

# Dusting for Success

By Trail End State Historic Site Curator Sharie Mooney Prout; from *Trail End Notes*, November 2011

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Here's a quick tip for caring for your collectibles: dust your stuff! We all know we should do it (whether we want to or not), but why? The simple answer is because dust can be very damaging! It is abrasive, absorbs moisture, attracts pests, and can even encourage mold growth - all things that can damage our family heirlooms.



Feather Duster, undated (TESHS Collection)

What is dust, anyway? According to *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, dust is “fine particulate matter.” True enough - as far as it goes. But what kind of particulate matter? That depends on where you live and who or what you live with.

*Wikipedia* tells us that dust in most indoor human environments contains “plant pollen, human and animal hairs, textile fibers, paper fibers, minerals from outdoor soil, human skin cells, the remains of burnt meteors and many other materials which may be found in the local environment.”

When you drop the decaying remains of dust mites into this mix, you can see why dust has to be removed.

Fortunately, there are a few easy ways to do this that won't harm your fine collectibles nearly as much as the dust itself might. Hard surfaces, for example, should be dusted with a dry, lint-free cloth. If you have crevices and difficult-to-dust places on your objects, try using a soft, long-bristled brush (such as a new, tiny paintbrush) to clean the area. For the intricate carvings in Trail End's woodwork, we use a cotton swab to get into the nooks and crannies.

Here we must insert a quick word about polishes and oils. Most of them are not recommended for heirlooms or antique furnishings. Many contain linseed oil or other drying oils, which over

time create a gummy surface coating that darkens the wood. There are products that do not contain drying oils, such as ones that use lemon oil, but even these attract and capture dirt and grime. Here at Trail End, we use nothing but a clean, dry cloth.

Dust doesn't just land on hard surfaces; textiles such as quilts and upholstered furniture need to be vacuumed regularly. Make sure your vacuum cleaner has a HEPA (High Efficiency Particulate Air) filter. Using the brush attachment, gently go over your item. If you are worried about the vacuum catching on or sucking up any loose buttons or strings, a mesh screen can be laid over the object and then vacuumed over.

As always, if you have any questions about caring for your own collections, give the staff at Trail End a call.



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