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Western Carolina University
Mountain Heritage Center

Collections Procedures Manual

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INTRODUCTION

A museum’s collection does not just sit on a shelf gathering dust. It must be properly documented, kept track of, housed and maintained, and used. This manual sets out the procedures for doing these activities in a manner that is consistent and that provides for the safety, access and use, and intellectual integrity and protection of the collection.

In addition to the PastPerfect User’s Guide referenced in many sections of this manual, MHC has a PastPerfect training CD, kept on the bookshelf in the Curator’s office, that offers a great deal of useful information about data entry procedures.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PASTPERFECT DATABASE

Why Do We Use a Computerized Database?
Collections management programs currently in use are based on a relational database. In this type of program, all of your information can be related to other
information through the use of unique identifiers for objects, acquisitions, and people. This system takes the place of the old catalogue cards, that had to be duplicated and cross-referenced for every search parameter - source, time period, location, type of object - that was needed in order to provide management of and access to the objects.

The PastPerfect program is installed on four of the MHC computers:

The “Mother Ship” in the office at the end of the hall. This computer should not be turned off, as it is the server where PP5 data is stored.

The large computer in the Graphics Workroom.

The small white Mac laptop, usually kept on the table behind the Curator’s desk. This computer’s battery is almost worn out, so if you are using it, plug it in. Wireless reception varies throughout the MHC, so you may not be able to use this computer everywhere.

The Receptionist’s computer at the Front Desk.

MHC has two copies of the PastPerfect Software for Museum Collections Version 5 User’s Guide, usually kept on the bookshelf in the Curator’s office. It contains detailed information on how to use the program. Some of the capabilities of PastPerfect that are used by MHC are:

Searchable fields for entering extensive data about every aspect of an object, from where it was obtained to family histories of those who used it to what it’s made of and what condition it’s in.

Reports and other ways to organize data about the collection in ways that are useful for every facet of the Center’s exhibits, collections management, and programs.

Generation of pre-filled forms for any activity requiring physical documentation.

Records of exhibits, object location histories, condition and conservation treatments - and the list goes on.

Please Note

You will see that there are two icons for PastPerfect on the computers that have the program installed. The old version, Version 4, is no longer in use and should not be opened. Its icon is a gold rectangle with the Roman numeral IV in it. The new version, Version 5, has a circular gold icon with PPS 5 on it. This is the one to use.

Data Entry Standards

Computers are very literal, so they do not see C35d as being the same as C 35 d. They will not find the name of an object’s former owner if you’ve put it in the Description field instead of the Notes field. Thus, it is important to be aware of the format MHC uses for certain information, and of what information goes into
what field. Also note that MHC does not use all of the features of the program, and many fields will be left blank.

Naming Objects:
MHC uses a controlled vocabulary known as Nomenclature 3.0 for Museum Cataloguing for naming objects. This system, developed originally by Robert G. Chenhall for classifying man-made objects, divides objects into ten categories and a number of sub-categories based on how they are used. Under each sub-category is a list of object names.

When you enter an object name, if it is not in Nomenclature, you will be prompted to choose another name.

When you choose a name, be sure it is in the proper category and subcategory for that object.

If you are making changes to an existing record, you may be told upon trying to save your changes that the object name for that record is not in the Lexicon.

Choose another name for the object rather than just accepting the improper name.


Location Information:
The Location subscreen can be accessed from the Sidebar. You will notice that most of the location information is currently entered into the field HOME LOCATION/BUILDING. This is because the old version only had one location field. For the time being, MHC is continuing this practice, only adding names in the ROOM field. These are the formats to be used in referring to locations:

- Cabinets are referred to by the letter C followed by a space followed by their two digit number followed by a space and the shelf letter - C 35 d. There is no punctuation in this designation.
- Shelving units are referred to as SU followed by a space followed by their two-digit number followed by a space followed by their shelf letter - SU 22 c. There is no punctuation.
- Refer to the floor plans at the end of this manual for other areas, always maintaining the same unpunctuated format with spaces between letters and numbers.
- Add the name of the room in the ROOM field.

List of Room Names:
These are the official names of the galleries, lobbies, and rooms in MHC where collections objects may be stored or exhibited:

- Auditorium Lobby
- North Lobby
- Main Lobby (the wall cases in this lobby are numbered 1-8)
South Lobby
Gallery A
Gallery B
Gallery C
Collections Workroom
Collections Storage
Collections Annex
The Cage (located inside room 118 at the back of this floor of the Robinson Building)
Reception Area (includes showcase on the wall)
Office Hallway
Curator’s Office
Room 161 at the end of the Office Hallway (used to store borrowed artifacts)

Data Entry in the Objects Catalogue

The User’s Guide has detailed information about what kinds of data to enter in each field of the Objects Catalogue. This is in Chapter 6, “The Objects Catalogue.” The section called “Objects Cataloguing Tutorial” takes you through the available fields and tells you what kind of information belongs in each. We use the “History Screen View” for most of the objects in the MHC catalogue.

You will see that data entry in the past has not been consistent, with much of the information about an object simply included in the DESCRIPTION field. If you are working in the database and have time, you might want to pull some of this information out into the appropriate fields. Here are a few specifications to help you get information into the correct places:

Notice that there are specific fields in the History Screen View to enter information such as the Collector of the object, its materials, where or by whom it was Found, Made, Used, or Owned.

Provenance refers to the ownership history of an object. This is not always known prior to when the object came into the MHC collection, but sometimes the donor will give either general or specific information about its past.

Under “Other Views” in the Sidebar, you will find fields for many other bits of information. Condition, Dimensions, Lexicon, and Location are explained below under Processing the Collection.

Notes & Legal offers a Notes field for putting in information about any stories, family history, usage information, or other non-descriptive data about the object.

See the User’s Guide for a good description of the types of information that go into the People-Subjects-Classification-Search Terms subscreen.

The Relations subscreen allows you to list any publications in which the item is mentioned; you may also, through Related Items, establish relationships with other objects. See “Relations Subscreen” in Chapter 6 of the User’s
BRINGING OBJECTS INTO THE COLLECTION

Entering Contacts into PastPerfect

The first step in bringing any object into MHC, whether temporarily or for acquisition, is to enter the contact information of the source into the database. In Chapter 20 in the User’s Guide, see “Working with Contacts” for entering information about the owner of the object. Note that the database is used for keeping track of many types of contacts besides collections donors. Note also that all of this information is confidential. A few points to be aware of:

Always check before entering a new contact that this person is not already in the database, following instructions to Browse Contact File.

If you only have a company name for a donor or lender, leave the name fields blank and enter the company name in the Company field.

The MHC and PastPerfect always use the LAST COMMA FIRST format for referring to source names, e.g. Stufflebeam, Andrew.

Temporary Custody

Temporary Custody is a form of short-term loan, used when objects are brought into the Center for any purpose, not just for acquisition through accession or loan. The form may be accessed from the Main Menu in PastPerfect, and should be pre-filled with information on the source using the Select Donor from Contacts File button on the Add New Temporary Custody Receipt screen. Blank forms may also be printed using the Reports feature in the database - see Chapter 17 in the User’s Guide, “Reports.” Temporary Custody is listed under Report Types, and you will be given the blank form as one of your choices. Follow the instructions to run and print this report. Use a printed form if you are going somewhere else to pick up Temporary Custody items, filling out and signing two copies and leaving one for the owner of the items.

If filling in source information manually, be sure to fill it in completely so the MHC can contact this person about the eventual disposition of their objects.

Be sure to check the reason why this object or group of objects is being taken to or left at the Center.

Be sure to check what will happen to the object/s if they are not being kept for acquisition - this is extremely important - and should include how the item is to be returned if the owner is not able to come to the Center.

Whether filling in items manually or in the database, list each item, one item per line, with enough descriptive information that the items can be identified.

Temporary Custody forms that are filled in manually should then be brought back to the Center and entered into PastPerfect following instructions in Chapter 4 of the User’s Guide, “Temporary Custody,” in the section “The
Basic Steps . . .

When the form has been entered into the database, print out two copies, have the owner and the Curator sign both.

Give or send one copy to the owner and keep the other in a Temporary Custody file labeled with the number of the receipt and the owner’s name.

The artifacts should be taken into the Collections Workroom and kept together, clearly labeled with the Temporary Custody receipt number, the owner’s name, and the proposed date of return should the objects not be accessioned or formally loaned.

Accessioning

An accession is defined as an object or group of objects from a single source brought into the collection at one time. The following are steps in accessioning items into the permanent collection:

The object/s are offered by a donor, and may be left at the Center under a Temporary Custody Receipt.

The Director and Curator evaluate the suitability of the item/s for inclusion in the collection according to the MHC Collections Management Policy.

If the item/s are already at the Center, the accession may be initiated from the Temporary Custody screen in PastPerfect. For this procedure, see Chapter 5, “The Accession Process,” in the User’s Guide.

If the items are not at the Center, or have just been brought in and accepted while the source is still present, they can be accessioned directly from the Accession screen in PastPerfect.

PastPerfect will require that an accession number be assigned to the donation; rather than using the number after the one brought up as “last used” by the program, the Curator must assign the next number available.

A Deed of Gift (DOG) can be printed from the Accession screen - use acid-free paper and print two copies.

An accession file, labeled with the accession number and the donor’s name, last name, first, should be established.

All forms, correspondence, emails, and notes of telephone conversations regarding the acquisition should be placed in this file.

If the donor is present, have them sign both copies of the DOG, which then have to be sent to the Executive Secretary of the WCU Foundation for signature.

If the donor is not present, send them both copies along with a thank you letter asking them to sign and return BOTH for the Executive Secretary’s signature.

Send one copy to the donor for their records, and retain the other for the Accession file, which is kept in the Curator’s office.

Incoming Loans

The Mountain Heritage Center may borrow artifacts from other museums or
institutions, or from organizations or private collectors, for use in exhibits. Sometimes the lender will require the use of their own loan form or contract, but often non-museum organizations or private collectors will be given an incoming loan form generated by the MHC. The procedure for initiating and processing such loans is as follows:

The Curator determines what objects are needed and sources for these objects.
The potential lender is contacted and asked for the loan of the object/s.
The lender is asked for a list of their requirements, which may include proof of insurance, a General Facility Report or other assurance of the care their object will be given, and/or execution of their own outgoing loan form with indication of and acceptance of their institutional standards and requirements.
MHC and the lender must agree on how the items are to be transported to the Center and who is responsible for the costs.
The loan is entered into the PastPerfect database - see Chapter 11 in the User's Guide, “Incoming Loans,” for this procedure.
If using the MHC loan agreement, two copies must be printed out and signed by both the Curator and the lender.
A loan file, labeled with the loan number and the lender's name, is established in which to keep all records pertaining to the loan from inception to return.

See the “Incoming Loans” section of the MHC Collections Management Policy for detailed policies regarding the documentation, processing, care, and return of loaned objects.

See also the Artifact Handling section of this manual, keeping in mind that the standards of care for borrowed objects should be at least as high, preferably higher than, those observed for the Center’s own collection.

PROCESSING THE COLLECTION

Once the necessary steps to bring an item into the collection have been completed, each item within an accession must be processed in order to record information about it, to identify it, and to ensure its preservation. These are the steps required to catalogue an object.

Assign Object Numbers:

  When an accession is entered into the database, it is assigned a number indicating the year, and the order of its acquisition within that year. Thus, the first accession of 2013 would be 2013.001.
  As objects are then entered individually into that accession, each is given a further four-digit number.
  Objects consisting of more than one part, such as a pair of shoes, or a compass with two interchangeable ends are given a letter for each part. The shoes
might be 2013.001.0001a,b; the compass 2013.001.0002a-c. Sets consisting of more than one object are given further numbers. A teaset with a pot, sugar bowl, creamer, and four cups with saucers, might be numbered 2013.001.0005.001a,b; 2013.001.0005.002; and so forth.

Make and Attach ID Tags:

Hang tags should be made of acid-free card stock or Tyvek and attached to the object with soft cotton string. The object number should be written on both sides with either pencil or a Pigma marker. Do not use ball point pens or Sharpie-type markers. Write the object name under the number on the front of the tag. Attach tags to parts of the object that are not fragile, and be sure that the tag will be visible when the object is on its shelf or in its box. You may need to use a longer string to tie a tag to something such as a large piece of pottery. If an object is very tiny, you may find you need to put the tag in a small zip-lock bag with it or in a box alongside it. Make sure that there can be no confusion about which tag belongs to which object.

Write a Physical Description:

In these days of instant digital photography, a physical description may seem redundant. However, if the grid is down and all you have is a file cabinet and a flashlight, you will be glad you wrote a detailed description. Keep in mind that the purpose of this description is to enable you to pick out your object from any group of similar objects. Here is what it should, and shouldn’t, contain:

- What it is, if you know it. If not, a physical description will have to do. If there is anything you have to guess about in writing a description or condition report, do not present your guess as fact. Use words such as “probably” or “possibly,”, or put “(?)) after the word or line you are not certain about. “Possibly brass” or “yellow-colored metal” is far better than a guess.
- What it looks like - shape, color, materials, finish. Go from top to bottom, front to back, in some logical order. Go from the general to the specific. If it has separate parts, describe them and their relation to the whole.
- If it has any decorative finish or design, include what it looks like, where it is, how it was done (if you know,) and its colors.
- If there is a manufacturer’s label, a signature, or any other identifying material, describe where it is, what it says, and what it looks like.
- Do not describe what condition the object is in, unless there are blatant details such as missing parts. This information belongs in the condition report.
- Do not tell what the object is for, how it is used, who owned it, where it came from, or any other details that are part of its history. These belong in other fields.

Measure the Object:
Measurements help in identifying an object - if you are looking for a crock described as 17”H, then you know the one that’s 12”H is not what you need. They also help curators and collections managers assess storage and exhibit needs. Hence, measurements start with the overall dimensions of an object as it would stand on a shelf, and then go to details. For further information, see “Measuring,” Section 5C in MRM5. Measurements should be entered in the Dimensions screen in PastPerfect.

Write a Condition Report:

A condition report is done when an object first comes into a collection. This serves as a baseline that can be compared with subsequent condition reports to determine whether an object has been damaged by handling, by substandard housing, or by adverse environmental conditions. This is what it should contain:

What the object is, and a very brief description of what it looks like and is made of.

Its overall condition - generally expressed as Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor. An excellent object is in mint condition, with no damage or wear whatsoever - usually only a just-manufactured item will be in excellent condition. Good condition usually means that the item is intact, is usable for its intended purpose, and has only the wear expected in an item of its age. A fair object will have excessive wear or some damage, or might have some missing parts, or be intact but non-functional. Its finish may also be deteriorating - badly chipped or peeling paint, or substantial corrosion. Poor is reserved for items that are probably not able to be exhibited because of missing parts, severe corrosion or other damage, or physical or chemical instability.

For detailed instructions on doing condition reports for a variety of objects, see “Condition Reporting,” Section 5D in MRM5.

Condition reports are to be entered in the Condition screen in PastPerfect.

Photograph or Scan the Object:

Photography serves several purposes - identification, to augment written condition reports, and for exhibit graphics, catalogs, and online and print publicity materials, as well as for possible sale to the public as reproductions. The MHC currently uses a digital camera, but has no photography studio nor set of lights. There is a set of lights used for videography that may be used for object photography. Here are some guidelines for taking record photographs of objects:

Do not start photographing objects until you have been instructed in the use of the equipment and in the proper procedures to follow.

Objects to be photographed should be placed in front of a neutral backdrop such as a sheet of board or paper, and lit from both sides to eliminate shadows that would obscure details. Be sure the lights are not close enough to heat up the objects.

Remove the object’s ID tag immediately before photographing it, and replace
it as soon as you are done.

Either keep a log of what you have photographed so you can identify the objects later, or put a card with the object’s ID# written on it in the field of each photograph. Keep this card in the same general plane as what you are photographing so it will be clearly focused, but do not let it obscure any part of the object unless you are taking closeups of details.

Take a general portrait of the object as it might appear when you are looking at it in an exhibit, then proceed to photograph systematically from the front, the side, the back, the other side, the top, and the bottom.

Follow these views by taking closeups of marks or labels and of any condition concerns. It is better to take too many rather than too few photographs.

Process the Images and Upload to PastPerfect

Once you have taken your photographs, the images need to be renamed and processed on the computer in the Graphics Workroom and then uploaded to the database as a part of the catalogue record.

Using the download cable, connect the camera to the computer in the Graphics Workroom. This will open iPhoto, and give you the option of importing your images.

Delete the images from the camera once you have imported them. All collections photos should be saved as TIFs.

If you have more than one image of the same view, select the best one and discard the rest.

Use the editing tools in iPhoto to crop the image, rotate it, and brighten the shadows if needed to bring out details. Do not manipulate the colors or perform any other editing.

Rename each image file with the object ID of the object. For multiple views, follow this ID number with an appropriate description, e.g. front, side, or label detail. If you prefer, you may simply put a dash and a sequential number, e.g. 2012.003.0047-1, 2012.003.0047-2. Do not use letters to designate sequential views because that is how we designate parts of multi-part objects.

From iPhoto, put the images into folders under Collections Pics in the Shared directory. If there is already a folder for the accession/s you are working with, put the images into that folder. If not, make a folder labeled with the accession number (not the object number,) followed by the collection name. Thus the objects above would go into a folder labeled 2012.003 Bardo.

You can then put the images into PastPerfect, which is located on the Windows drive in the same computer. The Collections Pics folder is also accessible from here.

Follow the instructions for putting images into the database to be found in Chapter 26 of the Users Guide, “Multimedia,” in the section “Attching Digital Images.” You will be using the procedure found on p. 559 titled
“Attach an Existing Image File.”
Do not use the editing tools or other processes suggested by the Guide, just upload your images.
If you have images that were taken to show condition, you may enter them from a condition report in the same manner as you entered them into the object record.
Start by creating a condition report and, after you have saved the report, click on “Image Management” and upload your images from the file.

Mark the Object:
Markings on museum objects should be done with reversible methods. They should be small enough to be unobtrusive but large enough to be read, and they should be located in areas where they can be hidden when an object is on exhibit. Here are some general principles and practices of marking objects:

- Objects with fairly smooth, hard surfaces can be labeled by adhering a label, printed with a laser printer on acid-free archival paper, using Paraloid B-72 or other archival adhesive that is readily reversible using a solvent.
- Textiles, and some forms of basketry, beading or other woven materials, may be marked by writing the ID# on a length of cotton twill tape and sewing it to the artifact using natural-colored cotton thread and a blunt-ended needle.
- Some very tiny objects cannot be marked, but can be placed in small zip-lock bags with a tag placed inside or a label written or adhered to the outside.
- Problematic objects, including those with very rough or fragile surfaces or badly degraded finishes, must be handled differently. Ask your supervisor for help with these.

Refer to Section 5E, “Marking,” in MRM5 for further instructions in where and how to mark specific objects.

Determine the Object’s Housing Needs:
When deciding where an object should be stored and how it should be protected, there are a number of factors to consider:

- Is the object fragile enough that it requires protective housing?
- Does the object have an unstable finish so that it must be protected from handling or contact with surfaces?
- Is the object sensitive to light?
- Does the object pose a danger to other objects it might be stored with?
- Is the object small enough that it can be stored in a box or drawer with other like objects?
- Is the object so large or heavy that it is difficult to move?
- Does the object require support to allow it to stand on a shelf or sit in a drawer without toppling or rolling?
Does the object’s monetary or curatorial value merit special security? Refer to Section 5H, “Storage,” in MRM5 for discussion of the whole subject of storage; see also Section 5J, “Preparation,” for more specific discussion of housing methods and materials. Keep in mind that these chapters discuss some projects that are beyond the scope of the MHC’s available facilities and supplies.

Place the Object in Storage:
Once you know where an object will be stored and how it is to be housed, you will need to follow these steps:

- Be sure the object is listed in the PastPerfect database, with all necessary catalogue and condition information.
- Place the object into its housing, if there is one, and be sure the is a label on the outside of the box or container or on the mount that is to be used.
- Place the object in the designated storage location.

Update Permanent Files & Database:
Once an object has been processed and housed, its files need to be updated:

- Be sure all descriptions, measurements, images, and condition information are entered into the PastPerfect database.
- Enter the object’s permanent location into the appropriate locations in the database, following the data entry protocols listed above.
- If any special housing or handling instructions are needed, these should also be entered into the database in the Notes field for the object, and in the Condition Notes field.
- If any cleaning, preventive conservation, or repair was done to the object as part of its processing, or during exhibit preparation, note this in the appropriate place in the Condition section of the object record.
- Conservation treatments, special housings and instructions, and copies of images should be placed in the accession file for the object, with each page labeled with its ID#.

CARE AND PRESERVATION OF THE COLLECTION

Object Handling

Introduction:
The Mountain Heritage Center’s collection comprises approximately 10,000 objects having to do with the cultural heritage of the Southern Appalachians, and as part of our mission, we treat each item, no matter how small or seemingly mundane, as if it is priceless. And some of them are.

Here are some common-sense tips for avoiding harm to collections and to personnel, including procedures specific to the MHC’s policies and physical layout, and resources that go into detail about the handling requirements of the
many different types of objects and materials to be found in a history collection.

Dress:
Collections staff must consider the following -

Collections work can involve dirt, solvents, use of tools, climbing and clambering. Plan to dress wisely rather than well.

Loose, flowing sleeves and skirts and loosely woven fabrics can get caught on projections or rough textured surfaces, and can even cause you to pull objects over or knock them onto the floor. Think before you dress, or have a change of clothes available. There are no lab coats available.

Long necklaces, chunky rings and bracelets, large belt buckles, and big buttons can also catch in objects or knock against them as you pick them up or lean over. As you get ready to work with collections, survey what you’re wearing and take off anything that would endanger collections. Guys, this applies to you, too!

You may be required to crawl around on the floor or climb step stools or ladders. Neither flip-flops nor high heels are safe for these activities.

Hand in Glove:
An accumulation of the oils and acids from human skin cause changes to objects that are handled, sometimes even just once. While antique dealers might advertise this as patina, museums consider it damage.

Wash your hands and dry them thoroughly as soon as you come in to work, even if you washed them before you drove or walked over. Even if you never eat in your car.

Wash your hands again if you eat or drink anything during a break.

We have a plentiful supply of clean white cotton gloves in a drawer in the lab. You will wear these for handling most items, with the following exceptions:

glass or glazed ceramics - use clean bare hands to avoid these slipping out of your grasp
un-fired or low-fired ceramics, such as most Cherokee pottery - use nitrile gloves
roughly-textured wood, basketry, and the like - use nitrile gloves so they don’t catch
items with fragile, powdery, or flaky surfaces - use nitrile gloves
fragile or highly textured textiles - use clean bare hands

NEVER HANDLE METALS WITH BARE HANDS

Moving Objects:
The greatest danger to the safety of museum objects is us. More items are lost or damaged through poor handling than through theft, vandalism, or natural
disasters. Whenever you move a museum object, be sure it really needs to be moved, and consider the following:

Never move an object until you know where you are going to put it down, and check to be sure there is an open space for it and a clear path.
Use both hands to pick up an object, and carry one thing at a time.
If you have lots of small objects to move, consider putting them into a cart or a tray, but be sure they are padded or supported so they can’t move around or knock into each other.
If an object is large, awkward, or heavy, or you have to climb a ladder to get to it, ask for help. Always use two people in moving a ladder.
The location of each object in the collection is recorded in the PastPerfect database. If you are moving anything that is not going to be put back into its home location within that day, record its change of location in the database or in the Object Movement Log, including why it was moved, by whom, and when it will be returned.

Further Information:
Section 5B, “Object Handling,” in Museum Registration Methods 5, provides further detail about handling museum objects safely. This book can be found in the MHC reference library.

Environmental Monitoring
Constant temperature and relative humidity are important to the preservation of museum objects. While the Center’s HVAC system is expected to maintain these conditions, it is important to monitor it:

Notice the temperature and humidity displayed on the thermostats in collections areas and galleries, and report if they fall much outside of 68-72 degrees F or 35-60% RH.
Dataloggers that monitor temperature and relative humidity are installed in five locations around the Center. They need to be downloaded periodically in order to monitor the performance of the system. Locations of loggers and instructions for this procedure are posted on the wall in the Collections Workroom just to the left of the door as you walk in.
Pest management is also important to the maintenance of a museum collection. There are insect traps installed in various locations in the Collections areas.
Instructions for monitoring the traps are posted on the outside of the door from the Collections Workroom into Collections Storage.
Locations of the traps and sheets to log inspections and results are found on the walls or on cabinets in the storage area.
Maintaining the standards of cleanliness mentioned in other parts of this policy is important to avoid attracting pests.

If an infestation is suspected, or confirmed by trap inspection, notify the Curator and the Office Manager, who will notify the University’s pest control office to take appropriate action.

Cleaning

Most artifact cleaning requires the specialized knowledge and materials available to an object conservator. The only artifact cleaning done by Center staff is vacuuming, dusting, or dry sponging with a cosmetic sponge. Rarely, plain water may be used to clean nonporous materials such as glass or ceramics.

Never clean an object unless instructed to do so by an MHC staff member.

Only sturdy artifacts with surface finishes in excellent condition are vacuumed directly, and then only with a piece of nylon stocking fastened over the nozzle opening or, in the case of textiles, a piece of fiberglass screening kept over the surface. Use the lowest possible suction.

Often, the best technique is to brush the dust off the artifact into the nozzle of the vacuum. Cover the nozzle as above, and use only a very soft bristle brush.

Cosmetic sponges with no additives (such as aloe vera) may be used to gently blot away surface grime that cannot be vacuumed. Always stop if there are any concerns about the integrity of the surface you are cleaning.

Only plain, unpainted glass or ceramics can be cleaned with plain water in a well-squeezed out sponge. Ceramics must have an intact glazed surfaced. Greenware, bisqueware, and low-fired ceramics such as most Native American pieces cannot be washed.

Conservation

If objects from the permanent collection are found to be in need of repair or stabilization, the Curator will be responsible for engaging the services of an objects conservator who is a member of the American Institute for Conservation. The AIC website, HYPERLINK "http://www.conservation-us.org" http://www.conservation-us.org, offers Information about conservation in general, plus a “Find a Conservator” search engine.

KEEPING TRACK OF THE COLLECTION

Inventories

Inventory of museum collections is accomplished in two steps, the physical inventory and inventory reconciliation. How long it will take is dependent upon the quality of the museum’s record keeping during the period between inventories, and upon any auxiliary tasks that are to be undertaken while museum objects are being physically counted. These auxiliary tasks might include:
updated descriptions, including measurements
condition reports
digital imaging
replacement of illegible or missing Object ID numbers
addition or upgrade of hang tags
relocation
rehousing

Physical Inventory

Before the inventory is begun, museum staff should determine how many personnel will be available over how long a period in order to decide whether any of the above auxiliary tasks can reasonably be added. It might be necessary to do a test inventory of a given cabinet or set of shelves to calculate the amount of time the whole will take.

These are the preliminary steps toward the physical inventory:

Run through object location information in the PastPerfect database to determine whether it all follows data entry standards - in other words, it is all in a consistent format.

Determine what percentages of the collection need descriptions, condition reports, or images.

Determine how to break down locations into sections that can be put into catalogue lists, exported to Excel, and made into printed checklists to be used to enter information as objects are located. Don’t forget that items on exhibit will also have to be inventoried.

See the database User’s Guide, Chapter 15, “Catalog Lists” for instructions on preparing lists and exporting them to Excel.

Save the exported list as an Excel file with an appropriate name. Open the file and delete all columns except OBJECT ID, OBJECT NAME, HOME LOCATION, and DESCRIPTION.

Make new columns to the right and name them FOUND, NOT FOUND, NEW LOC, NOTES, INV BY, DATE, and DB.

The description fields contain far more information than you need for identifying objects. Set the row height to show only the first line of the description.

Set the column width to fit for all columns except NOTES and DESCRIPTION. These columns will need to be wider - perhaps three inches for DESCRIPTION and four inches for NOTES.

Set the print area and add gridlines. Format the list for landscape orientation, 11 x 17 paper, and to repeat the headers row on every page.

Prepare these checklists as suggested above, print two-sided copies on 11x17” paper, and staple each section together.

Prepare as well a copy of the entire inventory in Object ID order, and have several available. This allows the teams to check the former locations of
items they find that are not listed in their sheets.
Run through the collections storage areas and make sure that each cabinet,
shelving unit, and shelf is clearly labeled. Consult the latest floor plans to
determine how to refer to walls and floor areas.
Conduct a test as suggested above and develop a schedule.

Once these steps have been completed, the actual inventory can be done:

An inventory team should consist of two people, one to handle the artifacts,
one to record locations.

Keeping good object handling standards in mind, physically verify the number
on each object. If this requires removing items from shelves or boxes, be
sure there is a work surface to put them on safely, (carts are best) and be
sure to return them properly packed and located.
The inventory team can handle making or replacing tags. Have a good supply
of blank tags with strings installed at hand, as well as pencils or Pigma
markers for filling in the information. The handler can dictate the
information and put on the tag, while the recorder can fill it out.
Try to replace items on shelves or in boxes in such a way that the tags are
visible without moving the object or those around it. If markings have
become illegible or are missing, identify the object if possible and note in
the inventory sheet that the object must be re-marked.

If objects are to be photographed, another team of object handler and
photographer will be needed to set up and take the photographs. Make a
note in the “notes” column of the checklist.

If objects with obvious condition issues are found, note this on the inventory
sheet and, if necessary, remove them to the workroom and make a note on
the spreadsheet. Note the temporary location on the worksheet and update
the database when the object is returned to its home location.

If objects are removed from storage to be photographed, note this temporary
location on the inventory sheet along with the reason and update the
database when the photography is completed and the object returned to its
home location.

If objects are removed from storage to be marked or to have markings
replaced, note this temporary location on the inventory sheet along with
the reason, and update the database when the object is returned to its
home location.

The recorder must note on the checklist the date on which an object is
inventoried, and their own initials. Enter this information on the first
record of the day, and draw a line down to the last when you are finished.
If an object is found in its proper place, simply check off that column on the
list.

If an object is found to have been moved to another shelf in the same cabinet,
note the change in the column for that use.

If you find an object that is not on the list, go to the master list and find out
where it is supposed to be. You will have to decide whether to keep it where it is or to move it back to its original location. Some of these items may have no location listed at all. Note where they are on the Master List. If the handler determines that an object is endangered by the way it is stored, they should try to improve the situation by rearranging the shelf or cabinet, by moving the object to a different location, or by handing it off to the curator to be rehoused. Be sure to note the object’s location or status on the checklist.

If objects have been moved to the workroom to be photographed or documented, remember to put them back afterward and note their location on the checklist.

Inventory all the objects on exhibit in the galleries and in the lobby cases. When a checklist is completed, put it in a box labeled for that use on the workroom counter and pick up another list.

Inventory Reconciliation

Once the physical inventory has been completed, the PastPerfect database must be updated using the information from the checklists. Be sure to consult current data entry standards and be prepared to move some information into different fields if necessary. These are the steps in reconciling an inventory:

Pick up a checklist and locate the corresponding catalogue list in PastPerfect.
Go through the objects one by one, making any location changes noted on the list.
If an object was not located, refer to the Master List. Its location may have been recorded there.
If an object was not found at all, place a question mark in each location field and, on its main catalogue page, list its status as missing. Don’t forget to check first whether the object is on exhibit or on loan.
If you have been trained in its use, you may use the Global Update feature to fill in the inventory date and inventoried by fields. If not, these fields will have to filled in from the individual record. Never use Global Update until you have been approved to do so, and do not make the changes until you are sure your information is accurate and correctly formatted!

Make up a new catalogue list of all the items that were not located, being sure to include the word “Inventory” and the date in its title, e.g. “C 24 Inventory 10-28-2012.”

ACCESS TO THE COLLECTION

Who May Use the Collection?

Access to a collection is necessary and allowed for anyone who has legitimate use for it, but it must be restricted in order to protect the objects, the facility, and the staff of the MHC. The following staff are allowed unrestricted access to the collection workroom and storage areas:
Director
Curator
Educator
Collections Manager/Registrar (Not currently a staff position)

It is understood that collections objects will not be touched or moved by anyone unless for reasons related to the work of the MHC.

The following are allowed access to the collection workroom and storage areas provided they have completed training in collections handling and documentation, and with the permission of a supervisor:

  Student Curatorial Assistants
  Collections Interns and Graduate Assistants
  Collections Volunteers

Access to the collection workroom and storage areas is permitted for the following only if they are accompanied by a member of the staff:

  Community service workers who are requested to help with specific tasks
  Student workers or volunteers who are not assigned to collections work, but whose assistance is requested with specific tasks

Outgoing Loans

Requests to borrow materials from the Mountain Heritage Center’s collection must be made to and approved by the Curator. Borrowers must be qualified according to the Center’s policies, and must abide by its loan conditions and restrictions. Once a qualified borrower has satisfied the Curator that the request is legitimate, this is the procedure:

  Determine which artifacts will satisfy the borrower’s needs
  Assess each artifact to determine whether it is in good enough condition to travel
  Choose “Outgoing Loans from the PastPerfect main menu and follow the procedures found in Chapter 12 of the User’s Guide or in the Outgoing Loans section of the training CD kept in the Curator’s office.
  Start an outgoing loan file labeled with the loan number assigned by PastPerfect and with the name of the borrowing institution.
  Be sure that a loan period is specified, then print out two copies of the loan form and have them signed by both the borrower’s representative and the MHC Curator.
  The lender must provide a certificate of insurance, which will be kept in the outgoing loan file.
  Once the loan forms have been signed, the objects should be packed using the materials and methods appropriate to protect them during transport.
  Keep copies of correspondence related to the loan, including emails; as well as shipping documents and any other records pertaining to the loan, in the
Refer to the Collections Management Policy section on Outgoing Loans for detailed loan conditions and renewal policies.

Rights and Reproductions

Writers, researchers, commercial firms and others will sometimes request images of objects from the MHC collection for publication or other use. Provided such use is not restricted by copyright or accession, MHC shall determine that it is a legitimate use that will not reflect poorly on the reputation of the Center, its donors and supporters, or the University.

All users are required to submit a written application detailing how the image will be used, including the format and date of publication.

Fees charged by MHC are to be paid in advance; applications to waive fees must be made to the Curator.

All requests for use of existing images will be satisfied with scans or digital images to be delivered as email attachments or on CD.

If new photography is required, all expenses are to be paid by the user unless otherwise agreed between the user and MHC.

Images may not be cropped or altered by any mechanical or digital means without the approval of MHC.

Visitors to the Center

The Mountain Heritage Center lobbies, exhibits and reception area are open to the public free of charge; however the offices and collections areas are restricted. NOBODY WITHOUT AUTHORIZATION IS EVER TO BE ALLOWED IN THE COLLECTIONS AREAS UNESCORTED. Visitors may come to the center to look at something in the collection, to get information about something from their personal collection, or to donate items to the MHC. The receptionist should refer them to the Curator or the Education Associate, if they are available. If not, they should make an appointment. NOBODY SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO LEAVE UNSOLICITED ITEMS AT THE CENTER!

If other visitors such as researchers, salespeople, school groups, or quilting clubs need to see a staff member, the receptionist should check with that staff member before letting them go to the office. Persons with business in the Conference Room are allowed free access.

Appraisals

The Center is not required to place a value on each item in the collection, and therefore appraisals are done only for particular needs such as insurance valuation.

Appraisers can be found through the websites of professional organizations such as the American Society of Appraisers, HYPERLINK "http://www.appraisers.org" http://www.appraisers.org. This organization has a
“Find an Appraiser” search engine.
If a donor has an item appraised as part of the donation process, sometimes they will agree to share the appraisal with the Center.
Center employees, interns and volunteers are prohibited by policy from placing any valuation on objects belonging to members of the public; however, staff with expertise in the field may provide internal valuations if necessary for documentation needs. These are in no way to be considered legal appraisals.

SAFETY AND SECURITY

How is the Collection Kept Secure?

Reception
The front desk should be staffed whenever the Center is open to keep unauthorized persons out of the offices and collections areas. The Receptionist should stay with visitors who enter the office, using the phone to notify whomever they have come to see.

Controlled Access
Access to collections and exhibit areas is controlled by keys kept in the key cabinet inside the workroom door. This cabinet should be kept locked, and the code to open it should be considered confidential. This code may be shared with selected student workers at staff discretion, but must never be given to a student or volunteer by another student or volunteer.
The collections storage rooms are kept locked at all times except when work is actually being done there. The workroom door is generally left open during business hours, but access is controlled by the receptionist. If the desk must be left unattended, it is the receptionist’s duty to notify another staff member or student worker to take over. Lights in these areas should be kept turned off unless someone is working there.

Exhibit Security
Exhibits in the galleries are generally protected by casework or stanchions. Additional security measures may be used as needed to protect particularly valuable or vulnerable objects. Everyone who works at MHC is expected to share responsibility for the security of the collection, and report to the Curator or other staff if they have reason to see or suspect accidental damage, vandalism, or theft anywhere in the MHC.

Storage Areas and Workroom
There are two collections storage rooms in the Center, Collections Storage and the Collections Annex. Some artifacts are kept in the Collections Workroom. The Cage, located in Room 118 at the back of the building, is used for storing deaccessioned items and exhibit and Mountain Heritage Day materials. Office 161
at the end of the Office Hallway is used for locked storage of borrowed artifacts. See the Floor Plans section of this manual for room and storage designations, and Data Entry Standards for consistent formatting of these designations.

Safe Navigation:
Crowded work and storage areas anywhere can be hazardous to those who are not careful to remain alert to their surroundings as they work in and move through them. In a museum, most areas are also likely to contain artifacts, some of which are fragile and/or irreplaceable. Your safest bet is to treat everything as if it were an artifact.

Be aware of your surroundings and of anything you are carrying or wearing that might knock against or catch on furniture or objects.
Do not back up while carrying anything unless it is absolutely necessary.
Steer carts carefully and slowly. Different carts steer differently, and you don’t want them to surprise you. Have a helper if you are concerned or if objects on your cart need to be stabilized.
See “Moving Objects” in Section 3.3 for further details.

Stools & Ladders:
If you must use a stool or a ladder to get something off a shelf, use precautions to avoid falling and/or damaging anything:

Use a stool or ladder that is the right height for what you are doing.
Be sure it is fully opened or extended before you step on it.
Do not prop ladders or stools against walls, shelves, or cabinets - open them out and use them freestanding
Always use two people to carry a ladder through the work or storage rooms.
Always ask for help if you must move the large wheeled ladder in Collections Storage.

Safe Housing:
In addition to the precautions in Artifact Handling, keep the following in mind:

Artifacts should never be left close to the edges of open shelving or tables, where they could be knocked onto the floor.
Artifacts should not be so crowded on shelves or in drawers that they cannot be removed or replaced without risk of damage to other artifacts.
Artifacts in drawers should be stored so they will not move when drawers are being opened and closed; likewise, always open and close drawers slowly and smoothly.
Unstable artifacts should be boxed or stored on mounts so they won’t topple over and break or damage other items. Or people!
Unless protected by boxes, only large, stable, and sturdy objects should be stored on the floor. Be sure they are labeled as artifacts, and if necessary placed under dust covers.
Carts and temporary shelving units are used for a variety of tasks in the workroom and storage rooms. If they have artifacts on them, use caution when moving through the space.

Do not bring food or drink into collections areas, and be sure your hands are clean before you come in.

Do not touch or handle anything unless required to do so by your job.

Use caution whenever you must climb a ladder or step stool.

Do not lift anything that is too large or heavy. Ask for help. Dollies and carts are available.

Do not carry anything into, through, or out of the space without making sure the coast is clear and that you will not be knocking into anything.

Keep carts and dollies clean - they are often used to transport artifacts. Watch out for them, being careful not to knock into them when working in or moving through a room, and be careful not to knock them into anything else when you are moving them.

Tools:

The tools in the workroom are shared by many people and used for many different purposes. In order to maintain a functional workspace:

- Do not use a tool unless you have been instructed in its use in a museum setting. This is especially true of power tools!
- Always return tools to their labeled locations, even if you didn’t find them there in the first place.
- Keep tools clean and dry. If you get adhesive residue or other stuff on scissors, rulers, or knives, clean it off before you put them away.
- Use tools for their proper function. Screwdrivers are not pry bars.
- If you break or damage a tool, notify the Curator.

Supplies:

Archival supplies are expensive and in limited supply. In addition, some artifacts should only come in contact with specific materials or surfaces, due to the danger of chemical interaction. MRM5 contains information about compatible materials, as do many online resources.

- It has become an old saw, but “Measure twice, cut once” should be the rule.
- Please be economical in your use of materials.
- Keep archival materials clean and in good condition. Creased, crumpled or dirty materials cannot be used with artifacts.

Collections Objects:

As mentioned above, some collections objects are stored in the workroom. In addition, items that are being processed into the collection or that have been pulled for exhibit are often left out on the table, on carts, or on the floor.

- If you don’t know whether something is an artifact or not, assume that it is.
Do not put anything on top of an artifact, no matter how large, sturdy, or indestructable it might seem.
Do not put artifacts on the black counters or in the exhibit shop area - keep them on the tables, on carts, or if they are too large, on a piece of foam on the floor where they won’t get run into.
For further details, please refer to the Collections Handling section of this manual.

Education Collection Cabinets:
The items in these cabinets and in the traveling trunks are for hands-on use in museum programs, but they are still valuable and should be handled accordingly:

If you use any of these items for programs, return them where you found them.
If you damage or break an education item, tell the Education Associate or the Curator. Do not attempt to repair it yourself.

Computers and Data
The following precautions are taken from the University’s guidelines for data security and confidentiality:

Shut down your computer every night, but do not shut down the computer at the end of the hall in Office 156.
Computer files containing personally identifiable information or confidential material should be stored on the University’s secure share drive, not on local hard drives.
Use strong passwords - current best practice is to use 12 characters, mixing numbers, letters and symbols. Do not use recognizable words or easily obtained numbers such as your birthday.
Do not post written passwords near your computer and do not share passwords.
Back up your hard drive on a regular basis.
In addition, the PastPerfect database requires certain actions to safeguard the data:

The program needs to be reindexed regularly. The Education Associate is responsible for this procedure. If you are asked to do it, see PastPerfect Museum Software 5 in the Curator’s office for instructions.
The program also needs to be backed up regularly. The manual contains instructions for this, and the Education Associate is the person responsible for this procedure. Ideally, the data would be backed up every day to a portable storage device that is then taken off site for storage and returned the next day. The image files should be backed up whenever images are uploaded to the database.
Safety

Safety on the job is the responsibility of everyone. In an area such as this where there are collections items, exhibit props, and unusual tools and equipment everywhere, it pays to be alert. Here are a few commonsense precautions:

- Wear clothing and footwear appropriate to your work.
- Do not leave anything on the floor in traffic areas, or leave anything hanging over the edges of desks or shelves or in badly balanced piles.
- Clean up spills, especially where people will be walking. Block off the area if necessary.
- If you are about to go into a room, turn on the lights. Don’t blunder blindly into dark areas.
- Be responsible for your own health and safety. Take breaks, drink water, adjust chairs and computer equipment to assure your own comfort.
- If you must use an extension cord, be sure it is of the proper rating for the equipment, that it is not going to be tripped over, and that it is unplugged when you are finished or are leaving. Never use extension cords for heating appliances.
- Use of space heaters is forbidden by state policy.

Emergency Situations

The Mountain Heritage Center Emergency and Disaster Response Plan, available in the bookcase in the office hallway and in the Share directory in the MHC folder, covers in detail most of the situations you could expect to arise during your work here. In addition, there is a great deal of online information about preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters for cultural institutions. A few links are to be found in the appendix to this manual. Here are some brief notes about situations that might occur during collections work.

Artifact breakage:

If an artifact from the museum’s collection gets broken, you must immediately notify the Curator. Do not pick up the pieces, and especially do not try to fit anything back together. If it is in a public areas or a place where people are working, guard the scene until someone comes to take care of it. Refer any questions about the situation to the Curator.

Injury or illness:

If a visitor or staff member is injured or becomes ill, do not try to treat them unless you are certified in first aid/CPR, and then only if they request help. If the injury or illness seems severe, or if there is any question, call 911. Emergency responders would far rather come for someone who doesn’t need help than arrive too late or not be called at all. There is a first aid kit in the Collections Workroom on the counter to the left of the door. Keep in mind that blood is very hard to
remove from artifacts. Use bandages if you cut yourself.

Pest damage:
If you notice the presence of insects or mice, or evidence of their activity in any area of the MHC, notify the Curator at once. Do not try to spray, swat, or otherwise get rid of the offenders yourself. It may be necessary to notify Facilities Management to deal with an infestation.

Mold:
The presence of mold indicates an environmental problem. Don’t try to clean it up. Notify the Curator, who will contact Safety and Risk Management and/or Facilities Management if necessary.

Water damage:
Never step into standing water! If there are outlets or electrical equipment involved, you could be electrocuted. If collections objects are endangered by a spill or leak, notify the Curator immediately, and be prepared to help remove them to safety. Facilities Management must be notified to remedy the cause of leaks or other water problems.

Electrical outage:
If the lights go out, be sure visitors and workers are not trapped in areas where there is no light from windows. Notify Facilities Management by phone; if the phones are not working, use a cell phone. Depending on the expected length of the outage, it might be necessary to close the Center.

Fire:
If you discover fire or smell smoke, call 911 and then notify the Director or other MHC staff. Never attempt to use a fire extinguisher unless the fire is very small and contained and you have been instructed in its use, and never let the fire come between you and an exit. If alarms have not been triggered by smoke or heat detectors, go to the nearest fire alarm pull station - see locations on the map at the back of this manual - and pull it. Once an alarm sounds, everyone must leave the building. Check all rooms and offices, including restrooms, to be sure nobody is still inside. If emergency personnel have been summoned, have someone wait outside the nearest door to point out the location of the problem. Do not return to the building until emergency responders tell you it is safe.

EXHIBIT INSTALLATION

Materials and Mounts
The Mountain Heritage Center keeps a modest stock of archival materials for fabricating exhibit mounts. The following precautions should be taken when putting any artifacts on display:

A barrier should be employed between artifacts and any surfaces that are
painted with acrylic paint, no matter how old the paint, or between artifacts and any surface about which you are not sure. Plastic laminate surfaces are okay for direct contact.

Barrier materials include Mylar, Tyvek, and sheet foams such as Ethafoam and Volara. Paper is not sufficient.

Do not use polyurethane or any oil-based finishes on exhibit mounts or furniture.

Do not use unsealed lumber or plywood for exhibit mounts or furniture.

Use low-VOC water-based sealers and paints, and allow at least two weeks for the item to off-gas before installing artifacts.

Never use any kind of adhesive to secure artifacts, and never let any kind of adhesive used to construct mounts contact artifacts.

Acceptable materials for constructing mounts include polyethylene foam sheets and blocks, Coroplast, acid-free cardboard - “blue board” - or other acid-free boards or papers, metal wire if coated with padding material, polyester felt, cotton or poly-cotton fabrics, and linen.

Items that need to be tied down may be secured with cotton string or tying tape if it will not be visible, or with monofilament if it needs to be unobtrusive.

When using monofilament, which is hard to knot securely, the object should be tied to some sort of backing such as blue board, and knots additionally secured behind the board by tape.

Stands or supports made of Plexiglas, glass, or metal are acceptable, although metal-on-metal contact requires a barrier.

Unacceptable materials include vinyl, PVC, acidic papers and boards, styrofoam or styrene plastics, unsealed wood or wood products, foam boards except acid-free foam core, surfaces painted with oil-based finishes or sealed with polyurethane, rubber, and plastics containing plasticizers, dyes, or anti-static finishes.

Keep in mind that the effects of unsuitable materials are intensified by putting objects in closed cases and vitrines.

Light Levels

Light damages most objects, with the exception of stone, unpainted metals, and most unpainted glass and ceramics. All light, no matter how dim, causes fading and deterioration. Light damage is cumulative and irreversible. Resting an object by taking it off display and keeping it in the dark will not allow it to recover, it will only postpone the inevitable. Thus, it is important to use light levels in exhibits that will do the least amount of damage to objects while still allowing them to be seen. Ultraviolet light, a component of fluorescent and natural light particularly, is also damaging. Fluorescent lights should be shielded if used in exhibits. The following are recommended maximum light levels for museum objects, from most to least sensitive:

5 footcandles/50 lux for textiles, prints and drawings, watercolors,
manuscripts, organic materials such as fur and leather, and photographs
20 footcandles/200 lux for oil and tempera paintings, other organic materials
such as wood
30 footcandles/300 lux for stone, glass, ceramics, unpainted metal, other
inorganic materials

Light exposure can be limited in the following ways:

Use covers over cases, with signage indicating that visitors may lift and
replace them.
Display sensitive objects can be displayed for limited times, then replace them
with similar objects or reproductions.
Glazing for frames and vitrines can be made of glass or plastic that blocks
ultraviolet and/or visible light.

Protection and Security

Protection of exhibits starts with the installation process. Keep the following in
mind:

Untrained “help” should not be allowed to handle artifacts
Any construction in the gallery should be done before artifacts are installed; if
this is not practical, artifacts must be in their cases or otherwise protected
from harm.
When transporting objects between storage and the gallery, be sure the path is
clear, and use an escort if there are members of the public present or a cart
or container is large, heavy, or unstable.
Once artifacts are in the gallery, if they are not secured, someone must be
present at all times to keep onlookers out.
Use signage and stanchions to secure the exhibit during installation if
someone cannot be in the gallery; but never leave small or valuable items
unattended.
Keep the same level of security when an exhibit is being taken down.
Remove the objects before starting to dismantle exhibit components.

Museum visitors do not usually intend harm to objects on display, but many will
have the natural inclination to touch them, and children will often want to play
with or climb on them. Even older children will lean on things or walk or run
heedlessly through a gallery. The following methods are used by the Mountain
Heritage Center to protect displays, from most to least effective:

Closed cases and vitrines
Proximity alarms or other devices to detect intrusion into a space
Frames with glass for wall-hung items
Physical barriers such as stanchions or walls, or strategically placed furniture
Raised platforms, with or without additional barriers or alarms
Signage
Smaller, less stable, and more sensitive items should be given the most effective protection. Unstable items put in cases are still vulnerable to being bumped, and so should be supported or anchored in some way. Good exhibit record-keeping is also a protection, as it indicates whether an object is missing or has been misplaced. Condition reports done at the start of an exhibit can help determine whether any object damage or deterioration has occurred.