



# MANL Note

## Care of Collections

A Publication of the Museum Association of Newfoundland and Labrador

### CARE OF HISTORIC FURNITURE

The main causes of damage to furniture are:

- (1) **Light** - too much
- (2) **Relative Humidity** - extremes
- (3) **Mis-Handling**
- (4) inappropriate **Cleaning**.

1) The ultraviolet component of sunlight and fluorescent lights, fades dark colours and darkens light colours. Also, the heat from infrared waves (of sunlight and incandescent bulbs) dries out the wood and its finishes,



causing cracking, blistering and warping. To **reduce** the amount and intensity of light: **Avoid Direct Light**. Do not place furniture in the direct sunlight or under spotlights. Make **USE** of period **Shutters, Blinds, and Curtains**. **Turn off lights** when the room is not in use. Fit fluorescent bulbs with **UV Filters** and install **UV protective film** on windows.

2) Too much moisture in the air will cause wood to swell and glues to soften, inviting mould and insects. Dry air will suck the moisture out of the furniture, causing veneers to lift, finishes to crack and joints to loosen. Generally wooden furniture like about 50% RH, but mostly it cannot handle extreme

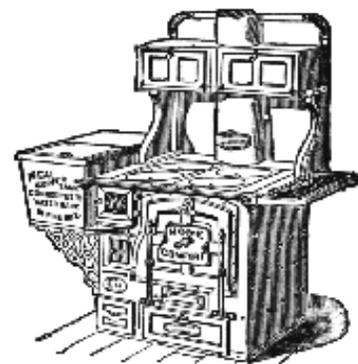
changes very quickly. To make these changes more gradual:

**Avoid Sources of Heat and Coldness**. Do not place furniture directly over or in front of heaters, doors or windows. **Allow space for air circulation**: two inches behind furniture at outside walls and under flatbottom furniture, especially on stone floors.

3) **Handle as little as possible**. Historic furniture often looks more stable than it is. The hardware, decoration and upholstery are worn and fragile. When moving, inspecting or cleaning, **WEAR CLEAN WHITE COTTON GLOVES**, and change them when dirty to avoid transfer of dirt to another place.

Before moving, **document** the **condition** of the piece, noting any loose or broken parts, and keep them with the piece. **Do not use any adhesive backed tapes or labels on any furniture surface**.

Doors, drawers and hardware can be secured with soft cotton string or twill tape. Cover upholstery with clean, white cotton cloth. **Do not drag a piece of furniture**. Lift it onto a dolly.



Separate large pieces into component parts if

possible. **Plan your route. Carry by the solid frame or base parts - not by the top rails or handles.**

Heavy glass mirrors and marble tops should be carried vertically.

When decorating or renovating **completely cover furniture which cannot be removed.** Use floor cleaning equipment with care. **Do not use a wet mop near furniture.**

4) Cleaning: Forget all of the home remedies and commercial product claims for rejuvenation of antique finishes. **Thorough inspection and dust removal** is all that is required. Remove dust from every crevice and joint by brushing the dust into a vacuum with a soft bristle brush. Wipe all of the smooth surfaces with a soft dust **CLOTH** (CCI recommends Dust Bunny Magnetic wiping fabric, made by Test Fabrics). **DO NOT USE FEATHER DUSTERS.** They cannot be washed and if broken can scratch surfaces. Use separate brushes and cloths for waxed surfaces and for gilded surfaces.

**Gilding is very sensitive to wetness. It will lift off on a damp brush or on your fingerprint. Use a clean dry, soft brush to dust it.**



**Do not use wet cleansers, wax polish, or water on historic furniture without consulting a conservator or furniture restorer.**

Be very careful around loose decoration of lifting veneer. Cover the vacuum nozzle with fine mesh or screen to prevent sucking up loose bits, and use a small fine sable brush. **Never use a duster on a matte painted surface.** If the design is checked and flaking, you may be able to blow off the dust with a photographer's blow brush.

**Do not use commercial dip cleaners, emulsion type brass polishes or copper brighteners on metal hardware.** A protective patina has formed with age which matches the aged surface of the rest of the piece. To remove old polish residues or green corrosion, consult a conservator. Glazing can be cleaned with a soft cotton cloth. **Do not spray commercial window cleaners on antique glass.**

**Check regularly** (upon re-opening seasonal sites) **for infestation.**

**Infestation Check:** Upholstered parts can be cleaned with a low suction vacuum, and brush as above. Cushions should be removed and all crevices examined with a flashlight for signs of Moth Casings, which are delicate white and gauze like; and/or Frass, which is the powdery remains of the wool or silk fibres they have digested, usually the same colour of that fabric. If such evidence is found **ISOLATE** the piece, **Seal In Plastic** any removable parts and take them to the nearest **Freezer.** Call CCI or a conservator for how to deal with the rest.

**MOULD CHECK:** any furniture with cloth, leather or paper linings or parts, sometimes even the wood itself, is subject to mould forming in dark and damp places, with little or no air circulation. Mould looks fuzzy and is usually a pale colour. Sometimes the stain from mould is black. Again, **ISOLATE** the piece from other artifacts if possible. The affected area must be thoroughly **dried.** **Zapping with UV ray from Sunlight** help kill the mould! Brush and vacuum off the powdery mould and spray the affected area lightly with **UNSCENTED LYSOL** to kill the mould spores. Do this in a well ventilated area.

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Newfoundland Museum March 1994*



