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# MUSEUM ARCHIVIST

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Newsletter of the Museum Archives Section  
Society of American Archivists

February 1994

Volume 8 Number 1

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## FROM THE CHAIR . . .

The months since the last newsletter have been busy ones. There was the SAA meeting in New Orleans where thirty-four people attended the September 3rd Museum Archives Section meeting. During the business meeting Maureen Melton was elected Vice Chair/Chair-elect and Susan Glenn was re-elected Section Secretary. Alan Tucker of the Research Libraries Group also gave a brief progress report on AMIS (Archives and Museums Information System) software. After a brief coffee and beignet break, the extremely dedicated Section members returned to work with the committee of their choice on developing plans for publications, programs, and outreach. You will find these plans incorporated into the Section's "Current Activity and Three-Year Plan," elsewhere in this newsletter.

In September and October the American Association of Museums Program Committee approved the following museum archives related session for the AAM's 1994 annual meeting in Seattle: "Starting An Archives On A Shoestring" (see AAM program report).

As a member of a special advisory committee of the Association of Systematics Collections, I drafted archives and records policy guidelines for an ASC project designed to provide policy guidelines for natural history museums. Members of the ASC archives committee for this IMS-funded project are Dr. James E. King, Director of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, and James Solomon of the Missouri Botanical Gardens. Several natural history museum archivists reviewed the draft, as well. Further discussions of archives and records policies will take place at the joint meeting of the ASC and SPNHC (Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections), May 11-15, 1994, St. Louis.

An on-line Museum Archives discussion list was started in November. Anyone with an email address (including RLIN,

Internet, Freenet, etc.) may join the list by sending me a request to be included on the group's distribution. Anyone without an email address may send me a message by fax or regular mail to post to the group. (Messages of more than one page should be sent on an IBM compatible floppy disk.) As of December 1993, there were fifteen names on the list. The list should prove to be a quick means of sharing ideas and information.

## 1994 Project: Plans for "BELMONT II" Conference

Upcoming in the new year, the Section's officers and past officers will be making plans for "Belmont II." "Belmont II" is the working title for a conference designed to strengthen and direct the growth of the museum archives "movement," as the twenty-first century approaches. The first Belmont conference, sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution and the Archives of American Art, was held in 1979 at the Smithsonian's Belmont Conference Center in Maryland. From that conference came the seminal *Draft Guidelines for Museum Archives*. The Belmont conference marked the beginning of a museum archives crusade, which has made immense strides in the last fourteen years.

Museum archivists are now feeling the need to take stock of our progress and plan strategically for a future which is fraught with more, rather than fewer, difficulties, funding being at the top of the list. In addition, we must outline our opportunities and map our plans for future successes. In early April 1994, a Museum Archives Section group will meet to develop plans for a Belmont II conference which will, we hope, help museum archives prepare for a new century. Progress reports will appear in the newsletter and be discussed at the Section meeting in Indianapolis.

Kristine Haglund  
Denver Museum of Natural History

MUSEUM ARCHIVIST

is issued twice a year by the Museum Archives Section of SAA.

News items, letters to the editor, and comments from the archives community are welcome.

Next deadline: July 15, 1994.

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SECTION BUSINESS

GUIDELINES FOR SUBMISSIONS

News articles, reports, and announcements are all welcome. Readers with ideas for articles may want to discuss them with the editor; in general, we will accept submissions of any length, but may have to limit articles for a particular issue. Items may be submitted on any 3.5" or 5.25" diskette; IBM is preferred, but Mac disks can be accommodated. Any standard word processor is acceptable and will be translated using Software Bridge. Please avoid any special formatting (indents, underlining, bold face, spaces between paragraphs, etc.) since it will all have to be wiped out and replaced with the newsletter format.

MINUTES OF THE MUSEUM ARCHIVES SECTION SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS SEPTEMBER 3, 1993

The meeting was held in the Aurora Room of the Sheraton Hotel in New Orleans, Louisiana. It was called to order on Friday, September 3, 1993, at 8:05 AM by the Chair, Kris Haglund. There were forty-one Section members present at the meeting.

The first order of business was introduction of the officers and committee chairs. These include Alan L. Bain, Membership Chair; Theresa Percy, Outreach Chair; Deborah Wythe, Newsletter Editor; Maureen Melton, Education Chair; and Susan Glenn, Recording Secretary. Maygene Daniels, Publications Chair, was expected later.

Haglund asked the Section members in the audience to introduce themselves briefly. This done, she announced that the Section would elect officers later in the meeting. It will also be necessary to appoint a new Publications Committee Chair, as Maygene Daniels has been elected Vice President/President Elect of SAA.

The next business was the call for committee chairs to report on events for the past year. Alan Bain, Membership Chair, reported that the newsletter is now being sent to 480 people in museums and universities. Of these, less than half are SAA members.

Deborah Wythe, Editor, thanked everyone who had contributed last year and asked that we continue to do so. The deadlines are December 15 for the February issue and July 15 for the pre-SAA meeting issue in September. She noted that the volunteer issue last year was a particular success and asked that records management, the Internet, and cataloging systems for museums and archives be kept in mind for upcoming issues. Alan Bain suggested that the newsletter might be made available on the Internet.

## SECTION BUSINESS

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Minutes, cont.

Maureen Melton, Education and Program Committee, reported that the Section co-sponsored two sessions, "The Unexplored Facets of Repatriation," and "Something for Nothing?" at the current SAA meeting. The former included as panelists, Edwin Lyon, Tessie Naranjo, Kris Haglund, and James Glenn (standing in for Mary Elizabeth Ruwell, who was otherwise occupied). The latter session, which explored the management of volunteers and their perspectives, included George Parkinson, Deborah Wythe, Terry Brown, and Judy Davidson. Our session topic on documenting cultural history was not accepted. Melton stated that the deadline for 1994 session proposals is October 8, 1993, which means that we should also be thinking now about 1995 proposals. Discussions will take place at the breakout session at the end of this meeting. As the education component of this meeting, Alan Tucker of the Research Libraries Group will discuss AMIS, the Archives and Museum Information System.

Haglund thanked the Chairs and said that the publications report will be postponed until Maygene's arrival. Haglund thanked Theresa Percy for her work on the Old Sturbridge Village Museum Archives Institute held in April 1993. Percy said that 1993 was the sixth year for the Institute, held in collaboration with the New England Museum Association. The 1993 Institute had an attendance of 65 people and a national faculty including Section members Deborah Wythe, Alan Bain, and Fred Calabretta. The workshop includes two parts, an introduction to museum archives and a special topic such as photographs. This allows attendees to come every year without repetition of topics.

Haglund noted that we do other individual outreach work and asked Alan Bain to tell the group about two of his activities in 1993. Bain said that he had given a workshop at the meeting of the Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections, where he discussed establishing a program, special collections, legal issues, etc. Fifteen people completed the workshop and received certificates. He also journeyed to Ljubljana, Slovenia, where he delivered a paper on "Museum Archives, Documentation for Managing Museum Activities" at the ICOM meeting.

Haglund said that work with ICOM and AAM is quite important to the Section. Bain said that there is usually a spring meeting of librarians and archivists in Washington, DC, to propose sessions for the annual AAM meeting. This meeting is generally composed of people living in the area because of the last minute timing of its announcement. The AAM makes tentative approval of sessions by the end of September. Our Section should try to win approval for at least one proposal. Anyone who has a suggestion for an AAM session should give it to one of the DC members of

the Section. It was noted that both Pat Williams and Laurie Baty are advocates in the AAM for archives issues. Kris Haglund said that the Association of Systematics Collections is also an important audience of 70 to 75 institutions. The ASC distributed a brochure on the importance of archives and manuscript collections. Also of importance to the Museum Archives Section are the efforts of regional museum groups. For example, the Colorado/Wyoming Association of Museums has joined with the Society of Rocky Mountain Archivists to provide consultations to small museums on establishing archives programs. The Denver Botanical Garden is one beneficiary. It will start an archival program this year. CWAM also provides \$150 for archivists to meet with small museums on a consultant basis.

Another facet of our outreach work is the Museum Archives bibliography, which is made available on a wide basis to those interested. Kris Haglund would like to see the biblio-graphy available on the Internet and asked for suggestions on how to accomplish this.

The next order of business was the introduction of Waverly Lowell, our liaison to SAA Council. She asked that all members take note of the SAA strategic planning document in our meeting packets and attend the planning session.

Haglund suggested that we should consider planning for a second Belmont Conference on the future of museum archives. It has been fifteen years since the first conference. Anyone interested should contact her.

The next order of business was nominations for certain offices. A Vice Chair/Chair Elect will be chosen this year and serve one year assisting the chair, then two years as chair. Maureen Melton was nominated for this office. Deborah Wythe has agreed to remain as Editor and was so nominated, and Susan Glenn was nominated for Recording Secretary. Ballots were circulated.

The Chair asked attendees to note their email addresses on the sign-up sheet and then called for announcements. Laurie Baty announced that there would be coffee and beignets available next door during the break (courtesy of the ACA breakfast meeting). Kathleen Robinson said that the Historic New Orleans Collection is hosting a reception on Saturday afternoon, to include a preview of a new exhibition, "Letter Perfect." Waverly Lowell mentioned the open forum by the SAA Task Force on Roundtables and Sections. The roles and importance of these groups in SAA will be discussed. It was announced that Kathleen Robinson will be serving on the 1994 Program Committee for the Indianapolis meeting. Robinson said that the theme will be "The Archival Core: Defining the Professions in the Information Age."

Kris Haglund then introduced Alan Tucker of the Research Libraries Group (RLG), to discuss the Archives and Museum Information System (AMIS), an integrated information

## SECTION BUSINESS

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Minutes, cont.

management system to serve the needs of archives and museums. Tucker noted that the similarities between the two are greater than the differences. AMIS is a software package that will run on any 486 computer and manage almost any activity in an archives or museum. The system is driven by checklists of an institution's policies and procedures. The checklists are simply lists, steps, or components of a given way to carry out a task, very much like a looseleaf binder of established procedures for certain functions. RLG is currently developing a questionnaire or survey instrument to elicit responses from institutions about their activities. Because of the great diversity of institutions, RLG is working with thirteen discrete repositories, including the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Minnesota Historical Society, Cornell University Archives and others. Much of the work of the past year was hidden, so although there did not appear to be much progress, important things were accomplished in the area of making the checklists run.

The planning of an exhibition serves as a good model to illustrate the utility of AMIS, which can produce descriptions of desired objects; check on exhibit space diagrams, layout, restrictions, and environmental factors; manage constituencies such as potential lenders and donors, docents and guides; and handle events scheduling, publicity and tours. With AMIS, exhibit planners could access descriptive information about objects, determine restrictions to their use, identify owners of objects for loans, prepare captions, create publicity materials, assemble a list of knowledgeable docents, and prepare a list of members to invite to the opening. A demonstration of AMIS is available in the vendor hall.

There were two questions from the floor. On the subject of MARC compatibility with AMIS, Tucker stated that this had not yet been decided. Asked about the timeframe for release, he said that the beginning of 1995 is an optimistic date. At any rate, there will be a "controlled release." *Editor's note: please see report in this issue for news of RLG's recent suspension of the AMIS project.*

Tucker's talk was followed by several more announcements. Haglund told the group that the absent Mary Elizabeth Ruwell had just become the mother of a baby boy, Alan Edward. Mom and baby are both doing well.

Maureen Melton announced that the Art Libraries Society annual meeting will be held in February at Providence, RI. Her session's title is "Love's Labor Lost: or How Does an Exhibition Want To Be Remembered."

Haglund announced that Maygene Daniels has been elected Vice President/President Elect of SAA and will

have to relinquish her duties as Publications Chair in the Section for now. John Smith will take on this position. Daniels reported on the status of the committee for the past year. She noted that the bibliography was very popular and had been announced on the Museum Listserv. The Deiss manual on museum archives is still popular and plans are underway for its updating. We will have to seek funding for the planned brochure on museum archives.

After a short recess, Kris Haglund asked for ballots to be returned to the front, followed by the formation of three small groups to discuss education, outreach and publications. Members could attend any group in which they were interested. After approximately twenty minutes, the full meeting reconvened and Haglund asked for reports from the chairs.

Maureen Melton, Education and Program Committee, noted that her group had concentrated on next year's Section meeting and on ideas for an educational component for that meeting. It was decided that everyone could bring along videos, brochures, and other materials used in their repositories. These would be used to stage a mini-exhibit for the Section meeting. Melton reported that her group had discussed various perspectives relating to archival exhibits and that these perspectives might be interesting to the entire Section. Some archives use original documents for display, while in others it is strictly forbidden. Other education topics can have a timely appeal, so next year at the meeting we may see at least one session on the aftermath of the 1993 floods.

Theresa Percy, Outreach Committee, reported that her group had discussed the importance of regional museum organizations in spreading the word about museum archives. Her committee members will each be taking a region of the country and contacting the appropriate organization to determine how difficult or easy it would be for the Section to submit a session proposal for the group's annual meeting. Museum studies programs at educational institutions offer another possibility for outreach activities. This would depend heavily on our producing a lively brochure on museum archives. Until the brochure becomes a reality, we can develop a list of museum studies programs in preparation for a mailing of that brochure. A third vehicle for outreach would be the development of a museum archives workshop or institute for a location west of the Mississippi to provide the kind of program that the Old Sturbridge Village Institute does each year in the east.

John Smith reported for the Publications Committee, on the proposed museum archives brochure. Funding ideas are needed for this project. Our model would be the brochure produced by the Business Archives Section and our goal would be to sell the idea of museum archives to museums. Four people were chosen to work on the brochure, but suggestions from anyone are most welcome. Deborah Wythe

## **SECTION BUSINESS**

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Minutes, cont.

reported on the *Museum Archivist* newsletter. She noted that two guest editors are working on special topics for the coming year. A study of cutbacks in museum archives may be a timely topic, but we should strive to avoid a "doom & gloom" approach. Anita Weber will take on this project for February. Next summer's newsletter will feature Dennis Moser as guest editor, investigating the Internet. Wythe asked Section members to continue sending her articles and news for publication.

The Chair announced the election of officers. Kris Haglund will continue to serve as Chair for the next year, assisted by Vice Chair/Chair Elect Maureen Melton; Deborah Wythe continues as Newsletter Editor, and Susan Glenn continues as Recording Secretary. The meeting was adjourned at 10:15.

Susan W. Glenn  
Smithsonian Institution

### **REPORT OF THE MUSEUM ARCHIVES SECTION TO THE SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS: 3-YEAR PLAN**

#### Activities

Business meeting was held in New Orleans. Committees met to discuss plans for the coming year. Alan Tucker of RLG updated the section on the development of AMIS. Election of officers was held.

#### Publications

Newsletter: Two newsletters were sent to section members, as well as non-members that the section wants to convince of the importance of museum archives and encourage to join SAA. Cost: Most production and distribution costs for the "Museum Archivist" are absorbed by the Smithsonian Institution. SAA's newsletter stipend to the Section is used to reimburse the editor's employing institution for long distance calls which are related to newsletter business.

Museum Archives manual update: Production was delayed because Maygene Daniels, who was spearheading this project, was elected Vice President of SAA and had to temporarily put the project aside.

Promotional brochure: A brochure to promote/improve museum archives programs was delayed because Maygene Daniels, who was spearheading this project, was elected Vice President of SAA and had to temporarily put the project aside. This project is a top priority of the Section's new Publications Chair for 1994-95. (SAA permission will be sought to solicit external funding for printing.)

Bibliography: The Publications Chair continually updates the Museum Archives Bibliography with assistance from all Section officers and others.

#### Education

SAA 1993 annual meeting, New Orleans: (a) A short educational program was provided for attendees of the Section's annual meeting. (b) Two general sessions proposed by the Section incorporated museum archives issues and featured museum archivists as speakers.

SAA 1994 annual meeting, Indianapolis: (a) Because of a change in chairmen for the Section's Program Committee, no program proposals were submitted from the Section. (It would be very helpful if SAA would reconsider its program proposal deadline.) At least one approved session, however, centers on museum archives and features museum archivists as speakers. (b) The Section's new Program Chair will arrange a short educational session for attendees of the Section's 1994 annual meeting and begin putting together program proposals for the general SAA annual meeting in 1995.

#### Appraisal, etc.

(a) The Section chair has just established and will maintain an e-mail mailing list/discussion list for the exchange of information among museum archivists regarding the appraisal of museum records and any other topics which may be of interest.

#### Outreach

Ties with American Association of Museums: The new Outreach Chair will update the Section's mailing list to include information on current editors of regional museum organizations. She also will work with one regional museum organization to increase the Section's visibility and promote awareness of archives. In addition, at least one member of the Section will attend a meeting at the American Association of Museums to develop program proposals for the 1996 AAM annual meeting. At least one museum archives session has been approved for the AAM's 1995 meeting in Seattle.

Museum studies programs: The new Outreach Chair will update the Section's mailing list to include the administrators and/or faculty of museum studies programs in the U.S. She also will compile a list of potential speakers on museum archives topics.

Museum Archives Institute West: The feasibility of conducting an institute, patterned after the one done at Old Sturbridge Village, will be examined for a western U.S. venue. Section members will continue to speak/teach at museum organization meetings and workshops.

## SECTION BUSINESS

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3-Year Plan, cont.

### Management and Planning

Belmont II Conference: Past and current Section officers will meet at Old Sturbridge Village in April 1994 to develop plans and draft a funding proposal for a Belmont II conference. Section officers have already begun to identify possible foundation funding sources. (Clearance will be obtained from SAA before funding proposals are submitted to a funding agency.) Initial plans call for a Belmont II conference to (a) assess progress made by the museum archives "movement" since the first Belmont conference in 1979, (b) develop goals, objectives, and strategies for the Museum Archives Section toward 2000 and beyond, (c) and produce a publication which can serve as a guide for future museum archives planning and funding proposals.

Update Section by-laws, as appropriate: No changes.

Newsletters: 2/year, about 12 pp. ea. Mailing list: c. 500

Mid-Year Meeting: Special planning meeting, April 9, 1994.

Program Proposals: None

#### PLAN YEAR I: SEPTEMBER 1994-AUGUST 1995

1. Publish & distribute brochure described in 1993-94
2. Hold Belmont II conference.
3. Update the 1991 "Museum Archivist" directory.
4. Begin to compile appraisal guidelines for museum archives
5. Continue on-going educational and outreach activities.

#### PLAN YEAR II: SEPTEMBER 1995-AUGUST 1996

1. Begin to implement Belmont II goals, objectives
2. Write and prepare update of museum archives manual for publication.
3. Continue on-going educational and outreach activities.
4. Continue to compile appraisal guidelines for museum archives.

#### PLAN YEAR III: SEPTEMBER 1996-AUGUST 1997

1. Continue to implement Belmont II goals, objectives
2. Publish update of museum archives manual.
3. Continue on-going educational and outreach activities.
4. Continue to compile appraisal guidelines for museum archives.

Kristine Haglund

Denver Museum of Natural History

### **PROGRAM COMMITTEE REPORT: MAY WE HELP YOU?**

For many of us, that question may conjure up less-than-pleasant memories of recent Christmas shopping expeditions to area malls. However, it also

applies to the work of the Museum Archives Section. Your input is the key to successful educational activity and programming.

If you have any ideas for the following, please call or write and let me know: possible SAA Annual Meeting sessions for '95; brief programs or other educational activity to be offered during the Museum Archives Section meeting in Indianapolis; other ideas pertaining to education.

I would welcome any fresh (or even recycled) ideas regarding possible themes, topics, speakers, etc. Any input would be very helpful. So whether you have general suggestions regarding topics of interest, or fully developed ideas for sessions, please call or send me a note.

### Forthcoming Activity

The following are educational opportunities and events which may be of interest to Section members. Several sessions at the SAA Annual Meeting in Indianapolis will be of particular interest. Details in the next *Museum Archivist*. A brief program, possibly of disaster preparedness, will be presented during the Section meeting.

In response to a demand for information about oral history, a "How-To" packet will be available to Section members free of charge in Indianapolis. If you are unable to be there, the information will be available by mail. Details in the next newsletter.

The annual Museum Archives Institute, sponsored by Old Sturbridge Village and the New England Museum Association, will be held April 8-9, 1994. It offers introductory and special topic programs; this year's special topic is photography (further information elsewhere in this newsletter).

Again, please contact me with any ideas or comments you may have. Fred Calabretta, Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, CT 06355-0990 (203 572 0711 x5168; fax 203 572 5394).

### **BRING YOUR PUBLICATIONS TO INDY!**

We would like to encourage Museum Archives Section members to bring samples of brochures, finding aids, publications, and other printed material to the Section meeting at this year's SAA Annual Meeting in Indianapolis. Sharing these examples of printed material relating to your collections and work will be of great interest to the group. Also, even if you are not a Section member, we would be delighted to include relevant materials which you would like to provide. If you would be in Indianapolis, give the items to someone who will be attending, or you may forward them to me and I'll see they're included. Thanks!

Fred Calabretta  
Mystic Seaport Museum

## SECTION BUSINESS

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### OUTREACH COMMITTEE SEEKS VOLUNTEERS FOR SPEAKERS' BUREAU

The Museum Archives Section's Outreach Committee is developing a Speakers' Bureau--a list of Section members who would be willing to present a session on museum archives at a regional museum association meeting. Such a session might take the form of a formal paper, a workshop, or a panel discussion; topic could range from the most basic ("why a Museum Archives" or "Setting up a Museum Archives") to specific problems and concerns like planning for a new facility or developing disaster recovery plans.

Presenting a program is an opportunity to generate some good PR for your archives, both in your museum and among other museums in your region. Think about it and let me know if you would be interested in joining the Speakers' Bureau.

If you're interested in having your name added to the list, please let me know. I'm at the Milwaukee Public Museum, 800 W. Wells Street, Milwaukee, WI 53233 (tel: 414 278 2730; email: jat@sd4.csd.uwm.edu). Please include your name, institutional affiliation, address, daytime telephone number, email address (if you have one), and the topic(s) on which you would be willing to speak. Please indicate which regional museum conference(s) you would be willing to attend.

Judy Turner  
Milwaukee Public Museum

### FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK: WINTER FREEZE UP SLOWS MUSEUM ARCHIVISTS

You may have noticed (though I hope you didn't) that this issue of *Museum Archivist* is appearing in your mailbox a few weeks later than usual. I've searched my brain and conscience for an explanation and have come up with the only plausible one--the weather! It has been an excruciatingly severe winter so far, so I must conclude that we're all reacting like cold-blooded beings and slowing down in direct proportion to the temperature. Please mark your calendar with the next issue's deadline: **JULY 15, 1994** and plan your submissions accordingly--heat waves notwithstanding!

The next *Museum Archivist* will contain the usual news, notes and reports, but will also have a special topic guest editor, as this one did. We're looking for information and articles on the Internet--how you're using it, how did you get access, how much is it costing. Dennis Moser will be the guest editor. Many thanks to Anita Weber for her investigative reporting in this issue on the state of museum archives today.

### SAA Proposes Consistent Graphic Look

The SAA central office recently mailed out camera ready copies of the SAA logo and polled Sections and Roundtables on their opinions about the merits of adopting a consistent graphic look. The memo from Anne Diffendal, Executive Director, noted: "in an attempt to improve SAA's overall graphic image, we are striving to create a consistent look on all SAA printed pieces" and asked for our input.

As editor, I replied as follows: I think that having some consistent elements is a fine idea. However, this should be spiced up by some elements that express our own group's individuality and spirit. Providing materials like the logo sent out with this mailing is helpful, but they should be available in electronic form for those of us who produce materials on line. In response to the suggestion that SAA provide two or three professionally produced mastheads, I replied: No go. This would be a real headache, since we'd have to strip them in, instead of just using the laser printer.

Deborah Wythe  
Brooklyn Museum

## MEETINGS

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### REPORT AND PERSONAL REFLECTIONS FROM CENTRAL EUROPE CIDOC MEETING, LJUBLJANA, SLOVENIA

Below is an abstract, provided by the CIDOC Working Group on Museum Libraries and Information Centres, of Alan Bain's paper, "Museum Archives, Documentation for Managing Museum Activities." This paper was given at the post-CIDOC meeting on Libraries in Museums and Galleries, Ljubljana, Slovenia, 16 September 1993.

Over 200 museum staff from 25 countries attended the CIDOC conference. I am not sure of the numbers, but it appeared that more than half came from central Europe, with supporting funds from the Getty. Close to 50 museum staff attended the post-conference session on "Libraries in Museums and Galleries," where I presented my paper on museum archives.

There was a noticeable difference, both at the general and post-conference sessions, between staff from the United States, Canada, and England discussing developments for capturing library and photographic holdings in various MARC formats and developing CD-ROM disks with museum information, and central European librarians calling for greater monetary support and professional development of librarians for museums in their respective countries. Librarians in these countries were hoping to develop equal status with museum curators in order to develop professional library programs and have equal input in the direction of their museums.

## MEETINGS

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CIDOC, Ljubljana, cont.

None of the central European nations, and Slovenia in particular, could afford a museum archivist. Documentation consisted of special collections (rare books and manuscripts) as opposed to museum records. These were handled by librarians and technicians. The central Europeans would rather have next year's meeting in Europe than the United States. From a practical point it would make sense for staff from central European museums and others in Europe with a common agenda to get together as often as possible, possibly as a separate section within CIDOC.

### **ABSTRACT: MUSEUM ARCHIVES, DOCUMENTATION FOR MANAGING MUSEUM ACTIVITIES**

Museums within the United States have started developing archival programs. While there are programs that can trace their beginnings to the mid-1940s and earlier, for the most part this is a phenomenon that started in the late 1970s.

Museum archives maintain primary documentation on the permanent collections of the museum. This documentation has been transferred from the offices of the director, curator, and registrar, and ranges from field notebooks, specimen catalogues, and accession records in natural history museums, to curatorial records, registrar records, personal papers and special collections in all discipline related museums. This information is used by curators and registrars documenting exhibitions and by general counsel for litigation cases, in addition to a wide range of scholarly pursuits not necessarily museum-specific.

Archivists have an obligation to make known this information and have a variety of tools for doing this, ranging from collection-level descriptions in repository guides, to detailed finding aids with name and subject access points that may take researchers to the box and folder level within the collection. Some archival records and special collections require item-level control.

With the availability of the personal computer, development of national library information systems, the MARC format, and international hosts for accessing data, museum archivists are attempting various methods for electronically placing information into the hands of scholars and museum staff. Driving the method used are the availability of funds, and whom the archivist reports to within the museum; if it is the librarian, then the system used depends on library support and staff time.

The discussion at hand is not to talk about specifics of information handling, or even problems archivists have with the systems now available, but to open up an area long neglected in studies on museum information, archival documentation. The purpose is to widen the agenda so

that future attempts to develop systems concerning museum management of information will include museum archives, thereby providing museum staff with additional resources for managing museum activities.

### Personal Reflections

*Editor's note: The following is taken from a personal letter Alan Bain sent to me after returning to the United States. I found his comments evocative as well as entertaining and received his permission to print them here.*

My topic, though interesting in the concept, was superfluous, given the region where the meeting was held and those who attended. Museum archivists are a luxury central European museums cannot afford. The meeting was attended by a good number of librarians from Central Europe, all interested in trying to develop a professional cadre of librarians in the museums of the region. However, whenever any librarian discussed using MARC concepts for controlling item level materials (photos, for example), they admitted to not knowing what to do with archival holdings. A talk on use of MARC for collection-level control over holding would have served this meeting better.

I did manage to take an exciting early morning (3:30AM) train to Venice. I wandered the city looking for a museum archivist, but found none. The city is fascinating and I am sorry I only allowed myself thirty-six hours there. Did not have time to sit down and enjoy eating olives and watch the tourists go by. Unlike my family and relatives I am not a wine drinker. So, when I ordered mineral water with my dinner the waiter's eyes rolled back into his head. I understood and sympathized with his gesture.

There is a Venezia state archives with some photographic holdings of one of the museums, but staff there said they did not have museum records. However, they emphasized there were no archivists in existence outside of their agency. Visited the Correr museum and finally managed to speak to the director, who told me that the founding family papers and records of the museum were kept in the library. I suspect this holds true for all the museums. The director told me that the best English-speaking staff member was away and would get back to me if I faxed a letter. I sent something off, but have not yet received a response.

I think it would be interesting to try and document European museum archival holdings and records keeping, but it will take multi-lingual archivists to do so. One individual from a Bulgarian museum could not get into the Ottoman Empire archives at Istanbul to browse through historical documentation about his region. War and conquest pose interesting questions that for the most part we have not had to face.

Alan Bain  
Smithsonian Institution



## MEETINGS

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### ARCHIVES ISSUES EXPLORED AT ARLIS/NA CONFERENCE

The Art Libraries Society of North America will hold its Annual Conference in Providence, RI, February 11-16, 1994. The following two sessions should provide, respectively, an introductory look at archives and an in-depth consideration of a major records series--exhibition files. *Editor's note to anyone who attends: Detailed reports on these sessions and recommendations of papers that might be interesting to print in Museum Archivist would be gratefully appreciated for the next newsletter!*

#### Developing and Sustaining Institutional Archives

Moderator: Stephen Bloom, University of the Arts.  
Speakers: David Maslyn, University Archivist and Interim Director of Libraries, University of Rhode Island; Theresa Rini Percy, Associate Director of Research Collections and Library, Old Sturbridge Village; and Hikmet Dogu, Library Director, Parsons School of Design

This session is sponsored by the Art and Design School Library Division of ARLIS/NA, and will discuss archives as an issue encountered often in both art and design school, museum and other institutional libraries. The speakers will offer a blend of theoretical and practical wisdom on archives theory, current general issues, and examples of ongoing archives efforts in libraries.

The program is intended as a useful and provocative introduction to archives for librarians who encounter archival collections and responsibilities with little preparation. In addition to questions of definition, training, collection development, and management, the speakers will address issues relating to differences in approach by librarians and archivists to collections and access, appropriate relationships between archival responsibilities, records management, and other kinds of archival activities, the place and importance of such collections and programs to an institution, the scholarly community, and others, and funding and political strategies for setting up and for sustaining such programs.

"Love's Labors Lost" or,

How Does an Exhibition Want To Be Remembered?"

Moderator: Trudi Olivetti, Cataloger, National Gallery of Art Library. Speakers: Judith Cline, Assistant Registrar for Loans, National Gallery of Art; Maureen Melton, Archivist, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Daniel Starr, Associate Librarian, Cataloging, Museum of Modern Art Library.

This panel discussion will confront the various issues raised when documenting an exhibition. Beginning with the visions of the curator and artist, visual and textual material generated by an exhibition moves through the offices of the registrar and publications, eventually landing in the library and the archives. A vast amount of material in a variety of formats is produced. Although researchers unanimously proclaim this information to be invaluable, deciding what to save and where to put it becomes a challenge.

Determining what is necessary and significant to the historical record of an exhibition is a difficult process, both in terms of scholarly importance and institutional capabilities. The published catalog is the most obvious record of the exhibition, but there are other types of material to be dealt with, including correspondence with the artist or collector, loan forms, and condition reports on each item. Pictorial documentation, such as installation photographs, brochures, posters, and postcards are often as significant as the textual information.

Once decisions about what to save have been made, it is equally important to know how to save it. Since each exhibition has a unique set of circumstances, can one set of procedures be created for all? How can we continue to keep adequate records with limited budgets and shrinking spaces?

In addressing some of these problems, this panel will focus on one particular exhibition, "Helen Frankenthaler Prints," held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston during the time of the conference, and which originated at the National Gallery of Art in Washington. The conference attendees will have the opportunity to see the results of the process which created one specific show.

The panel includes a registrar who handled the very earliest paperwork, an archivist who must manage the unpublished papers and documents, and a cataloger who processed the published catalog and other related materials.

The panelists have been drawn from several institutions, including the National Gallery of Art, the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Fine Arts. We hope to touch on many of the important issues concerning this ongoing responsibility. Through a question and answer period, we also hope solutions may be shared from the audience as well as by the panel.

Stephen Bloom  
University of the Arts, Philadelphia

Trudi Olivetti  
National Gallery of Art

## MEETINGS

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### MUSEUM ARCHIVES SESSION PROPOSED FOR 1994 AAM MEETING

Section members have proposed a session, "Starting an Archives on a Shoestring," described as follows, for the next meeting of the American Association of Museums.

Museums of the 90s, as never before, must be accountable and accessible in every aspect of their operations. To be responsive, museums need better control over their own records and the manuscript collections which they administer. Factors focusing attention on the significance of museum records and manuscript collections include: new laws, such as the 1990 repatriation law; the need for better documentation of collections and donations; the continuing value of many type of records to researchers; the shortage of storage space for and deterioration of museum records; and the museum staff's inability to find needed information to meet their own and their constituents' needs.

Museum organizations, including AAM, provide sessions which stress the importance of museum records. As a result, museums are increasingly aware of their need for professional archival programs, but have been unable to start them because budgets and staff time are stretched to or beyond the limit. This session is designed to help museum staff overcome the issue of limited resources and start an effective archival program that will prove its value from the very beginning.

According to the proposal's goal statement, after the session, participants will better understand the value of a professional archival program to their institution and its constituents, be able to produce a proposal to develop or improve an archival program within their institution, and implement selected archival program components.

If accepted, the session will be chaired by Dr. James E. King, Director of the Carnegie Museum of Natural History, Pittsburgh. Pennington Ahlstrand, California Academy of Sciences, will present the benefits of an archival program; Bruce C. Harding, past president of the Association of Records Managers and Administrators, will discuss cost cutting techniques; and Laurie A. Baty, National Historical Publications and Records Commission, will address grant possibilities and writing proposals.

## MCN AND CIDOC MEETINGS TO BE HELD IN WASHINGTON

The Museum Computer Network and the International Council of Museums, International Documentation Committee will hold consecutive conferences in Washington, DC, August 28 through September 3, 1994. The theme of the conferences will be "Cultures Connected: Automating Museums in the Americas and Beyond." Local sponsors for the conferences are the Smithsonian Institution, National Gallery of Art, and National Park Service.

Keeping up with the pace of progress is an increasing challenge for museum professionals. Advances in computer and communications technologies enable museums to bring a wealth of knowledge to a much broader audience. Increased reliance on computers for storing and managing museum information has brought fresh outlooks to issues like data standards and structures, concern for the exchange of information, and new ways of utilizing information. Imaging technologies, Internet access, networking and a host of more exotic developments are being implemented by museums around the world. The conferences provide a forum to exchange information about the technological challenges and opportunities facing museums.

CIDOC's conference (8/28-31) focuses on new developments in museum documentation standards and practices from around the globe, with emphasis on the Americas. Updates of the CIDOC working groups in archaeology, terminology, database surveys, data modelling, iconography, multimedia, museum information centers, and member services will be presented. Participants will demonstrate automation projects that include local regional, and national systems. With over 500 members from 50 countries, CIDOC is the international forum for the documentation interests of museums and cultural institutions.

The MCN annual meeting (8/31-9/3) emphasizes interchange standards, imaging, multimedia applications, collections management, and networking. Workshops on Image Databases, Planning for Museum Automation, the Internet, Contracting and Licensing for Multimedia Projects, Multilingual Thesaurus Construction and more are planned. Vendor demonstrations as well as updates on MCN sponsored projects and special interest groups will be offered. MCN is a not-for-profit international organization serving museum professional and institutions wishing to improve the means of developing, managing and conveying museum information through the use of automation.

For more information about the conferences or to obtain registration materials contact: Museum Computer Network, 8720 Georgia Avenue, Suite 501, Silver Spring, MD 20910 (301 585 4413; fax 301 495 0810; email: mdevine@cni.org)

## **MEETINGS**

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### **GET INVOLVED: MUSEUM ARCHIVES ACTIVITIES AT MCN/CIDOC MEETING**

Anyone interested in the possibility of establishing a museum archives booth; developing a session on how museum archivists provide scholars and staff with information about their holdings (MARC or MARC look-alike); or a session on museum electronic records and what museum archivists are doing, should contact Alan L. Bain, Smithsonian Institution Archives (202 786 2747) as soon as possible.

## **NEWS, NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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### **ARCHIVES OF AMERICAN ART ACQUIRES TRUSTEE ASSOCIATION RECORDS**

The Archives of American Art recently received Museum Trustee Association files created by George C. Seybolt (1914-93). Seybolt, while president of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, was a founder of the association in 1970. The association's purpose is to provide trustees of museums with regular lines of communication and a means of influencing the actions of the American Association of Museums, both independently and as a group. As noted in the Archives of American Art *Journal* (32/2, 1992), "the issues discussed and the data the files contain can be of real value to research into the evolution of American museums during the past twenty years."

### **BRIEFLY NOTED: TOP SECRET MUSEUM**

Kathleen Robinson reports: "I read an article in the Sunday edition of the *Houston Post* about a Secret Service Museum in Washington, DC. Michael Sampson is quoted as the Museum director and archivist in the article. I found it interesting that the museum is only open by appointment, and then only to friends and family of secret service agents. And, of course, I love it that the archivist is also the director." *Any volunteers to do a little investigative reporting for the next issue of Museum Archivist?*

### **PENNSYLVANIA ACADEMY ARCHIVES AFFECTED BY RENOVATIONS**

The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts would like to alert all concerned parties that it is highly likely that the Academy galleries, archives, and permanent collection will be inaccessible for a period of three to four months this coming spring and summer. Archival materials and works

of art will be in storage due to the renovations planned for the basement and front foyer. Definite dates and specific plans are not yet formulated, but the renovations are currently scheduled to begin June 1st, so the move of the collections into storage may take place in May. For further information, call the Registrar or the Archivist at 215 972 7600.

Cheryl Leibold  
Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

Toledo Museum  
Prepares for NHPRC Grant

The Toledo Museum of Art was awarded a grant of \$4232 from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission to hire a consultant to develop an archives and records management plan for the museum. Prior to taking that step, however, the museum is currently funding a records survey so that the consultant will have all necessary information in hand. Archivist Julie McMaster is carrying out the survey; the project supervisor is the museum's Associate Registrar.

### **SOMETHING NEW: "AN UNCOMMON VISION"**

Janet Miller, formerly archivist/registrar of the Anthropology Department at the Field Museum and director of Archives and Special Collections on Women in Medicine at the Medical College of Pennsylvania, has asked us to announce that she has started a business specializing in women's history and women's lives, as found in out-of-print books, photographs, ephemera, post cards and material culture. Thus far, Miller has produced three specialized catalogs for "An Uncommon Vision." Ms. Miller will assist museums, scholars and collectors in locating materials that are by or relate to women. She welcomes the opportunity to assist museums in developing women's history collections, as well as securing exhibit quality material. Contact: An Uncommon Vision, 1425 Greywall Lane, Wynnewood, PA 19096 (215 658 0953; fax: 215 658 0961).

### **NELSON-ATKINS STAFF NEWS**

Lois Kauffman has replaced Kate Hogan as assistant Archivist at The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Archives. She comes to the Museum from graduate school at the University of Missouri at Kansas City where she is completing her degree in art history. Her thesis relates to the history of special exhibitions at the Nelson, and her expertise in this area is very important to the Archives at this stage of its development. Ms. Kauffman will have primary responsibility for processing the records of the William Rockhill Nelson Trust.

Chuck Hill  
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

**AMIS PROJECT STALLED**

The following statement was recently circulated on the RLG listservs by the Research Libraries Group president James Michalko.

"On November 3, I wrote to you about the status of AMIS, the Archives and Museum Information System project. I said that the Board had authorized an extraordinary effort to secure funding and that an ad hoc "AMIS Fund-Raising Group" had been established. I also explained that assurance of funding sufficient to complete the project was needed before the end of the calendar year.

"I regret to report that, despite intensive member effort within and beyond the ad hoc group, as well as by RLG staff, we have not been able to secure the funding commitment we need. Accordingly, work on AMIS will be suspended on December 31, and members of the AMIS team reassigned. We take this action with the greatest reluctance for all the reasons outlined in my earlier letter. We believe however that we have no reasonable alternative.

"At the same time, a few possibilities have emerged in the final weeks of this year which, in our opinion and in the view of the ad hoc fund-raising group, deserve exploration after the holidays. One of these involves a vendor partnership; another involves new software that could conceivably reduce the magnitude of the AMIS development effort; several others offer some promise, albeit slim, of substantial funding. RLG staff and the members of the ad hoc group will explore each of these during the first calendar quarter of 1994.

"Also during the first quarter of 1994, RLG will conduct a briefing for interested parties--information systems offices in archives and museums, systems vendors, and others--on the work done on AMIS to date, on AMIS in the context of new technical developments generally, and on options for AMIS-like solutions in the future. This briefing will be scheduled for February 1994. Your suggestions of who should be invited are welcome.

"Finally, RLG will announce no later than March 30, 1994, whether any basis has emerged on which AMIS development could reasonably and responsibly be resumed, by RLG alone or in partnership with others, in a time frame that is responsive to the needs of the community.

"In closing, I wish to thank the members of the ad hoc group and others who have worked to solve this problem. It is not for want of enthusiasm, conviction, or effort that the news is not better."

**REQUEST FOR INFORMATION:  
RECORDS MANAGEMENT IN MUSEUM ARCHIVES**

*Editor's note: Barbara Austen's preliminary findings on this topic appear later in this issue. By responding to the survey below, you will help her complete her study, which will eventually be published, bringing benefits to us all.*

Records management is a field in and of itself, generally seen as separate from, yet tangential to archives. However, in those museums with institutional archives (as opposed to historical manuscript collections), records management, if it exists at all, is an integral part of the archives. This is certainly not unique to museums, but it is a topic worth some study, since it seems to go against the claim of records management as a separate discipline.

I recently completed a course in records management at Simmons College in Boston. I have also worked as a curator in various museums for the past ten years or so. It was only natural that my course research paper examine the status of records management in museums. To gather my data, I sent out about 30 letters to institutions which had received NHPRC funds to start an archival program. About one third responded. An appeal through the archives listserv had an even poorer response rate (not surprising, I suppose). The individuals who did answer sent me some very complete and quite interesting information. My greatest appreciation.

Although the course is over and my paper graded, I want to continue my survey of museum archives and records management programs, to get more than 13 responses (which is far from statistically significant!). If you have not already replied to my letter of inquiry, and if you work in an institution with an archival program, would you please take a few minutes to answer the following questions:

1. When was the institutional archives founded?
2. Where is the archives placed administratively within the museum? Who is responsible for the archives?
3. What types of records are in the archives? (I am particularly interested in records that might be considered "unique" to a museum).
4. Is there a collecting policy for the archives? Is there a records management policy? Does it address the papers of staff members upon their departure?
5. Is there a records management program in your museum? Is it part of the archives, or a separate function? If separate, where does it fit administratively into the institution?
6. Do you have a records retention schedule? Who developed it, and how is it "enforced"? Are there records managers in each department?
7. Do you have a vital records program? A disaster plan?
8. Are inactive records stored in a separate records storage center until final disposition?

## **NEWS, NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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Records management survey, cont.

9. Who is responsible for reference services for the inactive records? For the archives? Who has access to the records? How long are certain records closed to the general public?

10. Is your records management program automated?

11. How are curatorial and registrarial records handled from an archival/records management standpoint? Are they ever considered inactive?

Copies of collecting policies, retention schedules, etc., would be of great use if they are available.

Many thanks to those of you from whom I have already heard, and an early thank you to those who respond to this request. With any luck, there will be enough data for Alan Bain and me to compare results of our surveys, and a report published in this newsletter. Please respond to  
Barbara E. Austen, 45 Winthrop Street, Medford, MA  
02155

### **REQUEST FOR INFORMATION: MUSEUM PUBLICATIONS**

*Editor's note: With the increasing ease in contacting people through electronic mail and listservs, we have the opportunity to gather data on archives practices in a relatively easy (if unscientific) way. People seem willing to type out a quick email answer, when they might be less anxious to type, address and mail a letter. Following is a call for information passed along from the museum archives list (see Chair's report for more information on the list). To the originators of such searches: how about writing up your results for the newsletter?*

I am in my first professional archives job as the Archivist for the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago and would like some advice from other museum archivists regarding museum publications. How many copies of various museum publications do you save in the archives? One? Two? Does it depend on the type of publication? I was thinking of just saving one copy and then putting extras in a non-archival storage area, but then someone here thought we should save two copies of each edition in case one might be used in an exhibit or the like. What is your experience with this and your opinion? Also, do you save the extras (after archival copies have been separated out) in a storage area or give them away to museum employees/education department? Responses greatly appreciated (312 684 1414 email: lhgmsi@class.org)!

Laura Graedel  
Museum of Science and Industry, Chicago

## **COPAR STUDIES ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES**

The Council for the Preservation of Anthropological Records (CoPAR) is engaged in a national effort to preserve anthropological records in all media. The project is supported by a grant from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and is jointly sponsored by a consortium of national anthropological, library, museum and archival organizations.

As the latest step in their efforts, CoPar is trying to learn about the status, holdings, problems and needs of existing anthropological archives in departments, archives and museums in the United States. In December 1993, a brief questionnaire was circulated to institutions known to have relevant holdings. In their cover letter, Don D. Fowler and Nancy J. Parezo of CoPar defined three goals: to provide information to the NEH Preservation and Access Program on the scope of archival needs within anthropology to help NEH plan for and review proposals in the context of national need; to help establish standards for anthropological archives; and to help CoPar develop brochures and other materials to help individual anthropologists, departments, and other entities deal with their archival collections.

If you did not receive the questionnaire and have information to contribute, contact either of the Co-chairs: Don D. Fowler, Dept. of Anthropology, University of Nevada, Reno, NV 89557-0006 (tel: 712 784 6851; email hp@scs.unr.edu) or Nancy J. Parezo, Arizona State Museum, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721 (tel: 602 621 6277).

### **OSV OFFERS FELLOWSHIP**

Old Sturbridge Village, an outdoor history museum in Sturbridge, MA, announces its fourth Research Fellowship, to be awarded to a scholar working in the social history and material culture of rural New England from 1790-1850. The fellowship project need not be limited to rural New England nor to this period, but must relate significantly to the Village's time and place. Fellows will be in residence for six to twelve weeks, preferably in the fall or spring semester. Candidates should have significant work and accomplishment in historical, archaeological, or material culture scholarship, and be strongly committed to publishing the results of their research. A stipend of up to \$2500 will be awarded. For application information, please contact Jack Larkin, Director of Research, Collections and Library, Old Sturbridge Village, 1 OSV Road, Sturbridge, MA 01566 (508 347 3362 x268). Deadline for applications is July 1, 1994.

## **NEWS, NOTES & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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### **1994 MUSEUM ARCHIVES INSTITUTE**

The 7th annual New England Museum Association and Old Sturbridge Village Museum Archives Institute will be held at Old Sturbridge Village, Sturbridge, MA, on April 8-9, 1994, and will include both introductory and special topic programs. The introductory program is designed for the beginning archivist who works in a museum or historical society and will offer a variety of comprehensive and in-depth sessions focused on basic archival theories and practices. This year's curriculum includes such topics as collections management, audiovisual collections and oral history, automation management, donor relations, and copyright. Two programs, Arrangement and Descriptions, and Records Management and Appraisal, will be offered concurrently. Participants may choose to attend either of these sessions. Instead of the introductory program, participants may select the special topic program. These sessions provide the experienced archivist with the opportunity to keep abreast of current archival issues and theories. The 1994 special topic is a comprehensive study of photography.

Faculty for this year's Institute include Mary Elizabeth Ruwell, Katherine Kane, Julie Bressor, Mary Cooper, Maureen Melton, Kathleen Robinson, Deborah Wythe, Alan Bain, David Horn, Fred Calabretta, Barbara Williams, Laurie Baty, and Karen Motylewski. Kris Haglund will be the keynote speaker; Theresa Percy and Mary Beth Hilger are the Institute's masterminds and organizers. Participants in either program qualify for 1.2 C.E.U. credits. Please call if you have any questions. We look forward to meeting you at the Institute. For information, contact Theresa Rini Percy (tel: 508 347 3362 x203).

### **REPORTS**

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#### **NELSON-ATKINS UPDATE**

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art Archives is continuing to make progress toward the successful completion of a grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission. As reported in previous issues of the Museum Archivist, the major efforts to date have been to set up the Archives in off-site offices, retrieve several hundred cubic feet of material from storage in a limestone cave, survey records in the various Museum offices, make connection with RLIN and begin cataloguing records, create volunteer opportunities, and to do the myriad of tasks involved in establishing an archival program at a major museum.

Now, having established minimum and maximum level processing standards, we've settled down to maximum level arrangement and description of those the records and manuscript material that we feel will be most useful

to researchers. With the help of several volunteers, we have two fully processed collections; the Paul Gardner Papers and the Senior Curator Records. Mr. Gardner was the first Director of the Museum, however, his papers primarily reflect his service in the Coast Artillery Corps in France during WORLD WAR I. The records of the Senior Curator cover the period 1949-84 and document several major exhibitions, including "Taste of Napoleon" (1970).

We are also working very hard to complete processing on the first ten years of records relating to the William Rockhill Nelson Trust (1927-37) which include files relating to the development of the collection and the construction of the Museum. One of our volunteers, Mike Milens, has been putting in an average of 8 hours a week cataloging and preserving several hundred original plans and drawings, some done in ink on linen and others in pencil on tracing paper. The completed inventory will be a valuable resource for planned gallery renovations. The other significant collection being worked on is the Laurence Sickman Papers. Mr. Sickman was the Museum's first curator of oriental art and the second director.

The Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art has begun its archival program with funding from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) and the William T. Kemper Foundation, Commerce Bank Trustee. Although reference service is limited at this time, the Archives staff will be happy to provide whatever assistance they can to researchers. An appointment is necessary for research but visitors are welcome at all times. Contact the Archivist, Chuck Hill, or the Assistant Archivist, Lois Kauffman, at (816) 751-1354, Monday through Friday, between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m.

Chuck Hill  
Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art

#### **THE STATE OF MUSEUM ARCHIVES**

During September's Museum Archives Section meeting in New Orleans, some members expressed concern about the staffing levels at museum archives across the country. There was a nagging feeling that staffs were facing cutbacks due to economic conditions. To determine the state of archives staffing I contacted twenty-five institutions across the country to conduct an informal and very unscientific survey. I asked a series of questions about staffing levels, collection size, and reference service. My goal was to see if there had been any recent changes and if so, why those affected felt they had occurred. Most archivists were contacted by telephone. Several responded to requests for notices on the ARCHIVES-L and MUSEUM-L. My thanks to everyone who gave me some of their precious time to discuss this topic.

It should come as no surprise to anyone that most archives in the survey have tiny professional staffs. Eleven institutions have only one professional archivist and, at three of

## REPORTS

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State of the Archives, cont.

these, the professional is only half time. Another seven institutions have two professionals. Four institutions have larger staffs of between three and thirteen professionals. At the remaining three there are no professionals.

In addition to small professional staffs, these archivists have little in the way of support. Thirteen have no paraprofessionals and only four have one. And five institutions reported between two and fifteen paraprofessional assistants.

However, while the staffs are small, they have a good deal of responsibility. They manage collections ranging from 20 linear feet to 29,000 linear feet in size, not to mention the millions of manuscripts and thousands of drawings and blueprints as well as tens of thousands of photographic prints and negatives these institutions hold. There does not appear to be any real correlation between size of staff and size of collection. Nor is there one between staff size and reference questions. The questions received per year ranged from 40 to 5000.

So what of the changes? They are happening. The Art Institute of Chicago lost its "entire staff of one FT paraprofessional and one PT paraprofessional" this summer leaving only the archivist. The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village is in the midst of a restructuring to become client centered. Thus, according to Luke Swetland, "when people leave through attrition, the same position is not automatically filled. The Museum is really looking at how human resources are deployed." At the National Anthropological Archives one professional was lost and the archives has seen a change from being reliant upon career appointments to relying upon contract or short term appointments to fill archival positions. The University Museum Archives at the University of Pennsylvania has lost two part time people in two years and its photo archivist position sat vacant for fourteen months. And upon restoration of this position, it was filled as a technical one, not a professional one as had previously been the case. At the Margaret Woodbury Strong Museum the staff has dropped from four full time members to one full time and two part time. The Sheldon Museum has laid off one part time person. In Houston, the Museum of Fine Arts eliminated the position of assistant archivist in July 1992 due to economic downsizing (and although the position is currently filled on a temporary basis, Kathleen Robinson sees signs that it could be brought back on a permanent basis for fiscal year 1994-1995). The Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum lost two part time people over the last three years.

As discouraging as the above seems, those institutions still employ professional archivists. However there are two archives that no longer have any archivists on their

staff. In 1991-1992, facing budget cuts, the Detroit Institute of Art closed its archives to researchers and let its archivist go. The Philadelphia Museum of Art has had no staff since 1991. Currently a volunteer, who retired as the archivist over four years ago, staffs the archives two days per month. This facility, too, is closed to researchers although they will try to help outsiders when time permits. Also in Philadelphia, the Franklin Institute Science Museum is without a staff. However in this instance there has never been an archivist. Any requests that come in are handled by the library with a two month backlog. It is hoped by staff there that a curator will be hired in Spring 1994 to ease this situation.

And why all the cuts? As might be expected, downsizing and budget cuts were the main culprits. Loss of grants and changing financial structures also contributed to the problem. At most institutions there is no indication of whether these positions will be reinstated once economic conditions improve. Some archivists are hopeful that this will occur while others know that "small is better" is their permanent situation. The negative effect that these cuts have on archives cannot be denied. At one institution "the immediate effect of these cuts was the elimination of the records management program, by all accounts an efficient and well managed operation." Cuts also mean a reduction in processing often resulting in that task being turned over to volunteers (for good or evil). With the large volume of reference requests received by these one person shops, response time is delayed and little else can be accomplished. One lone archivist reported receiving more than twenty five calls per day!

While the forgoing is bleak, not all is gloom and doom. There is also good news to report. The Museum of Science and Industry hired the first professional archivist in its history (only 60 years after the position was written into museum plans) and the Cleveland Museum of Natural History hired its first professional archivist (albeit a part time one). The Greensboro Historical Museum made its archivist full time in 1989 and has hopes of hiring a part timer some time soon. At the Metropolitan Museum of Art a half time person was added and the Brooklyn Museum added grant funded staff. Yet these are small steps.

Archivists seem to feel that to whom they report has an effect on their profile at their institutions. Six archivists report to the librarian of their institution. Five report to their director or president with the same number reporting to the head of collections for their institution. The remaining six report to a variety of people. Concerning his reporting line one archivist stated "we answer to the chairman of the Department . . . that means we are buried deep down in the administrative and funds and rewards structure of the Institution." Another stated "I report to the librarian of the museum [and] there are problems with this reporting structure

## REPORTS

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### State of the Archives, cont.

that I think have hindered us in terms of access to staff and general visibility within the museum itself." A third felt that "reporting to the Collections Division Supervisor buried the archives within the institution as well as prevented other museum staff from realizing that the archives was an institution wide department--not just for the Collections Division."

So what, in the end, can we say about museum archives and the economy? Basically, that nagging feeling was correct. The economy is affecting us. An archive's existence is a precarious one during this era of the bottom line. As one archivist put it "programs are still very fluid within institutions." Few archives surveyed have much "fat" to give up in downsizing situations. Many archivists questioned considered themselves resigned to this situation. It would seem that archivists, while understaffed and overworked will continue to make the most of what is available knowing that resources will more likely continue to shrink than grow in the near future.

Anita Weber  
Cleveland Museum of Natural History

### **"DO WE REALLY WANT TO DO THIS?" STARTING A RECORDS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM IN A MUSEUM ARCHIVES**

The Archives staff of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (which includes an Archivist, a Project Archivist and three intrepid volunteers) recently completed a records retention scheduling project spanning nearly four months. During the same period, the staff planned and completed a move of the Archives to a new MFA,H facility. These words are offered as proof that Archivists can survive a records scheduling project without screaming and running mad into the streets! In fact, this project has already paid benefits that can be appreciated by Archivists as well as Records Managers. This brief article is intended to outline some of these benefits and suggest some initial strategies for those among us who have contemplated a records retention scheduling project, but are yet to take the plunge. Indeed some of you may experience pressure from your institutions to take on the role of records manager with limited staff resources and even smaller budgets. So here it is, some small words of encouragement and advice.

Let's begin with the benefits. Needless to say, this has got to pay if you're going to play. Among the pleasant surprises that the program brought was a better awareness among other Museum staff members of the purpose and importance of the Archives to the institution. I have yet to meet an Archivist (but hope to

some day) who has not complained that their Archives are misunderstood or under appreciated. Meeting with and discussing the administrative and historical records created by the staff increases their understanding of the value of records, and by extension, the value of the Archives that preserves them.

In several cases, departments which had infrequently or reluctantly deposited records with us in the past reached a comfort zone that will allow them to pack their files and send them to the Archives with confidence. Others did not realize how much of the planning for annual events, fund raisers, and membership campaigns could benefit from experiences recorded in the historical record. This was particularly true of the Development Department which has a heavy staff turnover rate and, therefore, loses its collective memory every few years. Meetings also unearthed cases of multiple offices within a single department keeping the same or similar records. With encouragement from us, these departments are implementing or considering a more centralized filing system. The benefit of this move is pretty clear.

Perhaps the happiest payoff for me as a new member of the Archives staff is the education that the project provided in the functions of the Museum and its various offices. I dare say that the more experienced staff became "re-educated" as well. In the course of a meeting, we often discovered that roles and responsibilities had shifted from one office to another, activities were discontinued, and some records were no longer created. The interrelationships between departments became clearer to me as well. Should you decide to begin a records management program, bring your least experienced staff with you when you meet to discuss records. The accelerated training program will be appreciated--eventually.

A more tangible payoff of a records management program is the obvious decrease in the deposits of valueless records in the Archives. A better case of "you can pay me now, or pay me later" I can hardly imagine. Although records meetings are often lengthy and difficult, the investment of time cannot compare with the time required to sift and process records. Although this may be preaching to the converted, the importance of this point cannot be understated. Of the records types that we have identified, roughly thirty percent were assessed as temporary and will be discarded. And a good riddance to them too!

Old records that were deposited in the Archives years ago are now also eligible to be destroyed with the approval of Museum administration. Approximately 268 cubic feet of records were left behind when our Archives were moved to our new facilities. (They are to be shipped to a commercial shredder for disposal and are known around here as the "total destruction" pile.) As a result, we have realized an immediate savings in the cost of shelving units in our new space. Since the total linear feet of records that come to the



## REPORTS

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Records Management at MFA,H, cont.

Archives will be reduced, the need for additional square feet of storage space is slowed. Last, but not least, our orders of archival quality supplies are smaller. In fact, we'll be reusing hundreds of cubic foot boxes vacated by the destruction of valueless records. All this translates into savings of the almighty dollar--a point which goes a long way in most institutions these days.

Should you decide to embark on the perilous journey (I didn't say it was easy) towards a records management program, I should mention that the benefits listed above also conveniently double as selling points for the effort. Needless to say, financial arguments seem to carry the most weight, but the others shouldn't be ignored. Think of them as another opportunity to "educate" administrators about Archives and Archivists.

Of all the factors that contribute to the success of a records management program, the first and foremost is the support of your institution's administration. Regardless of the size or extent of your program, this support is essential. Emphasize the need for legal approval of the assessment decisions that you make. This adds additional weight and authority to your efforts and is a necessary step besides.

Decide on the scope of your program. Do you want to build on small successes and start with only a General Retention Schedule that governs routine records created by every Museum department, or do you prefer to target a small number of offices that create a large volume of records--your Accounting and Personnel Departments for example? Consider it carefully. A small program may be what you need based upon your individual circumstances. While it may not be totally inclusive, it may yield enough tangible results to justify additional support. Perhaps you're feeling flush and want to take on the whole ball of wax? In any case, make certain that each individual schedule is completed thoroughly and approved by the administration and legal counsel. Should your Museum be a party to litigation, it must demonstrate that your program is properly administered and approved.

Consider the methods you'll use to collect the information needed to assess each type of record. We met with as many members of a given office or department as we could manage to assemble, but some of you may not have that luxury. Perhaps it would be best at your institution to meet with the head of a department only. Maybe an office manager or secretary can tell you everything about his or her department's records. Then again, a combination of clerical and professional staff may be the best scenario. The choice is yours.

If setting up a special meeting to discuss records is problematic, consider bullying your way on to the agenda for regularly scheduled staff meetings. If this too is a problem, think about a survey in written form or over the phone. The staff may in the long run prefer a meeting to answering written questions! In whatever case, be creative and flexible. Different strategies may be needed to handle different departments or personalities.

Think about the types of statistics that you'd like to keep to document your program. While it sounds like just so much additional number crunching, it is a valuable tool for describing the progress and results of your work to the administration. Incorporate the collection of statistics into your meetings with staff. Things like annual accumulations of each type of record, the percentage of records that can be destroyed, and even the length of your discussions with staff, can help administrators to grasp things fully. Our final report to the director will arm him with a battery of new numbers aimed at impressing trustees and potential donors.

Make use of volunteers. Draft a list of tasks that they can handle for you. Our volunteers developed standard forms, did considerable data entry, and set up appointments for us with department heads and staff. They can lighten the load considerably.

Make a list of the types of records that have been received from each department or office in the past. The list will help to prompt the right questions and will often refresh the memories of the people with whom you are discussing the retention of records.

For large scale projects, create a "milestone chart" that lists each task in the order it must be completed for each departmental schedule. Since other work will often divert your attention from the project, a milestone chart will help you to get your bearings and put you back on course.

And finally, consult a few good books on the subject of recordkeeping requirements. If you are like most of us, government regulations affecting the retention of records are not always clear. A reasonable amount of research will give you more confidence and the knowledge you gain will invariably come to bear in your discussions with staff about their records.

Make use of retention schedules obtained from other institutions similar to your own. We found them to be useful guides for formatting our Records Management Manual and for comparing appraisal decisions. In fact, we are more than willing to share our schedules with those of you who would like to see them.

## REPORTS

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Records Management at MFA,H, cont.

So there you have it, a few words for the wise and wary. Although taking on a Records Management Program is not easy, it does have its rewards. If you think that you'd like to give it a go, but have some questions, please feel free to contact me by mail or via E-mail at [BM.MFX@RLG.Stanford.edu](mailto:BM.MFX@RLG.Stanford.edu). *Editor's note: Joey Kuhlman is offering a workshop at the 1994 SAA Annual Meeting in Indianapolis entitled "The Retention Schedule Process: A Primer for Archivists."*

Joey Kuhlman  
Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

### **MUSEUM RECORDS MANAGEMENT AND ARCHIVES: A SURVEY OF THE FIELD**

For centuries museums have documented national, state, and local history, natural history, science and technology, society, and art. However, they have not been as conscientious about documenting their own existence.

Few of the over 6,000 museums in the United States have an archives program; fewer still have a formal records management program. Most museums have a library, and many collect manuscripts to support and document their collections. The latter are manuscript collections, however, not institutional archives. Too often employee or department files are "weeded" when new staff arrive or the museum is reorganized, and valuable information is lost. The impetus to create a museum archives often results from an upcoming centennial or other anniversary, or an exhibit. piecing together the past frequently becomes an exercise in futility.

If museum archives are new and relatively rare, museum records management programs are still a gleam in someone's eye and nearly nonexistent. In the museum, records management is seen as a means to an end--it exists only to help preserve records for the archives. One explanation is that museums historically have not seen themselves as businesses, but as purely cultural institutions serving a higher purpose. If it isn't a business, then there is no need to manage records. That attitude has started to change in the past fifteen years or so as museums find themselves competing for recreational dollars, looking at the "bottom line," hiring directors from the corporate world, and instituting management techniques. Records management should be part of that attitude shift.

Why should a museum care about managing its records and creating an archives? The reasons go beyond reducing file storage space in offices or preserving the institutional history. A records management program in a museum, as in any institution, increases administrative

efficiency by reducing redundancy of records, improve information retrieval, enhance communication between departments (when they find out who has what kind of information), meet legal and fiscal requirements, assist in decision making, document transactions and decisions with impact on current operations, support the museum collections, and help publicize the museum using historical facts and precedents.

Museum records preserved in an archives illuminate the "institutional culture" of the museum, "those elements that give a museum its unique history and fascinating personality and those founding principles and shared beliefs that help give meaning to its current activities and mission." In addition, an archives "can help identify and preserve the traditions, institutional heroes and common values associated with a specific museum.

Museum archives have value beyond the museum's walls. Historians use museum records to document "the relationships of their institutions to broader currents of social change in their communities, regions and, indeed, the nation as a whole." For example, one can learn about the social dynamics of a community from "correspondence from the culture barons who were instrumental in first establishing and then shaping the policy of a given institution. Museum records provide information on education, who did and did not attend museums at different periods of time, the history of science, changing patterns of philanthropy, the increase of government involvement in cultural institutions, and museum interactions with other museums. "Museums are mirrors in so many ways of the societal environment in which they exist."<sup>3</sup>

With such compelling reasons to preserve museum records, it is surprising that so few museums have archives. The profession is not entirely unaware of their existence or purpose. As early as 1907 the American Association of Museums offered a session on museum records and "voiced the need for trained specialists across all museum departments to handle accession and specimen records."<sup>4</sup> However, the curator and registrar continued and still continue to maintain those records in the majority of museums.

The record of museum archives is silent until the formation of the Archives of American Art in 1954. As part of its microfilming project to gather records on American artists, the organization copied some museum archives related to collections (most likely curatorial or registrarial records only, which are a special case in museum record keeping).

The Smithsonian Institution started its archives program in the 1960s, providing a model for other institutions. Records management advice is part of the archivist's responsibilities, and is classified as an archival function.<sup>5</sup>

## REPORTS

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### Records Management Survey, cont.

Several museums, most notably the Detroit Institute of Arts, started their own archives and records management programs beginning in the mid to late 1970s. The Detroit Institute conducted a preliminary survey of its records in 1975, and in 1978 received the first National Historic Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC) grant to establish a museum archives.<sup>6</sup> The Institute proposed "to locate, appraise and process the official records of the museum; to establish a records management program; and to serve as a research center for the museum's history." The records management aspect of the project was "a corollary to the active records survey and the transfer of inactive records."<sup>7</sup>

The NHPRC is the only federal granting agency that funds the development of museum archives. In a flurry of activity, the agency made 11 grants to nine institutions between 1979 and 1981. To date, 34 museums have received 39 grants totaling \$1,138,646. Only one of the funded programs has closed.<sup>8</sup>

The "year of museum archives" appears to be 1979. A conference on the topic, organized by the Archives of American Art and sponsored by the Smithsonian Institution led to the drafting of a set of guidelines for museum archives. The guidelines state that "The archivist must be involved in the determination of how long and under what conditions particular records are to be kept" and "The advice of the archivist should be sought to avoid the creation of unnecessary records, to promote effective record keeping, and to recommend disposal of those records which do not have permanent value."<sup>9</sup> Also in 1979 the Smithsonian offered the first of many seminars on museum archives.<sup>10</sup>

Professional organizations joined the efforts to raise awareness of museum records and archives. In 1981, the Society of American Archivists authorized a task force on museum archives, which has since evolved into a section and now publishes an informative newsletter. An NHPRC grant in 1985 enabled the Associated Natural Science Institutions to prepare guidelines on preservation and access to records created by member institutions. In 1987 the museum profession gave archives a boost when the American Association of Museums included three questions concerning museum archives and records in its accreditation selfstudy and the association has since offered sessions in archives at its annual meetings. The New England Museum Association launched its annual Museum Archives Institute in 1988. And in 1990, the Association of Systematics Collections held a two-day seminar on archives.<sup>11</sup>

Guidelines for starting and managing a museum archives program are readily available. Museums with successful programs are proud to describe their accomplishments in the professional literature.<sup>12</sup> An

article by Maygene Daniels in *Curator* (1988) entitled "Developing New Museum Archives," provides a clear overview of the process. The first step is to survey the records, and from there determine the size, scope, and organization of the archives. She offers the practical advice of ensuring a stable operating budget and setting realistic goals with a realistic time frame for meeting them.

Daniels stresses that the archivist needs "operating autonomy, access to key administrative staff, and sufficient statutes to be influential with other museum departments."<sup>13</sup> The archives may be an independent department, placed with other information resources or research units, or associated with the legal office.

The next step after organization is to develop a policy statement. This should include the fact that "all materials made or received and maintained by the museum are museum property and can be destroyed only with the archivist's concurrence," and that the archivist has the authority to survey the museum's records and bring those with continuing value into the archives. The policy needs to define those types of materials appropriate for transfer to the archives and to establish access policies. If there are related activities such as records centers, a vital records program, microfilming, historical research, or oral history programs, the policy must outline the archivist's responsibility for them. The policy also needs to address the treatment of personal papers of curators and other staff, and must distinguish between archives and special collections and manuscripts. The final steps in starting a program are to apply the archival principles of provenance and original order in transferring and processing collections, and to educate the staff and the public as to the value of the archives.<sup>14</sup>

Daniels' viewpoint is strictly archival, with only a passing nod to records management. She is not alone in assigning records management responsibilities to the archivist.

The SAA published *Museum Archives: An Introduction* by William A. Deiss in 1984 as part of its basic archival series. This manual describes the following steps in creating an archives program:

1. Place the archives in the administrative structure, preferably directly in line with central administration
2. Establish the basic authority of the archives from the chief administrative officer or director
3. Establish an archives committee
4. Study and master the administrative history of the museum
5. Conduct a records survey, examining the records in each office, physically handling them, and interviewing the office staff
6. Establish priorities; develop records disposition recommendations

## REPORTS

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Records Management Survey, cont.

Records management is treated as one of the procedures of archival management, along with appraisal, accessioning, and arrangement and description. Deiss states that "Records management techniques can aid the archivist not only in saving those records with permanent value, but in ensuring the orderly disposition of those records with no permanent value." (p. 25)

What types of records are found and preserved in museums? As with any business there are Board of Director or Trustee minutes, Director's correspondence and administrative files, financial records, legal records, operations files, personnel records, public relations files, records on security and physical plant, and sometimes marketing records if the museum contracts for reproductions or runs a shop or cafe. Most of these records follow the retention schedules established by law or agreed upon among records managers in business. In appraising museum records for retention, the museum archivist evaluates whether they provide evidence of the "administrative structure and evolution of the museum, [have] legal or fiscal value, [or] research and informational value,"<sup>15</sup> as would any archivist or records manager.

Due to the functions and nature of museums and other not-for-profit institutions, some records do not have a parallel in the profit-making world. The museum keeps records on its fundraising (development) efforts, current and potential donors, and its members and volunteers. The educational component of the museum, including programs for school children, teenagers, and adults, as well as special events such as performances or fairs, create records that need to be preserved.

Another educational service of museums are their exhibits. Within these files are research notes, photographs, scripts, drawings, object lists, loan information, planning documents, publicity, and exhibition labels. Exhibition records document one of the main purposes for which a museum exists, and yet these records are rarely managed systematically to preserve the wealth of information they contain.

The other unique set of records in a museum are the curatorial/registrarial records that document the objects in the collection. Records include deeds of gift, purchase agreements, wills, correspondence, research notes, conservation treatment reports, insurance documents, and loan and exhibition records. In a natural history museum, the records might also include site reports, research data, or expedition reports. Unless an object is no longer owned by the museum (in which case the file on the object should be transferred to the archives),

these records are always active and should not be considered for transfer to the archives. However, because of their importance to the museum, the archivist can offer suggestions on how best to preserve the files during their active life, whether it is simply putting them in alkaline file folders or having the records microfilmed for backup and security. The archivist can also provide intellectual control over these records, informing researchers of their existence and helping them gain access, although the archives does not have physical custody.<sup>16</sup>

Curators often conduct research aside from that which they do directly for the museum. The archivist and the museum administration must develop clear guidelines on how to distinguish between personal and professional papers to prevent problems before they arise. A general policy of asking curators to donate their papers on their departure is a generally accepted procedure.

Given the resources available and the consensus that museum records are important, it is surprising that so few museum archives programs exist. Alan Bain of the Smithsonian Institution conducted several surveys of museum archives for SAA's Museum Archives Task Force. In 1983 he mailed over 500 questionnaires to AAM-accredited museums and 300 were returned; in 1991, 229 mailings to the readership of the Museum Archivist newsletter produced 161 returns.<sup>17</sup> In both instances, less than 50% of the respondents claimed to have an official institutional archives, and the majority were run by either a staff archivist or a librarian. The 1991 questions uncovered the fact that nearly 20% of the archives which did exist were founded before 1940, while 54% were founded after 1970 (not all of them "official.") Eight percent had no program at all. Only 37% had a written mission statement giving the archivist authority for all inactive records of the organization; 27% had a regulation requiring all staff to release their official records to the archives before leaving the institution; and only 5% had an agreement concerning staff members' personal papers. However, 50% had a policy governing special collections or manuscripts.<sup>18</sup>

I conducted my own unscientific survey by mailing requests for information to 30 of the museums that had received funding from the NHPRC to establish an archives. I also sent a request via e-mail through the Archives ListServ. Twelve institutions responded, one of which decided not to apply for a NHPRC grant due to budget constraints.

In all but three cases, records management is the responsibility of the archivist. One institution relies on the business office, another the chief librarian, and a third a curator of decorative arts. The latter museum is an official state agency, so many of the museum's financial and personnel records are transferred on a regular basis to the State Archives. The institutional archives, kept on site, primarily consist of "historical records," publications, exhibition and public event records, and papers published by museum staff.

## REPORTS

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### Records Management Survey, cont.

All but one museum started its archives within the past ten years. Seven have retention schedules, one is in the process of being written, one is written but not used, and two have no schedule. The schedules differ in the amount of time a record is considered active and when it can be transferred to the archives. However, there appeared to be little discrepancy about what records were considered archival. These included trustee and directors' records, certain financial records, building plant and operations, educational programming records, publicity, development and membership, grant reports, exhibition records, and curatorial files.

Seven of the museums have some form of written policy, whether it is a collection, archives, or records management policy. One has only a mission statement, one has no policy, and two gave no response. Those with policies make a clear distinction between institutional archives and manuscript or special collections, and try to address the problem of personal vs. professional papers. Each institution consistently mentioned the lack of staff to carry out both records management and archives programming. This fact more than any other explains the lack of developed records management programs in museums--they are lucky if they have an archives at all.

Winterthur Museum microfilms many of its records to reduce storage space. The museum also has a records officer in each division or department. Records older than 25 years are scheduled for transfer to the archives.

At the Brooklyn Museum, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and the Fine Arts Museum, Houston, the archives also serves as the records center, handling disposition of unnecessary records. The Museum of Modern Art and the Albany Institute of History and Art provide each office with schedules and instructions for boxing, labeling, and transferring records.

Access to archival records varies among institutions. The Museum of Modern Art and the Art Institute of Chicago open their archival records to outside scholars after ten years. The Albany Institute restricts business office and collection purchase records permanently, while other records are restricted to outside researchers for 15 years. At the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, security files are permanently closed, the financial and personnel offices have their own records management programs, and curatorial records as well as files from the directors' office and the trustees are open after 20 years. All institutions restrict access to those collections which have been fully processed, regardless of the date.<sup>19</sup>

One issue not addressed in any of the policies I received but which deserves careful consideration are object files (also called accession or registration files). These files, as mentioned above, contain deeds of gift, valuations, and other information that could be considered sensitive. For example, some donors wish to remain anonymous; outside researchers don't need to know the insurance value of a painting. At the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, the archivist reviews object files and some exhibit files (often lenders wish to remain anonymous as well) in her possession to remove sensitive information before the researcher has access. However, none of the museums seemed to consider how to handle the sensitive material in active files kept in the curatorial department and which a researcher might use there. Museums in New York State may be forced to face the issue sooner than they might wish. A bill which has been in process for the past 11 years is being revived. The regulation requires a museum to make its collection records public. The bill has passed the State Assembly but repeatedly failed in the Senate. An expanded bill is slated for reconsideration.<sup>20</sup>

Museum archives are a relatively new phenomenon, and their existence and extent is uneven among the over 6000 museums in the United States. As a result of their youth, most programs are understaffed and usually underfunded. One archivist, sometimes with the help of a part time technician or a handful of dedicated volunteers, must accession, process, and provide access to archival materials, as well as develop some form of records retention policy or formula. There are never enough hours in the day to perform all the tasks needed.

Records management in the museum is seen as a step in the archival process. Records are identified and scheduled to make sure that those with continuing value are preserved in the archives. The traditional records management goals of reducing storage space, improving staff productivity and effectiveness and increasing the efficiency of records retrieval are tangential to the archival purpose.

It seems ironic that institutions concerned with preserving our culture and expanding our knowledge do not extend that concern to their own records. Administrators, staff, and the public (and the legislature in New York State), need to recognize the importance and the special nature of museum records and make sure that archival and records management programs are an integral part of the administration, with adequate staff and funding. The tools are there. All that is needed is some education.

Barbara E. Austen  
Simmons College

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## REPORTS

Records Management Survey, cont.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Kathleen Hartt, "A Manifold Resource,," *Museum News* November/December 1991: 41.
- <sup>2</sup> Robert W. Rydell, "The Historical Researcher," *Museum News* 61 (April 1983): 39.
- <sup>3</sup> Tony Mitchell, "Museum Archives: A Case Study The Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney, *Archives and Manuscripts* 9:1 (September 1981): 66.
- <sup>4</sup> Alan Bain, "The Muses' Memory," *Museum News* November/December 1991: 36.
- <sup>5</sup> Smithsonian Institution, Archives and Special Collections, *Program Statement and Planning Documents of the Smithsonian Institution Archives 1987* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1987): 3, 6-7.
- <sup>6</sup> "National Historical Publications and Records Commission, Archival Development Projects, 1978-93 By Year" and Claudia Hommel, "A Model Museum Archives," *Museum News* November/December 1979: 63.
- <sup>7</sup> Hommel, 63, 68.
- <sup>8</sup> "NHPRC, Archival Development Projects;" and National Archives, National Historical Publications and Records Commission, "Federal Funding for Museum Archives Development Programs: A Report to the Commission," *Commission Reports and Papers* Number 2, December 1988: 2.
- <sup>9</sup> Archives of American Art, "Draft Guidelines for Museum Archives," 1979.
- <sup>10</sup> John A. Fleckner, "Archives and Museums," *The Midwestern Archivist* 5:2 (1990): 67.
- <sup>11</sup> Fleckner 67; and Bain, Muses' 38, 39.
- <sup>12</sup> See Hommel (Detroit Institute of Arts; and Stover, Catherine, "Museum Archives: Growth and Development," *Drexel Library Quarterly* 10:3 (Summer 1983) about the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, Philadelphia.
- <sup>13</sup> Maygene Daniels, "Developing New Museum Archives," *Curator* 31:2 (1988): 102.
- <sup>14</sup> Daniels 100-105.
- <sup>15</sup> Archives of American Art, "Guidelines".
- <sup>16</sup> William A. Diess, *Museum Archives: An Introduction* (Chicago, Society of American Archivists, 1984): 16-17; Alan Bain, "The Archivist," *Museum News* (April 1983): 45-46; Patricia Nauert, "The Registrar," *Museum News* (April 1983): 49; and the archives management policies of the Brooklyn Museum, the Albany Institute of History and Art, the Museum of Modern Art, and the St. Louis Art Museum.
- <sup>17</sup> Alan Bain, letter to the author, 30 October 1993.
- <sup>18</sup> Alan L. Bain, "Documenting Museums as Institutions and as Purveyors of Culture: Records, Papers, and Special Collections," Society of American Archivists, September 1991 [meeting], Handout.
- <sup>19</sup> Archives management policies and letters from archivists at the following institutions: Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia, Albany Institute of History and Art, Art Institute of Chicago, Brooklyn Museum, Boston Museum of Fine Arts, Cleveland Museum of Natural History, Maine State Museum, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Museum of Modern Art, St. Louis Art Museum, Tudor Place, Winterthur Museum.
- <sup>20</sup> *Museum Archivist*, 7:2 (September 1993): 5.

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## BITS & PIECES

### JOIN SAA-- HELP YOURSELF & HELP A FRIEND!

Following the last page of this newsletter is a new form from SAA soliciting new members. To our Museum Archivist readers who are not SAA members: there are many benefits to being an SAA member: contact with professional colleagues, excellent publications, a stimulating annual meeting, and a national voice for archives. Best of all, you'll then be eligible to be a full, voting member of the Museum Archives Section. Our meeting at the SAA Annual Meeting is always interesting; getting involved in one of the Section's committees will help you build new and fun professional friendships.

Fill out the form--join SAA! At the same time, you can help an SAA friend by putting his or her name down as a sponsor in Category 1 and help the Section win fame and fortune by entering "Museum Archives Section" in Category 2.

### PICTURE YOUR ARTICLE HERE!

Have you noticed that we almost always exactly fill the last page of *Museum Archivist*? Your faithful editor would not think of claiming any sort of exceptional expertise at layout--far from it--but we have always had just the right amount of material to fill the bill. Until now! It occurs to me that some one of our members maybe, just maybe, had a news item that they neglected to send in, that would have filled this sad, empty, right hand column just perfectly. Don't let this happen again!

Surely *something* is happening at your repository? Have you printed a repository description in *Museum Archivist*? It's a handy little bit of promo (and one that you can hand out again and again). Please write. We'd love to hear from you!

The Editor