
Storage and Shipping Boxes for Feather Bonnets

Eagle feather bonnets are common in Native American ethnographic collections. Because of their large size, unique design elements, and fragile nature, they can be problematic when museum storage space is limited, or when shipping and handling is necessary for treatment or for traveling exhibitions. The following article explores some storage and shipping mount solutions that have been used successfully for a variety of feather bonnet styles.

The basic storage mount and box for simple feather bonnets consists of a drop-front box made of archival board or corrugated plastic. A padded Ethafoam form to support the bonnet crown is mounted on a tube anchored to a slide-out platform.



The storage boxes are quite strong and may be easily stacked to maximize limited storage space.



Eagle feathers around the crown are held in place with a band of unbuffered acid-free tissue tied with cotton twill tape. Compressing the circle of eagle feathers with the tissue band allows the bonnet to fit into a smaller space than would otherwise be possible when the feathers are splayed open, and prevents the feathers from shifting and moving during handling.



Feather bonnets with long fabric trailers bearing single or double rows of eagle feathers are quite common. Sometimes these trailers can be up to 8 feet long and thus can be quite difficult to store.

With careful handling, the long feathered trailers may be rolled and the roll tied to the slide-out platform just behind the crown support mount. In this example, a small Tyvek pillow was used to support the center of the roll. Care was taken to avoid direct contact between the Tyvek and the feathers.



Experience has shown that it is best not to insert any synthetic material between the layers of feathers as the trailer is rolled, as materials such as Tyvek, Ethafoam sheeting, or similar can hold an electrostatic charge that can distort or damage the feathers. When necessary, acid-free tissue may be used.



Another solution when the trailers are quite long is to roll each trailer separately and anchor them side by side.

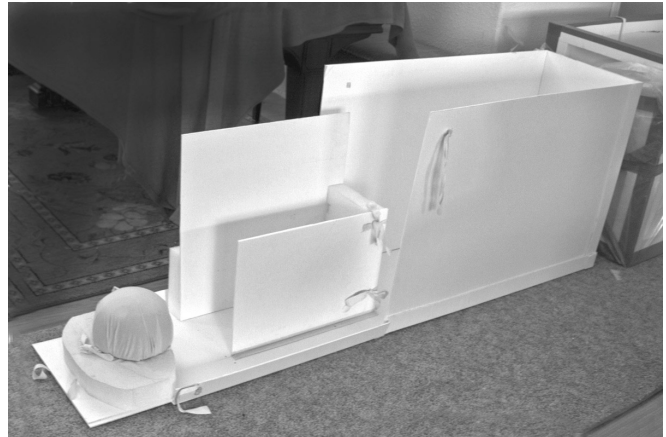


Modifications can be made to accommodate various types of decorative elements on the bonnets.

Bundles of silk ribbon or ermine skins are often attached at the temples of the bonnet crown, designed to hang loosely at either side of the head when worn. These materials may be bundled and tied gently to the platform on either side of the crown support. Very fragile silk ribbon may be wrapped in a protective envelope of acid-free tissue, rolled gently on a small Tyvek pillow and tied in place in a similar fashion.



In the case of extremely limited storage space or to accommodate the size limitations of commercial shipping crates, the long feather trailers may also be mounted upright on the box platform.



In this example, Ethafoam interleaving was used to add structural support to the upright feather roll, with a layer of acid-free tissue to protect the feathers from direct contact with the foam.

This method was successfully used to transport an extremely fragile trailer bonnet cross-country in the hands of commercial art shippers without incident.