Specifications for Cleaning Rare Books and Manuscript Boxes

Supplies and Equipment

1) Vacuum cleaner with HEPA filtration, variable speeds, soft horsehair brushes, and a good supply of bags
   Use softest brush on bindings, regular brush on shelves, book trucks and floors, and micro-tool brush on thin bindings. Brushes must be marked so the attachments used to clean library materials can be recognized readily and segregated from those used to clean shelving, book trucks and floors.

2) Cheesecloth or nylon stockings
   The end of the vacuum hose must be covered with cheesecloth or a piece of nylon stocking before the brush is attached to the hose. This ensures that small bits of text and binding will not be pulled into the cleaner bag.

3) Extension cord of appropriate weight and grounding (if necessary)

4) Stepstool or library ladder

5) Book truck large enough to accommodate a full shelf of books
   An entire shelf must be cleaned at the same time. A second book truck may be used for additional work surface.

6) Bricks covered with book-cloth or non-damaging bookends to hold materials upright on the truck

7) Soft artist brushes
   Vacuum attachment brushes may be too large or rough for use on some fragile materials. Artist brushes can be used with more precision and a lighter touch.

8) Microfiber or non-chemical dusting cloths
   Dusting cloths may be used on shelves, book trucks, and MS boxes. They should not be used directly on books. To test if a dusting cloth has chemical additives, place a cloth between two clean sheets of white paper under a weight and leave it for about one week. If the papers show any staining, then the cloth should not be used to clean shelves.

9) Nitrile or cotton gloves, if desired
   Avoid latex or natural rubber gloves, as some people may have unsuspected allergies to rubber. Gloves can limit the transfer of dirt and/or prevent oils or sweat on hands from staining leather. Use caution when wearing cotton gloves since the fabric may catch on fragile bindings.

10) Apron or lab coat, if desired

11) Dust mask (disposable N95 particulate style), if desired
General cleaning procedure

- Begin with the top shelf and work shelf by shelf down the range, so any dislodged dust or dirt will fall on shelves yet to be cleaned.

- Transfer a full shelf of materials to the book truck, so the entire shelf can be cleaned. Transfer items in safe, easily handled quantities. Use bricks or bookends to support items on the shelf and truck. Maintain order of materials and keep call slips in their proper locations.

- Check shelf for loose pieces of bindings, detached pages, call slips, etc. All pieces should be retained. If their proper location is known, they should be put in an envelope, labeled appropriately, and kept either with the book or in a file. If their proper location is not known, they should be put in an envelope and given to the collection curator, unless directed to do otherwise.

- Set vacuum to highest speed and vacuum shelf using the brush attachment reserved for that purpose. Use caution when working toward the back of the shelf where materials from an adjacent shelf may encroach on the shelf being cleaned. Especially dusty shelves may also be wiped with a non-chemical dusting cloth.

MS Boxes

- Vacuum MS boxes using the attachment reserved for shelf cleaning.
- Set vacuum speed to medium.
- Keep MS boxes closed at all times.
- Use caution when vacuuming around the handholds of boxes and box labels, so that materials are not pulled out of or off the box.
- If boxes are especially soiled or dusty, a microfiber or non-chemical cloth may be used.

Rare Books

- Vacuum rare books using the soft horsehair brush attachment.
- Set vacuum speed to low.
- Vacuum only intact books. These may include materials with detached boards, etc., if there is no danger of pulling off small pieces. (See instructions below for cleaning fragile or damaged books.)
  - Work one volume at a time and maintain shelf order.
  - Start with the head/top edge of the book, generally the edge with the heaviest accumulation of dust. Cradle the book securely under one arm spine uppermost, with a hand supporting the fore edge and keeping the volume tightly closed to prevent dust from entering the text. Tilt the head of the book forward and gently vacuum the head with the attachment, brushing only from the spine toward the fore edge.
  - Vacuum the remaining text block edges, the spine, and finally the sides of the volume. When vacuuming the tail/bottom edge, work from the spine toward the fore edge.
Return the dusted book in its proper shelf location, using bricks or bookends, as needed, to support the materials as you work.

Vacuum thin volumes with the micro-tool brush.

Oversize books that cannot be cradled under the arm should be placed flat on a book truck, gently held closed and cleaned as described above.

Repeat process on next lower shelf.

Procedure for especially fragile or damaged books

- Cover the end of the hose or nozzle with cheese cloth or nylon stocking. Secure the vacuum hose on an extra book truck using a brick, cotton tape or a clamp.
- Set vacuum speed to medium.
- Cradle book as described in general cleaning procedure.
- Hold the book near to the vacuum hose, but do not let it touch the hose or nozzle. Using a soft artist brush, gently brush dust from the head, working from the spine toward the fore edge, allowing the vacuum to pull the dust in from the air.
- Brush remaining edges and surfaces in a similar manner.
- Binding fragments should be retained. If their proper location is known, they should be put in an envelope, labeled appropriately, and kept either with the book or in a file. If their proper location is not known, they should be put in an envelope and given to the collection curator, unless directed to do otherwise.
- Do not vacuum any volumes that are especially fragile and at risk of losing fragments. Notify collection curator.

General advice

- Wash hands or change gloves regularly to avoid transferring dirt from hands to books.
- Vacuum book trucks and work surfaces regularly with brush attachment dedicated to that purpose.
- Launder non-chemical dust cloths and cotton gloves, as needed.
- Replace cheese-cloth or nylon stockings regularly or when damaged.
- Wash brushes and brush attachments with mild hand soap, as needed, and dry completely before re-use.
- Replace brushes when they are damaged, bent, or losing bristles.
- Follow the maintenance schedule described in the vacuum cleaner’s manual and replace the HEPA filter as often as directed. Check and change bags frequently.
- Receiving training from experienced cleaning staff is recommended.
- Consult with collection curator or cleaning supervisor about any questions or concerns.