

Patrick F. Taylor Foundation Object Project

Fact Sheet

Household Hits=Transformation



Focusing on everyday things that changed everything, “Object Project” will use common objects and uncommon exhibition techniques to encourage visitors of all ages to discover fascinating stories behind objects and the role of innovation in American history. “Object Project” will use more than 250 objects related to and including bicycles, refrigerators, ready-to-wear clothing and a variety of household conveniences to explore how people, innovative things and social change shaped life as we know it.

The 4,000 square foot “Object Project” is divided into four sections: Bicycles,

Refrigerators, Ready-to-Wear Clothes and Household Hits. Details on the Household Hits section are below:

Household Hits=Transformation

Americans have long been on the lookout for innovative things, especially household conveniences they could use to transform their lives. These things and the people who adopted them shaped—and continue to shape—everyday life, for better or worse.

HIGHLIGHTED OBJECTS

- **Embossed toilet bowl, about 1900**

“Object Project” features an elaborately decorated toilet (embellished bowls became popular when free-standing pedestal toilets replaced earlier flush styles that were enclosed in wooden cabinets). In the 1880s, spurred by public health reformers and a growing acceptance of “germ theory,” municipalities across the nation installed water and sewage systems. By the 1890s, wash-down siphon models were the norm: five to seven gallons of water rushing into the bowl pulled out waste; built-in traps kept a pool of gas-blocking water in the bowl. With indoor flush toilets came toilet paper—newsprint, mail-order catalog pages and corncobs were fine for outhouse pits, but were not flushable. Rolled, perforated paper was first patented in the late 1870s and by the 1890s had assumed its familiar on-a-tube form. Visitors can listen to the sound of an authentic toilet flush.

- **Automatic toaster, 1920s**

“Object Project” features one of the first pop-up toasters. During the 1920s, Americans bought more than a million electric toasters, usually for use right on the breakfast table. Early electric toasters browned only one side at a time and required users to watch, flip, and then remove each slice. The automatic toaster debuted in 1926; it toasted both sides and popped up the finished slice. Americans’ growing obsession with toast—and saving time—found expression in sliced bread. The Chillicothe Baking Co. in Missouri offered the first machine-cut loaves to local customers in 1928; two years later, Continental Baking introduced Wonder-Cut Bread nationwide.

- **Hoover suction sweeper, 1927**

“Object Project” includes a Hoover vacuum cleaner. From the time H. W. Hoover first pitched his “electric suction sweepers” to consumers in 1908, advertisements promised that vacuums would ease the burdens of housework. Ironically, the more vacuuming people did, the higher their standards of cleanliness became—and the more vacuuming of floors and furnishings they were expected to do. By 1925, half of the homes in the United States had electricity and appliances of all sorts were being promoted as “electric servants.”

- **Window air conditioner, 1950s**

“Object Project” features a Fedders home air conditioner. Many Americans first enjoyed air conditioning in the early 1930s in movie theaters, factories, offices, and commercial venues—many with banners or door stickers boasting: “It’s cool inside.” Later in the decade, engineers developed self-contained “room coolers” that required no plumbing and plugged in “just like a radio.” But not until the 1950s did home window units become affordable. In 1960, when for the first time, the U.S. Census housing survey gathered data on home air conditioning, more than 5.5 million homes (10.5%) had window units.

- **Microwave oven, 1974**

“Object Project” features a 1974 Amana Radarange microwave oven. Oven-sized microwaves for the home were introduced in 1955, but not until the 1980s did shrinking sizes and prices attract buyers. Although manufacturers envisioned home cooks using microwaves to prepare traditional meals with all the trimmings, not many did. Instead, most households used the microwave to zap frozen foods, heat leftovers—and to make popcorn. Microwave popcorn first appeared in supermarkets in 1981, but it had to be kept cold to keep the butter from turning rancid. Bags that could be kept at room temperature hit the shelves in 1984.

ACTIVITIES

- ***The Price is Right***

A special edition of the popular game show was designed for “Object Project.” Visitors play by guessing the prices of historical innovations ranging from Uneeda biscuits (1898) to a Palm Pilot (1992).

Innovation showcases highlight household hits from 1825 to 1986. Although no actual prizes are awarded, players who bid closest to the historical retail prices without “going over” or overestimating



the costs, win the game. In the process, visitors learn about past innovations—and how they appealed to consumers upon their introduction into the marketplace. Object descriptions were drawn from the effusive prose of advertising copy writers from the past two centuries. Price is Right® and its related indicia are trademarks of FremantleMedia Operations B.V.

OTHER FEATURES

- **Talking Objects**

A series of “talking” objects are available for visitors to touch and to listen to what they have to say. The talking objects include: a disc record player from the early 1900s; an alarm clock; a 1920s bottle of deodorant and candlestick phone; a 1950s portable television; a 1984 Macintosh computer; a Model No. 2 Kodak Brownie camera introduced in 1905 and a Maytag washing machine from the 1930s. Each object has its own personality and provides a unique perspective on its role in everyday life.



- **Object Story Boards**

Unique to “Object Project,” these gallery boards use advertisements, historical photographs and intriguing primary source materials to encourage active exploration of the history behind selected objects on view. Among the stories that will be available in this section: *Is it safe to open a window?* (Window screen); *What hath toast wrought?* (Automatic toaster); *What a difference a battery makes* (Hearing aid); *Less work for mother?* (Vacuum); *Take good care of yourself* (Medicine cabinet); *Oh, what a relief it is* (Window air conditioner); *A sanitary appliance* (Toilet); *It’s personal* (Transistor radio); *Zap it!* (Microwave oven) and *Could you hear me then?* (Cell phone.)

- **Mail order catalogs**

Visitors flipping through vintage catalogs will be able to answer for themselves the question: What household items were popular during different eras?

- **Hands-on Cart**

In facilitated activities, visitors will be able to handle authentic household toys and piece together the stories they hold.