

Trailing Questions from Lock, Stock, and Barrel: Firearms Collecting for Museums

Ronald Moniuk [Prince Albert Saskatchewan]: *Storage and displaying—what do others do to secure items and how do you secure antiques on display?*

Toni Kiser: Locked storage cabinets that do not share keys with any other cabinets, and then for display we try to ensure really flush finished and “hidden” locks so that you have to know where they are to unlock the cases.

Ronald Moniuk [Prince Albert Saskatchewan]: *I am also interested in storage & displaying bladed weapons such as bayonets*

Toni Kiser: See the drawers in Paul’s slides – I think that is a good solution for this.

Carrie Blough [Washington, DC]: *I would like to ask potential donors to have the firearms checked to make sure they are not loaded before bringing them in. Can we suggest they go to their local police department for that?*

Toni Kiser: Yes, local Police Departments are a great resource for people who are not sure how to handle a firearm or check to see if it is loaded. They may also find help at local sporting good stores or pawn shops that have firearms as part of their stock.

Elizabeth Appleby [Houston, TX]: *Is a 19th century Gatling gun considered a machine gun? Is it considered and antique? Thoughts on how to accept this type of firearm.*

Toni Kiser: A Gatling gun is not considered a machine gun. Its age means that it certainly falls into the category of Curio and Relics and should be able to be collected by a museum. Having the C&R License will make this helpful, but depending on your state law may be required.

Kali Mason [Clarksville, TN]: *Can an institution apply for a Curio and Relic license or does it have to be for a specific person?*

Toni Kiser: Yes, an institution can apply for a C&R. It does require one person to be the designated signatory.

Michelle Persons [Akron]: *For Storage, what kind of lock/access restrictions are there, if any?*

Toni Kiser: Your state may have restrictions that you need to adhere to, but ultimately it is about safety, both for staff and in the case of theft. Each institution will be different, so you will need to decide what will be best based on your staffing and space constraints.

Mary Ames Booker [Wilmington]: *RE: storage. In a previous site we had firearms in a large, locked cabinet. We have only a few here and they are in a locked gun cabinet.*

Toni Kiser: Locked rooms (storage rooms) with firearms in additional locked cabinets are great. For some items you may even have additional locked drawers within cabinets.

Stacy Thomason [Stanford, KY]: *We have an 18th century Kentucky long rifle with the flint in the lock should this be removed to make it not fireable or should something else be removed?*

Kali Mason [Clarksville, TN]: if the flint is original you may want to catalog it and put it as a related object in the database

Paul Storch: If it's on secure display, I think that you can leave the flint in. For long term preservation in storage, if it has the original flint with the original leather pad between the flint and the jaw, it's best to carefully remove the flint and pad, if possible and store it out of the jaw.

Ronald Moniuk [Prince Albert Saskatchewan]: *Curious do you use redundancy in securing firearms? My concern here trigger locked but some are under glass display only worried about smash & grabs - any suggestions*

Toni Kiser: One way that we deal with the smash and grab scenario is to disable firearms in some way that are on display. Firing pins removed for those that this will work for, plugged barrels, aluminum receivers, blocked breeches...there are several things that you can do depending on the type of weapon. Then, of course, you need to have a designated space to keep these pieces or parts and note in the item's database record what you did and where the parts are.

Heidi Vaughn [Edmond, OK]: *What do you use for surface cleaning?*

Ronald Moniuk [Prince Albert Saskatchewan]: *how do you treat corrosion*

Brooke Wagner [Spokane, WA]: *what do you use for spot corrosion reduction?*

Paul Storch: I use WD-40 and 0000 steel wool and mild steel 'rust erasers' (steel brush in a pen-type holder). Some conservators prefer CRC-36 over 40-WD. Whatever you use is rinsed with acetone or mineral spirits after cleaning. For heavier corrosion, I'll use a rotary steel brush on a Dremel or Foredom flexible shaft tool. That takes some experience to do properly so is best reserved for more involved treatments. Tech Talk Part II has info on that.

Anne Gegg [Champaign IL]: *Are we talking cloth gloves, or latex? What are the best types of gloves to use?*

Toni Kiser: Any gloves you would use for artifacts should be fine. Nitrile, cotton, or cotton with the grips (just be sure that the grips don't leave any marks on finishes).

Paul Storch: I prefer nitrile gloves over cotton. Unless you frequently change cotton gloves after handling a few dirty pieces, they can transfer dirt to other objects.

Liza Schade [Hillsboro, Oregon]: *Should we actually disassemble our firearms, to prevent issues with different materials?*

Paul Storch: If you mean disassembly and storage in pieces, I wouldn't advise that due to collections management problems that would cause. Full conservation, with disassembly allowing for access to all surfaces, involves coatings that can prevent further interaction between materials. If you don't have the in-house resources to do that, controlling the environment to slow down chemical reactions is recommended.

Karen Louvar [Fredericksburg, VA]: *Our historic house museum has a flintlock pistol that is cocked. Should I safely pull the trigger to release?*

Paul Storch: Yes, if the main spring isn't jammed or broken. Make sure it's unloaded and not pointed at anyone. Remove the flint from the jaws, if possible by carefully loosening the jaw screw. Grasp the top of the hammer and pull it back slightly but hold it in place; gently pull the trigger until you can feel the main spring release. Gently ease the hammer forward.

Kali Mason [Clarksville, TN]: *What kind of wall mounts do you use? Someone used red plastic covered metal hooks from a hardware store to display our rifles.*

Toni Kiser: For display we use steel rods coming from the wall or case base. Then brass hooks with felt on the interior to hold the weapon itself. In storage we have used hardware store hooks, but we cover them with inert materials like ethafoam or acid free tissue so that the artifact is protected from the plastic. We have not done this with firearms though since we like to keep them in locked cabinets even in storage.

Paul Storch: The red plastic coating those hooks are polyvinyl chloride (PVC) and can cause problems long-term. For display, Plexi rods or sheet stock cut and bend into L-shapes and padded with polyester felt or Volara (cross-linked polyethylene sheet) works well. Remember- don't extend rods or hooks into the ends of barrels as that makes it very difficult to remove the firearm from the mount without damage. You can also use polyethylene shrink tubing to cover steel or brass rods (Benchmark is a good source).

Don Cavness [Los Alamos, NM]: *Was that raw wood particle board on the shelving under the machine gun? Surely not.*

Paul Storch: The shelving boards are coated with water-borne polyurethane Camger 1-175 as a sealant and we use Mylar/Melinex as a further barrier between objects and any wood materials.

Michelle Persons [Akron]: *Is it recommended to clean firearms in house or should a conservator be contracted to do this work?*

Paul Storch: Depends on the level of cleaning required. Regular maintenance level cleaning can be done by collections/curatorial assistants to remove dust. If firearms need to be prepared for exhibit and have never been completely cleaned before, then it would be best to contract with a conservator.

Yasmin Hilloowala [Santa Fe, NM]: *What type of ammunition box or can do you use to store ammunition if you have any in your collection?*

Paul Storch: Even though the ammo is no longer live, storing it separately in a lock cabinet or drawer is a good idea. A standard military-type ammunition box or can is OK since those can also be locked. A plastic container made of polypropylene or high density polyethylene is also OK, but metal would be best to prevent corrosion to the lead if the storage cabinet happens to be made from wood or wood products. Lead is very susceptible to oxidation and corrosion by organic acids that are even in recommended wood products. Brass is less prone to corrosion that way, but sometimes older oak museum cabinets may not have been seal coated. That would be the biggest risk in this case once the gun powder is removed. The recommendations would be the same for percussion caps for black powder weapons.

Cory Amsler [Doylestown]: *We have a WWII era Japanese carbine, sent home by a serviceman from the Pacific Theater. Weapon is coated in Cosmoline®. Suggested removal strategies?*

Paul Storch: Cosmoline® is a Vaseline-type petroleum product used to prevent corrosion. Using mineral spirits is probably the best way to do that. You'll need personal protection equipment (gloves, masks) and proper ventilation. Here's a link to an excellent explanation of the solvent removal method written for the serious collector: <http://www.theboxotruth.com/educational-zone-23-cosmoline-removal/>