



Case Study:

COMBINING COLLECTIONS

American Civil War Museum | Richmond, VA

Two museums merge
to tell a more complete
story of the Civil War.



The new museum's storage systems work together to save space, preserve collections, and promote access.

Two Museums Become One

The new American Civil War Museum was created through the merger of two very different museums: the Museum of the Confederacy, which held the world's largest collection of confederate artifacts, and the American Civil War Center, which was founded with the goal of explaining the war and its effects through the perspectives of enslaved and free African Americans, immigrants, and women.

The merger presented the opportunity to combine the museums' collections and explain the Civil War more fully. The new facility would also have more exhibition space and a new collections storage area.

Merging the collections presented challenges, but it also offered staff the opportunity to re-think storage strategies.



TIP: A new collections area often results in new housings for stored artifacts. When assessing your collections to determine storage requirements, don't simply measure the space that the objects take up now. Think about how much space they'll occupy when they're rehoused to modern standards.

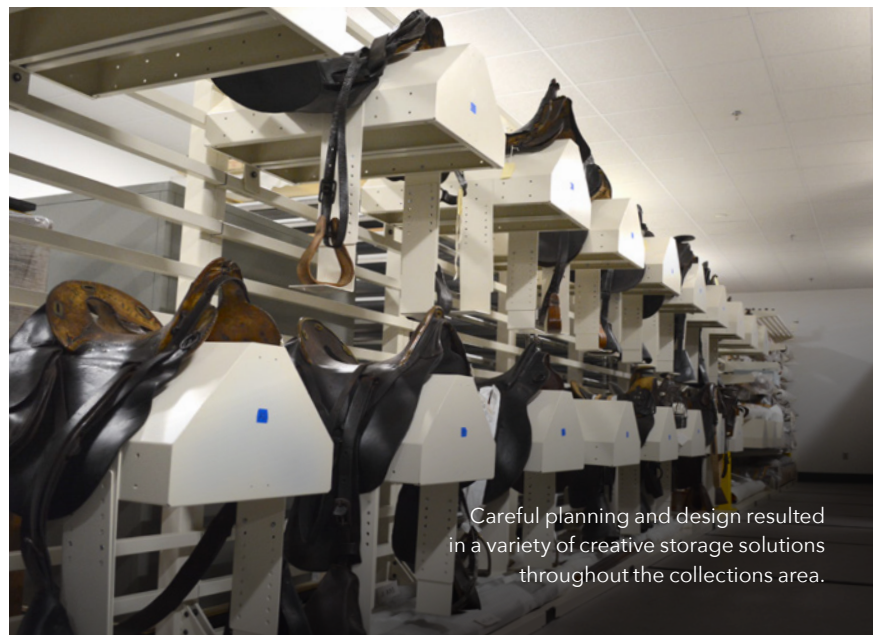


An Opportunity to Improve Collections Storage

Designing a new collections storage area is always a challenge, and this project was even more complex than usual. Space was limited and staff needed to find a way to store the combined collections in a way that would preserve the artifacts, optimize the available space, and provide room to grow in the future.

The process started with a thorough inventory of all the items in the combined collections. When staff measured objects to determine storage requirements, they noticed that many objects needed to be rehoused. They planned ahead, noting not only the objects' actual dimensions but also the amount of space they would take up after they had been rehoused in accordance with modern standards.

Staff soon realized that they would need help to figure out how to fit everything into the space allotted for collections storage in the new facility. They called on the local Spacesaver consultant to gain a better understanding of their options, and over the next few years he consulted with them and with the project's architects to ensure that the new collections area would not only provide the best preservation environment for the collections, but that the space would also be safe, efficient, and accessible for staff and visiting researchers.



Careful planning and design resulted in a variety of creative storage solutions throughout the collections area.



Swords and Scabbards

The swords and scabbards in the museum's collection vary in size and shape, and staff wanted to store them compactly while still keeping them organized. Also, because they're arranged alphabetically by the original owner's last name, staff needed a way to shift swords and scabbards to accommodate new acquisitions in the future.

The Spacesaver solution consists of foam mounts and steel supports mounted inside shelving unit frames. The steel supports can be moved along steel rails and the foam supports can slide from left to right. The local Spacesaver consultant sourced the foam mounts and had them custom cut to provide secure storage.

Foam mounts and steel supports can be moved to accommodate swords and scabbards of different shapes and sizes.



Flags and Other Textiles

The museum's flag collection, which is the world's largest single collection of Confederate and Union flags and flag fragments, also needed special attention. By installing divider rods between shelves, Spacesaver created an efficient way to compactly store flags that were mounted and framed. They're stored on edge to save space and the dividers keep them in place.

Some flags and other textiles need to be rolled onto tubes for storage. Cantilever racking fitted with adjustable arms provides an adjustable solution that optimizes space on the racks.



Saddles

The saddles in the museum's collection posed another storage challenge: they're large, heavy, awkward to handle, and vulnerable to damage and decay.

To protect the saddles and straps while also optimizing space in the climate-controlled collections area, Spacesaver's engineers designed sturdy steel mounts for the saddles, as well as adjustable steel brackets to support the stirrups. The stirrup brackets can be moved up and down on 1-inch increments and then locked into place, thereby relieving pressure on the stirrup straps. The brackets can also be moved from front to back for perfect positioning along the saddle. The mounts and brackets are compatible with Spacesaver's cantilever racking system, which offers even more flexibility in arranging the saddles.



This solution compactly stores historic saddles while also providing appropriate support for each saddle and its components.



TIP: Spacesaver's Nantucket museum drawers and trays can be installed in 4-Post shelving frames to store smaller objects that don't need a sealed cabinet.

Small Objects

Museum staff had initially thought they would need museum cabinets to house thousands of musical instruments, medals, and other small objects, and they were concerned that they didn't have the budget to purchase the large quantity of cabinets that would be required.

They were relieved to discover that Spacesaver's museum trays could be mounted on 4-Post shelving to store objects that did not need the sealed interior environment or the strength that a welded museum cabinet would provide.

High-Density Systems

To make the most of the collections area's limited space, high-density storage systems were designed specifically for the area's unique requirements. These systems eliminate wasted space by mounting shelving and cabinets on carriages that move along rails installed in the floor. They're robust enough to handle the weight of furniture and other large objects, and they're equipped with safety features to ensure the safety of staff and visitors.

These systems were crucial in accommodating the combined collections and providing room to grow in the future.



Historic Weapons

A modern weapons rack provides compact storage for the museum's historic long guns. Spacesaver's Weapon Rack III was installed in 4-Post shelving, which was in turn mounted on a high-density storage system, to save space and keep rifles and other long guns organized.

Enduring Solutions for Museums of all Sizes

At Spacesaver, we understand that planning for new construction or renovation can be a daunting experience. Although every project has its challenges, we bring the expertise you need to create a collections storage system that will protect your collections now and into the future. Our Wisconsin-based teams of in-house engineers, project managers, and manufacturing craftspeople are ready to work with your local Spacesaver consultant to design, build, and install effective storage solutions that will stand the test of time.

As you think about designing a new or renovated collections area, contact us to arrange a free consultation. You'll learn about your options and gain insight and inspiration from others who have undertaken similar projects.

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