibly seeping into the case. After cleaning the inner side of a glass exhibit case we let it "gas out" so that no residue is locked inside the case. We also look at the exterior of cabinets, and cases that may need pencil, crayon, or scuff marks removed.

Cleaning the non cased artifacts in the gallery can be a physical job. One will be climbing up and down ladders, handling vacuums and feather dusters, and be exposed to dust. As part of proper tools, dust masks should be available although persons sensitive to dust may not be able to tolerate this job.

Tools needed for gallery artifact cleaning are vacuums, soft bristle brushes, screening, rubber bands, gloves, and feather dusters attached to dowels that will give you a longer reach.



Nitrile gloves and a dust mask is the right personal protective equipment (PPE)



The Nilfisk Fanny Pack vacuum is convenient to use when going up and down ladders.



The Nilfisk GM80 Museum Vacuum is the industry standard for cleaning exhibits and collections. Its variable speed control allows for very low suction near artifacts.

For specifics on recommended types of vacuums please contact Curator of Museum Services or the Conservator at the Alaska State Museum.



Having a dedicated set of brushes used only for artifact cleaning will insure that no cross-contamination will occur.

Be sure to follow the safety requirements in use of ladders, and have your staff work in teams. Gallery artifact cleaning can be kind of fun, as you get to wear your comfortable grubbies (slang for jeans, tennis shoes and bandannas – not your normal presentation to the visiting public), plus be sure to have no jewelry, buckles, or long hair dangling where it could interfere with what you are working on.



Gently sweep dust toward the vacuum hose which is covered with a piece of screen. This prevents any small pieces from being sucked into the vacuum. Screening is cleaned often.

At SJM we try to look at a top down mode of operation. We start on those artifacts that are exhibited highest in the gallery, gently twirling the feather duster, or gently sweeping flat surfaces with soft brushes.

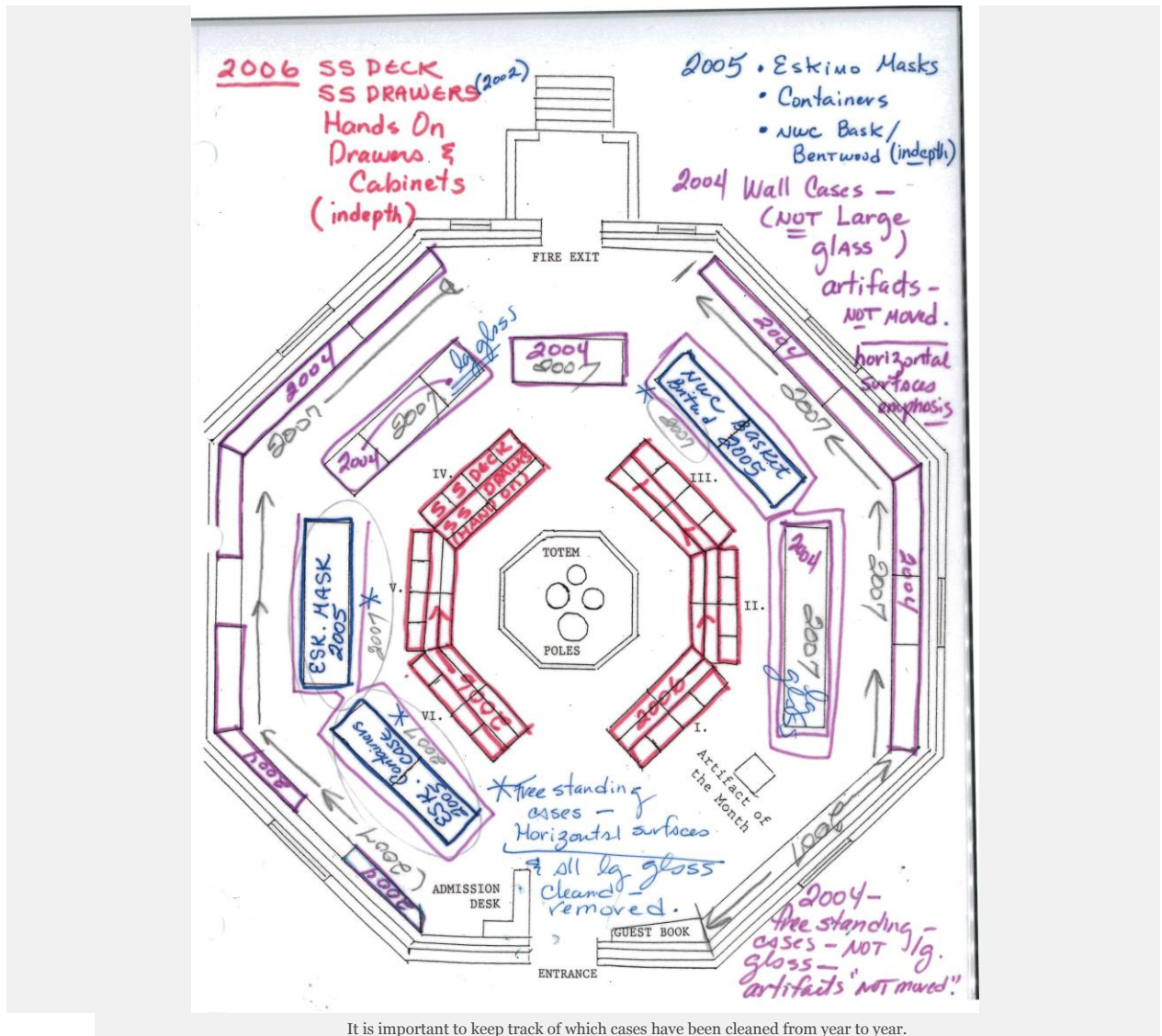


A feather duster comes in handy for gently knocking dust off of artifacts that are up high out of reach.

A vacuum is kept handy and as a team one person dusts, and as needed the other will vacuum the dust from the duster or brush. Sometimes it does not look like much, but at the end of the day your vacuum container will prove you actually did remove some dirt.

Artifacts that are very fragile, like certain parts of ancient totem poles for example, are not touched although careful rapid twirl of the feather duster nearby the artifact helps remove dust by encouraging it to fly somewhere else where it then can be vacuumed up.

With limited time and help, staff will not be able to do it all at one time. If there is a floor plan map of the exhibits, a copy can be made for keeping notes. See sample [Gallery Map 2012](#). The example uses color code and yearly notes of which areas were thoroughly cleaned. By keeping track of your in-depth exhibit and artifact cleaning, it will be easier to rotate and assign areas in the future. As a priority, annually try to clean all non-cased artifacts first. The exhibit cases can be cleaned on a rotational basis if you don't have the staff time to do it every year. This will make sure you have a general level of dust removal for the entire exhibit space.



It is important to keep track of which cases have been cleaned from year to year.

Documentation includes reporting anything that brings up a question. Is that an old moth casing? Is that new frass on the case under that wooden artifact? What about that split in the hide? Most times condition of an artifact has been noted, but today one can easily use a digital camera and date, document, and keep that record in the artifact's background file to track any changes.



A small piece of plastic on a flat surface hidden from public view can act as a dust catcher and be removed for cleaning or replaced as needed.

Another thought to consider is, will your gallery be open to the public during this time? We stay open but try not to run loud vacuums while guests are in the gallery. We also advise visitors to be mindful of extension cords. If cases are opened, we will rope off the area to keep the artifacts safe. If there is one thing visitors like to do, it is get up close and personal with your artifacts. It will happen if you don't make sure to keep them out. We only open cases where we are working, or set up a work area table. If artifacts are to be removed while cleaning, we use the gallery notebooks which have images of the exhibits labeled with artifact catalog numbers, and photocopies of the catalog cards to help us make sure we put them back in the same position.

Annual gallery cleaning is part of an overall conservation plan for the facility. All past history related to gallery exhibits, artifact condition, and past surveys should be available to answer any questions. After you have finished, be sure to empty vacuum containers, clean brushes and let them properly dry before storing. Keep your staff and volunteers happy with frequent breaks, coffee, donuts and tea (allowed in your break area only) and encourage camaraderie and your helpers will come back next year.



Good bye and good luck with you exhibit cleaning this year.

Ask ASM

Question: What are some of the reasons not to install a computer system in collections storage to operate the building HVAC and monitoring- units? The maintenance guys are really pushing for this because they say there is no other place for it. Others have said it would be nice to have another computer on which to enter collections data.

ASM: The main concern would be with security. Who will need to access the computer and for what reasons? Most museums allow collections staff to control access to storage. This helps keep the collections safe not just from theft, but also from damage and even inadvertent shifting or moving of collections which could cause them to become temporarily lost. If maintenance or any other non-collections staff has to go into collections area, someone from collections should be with them at all times. This means that every time they need to check the status of the HVAC, someone from collections has to stop what they are doing and be in there with them. And what if there is an after-hours emergency that requires access to the HVAC computer?

As far as having a computer workstation in collections storage for data entry, there is nothing inherently bad about this. They don't generate excessive heat or off-gas ozone like a photocopier, but these are some other things to consider:

- 1) Lights have to be on in the room a lot more, which cumulatively is not as good for the preservation of collections.
- 2) Collections storage should be kept at a somewhat cooler temperature for good preservation metrics, which is great for collections but uncomfortable for people sitting there entering data.
- 3) There is always the temptation to bring in a beverage, or one's coat or purse...these are all not best practices, for risks of spills, vector for pests, general clutter, etc.
- 4) Volunteers and interns who have to use the computer are then in the high-security area and need extra monitoring.

On the whole there are more negatives than positives for having computer work stations in collection storage. It sometimes done for the convenience of a quick search of the database but should be avoided for most other functions.

Shaking the Money Tree

NEH

Research and Development Program

The revised 2012 guidelines, which include new sample proposal narratives, can be found at: <http://neh.gov/grants/guidelines/PARD.html>

Deadline for submission: May 16, 2012

Grants in this program support projects that address major challenges in preserving or providing access to humanities collections and resources.

Preservation Assistance Grants for Smaller Institutions

Program information can be found at <http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/pag.html>

Deadline for Submission May 1, 2012.

Spotlight on Grant in Aid

With the Alaska State Museum's Grant in Aid season nearly upon us, it is important to keep certain dates in mind for this program:

April 2, 2012: The FY2013 applications will be available on the ASM Grants Webpage <http://www.museums.state.ak.us/grants.html> and sent through the AK Listserv.

May 15, 2012: Final accounting forms will be sent out to all current FY2012 grant recipients who have not already submitted their final accounting.

June 1, 2012: FY2013 applications are due and must either be emailed to scott.carrlee@alaska.gov by 4:30 pm or postmarked by this date.

June 30, 2012: End of the FY2012 grant cycle. All projects must be completed by this date or extensions should be requested.

July 1, 2012: Notification letters will be sent out and the results posted on the AK Museums listserv.

Late August 2012: Funds will be sent out to grant recipients.

Sept. 30, 2012: The final accounting for FY2012 grants due.

Also keep in mind that the Grant in Aid program is capacity building and project based. That means its purpose is to improve the quality of museum services and operations through projects that are appropriate to your museum's mission and enhance your museum's ability to engage with your community. These projects should have a beginning, middle, and an end, and are a high institutional priority. Your application will be scored on how well it meets these criteria.

There are three programs within Grant in Aid but you can only apply for one category each year.

Regular Grant:

This is for projects up to \$10,000. It is the most competitive with about 60% of the applications receiving funding.

Mini-grant:

This is for projects up to \$2,000. The application is shorter with about 80% of the applications receiving funding.

Internship Program:

This program will support an internship at your museum. You do not apply for a specific amount as the intern stipend is determined by ASM. Housing is generally supplied by the hosting museum but you can request additional funds for housing the interns. 90% of applicants receive funding.

ASM on the Road

Bob Banghart, ASM Chief Curator, and Scott Carrlee, ASM Curator of Museum Services, traveled to Hoonah to facilitate a discussion amongst several local institutions (Huna Heritage Foundation, Hoonah Indian Association, Hoonah Schools, National Park Service, and US Forest Service) about identifying cultural programming needs and developing partnering opportunities.



Bob Banghart, Chief Curator of the Alaska State Museum, facilitates the conversation about collaborative cultural projects

Conference Review: Alaska Anthropological Association



ASM conservator Ellen Carrlee attended this conference in Seattle at the beginning of March, subsidized by a contribution from the Friends of the Alaska State Museum. Among the most interesting sessions were those about European collections of early explorers, 21st century whaling practices of the Makah and Nuu Chah Nulth, and anthropological discussions of such Alaskan locations as Shishmaref, Fort Liscum, and Portage.

<http://www.alaskaanthropology.org/index.cfm?section=annual-meeting&page=Annual-Meeting>

Other useful lectures addressed Northwest Coast copper innovation, basketry hat

development, traditional food resources, and how archaeologists differentiate salmon species by examining their bones. You may be surprised to hear that of 100 talks given, 75% of them were about archaeology and the rest mainly cultural anthropology. Of 160 authors, 63% were from academia, 16% were Cultural Resource Management (CRM) archaeologists (in the business of excavating in advance of development according to federal regulations), 12% worked for government, 7% worked for museums, and 2% were Native. Promoting more interaction between anthropologists, museums, and experts who are Native would be a good direction for heritage preservation/education in Alaska.



Seal flipper bones seen on tour of the National Marine Mammal Research Lab. Tours of the archaeology and ethnology collections at the Burke Museum were also very informative.

Alaska Museums in the News

Recent News about the State Library, Archives, and Museums Project

<http://juneauempire.com/local/2012-03-10/geothermal-wells-save-energy#.T2pvWBESouc>

<http://juneauempire.com/state/2012-03-10/legislators-hope-building-gets-more-money#.T2pvGhESouc>

<http://juneauempire.com/opinion/2012-03-13/its-time-fund-and-build-new-state-office-slam-buildings#.T2pvvhESouc>

Louise Kellogg honored in Alaska Women's Hall of Fame

http://www.frontiersman.com/news/kellogg-in-alaska-women-s-hall-of-fame/article_00029f3c-5eae-11e1-8b16-0019bb2963f4.html

Ancient Aleut Art of Making Bentwood Visors Showcased at Anchorage Museum

http://articles.ktuu.com/2012-03-09/hat_31141973

Professional Development/Training Opportunities

Connecting to Collections Online Community recently hosted a Webinar called "Making the Most of the Storage You Have." A recording is available at

<http://www.connectingtocollections.org/recording-community-webinar-making-the-most-of-the-storage-you-have/>

You can also receive FREE conservation advice online through the C2C Online Community!

This spring, you and your small museum colleagues are invited to attend four free webinars hosted by the Connecting to Collections (C2C) Online Community. Simply register for free, (<http://www.connectingtocollections.org/>) and you can join experts in the conservation field for these informative presentations:

March 29, 9 am AKST

Introduction to LED Lighting

April 4, 9 am AKST

Outsourcing Digitization

April 18, 9 am AKST

MayDay!

May 31, 9 am AKST

Preserving Scrapbooks

Membership in the C2C Online Community also connects you with colleagues in the preservation field and helps your organization quickly locate reliable preservation resources. All events are recorded and posted on the site. Check it often for the upcoming schedule of events.

Call for Papers

Alaska Historical Society

2012 Conference, Sitka

Alaska on the World Stage

The Alaska Historical Society invites paper and panel proposals for the 2012 annual conference, "Alaska on the World Stage," to be held in Sitka from October 10-13. The AHS also welcomes proposals for facilitated discussions, round-table sessions, workshops, and "reports from the field."

In spite of being the most eastern, western, and northern of frontiers during the course of its history, Alaska is an international land. The inter-national encounters among peoples originated with the complex relations among the dozens of Alaska Native groups. With the advent of Russian colonization, Alaska became a linchpin to the Pacific World and a site of international trade and contact. Since then, Russian fur traders, Scandinavian fishermen, Asian cannery workers, American gold seekers, Alaskan Natives, Japanese and American servicemen, and a host of international scientists, artists and others have comingled in the Great Land. The state is perhaps most famous for its global exports, including oil, minerals, and seafood. The ethos of Alaska has been sold to the world's imagination through travelogues, contemporary television series, ethnographic collections found in international museums, and past and current scientific expeditions. Alaska as an intellectual export includes its central place in global debates over climate change and resource extraction.

The AHS welcomes all papers that explore the theme of "Alaska on the World Stage" for its Sitka conference. Sitka, the former capitol of Russian America, is a fitting place to explore Alaska's global connections. For consideration, individuals should send an abstract of no more than 250 words with their name, affiliation, and contact information to Anjuli Grantham (anjuligrantham@gmail.com) by May 1, 2012.

Professional Time Wasting on the Web

A good article about the Spike TV show "American Diggers"

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/21/arts/television/spikes-american-digger-draws-concern-from-scholars.html?_r=2&ref=arts

Cool video of a gigantic video globe in a museum

<http://www.zeitnews.org/applied-sciences/geo-cosmos-gigantic-globe-oled-display.html>

An interesting article on how we measure success in an organization

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/george-weiner/data-analytics_b_1315068.html?ref=email_share

Portrait of Mary Todd Lincoln determined to be a hoax.

http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/12/arts/design/portrait-of-mary-todd-lincoln-is-deemed-a-hoax.html?_r=1