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PROJECT SPOTLIGHT



Atlanta History Center

The Exhibit Came Down. Then the Real Work Began.

When the Atlanta History Center began preparing for its 100th anniversary, the milestone came with a major project: refreshing long-standing exhibits and making room for what was next. One of those exhibits was Turning Point: The American Civil War. *When it came time to deinstall the exhibit, the team knew they would need storage.*

They just didn't know how much.

THE PROBLEM

The Atlanta History Center has spent the last century collecting, preserving, and sharing the stories that shaped Atlanta and the region around it. Located on a 33-acre campus in Buckhead, the Center includes museums, archives, historic houses, gardens, and living collections all working together to tell Atlanta's story.

That kind of work takes space. And for a 100-year institution, space does not appear out of nowhere.

"Anytime you have an institution that's been here for several years, several decades, space is always at a premium," said Erica Hague, Collections Manager at the Atlanta History Center.

As part of its anniversary planning, the team began refreshing long-standing exhibits, including one of the nation's largest Civil War exhibitions, featuring thousands of original Union and Confederate artifacts. When the exhibit closed in May 2025, the team had to determine where those artifacts would go next.

The collection was larger than anyone had accounted for. *"We thought it was about a thousand,"* Hague said. *"It turned out to be over 2,000."*

Each artifact needed to be stored safely, tracked cleanly, and kept accessible for future research, preservation, and exhibit planning.

The existing storage area had static shelving and a lot of table space. On paper, that might sound useful. In practice, the tables had become a kind of holding zone. Items could be placed there and stay there for a long time, without a defined location or an easy way to track them.

The challenge wasn't just capacity. *"As a history museum, we collect a lot of different types of materials,"* Hague said. *"It could be anything from a button, a badge, a shoe buckle, all the way up to something large like a locker or drum or weapons."* Whatever storage solution came in needed to accommodate all of it.

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Collections Manager, Atlanta History Center

THE SOLUTION

The Atlanta History Center brought in Patterson Pope to look at the existing space and help determine what was possible. The answer was not to build out. It was to find more space in the same footprint.

"In preparation for the deinstall, we found that we needed to have additional space," Hague said. *"So we identified a storage area that we could change over from static shelving into mobile shelving and then have the space that we needed for items coming down off the exhibit."*

The final design created a mixed-use space. *"It's office space for our processing registrars as well as storage space for the items that have come down off exhibit and items that are being prepared to go up onto exhibit,"* said Hague.

The new shelving gave the team defined, trackable storage locations instead of open-ended table space. It also gave them adjustable shelves that could be configured around the collection.

"If it's a drum, we can move the shelves up or down," Hague said. *"If it's a weapon, we can make sure that it has enough space to actually sit there comfortably. If it's something small, we can make sure that it's in a box or in an enclosure of some sort that actually fits it and fits the shelf."*

Throughout the planning process, Patterson Pope helped the Atlanta History Center team understand their options, review schematics, and consider products and configurations they may not have known were available.

Once the plan was in place, the install moved quickly. Patterson Pope's team removed the existing materials, built up the subdeck, and installed the shelving system over roughly two weeks.

That schedule mattered. The storage project was part of a much larger exhibit timeline, and the Atlanta History Center needed the work to stay on track.







About the Atlanta History Center

The Atlanta History Center is one of the largest history museums in the Southeast. Located on a 33-acre campus in Buckhead, the Center includes museums, archives, historic houses, gardens, and living collections that preserve and share Atlanta's history. In 2026, the Center is celebrating its 100th anniversary alongside the opening of its largest exhibition ever—the new Civil War exhibit.

THE OUTCOME

The new storage system helped solve an immediate problem: more than 2,000 objects coming down from a long-running exhibit. But it also helped the Atlanta History Center plan for the years ahead.

Because the Center cannot easily expand its physical footprint, the team had to make better use of the available space. Mobile shelving helped them do that.

"It made us able to store more items in the same footprint," Hague said, *"which has added—hopefully—growth for us for several decades. It also gave us space for the staff members to actually work in that space, which makes it a lot easier for them to do their work."*

For a nonprofit working within a larger exhibit schedule, the process mattered as much as the final system. *"That we stayed on time and on budget was also a huge part of this,"* Hague said. *"Anytime you're working with a nonprofit, that's a big deal."*

Looking back, Hague said the value came from more than added capacity. *"Having a person to help guide the process was very helpful in understanding what we could do, what the possibilities were, and giving us new information to go off of for the next couple of dozen years,"* she said.







