

WHAT TO CLEAN WHEN AND WITH WHAT: HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUMS

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BLOOD RUN
NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARK



ABBIE GARDNER
SHARP CABIN

MASON CITY



MONTAUK

WATERLOO/CEDAR FALLS

DUBUQUE

SIoux CITY



EDEL BLACKSMITH SHOP



PLUM GROVE
HISTORIC HOME

IOWA CITY

DAVENPORT



STATE HISTORICAL
MUSEUM OF IOWA

DES MOINES



WESTERN HISTORIC
TRAILS CENTER

COUNCIL BLUFFS



TOOLESBORO MOUNDS
NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARK



AMERICAN GOTHIC
HOUSE

State Historic Sites

STATE HISTORICAL
SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

WHY?

Why do we need to clean regularly and why do we need to use special tools and methods

- Because cleaning is part of a good preventative maintenance plan for a building. You can potentially identify issues before they arise or before they become worse.



Water damage found on attic floor during routine cleaning at Montauk.

Came from a leak in the roof.

- Because cleaning is part of a good preservation plan for the objects in your collection, but if done incorrectly can permanently damage objects.

PREPPING FOR CLEANING

- Take off jewelry or clothing that may scratch or snag on objects. This includes any loose clothing or clothing with zippers.
- Wash hands and thoroughly dry. Do not apply any lotions or salves to hands.
- Use white cotton gloves or nitrile gloves for handling.
 - Don't use cotton gloves for ceramics, glass, polished furniture, or anything else that may slip.



Gaylord Archival sells cotton gloves.

Amazon sells cotton and nitrile gloves.

TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT

- Dusting cloth – microfiber and lint free rags
- Dusting brushes
- Low suction vacuum with HEPA filter - NILFISK
- Dry mop
- Renaissance or butchers wax
- Distilled water
- Q-tips
- Orvus
- Isopropyl alcohol
- Precipitated calcium carbonate & flannel pieces
- Padded cart or tray



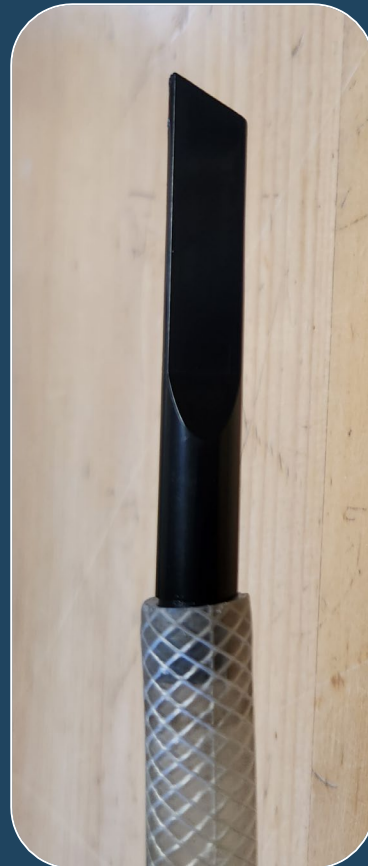
CARPET CLEANING - MODERN

- Damage can easily occur to baseboards and furniture.
- For modern/public spaces a regular vacuum can be used



CARPET CLEANING – HISTORIC RUGS

- Do NOT spot clean or wash
- NEVER use a regular vacuum (with a roller brush) on historic rugs and carpet
- Use a HEPA filtered vacuum on low suction



CARPET CLEANING – HISTORIC RUGS

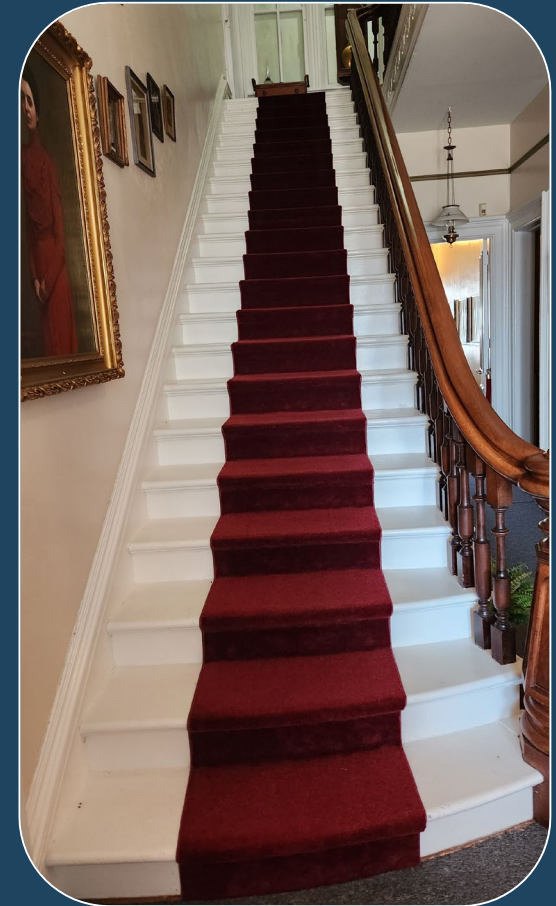
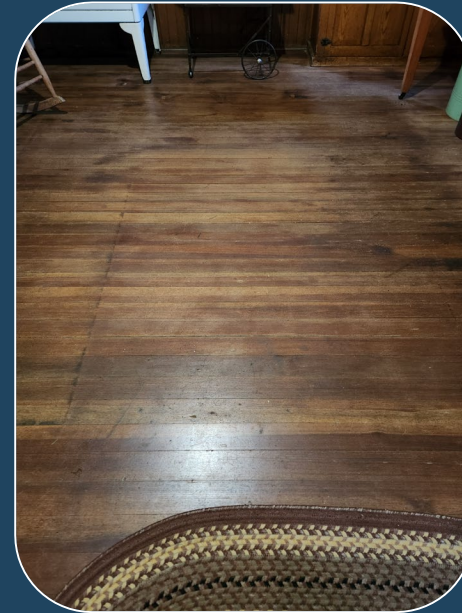
Process:

- Removing shoes and any damaging clothing or jewelry start in the farthest corner of the room/rug
- Using a low suction vacuum with a screen over the portion of the carpet you are going to clean, slowly and gently vacuum section by section
 - Do not vacuum if any threads are extremely loose
 - Use a tweezers to get any debris that is left behind
 - Be mindful of any fringe on the ends of rugs
- If the carpet is in good condition you can vacuum it without the screen
- If rug is small enough, it can be taken outside and gently shaken.
 - Use two people.



WOOD FLOOR CLEANING

- Your floors may be finished, unfinished, or painted
- For daily maintenance dry mop as needed
- Watch out for areas that could snag on a dry mop
- Can vacuum it with a low suction vacuum cleaner
- Use a damp rag to spot clean areas
 - Test an inconspicuous area first
- Damp mop only if necessary
 - Ensure you are not getting furniture legs wet
 - Do it on a dry day with plenty of air flow to dry



TILE FLOOR CLEANING

- For daily maintenance dry mop as needed
- Watch out for areas that could snag on a dry mop
- Can vacuum it with a low suction vacuum cleaner
- Use a damp rag to spot clean areas
 - Test an inconspicuous area first
- Do not use water and use caution cleaning if tiles are broken or there is loss of grout



WALLS AND CEILINGS

- Check for flaking paint and cracks in plaster
- Do not clean if you have historic wallpaper
- Use an extendable duster with microfiber or static cloth
- Dust walls and ceilings before doing rest of cleaning
- Use a damp rag to spot clean walls and woodwork as needed



WOOD & FURNITURE

- Preventative measure – consider covering furniture in off season
- Dust with a dry cotton rag or use a brush on carvings/details
- Watch out for areas that could catch or snag
- Can wax wood furniture every few years if needed – no more than every 2 years

Renaissance Wax

- Clean fabric on furniture same as historic carpets:
 - Make sure fabric is in good condition
 - Low suction vacuum cleaner with a screen on the end



WINDOWS

Coverings:

- Drapes & curtains can be cleaned as same as textiles/carpets – using low suction vacuum
- Shades can be dusted with a brush or cloth as long as they are in good condition



Some of the original wooden window shades at Montauk have compromised finish on them, so I do not dust or clean them.

WINDOWS

Glass:

- In a perfect world we would avoid commercial window cleaners...
- Don't use sprays or aerosols to spray directly onto glass as it can drift and land on woodwork and finishes
- Use 1:1 solution of isopropyl alcohol and distilled water with a couple drops of ammonia (can omit ammonia). Use a damp rag to clean glass making sure not to get it on the woodwork. Wipe dry with a lint free rag.



MIRRORS & GLASS

Mirrors:

- If mirror is in good condition has an ornate or gilded frame, dust frame with a brush
- Mirror can be dusted with a lint free cloth
- Silvering – the silver portion of old mirrors can start separating from the glass. Can happen from age, moisture, environmental conditions. There is no “fixing” the issue, and the mirror is not dirty.

Glass:

- Use nitrile (not cloth) gloves to handle glass objects
- For almost all glass objects I just dust using either dust brushes or cotton rag
- If it is clear glass (with not metal elements) and is in good condition (no cracks, chips, or repairs) it can be cleaned with a solution of distilled water and Orvus. Rinse with distilled water and dry with a lint free rag.



CERAMICS

- There are two types of ceramics: glazed (hard, glossy) & unglazed (porous, soft)
- Use nitrile gloves (not cloth) to handle ceramics
- Unglazed ceramics can be dusted by brush
- Glazed ceramics can be wiped gently with a damp rag if glaze is not cracked, and there is no over-glaze decorations. Otherwise dust with brush or cloth.

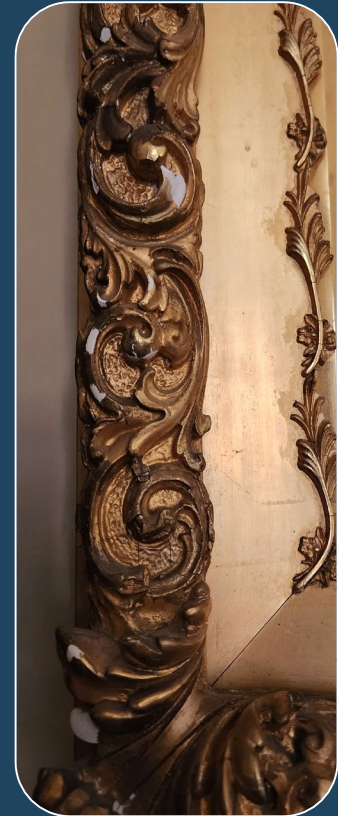


PAINTINGS & FRAMES

- Preventative measure – covering paintings and framed objects in the off season with Tyvek coverings.
- I dust paintings and their frames only once a year.

Frames:

- Ornate and gilded/painted frames should be dusted gently with a brush.
- DO NOT dust if there is any loss to the gilding/paint



Paintings:

- Paintings can be gently brushed from top to bottom
- DO NOT dust if painting has any flaking, cracks, loss of paint, etc.

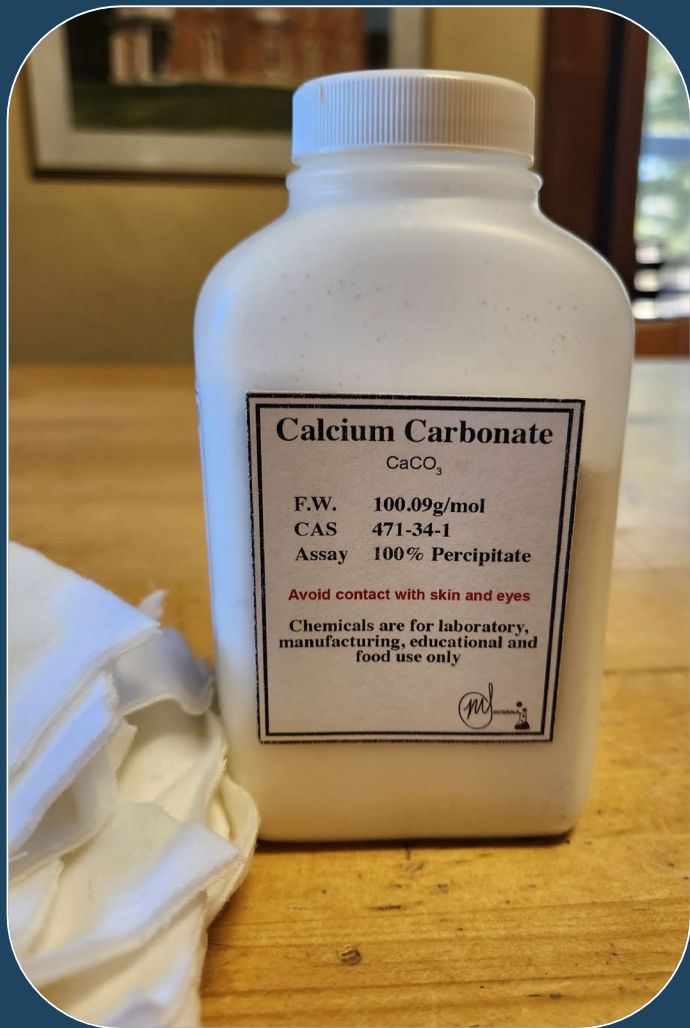
METALS

- Always wear gloves when handling metal – the oils and salts on our skin can damage it
- Dust metal with a brush. Avoid using a cloth as dust particles can potentially scratch.
- Don't attempt to remove rust/corrosion.

Tarnishing: Tarnish is actually a protective barrier and does not need to be removed. The only things I polish are a few silver serving items in our dining room, and that I only do every 5 years or so.

Polishing: No matter how gentle you polish something it is ALWAYS removing a layer of original metal from the object.

METALS



- Create a slurry of Calcium Carbonate and distilled water
- Using a flannel rag rub the slurry in circular motions on the surface to remove tarnish.
- You can use a Q-tip to get into small areas.
- Make sure to remove all the slurry by using distilled water – I wet down flannel pieces with water and worked at rubbing the slurry off.
- Wipe dry.



BOOKS

- Books need air flow around them so make sure they are not pushed all the way to the back of a shelf, and if they are enclosed keep the door ajar
- Don't pull a book from a shelf from the top of the spine, it will cause damage (see photo)
- Either push the book forward from behind or push the two books next to it back a bit so you can grab the book
- Dust book with brush or lint free cloth (if edges are not compromised)
- Keep book closed and dust away from the binding
- Make sure to clean the shelves as well



MARBLE

- Can be dusted with brush, cloth, or small attachment of a low suction vacuum
- Marble is porous:
 - Never use cleaning chemicals on it, especially not bleach
 - The whiteness of a marble statue/surface can brown over time due to dirt getting into the porous marble and no amount of cleaning will get it white again. Contact a conservator for proper cleaning.
- Highly polished marble can be wiped with a damp rag



TEXTILES

- Bedspreads, quilts, blankets, linens – can be cleaned similar to carpets
 - Use a low suction vacuum with a screen over any portion of the textile you are going to clean, slowly and gently vacuumed section by section
 - Do not vacuum any damaged areas
 - Be mindful of any fringe or decorative pieces
 - If object is in good condition you can vacuum it without the screen
- Clothing
 - Clothing on display should be rotated out every few years and refolded every year
 - Cleaning depends on condition and materials
 - In general if item is in good condition lay it flat and vacuum with a micro-attachment on a low suction vacuum, taking care of buttons, clasps, details, lace, etc.



RESTROOMS

- A lot of us may have historic restrooms that are either on display, or possibly have a mix use.
- I have a modern toilet in a historic bathroom used by staff, an entirely historic bathroom for display, and a modern restroom for the public.
- On modern pieces I use typical restroom cleaning supplies.
- In our historic restroom I just dust as needed.
- For porcelain and enameled cast iron, as long as it is in good condition you can wipe it down with a damp rag.



CLEANING SCHEDULES

Things to consider:

- Staff and volunteer availability and capability
- Visitation
 - When are visitors least likely to interfere? Or you can use it as an educational opportunity.
 - Foot traffic use
- Supplies needed
- Organize tasks by frequency – daily, weekly, quarterly, etc.
- Have physical copies of the schedule in a binder and a dedicated area to initial or sign when a task has been completed

CLEANING SCHEDULE EXAMPLE

Montauk Historic Site								
Quarterly Cleaning								
		Paintings Dusted	Frames Dusted	Upstairs Carpets Vacuumed	Dust Downstairs Books	Check folded textiles	Dust Gilded Frames	Downstairs Carpets Vacuumed
1st Quarter								
January								
Feburary								
March								
Notes:								

CLEANING SCHEDULE EXAMPLE

Montauk Historic Site						
Quarterly Cleaning						
2nd Quarter		General Object Dusting (up & down)	General Furniture Dusting (up & down)	Furniture Wood Waxing as needed	Furniture Vacuumed Under	Dust Upstairs & Attic Books
April						
May						
June						
Notes:						

CLEANING SCHEDULE EXAMPLE

Montauk Historic Site						
Quarterly Cleaning						
3rd Quarter		Mirrors	Windows	Check & Dust Downstairs Books	Upholstry Vacuumed	Wooden Floors
July						
August						
September						
Notes:						

CLEANING SCHEDULE EXAMPLE

Montauk Historic Site						
Quarterly Cleaning						
		Check Metal Objects on Display	Check & Dust Upstairs & Attic Books	General Object Dusting (up & down)	General Furniture Dusting (up & down)	Bed Spreads Vacuumed
4th Quarter						
October						
November						
December						
Notes:						

CLEANING SCHEDULE EXAMPLE

Montauk Historic Site							
Daily Cleaning	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Check public restrooms for supplies							
Sweep public restrooms							
Sweep porches							
Sweep sidewalks							
Vacuum front entrance & stairs							
Vacuum windowsills							
Vacuum house as needed							
Front door windows							
Empty trash							
Dust doors, baseboards, and walls as needed							
Dry mop kitchen as needed							

QUESTIONS?

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