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INDIANA HISTORICAL SOCIETY COLLECTIONS ADVISOR

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REPRODUCTIONS, REPLICAS AND FORGERIES IN MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

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ONLINE
RESOURCES

["President Lincoln Is Dead: The New York Herald Reports the Assassination" at the Newseum](#)
(BoothieBarn)

[Genuine Imitations](#)
(New York Times)

[Furniture Made to Fool](#)
(Real or Repro)

[Margolis Collection at the Connecticut Historical Society](#)
(Connecticut Historical Society)

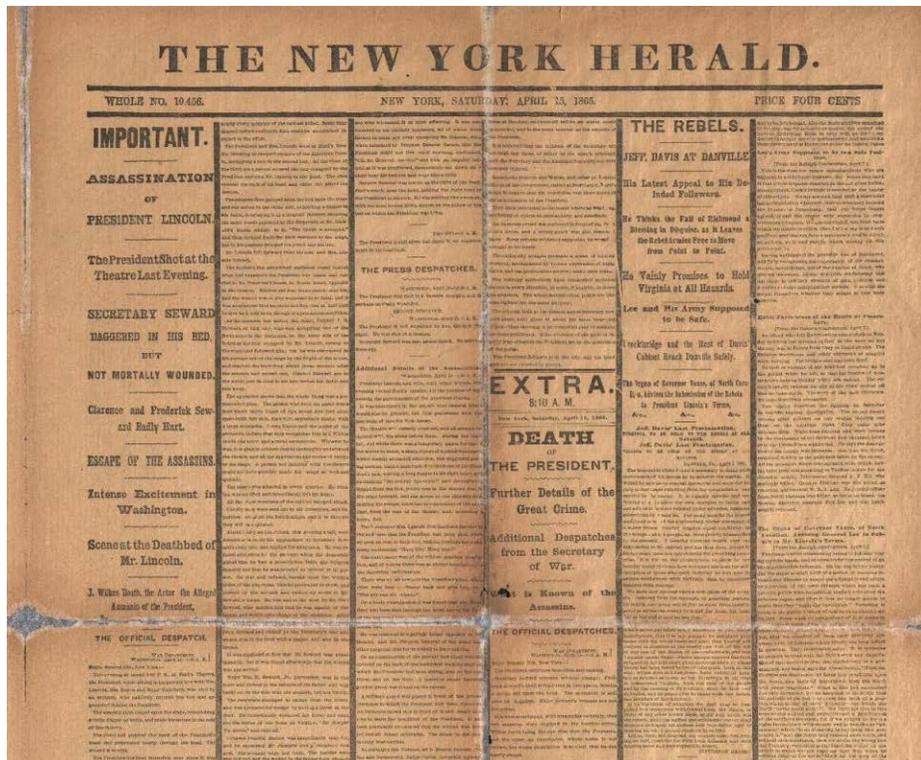
[Vintage Fashion Guild](#)

[The Story of Fake Chinese Ceramics](#)
(Chaire Associates)

[The Roseville Exchange](#)
(Laurel Hollow Park)

[Spurious Marks on English Silver](#)
(925-1000.com)

[Exhibition of "Fakes" and Reproductions](#)



A reproduction of the April 15, 1865, edition of *The New York Herald* showing browning of the paper and crumpling along the folds, characteristics of wood pulp paper. (Library of Congress, Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Alfred Whital Stern Collection of Lincolniana)

Authenticity is a word that often comes to mind when we think about museum collections. When we visit a museum, the objects on display are assumed to be real, not reproductions, replicas or forgeries. Or are they? During a recent site visit to a local history museum, a framed copy of *The New York Herald* published on the day of Abraham Lincoln's death came to light. On closer inspection, the newspaper appeared to be very browned and was crumpling at the edges and folds. An original newspaper printed on April 15, 1865, would have been printed on cotton fiber paper and would not display the browning and crumpling that is typical of later newsprint made from wood pulp. Research by the museum's staff revealed the newspaper to be one of a long line of [reproductions](#) based on the original 1865 edition of *The New York Herald* that relayed the news of Lincoln's death.

The New York Herald reproductions, also known as facsimiles, were intended to be souvenirs, advertising pieces and reminders of the tragic assassination of our 16th president and were not designed to deceive. Today, well-intentioned donors and museum staff alike can easily

NEWS

[WORKSHOP: Collections Management Policy "Write-In"](#)

March 22 - Indianapolis:
Eugene and Marilyn Glick
Indiana History Center
9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Join us for a "write-in"
workshop where you can
learn the fundamentals
of a strong collections
management policy.



misidentify this newspaper as the real 1865 artifact. Keeping the importance of authenticity in mind, how do we identify objects that look like they are from a particular era, when in reality they were made long after the thing they seem to be? In general, objects in this category fall into the broad categories of reproductions, replicas and forgeries. Reproductions and replicas are an exact or close imitation of an existing thing not meant to deceive the buyer or observer. Replicas may or may not be reproduced at the same size as the original item. Forgery includes the creation or alteration of a painting, document or object that is an exact copy or in the style of a particular artist, writer or craftsman and represented as an original work. Forgers intend to deceive and profit by selling their faked object to an unsuspecting buyer.



Photographs of genuine and fake Giovanni Bellini paintings from the correspondence of Dr. G.H.A. Clowes. (Indiana Historical Society)

The following list is not an exhaustive treatment of all of the types of objects that are typically reproduced, forged or faked. Consider it a starting point for your own research into the objects in your collection or the objects that donors bring to your museum. Consult antiques identification books in your [library](#) or guides that you can find online. Spend time examining the objects in your collection as a way to build your knowledge of the look, feel and genuine characteristics of original artifacts. Never hesitate to seek out the services of a [professional conservator](#), historian or [appraiser](#) who can help to authenticate an object of great historical value if it seems to be questionable in any way, especially if the museum is contemplating a purchase.

FURNITURE

Look for nails and [construction methods](#) that are appropriate for the time period. Modern wire nails where cut nails should be used can be an indicator that a piece of furniture is a reproduction. Machine-made wooden parts will be very precise, where the originals may show variation from part to part due to hand production techniques.

Some reproductions are very faithful to the originals, but are always marked to indicate their later origin. The Colonial Revival furniture made by the [Nathan Margolis furniture shop](#) in Hartford, Conn. (early 1900s through the early 1970s) is a good example of an honest effort to reproduce early American furniture that is now considered historic in its own right.

GLASS

Mouth-blown glass will show a rough scar at the base where the pontil, or metal glass blowing tube, was broken away from the glass object. Later, mold-blown or machine-made [glass](#) will display a raised line or seam where the mold sections joined together.

Early or old glass will often show wear at the base or anywhere the glass contacts a hard surface that new or reproduction glass will not display. Modern reproductions will be clearly marked to identify the maker, such as the common [MMA mark](#) that indicates early American glass reproductions sold by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

COSTUMES

Close attention to [construction methods](#) can reveal important clues about the age and approximate time period of a piece of clothing. Hand stitching uses a single thread and will show variations in stitching, in contrast to machine stitching that uses two threads (one thread coming from above, and one from below) and is very uniform in appearance. The presence, or lack, of zippers or hooks for closing or fastening are important details to note.

Costumes are rarely made to intentionally deceive; most items styled earlier than the date of creation were intended for wear at fancy dress balls, pageants or reenactments. Although the appearance or style of a garment may closely imitate a particular historical period, generally their construction methods will be consistent with their date of creation (hidden zippers, machine stitching, etc.).

CERAMICS

Authenticating [Chinese ceramics](#) can be notoriously difficult. In China, artisans imitated certain time periods and traditions as a form of respect and admiration, and at other times knowingly produced forgeries. If a vase of reputed antiquity simply appears to lack the wear, abrasions and chips acquired over the ages, it could be too good to be true.

Reproductions and forgeries of American art pottery (Roseville, McCoy, etc.) can often be identified by looking for subtle differences in the style or appearance of the [maker's name](#) that is inconsistent with original pieces. Glaze that appears to be dull or poorly applied can be another sign of a copy.

METALWARE

Original cast metal objects, such as cast iron pots, pans or kettles will show a smoother appearance without rough edges. Copies will often have a crude or rough appearance, and [incorporate misspellings](#) such as "Girswold" instead of "Griswold".

Solid silver objects will be heavier and more substantial overall than later silver plated items. [Hallmarks](#), the identifying mark of the silversmith, tend to be sharply defined on original pieces, but slightly blurred or indistinct on copies. Hallmarks were often forged, however, and can be a risky indicator of authenticity.

How should we respond if we discover reproductions or forgeries in our collections? Reproductions, replicas and forgeries could be candidates for deaccession to make way for authentic objects from your community. In some cases, if the historical owner of the object knew that it was a reproduction and prized it anyway, that can be part of the object's story and thus a legitimate part of local history. Museums have also arranged exhibits that place original pieces side by side with fakes to educate and stimulate thought about the very meaning of [authenticity](#). Other organizations have assembled education collections of reproductions as a way to provide learning opportunities for staff, volunteers and the public.

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[Local History Services](#)

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