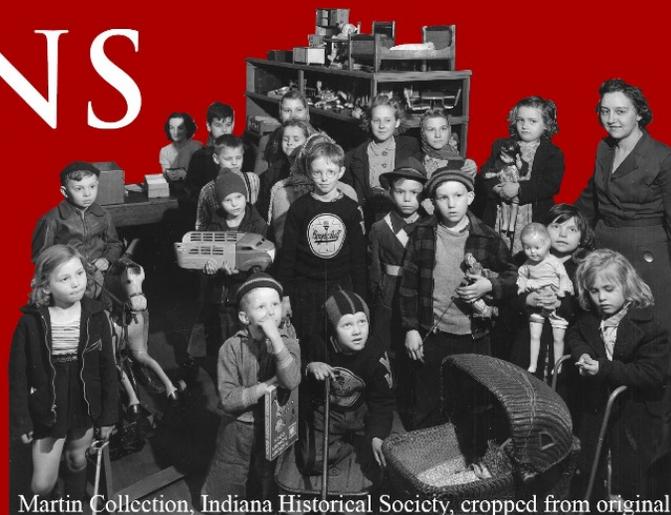


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# COLLECTIONS

## *Advisor*



Martin Collection, Indiana Historical Society, cropped from original

Issue 14, November 2012

## Winter at Conner Prairie

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Conner Prairie Interactive History Park, [www.connerprairie.org](http://www.connerprairie.org)

Winter on the Prairie is not a time for hibernation. In fact, the winter tends to be the collections department's busiest time. One of our tasks is to remove three types of objects from the grounds each November: guns, wooden buckets and textiles. Other tasks include cleaning and hands-on inventories of objects in the posts (locations on the grounds).

In November, we hire one of our interpreters to pick up all the guns and clean them. We then store them in the vault, returning them to post just before we open in April. We do this primarily for security and safety reasons, as well as care. In a smaller organization, this task could be handled by experienced, trained volunteers.

Another type of object removed from the grounds in winter is wooden water buckets. We remove these to a heated basement and put water in them to keep them from drying out and developing leaks. Someone checks them about once every 10 days in order to refill evaporated water and check their cleanliness. This keeps the buckets from falling apart during the winter and makes it possible to extend their lives from one year to two to four years.

Even though our textiles on the grounds are reproductions, they do need to be checked for damage and soiling. Our textile specialist staff picks up the textiles every November and begins washing, repairing and inventorying them. This would also be an excellent

job for any volunteers who are used to handling and caring for textiles. At Conner Prairie, the staff picks up everything from coverlets and curtains to kettle holders and zepherines (a knitted, wool piece that is about 4 to 5 inches wide tied under the chin and used to cover the ears) that are used to furnish the posts to make them look as if they are really occupied by a family. In some cases things are hand-washed, but as it is all reproduction, the vast majority of it goes through a washing machine. The settings are set to cold and delicate using reduced amounts of original formula Tide laundry detergent. Then they are allowed to air-dry on racks. If needed, they are starched and ironed and then packed in boxes to await return to the grounds in the spring. Textiles that are not reproductions require different handling and should not be placed in a clothes washer.

One of the biggest concerns for the winter is pest control. We stress day-in and day-out that cleaning is imperative. In the past several years, staff has helped keep the posts tidied up by removing food-related items including pop cans, candy wrappers and lunch containers daily. After closing for the season, our interpretive staff spends about a week removing food supplies and staples from crocks, jars and jugs to prepare for winter shutdown. Failure to clean results in filthy conditions and puts staff and visitor health at risk.

Lastly, our biggest winter task is an inventory of the grounds. We spend about four weeks checking each post for objects' condition, verifying their presence or lack thereof and general state of the post. If cookware is rusty, we need to determine why. Is it a leaky roof, did snow blow in under the door, was it left outside, was water left in it, etc.? Is something actually missing or has it simply been misplaced?

We then clean the buildings from top to bottom. This includes vacuuming, washing down walls and ceilings if necessary, washing and drying objects, washing windows and, in some cases, mopping floors. Student and community groups supervised by regular volunteers or staff would be an excellent resource for cleaning buildings. This is also the time to renumber objects if their accession numbers have worn away. It's a very labor intensive project requiring us to hire five interpreters per day to assist us in completing the project.

So why do we do all this? We do this because it is where stewardship and mission go hand-in-hand. The inventory provides an opportunity to handle every object and determine its condition (stewardship) as well as provide staff with the reliable tools they need to tell a story (mission). For visitors, a clean building is an inviting and comforting space; it's hospitable. It allows them to participate in an experience without hesitation and invites them to

return. And that gives your institution a reason for being.

## Resources

- Connecting to Collections Online community [www.connectingtocollections.org](http://www.connectingtocollections.org)
- Indiana History Society Lending Resources Center [www.indianahistory.org/our-services/local-history-services/lending-resources](http://www.indianahistory.org/our-services/local-history-services/lending-resources)
- Indiana Landmarks [www.indianalandmarks.org](http://www.indianalandmarks.org)
- National Park Service, Heritage Preservation Services division [www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm](http://www.nps.gov/tps/how-to-preserve/briefs.htm)

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