

HOUSEKEEPING MANUAL FOR THE MOUNT

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for Edith Wharton Restoration, Inc.**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Cleaning Philosophy	3
II. General Guidelines	3
III. Walls and Ceilings	4
IV. Woodwork	4
V. Windows and Doors	5
VI. Marble Fireplaces and Hearths	5
VII. Metal Railings and Firebacks	5
VIII. Light Fixtures	5
IX. Floors	6
X. Bathrooms	6
XI. Furniture	7
XII. Metals	7
XIII. Glass and Ceramics	7
XIV. Framed Artwork	8
XV. Books	8
XVI. Textiles	8
XVII. Credits	9

I. CLEANING PHILOSOPHY

EWR's housekeeping staff plays an essential role at The Mount. We have two primary responsibilities: to assist with the preservation of The Mount's buildings and collections and to maintain The Mount for the benefit of its visitors. We follow professional museum standards designed to do no harm to buildings and collections. We want The Mount to look clean and well-cared for, but we also respect its age and historic significance.

II. GENERAL GUIDELINES

Dos

- Wash your hands before starting to clean and regularly while cleaning. Be especially careful to wash off any cleaning residues before moving on to the next project.
- Work systematically. Clean the room from top to bottom so that loose dust and dirt will fall to the floor. Clean moving around a room in a clockwise or counterclockwise fashion.
- Don't forget to dust the lower portions of furniture such as chair rungs, legs, and feet.
- Always be aware of your surroundings relative to collections items. Be careful not to bump into or scrape against furniture with vacuums, hoses, and electrical cords.
- Refold and rotate dust cloths often to avoid abrading surfaces.

Don'ts

- Do not eat, drink, or smoke near collections items. Bottled water may be carried with you as long as it is tightly capped and placed in a plastic bag if "sweating."
- Wet sponge mopping or dusting. Sponges and cloths should be well wrung-out with no drips. Any wet surfaces should be polished dry immediately to avoid possible water staining.
- Over-cleaning. Some stains and other signs of age cannot be scrubbed out. Overzealous or excessive cleaning can harm many fragile surfaces.
- Commercial or household cleaners such as Murphy's Oil Soap, Pledge, Orange Oil, or Fantastik.
- Specialized cleaning products, such as cleaners for marble floors, silver and brass polishes, etc.

Appropriate Cleaning Equipment

- Clean cotton rags
- Soft long-hair brushes
- Soft toothbrushes
- Cotton dust mops
- Swiffer cloths
- Latex gloves for modern bathrooms
- Cotton gloves when handling metals
- Synthetic fiber brooms

- Q-tips (wooden stems work the best)
- Cotton batting
- Distilled water
- Ivory dishwashing detergent
- Ivory Snow laundry detergent
- Mineral spirits
- Ammonia

Cleaning Dust Cloths and Brushes

- Hand wash using spare amount of Ivory dishwashing detergent.
- Cloths can be machine washed with Ivory Snow laundry detergent.

III. WALLS AND CEILINGS

A. Painted Walls and Ceilings: Throughout house

- Dust from top to bottom with a soft cotton cloth attached to a dust mop.
- Hand dust molded plaster ornaments with a soft cotton cloth.
- Brush loose, flaking paint to floor using synthetic fiber broom. Cover any furniture or other items in the path of the falling paint with clean cotton sheets.

B. Historic Wallpaper Fragments: Bedroom floor

- Dust gently from top to bottom with soft long-hair brush, using extreme caution. Avoid areas that are brittle, tearing or detaching from the walls.
- Absolutely no wet cleaning. Historic wallpaper is extremely susceptible to staining.

C. Reproduction Wallpaper: Bedroom floor

- Dust from top to bottom with a soft cotton cloth attached to a dust mop.
- Use damp cloth for stains with extreme caution, only after testing color reaction in an inconspicuous area.

D. Paintings Set Into the Walls: Main Stair Hall, Den, Dining Room, Boudoir

- Dust from top to bottom with soft long-hair brush. Avoid areas of peeling paint. Be very careful not to force dust and dirt between frame and bottom edge of painting.

IV. WOODWORK

A. Painted Woodwork: Throughout House

- Dust from top to bottom using soft cotton cloth.
- Dust with slightly dampened cloth as necessary.

B. Finished Woodwork: Library, Butler's Pantry, Bookshop, Servants' Wing

- Dust from top to bottom using soft cotton cloth.
- Dust with slightly dampened cloth only with extreme caution, as finishes may be susceptible to water stains.

- Use a soft long-haired brush for unrestored woodwork, such as in Servants' Wing, to avoid snags from peeling finishes.

V. WINDOWS AND DOORS

A. Windows, Glass-Paned Doors, and Glass Tabletops: Throughout House

- Apply Windex sparingly to cotton cloth (never to glass itself). Wipe with moderate pressure and polish dry with clean cotton cloth.
- Be careful to wipe up any liquid and watch out for pooling liquid between tabletops and table surfaces.
- Be careful not to get any liquid on metal hardware, as it will tarnish.

B. Solid Wood Doors: Throughout House

- Follow guidelines for Woodwork, listed above.

C. Door and Window Hardware: Throughout House

- Dust and wipe metal hardware with clean cotton cloth (not Swiffers).
- Do not use any commercial polishes or any wet cleaners.
- Most of the hardware has been restored and coated with long-lasting lacquer to protect it from tarnishing.

VI. MARBLE FIREPLACES AND HEARTHES: Throughout House

- Dust with soft cotton cloth or soft long-hair brush.
- For heavy soiling and fingerprints, wipe with damp cloth and polish dry with separate clean cloth.

VII. METAL RAILINGS AND FIREBACKS: Throughout House

- Dust with soft cotton cloth or, if risk of snags, soft long-hair brush.

VIII. LIGHT FIXTURES

A. Glass and Metal Lights

- Dry dust with soft long-hair brush.
- Use Windex on cotton cloths and Q-tips to clean glass with extreme caution, as described in Windows and Doors section, above.
- Remove detachable glass globes and wash separately at ground level. Pad sink with cotton cloths while washing.

B. Lampshades

- Dust from top to bottom with soft long-hair brush.

C. Standard Light Bulb Wattage

In order to minimize possible damage to historic items from light and heat exposure, please use the following light bulb types:

- 15 watt candelabra bulbs for ceiling and wall scones
- 40 watt regular bulbs for wall scones
- 60 watt regular bulbs for table and floor lamps

IX. FLOORS

A. Ceramic and Concrete: the Entrance Hall and ground floor hallways

- Vacuum with the lowest suction possible.
- Dry dust with dust mop or Swiffer cloths.
- Well wrung-out (no drips) damp sponge mop to clean up mud

B. Wooden: Stair Hall and Main Stairs, Den, Library, Butler's Pantry, Bedroom Floor

- Dry dust with dust mop or soft cotton cloths.
- Spot clean with damp cloth (test first to make sure water won't stain).

C. Marble: Gallery, Drawing Room, Dining Room

- Dry dust with dust mop or Swiffer cloths.
- Damp mop with well wrung-out (no drips) sponge mop with mild mixture of soap and water (dish detergent works well).

D. Modern Wall-to-Wall Carpet and Area Rugs and Runners: Throughout house

- Vacuum with the lowest suction possible.
- Spot clean stains with damp cloth.
- Consult the Curator before using any commercial stain removers.

E. Historic Carpets

- Use a carpet sweeper for everyday cleaning.
- Because we do not have a museum-appropriate vacuum, do not vacuum historic carpets unless approved by the Curator. If approved, the lowest suction possible must be used. Never use beater bars or rotary brush attachments on historic carpets.
- Whether using a carpet sweeper or vacuum, always move in the direction of the pile, not against it.
- If a rug is very dirty, take it outside on a day that is not humid and gently shake it to get rid of excess dirt. This should always be done by at least two people.
- Do not use any commercial carpet cleaning products or steamers.

X. BATHROOMS

A. Modern Bathroom Fixtures: Ground floor main bathrooms, handicapped bathrooms on Ground and Main Floors

- Use appropriate commercial cleaners, taking care not to leave any residue on historic materials.
- Wear latex gloves while cleaning.

B. Historic (disconnected) Bathroom Fixtures: Main Floor bathroom adjoining Den, Bedroom Floor bathrooms

- Damp dust with cotton cloths.
- Do not use any commercial cleaners.
- Polish nickel-plated pipes and faucets with cotton cloths.

XI. FURNITURE

A. Hard Surfaces

- Dry dust with soft cotton cloth, long-hair brush, or soft toothbrush (for crevices).
- Use slightly damp cloth to remove heavy dirt and grime.
- Avoid flaking surfaces—dust very gently with brush only.
- Do not use any commercial polishes or cleaners.

B. Upholstery

- Dry dust with soft cotton cloth.
- Slightly damp cloth and/or vacuum attachments may be used on some items to remove heavy dirt and grime; check with Curator first before proceeding.

C. Hardware

- Dry dust with soft long-hair brush or soft toothbrush.
- Do not allow any contact with damp dusting cloths used to dust hard surfaces.
- Do not use any commercial polishes or cleaners.

D. Clocks

- Dust the exterior case only with soft long-hair brush.
- The clock face, works, and reverse of the glass door panels need to be cleaned by a professional conservator. Alert the Curator if cleaning is necessary.

XII. METALS

A. Silver, Brass, Copper, and Iron Items

- Always wear gloves when handling metals. The salts and oils in your hands can cause long-term damage from corrosion.
- Do not use any commercial silver or brass polishes.
- Dust with a soft cotton cloth or brush.
- Polish residues can be removed by buffing vigorously using mineral spirits applied with cotton balls or cloths and/or soft toothbrushes.

B. Modern Brass Music Stands (used to hold exhibit signs)

- These are the only items on which commercial brass polish may be used.

XIII. GLASS AND CERAMICS: FIGURINES, PLATES, BOWLS, DRINKING GLASSES

- Dry dust with a soft cotton cloth or long-hair brush.
- Do not immerse in water! Spot clean with a damp Q-Tip to remove heavy dirt and grime.
- Pad any work surfaces, including countertops, shelves, and sinks, with soft cotton cloths.
- Do not pick up by the handles, knobs or spots; these are usually the weakest spots on the items.
- Remove all detachable parts before beginning to dust, handle or move.

XIV. FRAMED ARTWORK

A. Paintings

- Gently dust front and back vertically from top down with soft long-hair brush, taking care not to lodge any dirt between the lower edge of the frame and the canvas.
- Do not use any cleaners or damp cleaning methods.
- Avoid all areas of flaking paint or mold growth.

B. Artwork framed under Glass and Mirrors

- Gently dust glass with soft long-hair brush, taking care not to lodge any dirt underneath the edges of the frame.
- If the glass needs deeper cleaning, use a small wad of cotton batting or a Q-Tip dampened with mineral spirits. Buff with clean dry batting.
- Avoid touching the frame with the cleaning solution—it can cause irreparable damage.
- Do not allow any moisture to seep under the frame and onto the artwork underneath.
- Do not use household cleaning products such as Windex.

C. Frames

- Gently dust with soft long-hair brush, taking care not to lodge any dirt underneath the edges of the frame.
- Avoid all areas of flaking gilding.

XV. BOOKS

- Dry dust with soft long-hair brush only once or twice a year.
- Do not use cleaners or any damp dusters, as books are very susceptible to water damage.
- Dust with the book closed: first sweep off dust on top edge from binding out, then dust other edges, then dust covers.
- Be careful not to tear or brush off any torn or broken edges.
- Remove a book from the shelf by pushing the books on either side back and pulling it out by grasping the covers on either side of the binding. Never grab a book by the top or sides of the spine—especially the top edge of the spine.
- Do not push books all the way to the back of the shelf; they need air circulation behind them.
- Do not lean books at an angle; this will break their bindings.
- Check for mold growth and do not disperse it into the air. Mold should be vacuumed off using a special attachment made for museums (unfortunately we do not have one at this time).

XVI. TEXTILES--Historic and Modern Curtains, Tablecloths, Bedspreads, Sheets, Towels, Table Runners, and Pillows

- Dust gently from top to bottom using soft brushes, or, for curtains, soft cotton cloths attached to a dust mop.

- Because we do not have a museum-appropriate vacuum, do not vacuum on any level of suction.
- Under no circumstances should these items be washed or ironed.
- Do not use commercial stain removers or detergents.
- A steamer may be used on items that will not be damaged by water exposure; check with the Curator before proceeding.

XVI. CREDITS

The following were used as sources for this manual:

Heaver, Melissa. *Housekeeping for Historic Homes and House Museums*. Washington, DC: National Trust for Historic Preservation, 2000.

Historic New England. *Housekeeping Plan*. Unpublished. Provided to the author by Julie Solz, Team Leader for Collections Services.

Edith Wharton Restoration, Inc., a private, non-profit organization, owns and operates The Mount, Edith Wharton's 1902 country estate in Lenox, Massachusetts.

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