

National Park Service

FACT SHEET: *Preserving Park Collections*



"Much of the knowledge and understanding necessary to predict the consequences of our activities can be learned by the careful study of our past. The preservation of the tangible evidence of this past insures the preservation of the knowledge base."

Director William Penn Mott

- The National Park Service is a selective storehouse of American history, art and science. It is not only the interpreter of many of this country's national resources but is the *conservator* of these treasures. The park service is a library, a public resource, a laboratory, an archive, a path to our past and our future.
- The care of museum objects involves two related activities: *preventive conservation and conservation treatment*. Preventive conservation seeks to eliminate or minimize the harmful effects of the environment surrounding an object in order that its life might be extended. Conservation treatment seeks to stabilize an object in a given condition and, if necessary, to restore it by such action as replacing missing parts or removing historically inaccurate repairs.
- The Service maintains a professional staff of conservators and curators who are responsible for the well-being and preservation care of collections. Special attention is given to the conservation needs of those materials which traditionally have not received professional care.
- Harpers Ferry Center contains the largest servicewide conservation laboratory in the system and includes specialists in: furniture, glass, ceramics, paper, paintings, metals, textiles, natural history, ethnographic and archaeological materials.
- Regional Conservation Laboratories are located at the Western Archaeological and Conservation Center, Tucson, Arizona and at the North Atlantic Historic Preservation Center, Boston, Massachusetts.
- These laboratories offer parks a full range of services: Laboratory Treatment . Emergency Assistance . Conservation Needs Survey . Park Consultation . Exhibit Design Review . Exhibit Installation . Review of Conservation Contracts.
- The programs of the Curatorial Services Division, Washington Office, also reflect the conviction that the Service's permanent collections are finite and nonrenewable resources. They work to establish collections care and management policy for the parks.

"Our task is to assure that the resources do not pay the price of our lack of knowledge and understanding and that if we err, we err on the side of preservation."

Director William Penn Mott

