Museum Archives Section blog

Friday, May 4, 2007

Smithsonian Institution Archives & Rockefeller Archive Center tackle digital preservation issues

The Collaborative Electronic Records Project is a three-year endeavor that began in August 2005. This project seeks to develop, test, and share technology to preserve digital documents. This initiative has a strong focus on e-mail messages and attachments. Lynda Schmitz Fuhrig at the Smithsonian Institution Archives (SIA) and Nancy Adgent at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) serve as the project's archivists.

CERP was developed by Dr. Edith Hedlin, then director of the Smithsonian Institution Archives and former SAA president, and by Dr. Darwin H. Stapleton, executive director of the Rockefeller Archive Center. These well-established, stable institutions have responsibilities for the management of records that go well beyond cataloging of historical manuscripts. Both are entrusted with the strategic management of a broad range of institutional records from founding documents to nearly current files.

The project archivists conducted interviews with depositors to determine how electronic records and email fit into their daily business routines. Not surprisingly, email management varies greatly from users with more than 10,000 emails in the Inbox with no organization to users who have elaborate systems of folder hierarchies.

Specific files and email account holders were chosen for testing. To date, email messages with attachments, education course planning files, an office handbook, and other electronic documents have been transferred in digital form. Transfers were conducted via server and removable media, and initial processing has begun.

The email presents interesting challenges: missing email addresses and transmission data, dead Web links, large bulk of messages, missing sent email, and specific applications needed for viewing the email.

Email guidance also has been drafted for the depositing organizations. Requirements for a digital repository for the materials are currently being refined. The results of this undertaking will be shared with the depositors and the archival community through a symposium.

The Smithsonian Institution Archives: http://siarchives.si.edu

The Rockefeller Archive Center: http://archive.rockefeller.edu

The Collaborative Electronic Records Project:
http://siarchives.si.edu/cerp/cerpindex.htm

Originally published March 20, 2007

posted by MAS Blogger @ 3:27 PM 0 comments

Museum Of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) Archives awarded NHPRC grant

The Museum Of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) Archives is the recent recipient of a three year grant awarded by the National Historical Publications and Records Commission (NHPRC). The NHPRC fully awarded the MFAH Archives proposal, providing 101,995 in funds for the processing of 402 linear feet of archival holdings. The MFAH will match funds for the project, which focuses on facilitating access to its archival materials through arrangement, description and the placement of finding aids on the MFAH Web site. Measures to preserve the documents are also being undertaken.

In October, the Project Archivist position was filled by Kathryn Jones. Jones is a recent graduate of the School of Library and Information Science at the University of North Texas. Her past experience has included two internships with the rare book collection of the MFAH's European decorative arts wing, Rienzi. She is a member of the Society of American Archivists, the American Library Association, the Texas Library Association and the Archivists of the Houston Area.

As the year draws to an end, the first objective of the grant project - the processing of the records of current museum director, Peter C. Marzio - is concluding. These records have been the primary focus of the project due to Marzio's instrumental role in the emergence of the MFAH as a predominant force on the U.S. art landscape and in the early museum archives movement in the U.S. during the late 1970's and 1980's.

Other materials selected for this project are institutional records and collections of personal papers that illustrate the museum's unique and important role in the cultural life of Houston and Texas. They are of significant historical interest to the art community as well as to students of museum studies, education, history, architecture, design, urban development, landscape design, philanthropy, and women and ethnic studies.

Among the archives to be processed and catalogued during the grant period are the estate papers of Texas philanthropist, Miss Ima Hogg, who donated Bayou Bend Collection and Gardens to the MFAH in 1957. Also included in the project are the drawings and correspondence of designer Sally Walsh, the first Houstonian to enter Interior Design's Hall of Fame.

Also slated for the project are the museum's exhibition files that, according to MFAH Archives director, Lorraine A. Stuart, generate some of the greatest and most consistent research interest among the archival holdings. Other institutional records are those of the MFAH education department, which oversees one of the most widely acclaimed museum

educational programs in the country.

Subjects covered in the museum's institutional records include the Economic Summit of Industrialized Nations in 1990; the 1987 landmark exhibition, Hispanic Art in the United States: Thirty Contemporary Painters and Sculptors; Isamu Noguchi's design for the museum's Lillie and Hugh Roy Cullen Sculpture Garden, completed in 1986; the ongoing Jack Yates Magnet School Photography program; the Masterson collections of Worcester porcelain and David Webb jewelry; and the 1995 installation of American sculpture at the White House.

This recent award is the second grant the MFAH has received from the NHPRC. The first grant, in the amount of $94,000, provided the original seed money for the establishment of the museum archives in 1984.

One of the oldest art museum archives in the country, the MFAH's Archives consists of 2,500 linear feed of institutional records and manuscript collections spanning more than 100 years. The department also operates the institutional records management program, which oversees an additional 1,000 linear feet of temporary records. It serves as the official repository for the records of the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston and the Art Libraries Society of North America's Texas-Mexico Chapter and houses a micrographic copy of the Texas Art Project, a segment of the Archives of American Art compiled by the Smithsonian Institution. Through a Web-based database, the Archives provides unparalled access to extensive and detailed information on the MFAH's exhibition history. Its holdings have been a valuable source in the compilation of local and regional histories, Houston architectural surveys, catalogues raisonné and other monographs.

Originally published January 3, 2007

posted by MAS Blogger @ 3:26 PM 0 comments

The Museum of Modern Art Archives & ARTstor Digitization Collaboration

The Museum of Modern Art and ARTstor are pleased to announce their collaboration to digitize and catalogue 23,000 black and white photographs of installation views of past Museum exhibitions. The Museum of Modern Art began documenting its exhibitions with installation photography beginning with its 1929 inaugural exhibition, Cézanne, Gauguin, Seurat, van Gogh. The Museum has documented over 70% of its exhibition history with installation photography. A sampling of the landmark exhibitions included in the project are, Machine Art, 1934, Cubism and Abstract Art, 1936, Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism, 1937, Bauhaus: 1919-1928, 1938, the Good Design exhibition series, 1950, 1951, 1952, 1953, The Family of Man, 1955, 16 Americans, 1959-1960, Dada, Surrealism and their Heritage, 1968, Information, 1970, Pablo Picasso: A Retrospective, 1980, Primitivism in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern, 1984-85, Vienna 1900: Art, Architecture and Design, 1986, Henri Matisse: A Retrospective, 1992-93, and Jackson Pollock, 1999.

ARTstor will scan the photographs and create high-resolution gray scale TIFF files. The TIFF files will reside with the Museum's Department of Imaging Services, who will then duplicate images upon request for reproduction. Additionally, three sizes of jpegs files for each image will be delivered to the Museum on hard drives, which will then be linked to the Museum Archives Image Database, MAID.

ARTstor will catalogue the photographs using existing item level documentation for each print. A style sheet has been prepared that will be used to normalize the catalogue entries for both the ARTstor and MAID databases.

Upon completion of the project, the scans and catalogue entries created by ARTstor will be augmented to the existing digitally-born installation views created by the Museum's Department of Imaging Services of exhibitions mounted since 2000 and currently posted to MAID; this will make it possible to access all installation photography in one database.

MAID is available to the public only in the Museum Archives Reading Room. Users have the ability to print images from MAID, including item level documentation and copyright information. Searching by keyword is available on MAID. By using keyword searching, digital surrogates from different Museum Archives records groups can be accessed together. Researchers may order digital images from the Museum's representatives, SCALA/Art Resource, by supplying the appropriate MAID catalogue number. The application and data server for MAID is iSeries-DB2 400 and the web server for MAID is iSeries Apache.

ARTstor in turn will be licensed to post low-resolution images of the installation views onto their database; from there, the images can then be accessed and downloaded at 72dpi for noncommercial use by subscribers to ARTstor.

Thomas D. Grischkowsky
Archives Specialist
Museum Archives

The Museum of Modern Art

Originally published November 10, 2006

posted by MAS Blogger @ 3:22 PM 0 comments ✏

Summary Report - SAA Conference Session 403 - Developing an Open-Source and Standards-Compliant Descriptive Tool for Lone Arrangers

Friday, August 4th, 2006, 2:30-3:30 PM

Reported by Courtney C. Yevich, Assistant Fine Arts Librarian and VMFA Archivist
Virginia Museum of Fine Arts

Speaking to a standing room only crowd, Chris Prom, Scott Schwartz and Chris Rishel of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign showcased their new archives software product, Archon™: The Simple Archival Information System. Prom began the session by stating their key message – they wanted to design an open-source application for those that are unwilling or unable to get bogged down by technospeak. Namely, when Prom learned how to compose EAD finding aids, he figured there had to be an easier way, and more importantly, there had to be a way to get higher returns for his efforts. The result was a product designed to "input once, output many."

Prom demonstrated the software's public and administrative interfaces, searching across collections and even repositories. He explained that you could also search authority records, manually or batch load MARC records into library catalogs, import any existing databases, EAD finding aids and MARC records, or export the data back out to another system with no loss of data. The program also supports the association of any type of digital media content. The compression algorithms are written in such a way that Archon™ actually runs faster than most proprietary software. Prom mentioned that he was performing searches across approximately 5,000 guides, and the return speed was indeed amazingly quick. Prom also spoke about the history of the software and the developers' desire to have the archival community engage in a conversation about sustainability models and continuing enhancement and maintenance support for Archon™, as well as find more users interested in participating in usability studies.

During the course of the software development, two field tests/evaluations were performed by Pamela Nye, Phoenix Research and Designs, and Deborra Richardson, National Museum of American History Archives Center. Nye was unable to attend the meeting, so Schwartz spoke in her place, and he described how Nye was contracted to be a consultant for two small-scale archives projects, one at a church and the other at a university. For both jobs, Nye was looking for a system that was free or very inexpensive, and that would be easy to use for a non-archivist to create publicly accessible inventories and finding aids. Nye attempted to manually load the software on a Mac platform, which proved to have numerous problems, and she eventually loaded the program onto a Windows system. Overall, Nye reported that she really liked the potential of the software

– she liked the look and feel of the administrative and user interfaces, the ability to customize, and the relative ease of using the administrative modules. She did feel, however, that the archival jargon might confuse the non-archivist user, and that she had to both consult the documentation and experiment with the program to truly understand the best usage of the various entry fields.

As the head of an archives which recently lost their IT personnel and had a very limited budget, Richardson described how she was looking for a free system that would function as an entire archival management program, from acquisitions to processing to conservation to research. Due to various extenuating circumstances, the system was never loaded onto a server at the museum, and two staff members ended up entering sample records into the UIUC system remotely. Overall, they found the system to be easy to use and the documentation and developers to be helpful. Global changes were easy to make, and the ability to enter information on a variety of hierarchical levels was appreciated. Their main dissatisfaction with the system came from its inability to collect and report usage statistics, and track conservation/preservation activities, although Richardson allowed that both of these functions could be developed at a later date. She also explained how their staff has now come to realize that an open source product does require a good deal of knowledge and time investment, as well as cooperation among IT and archives staff.

The presenters then fielded questions from the audience, which ranged from the scalability of the system (if necessary, large databases could be separated and search results aggregated), to licensing (it was released under an academic or research use license, but it is open source, so user developed modifications could be considered for future system implementation), to in-house usage (the public interface does not have to be utilized), to field help (they are considering integrating tips for each field to aid users in understanding the archival jargon better).

For more information, detailed user and system administrator guides, software downloads, and a demonstration version of Archon™, see their website at www.archonproject.org.

Originally published September 5, 2006

posted by MAS Blogger @ 3:20 PM 0 comments

Museum Archives Section Business Meeting Minutes 2006

Doc|Rtf versions

SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS, MUSEUM ARCHIVES SECTION

Hilton Washington, Washington, DC

Business Meeting, 4 August 2006

Following a call to order by Section Chair Kristine Kaske-Martin, each of the 60 members of the section present introduced themselves.

On-going section activities

Kristine provided a brief updates on one on-going section project, the proposed Directory of Museum Archives. The intent of this project is to provide an online searchable directory of museum archives, not specifically of museum archivists in North America. Those who had volunteered in the past to work on this project included Kristine Kaske-Martin, Marisa Bourgoin and Bernadette Callery. For this project, museums will be defined as having collections of 3-D objects. The directory project plans to use the terminology used by the American Association of Museums to distinguish between various types of museums. Respondents will be asked to provide name, contact information and a basic statement of their collection policy.

Introduction of section officers

Other officers of the section were then introduced. Kristine is the outgoing chair, having served a total of three years. She will be succeeded, following this meeting, by incoming chair Marissa Bourgoin. Kristin Parker (not able to be present at this meeting) serves as Secretary. Polly Darnell and Molly Wheeler are outgoing Newsletter editors. Daniel Alonzo and Ambika Sankaran are current section webmasters, with Lisa Grimmm volunteering to replace Ambika. All members of the section are encouraged to contribute to the workings of the section and are encouraged to contact any of the officers identified above directly with an offer of help.

Section newsletter

Polly and Molly characterized their editorial responsibilities as that of soliciting articles on topics of interest to the group, reports on projects from the section membership and personnel news. They saw their primary task as one of reminding people of their offers to contribute, and limited editing of the articles received. They have produced 3 newsletters per year (Fall, Winter and Spring), with at least one 750-1000 word article in each issue as well as news items, and reports on projects, particularly those supported by grant funds. Bernadette Callery and Collette Hill volunteered to serve as the next co-editors of the section newsletter.

Several attendees volunteered articles and reports, including Courtney Yevich on NEH funding, Susan Roper on the process of beginning a new archive (Clark Art Institute), The Getty's posted finding aids (Nancy Enneking) and the Rockefeller project with the Smithsonian (Lynda Schmitz Fuhrig). Authors were also solicited to summarize the sessions of particular interest to the Section held during this conference, including "What Makes A Great Leader? For Libraries? For Archives? For Museums?" (Kathleen Crossman) and "Ties That Bind or a Different Worldview? The Intersection of Archives, Museums and Libraries," organized by the section's own Anthony Reed.

SAA update

Steve Wright of the Winthrop Group, representing the Program committee for the 2007 SAA meeting in Chicago encouraged the group to submit proposals, encouraging proposers to move away from the traditional 3 personal panel and moderator to more interactive formats. This year, each section may only endorse 2 proposals, and the program committee promises to look very carefully at those sessions. In order to allow the program committee to make their decisions by December, all proposals must be submitted electronically by 9 October. Please see http://www.archivists.org/conference/chicago2007/proposals.asp for more information on submitting proposals. Presenters were also urged to avoid the use of PowerPoint as equipment rentals and Internet connections are rapaciously expensive at conference hotels.

Mary Jo Pugh, new editor of *American Archivist* also spoke, encouraging the group to submit articles to that publication, particularly those that support the [goals] of the society, i.e. Technology, Diversity and Advocacy. She is particularly interested in receiving articles discussing practice-based research with wide applicability to the profession and essay reviews which would deal with a number of related publications. She would also like to see more on the experience of the grant-funded pilot project – particularly what happened along the way – and how or if the project was continued after the grant funding was expended. In addition to book reviews, she would also like to see reviews of websites and exhibitions. She would also like to initiate reviews of websites and see more on grant-funded projects, particularly those that progressed beyond the initial or pilot stage. Other article possibilities were those programs which were proposed, but didn't make it into the annual SAA conference. As she will be serving on the program committee, she is anxious that we also re-purpose the oral presentations that were made. For those just venturing into print, she recommended that they consider volunteering to write book reviews and contacting Book Review editor Jeannette Bastian.

If you have ideas or further questions, please contact Mary Jo Pugh at americanarchivist[at]archivists[dot]org

David Gracy also reminded us that he was soliciting articles for *Libraries and Culture*, and was particularly interested in articles that deal with the preservation of the cultural record and the relationship between the creators of those records and the museum collection they document.

Deborra Richardson of the Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution, our representative with the joint committee of the American Association of Museums, American Library Association and SAA, the Committee on Archives, Libraries and Museums, CALM. CALM is responsible for the touring Collecting Cultural Object workshop.

[discussion of Joint statement on access to original material. Were comments being requested? To whom? By when?]

Ideas for proposed sessions for 2007 SAA conference

Ideas for the session proposals for the 2007 SAA conference were generally discussed, including museums of the gilded age, collaborating with for-profit organizations, the ethics of fees for service, particularly the use of images in museum archive collections, determining the right of access to collections and the ethics of use generally. Other approaches suggested were to use a case study approach to a session, and the topics for that included women instrumental in starting museums, various models of cooperative project management, particularly across different types of museums and the use of photo houses as a means of making your images accessible to a wider buying public.

Originally published August 24, 2006

posted by MAS Blogger @ 3:15 PM 0 comments

Society of American Archivists/Museum Archives Section Working Group Meeting Minutes 2006

Doc|Rtf versions

Wednesday August 2, 2006 National Gallery of Art/West Building Lecture Hall

---

The meeting began at 1:00 and was chaired by Kristine Kaske-Martin. The new section chair, Marisa Bourgoin was introduced. The primary topic to be discussed concerned intellectual property rights as well as use and reproduction policies, fees, and practices. The questions that we handed out at the beginning of the meeting were:

1. What do you charge for reproductions of collection material?

2. Do you charge for permission to publish: If so, how much do you charge?

3. Do you allow outside entitites use of your materials for profit making enterprises? Why or why not?

4. Does your institution use your materials for fund raising?

5. Who makes the rules we are to follow when it comes to matters that are both ethical and financial?

Maygene Daniels made the distinction between archival materials and works of art. While there are many issues involved in providing surrogates of works of art, there are many benefits to an institution to "publish" an archival piece rather than providing

it individually. The National Gallery of Art will charge a reproduction fee but not a use fee. The reproduction fee is a flat $20 (which doesn't include original photography) – they keep it simple and don't differentiate based on type of client. The archives are not the recipient of the funds, and the opinion was expressed that no one is going to get rich on reproductions of archival materials.

The Air and Space Museum charges a photography fee and a use fee.

MoMA (Museum of Modern Art) is scanning analog photos from 1929-2000 that will be available in 3 sizes of jpegs through ARTstor (23,000 images). There have been no rights restrictions imposed by ARTstor.

The Getty strategy is to put digital materials up in a OAI harvestable form. The policy is to not charge except for clearly commercial use. The legal department has determined that as a non-profit, the Getty organization can not provide an image to an individual or organization who will financially profit from it.

There was a discussion on staffing for rights and reproduction. MoMA outsources the supplying of reproductions.

Next centralized vs. distributed scanning was discussed and quality control was mentioned as an issue. The difference between staff orders (where it might be fine to scan from the archivist desktop) and public orders (where a centralized operation with standardized processes might be a better way to go) was brought up. It was predicted that within five years there will be DAM (Digital Asset Management) systems up on the web and there will be "image ATMs".

Exclusivity – no one spoke up to say that they will grant exclusive rights. There was an inquiry about Smithsonian/Showtime deal which is a 30 year contract that grants right of first refusal to Showtime for films using significant Smithsonian content. No archival personnel we consulted in the development of that contract.

Equal access – concensus was that there should be "no breaks for whiners" – that equal access and equal application of policy should be adhered to. But if an institution charges different amounts to different users for the same thing, are they adhering to the equal access provisions of archivists? Others felt there was nothing wrong with charging more from a commercial client. Some felt that reproductions are a privilege, and not the same as access – but the two concepts are getting increasingly tangled. The underlying question is whether the fee is a use fee or a service fee.

There was discussion about tax-free status, with some expressing the opinion that being not-for-profit automatically means that an institution is publically funded by virtue of a tax-free status.

Question – "Will anyone give a reproduction if they don't own copyright?" Some said they would provide a digital file on the word of the client that it was for research

purposes only, but others believe that the Digital Millenium Act does not allow for dissemination beyond the institution. The Computer Museum has copyrighted photos online that are orphaned works. They will provide a reproduction but with a statement that they are not providing copyright. They believe the materials have no significant commercial value and they will take an image down if requested.

The meeting adjourned at 3:00 and was followed by tours of the Archives of the National Gallery of Art.

Respectfully submitted,

Leah Prescott

Assistant Archivist

J. Paul Getty Trust

Originally published August 24, 2006

posted by MAS Blogger @ 3:12 PM 0 comments

VMFA Awarded Challenge Grant

VMFA AWARDED $610,000 NEH CHALLENGE GRANT THAT WILL STRENGTHEN ITS ART HISTORY LIBRARY

The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts has received a $610,000 challenge grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities that will be used to strengthen its 136,500-volume art history library, which is the largest museum library in the Southeast.

The grant, which is contingent on the museum raising $2.44 million in matching funds, will be used to endow the positions of head librarian and assistant librarian; for the acquisition of books for the core and rare-books collection; for archival and preservation materials; and for maintenance of climate controls.

The VMFA grant was among 171 grants and matching-funds awards worth $24.8 million announced recently by the NEH. Scholars and institutions in 43 states and the District of Columbia received NEH support.

"VMFA is extremely fortunate to have this splendid support from NEH. We are forming a library endowment fundraising committee to raise the match, and we expect this combined funding to have a very favorable impact on our library's services to the public," says Peter Wagner, vice president for development of the VMFA Foundation.

"This NEH grant marks a truly transformational moment for VMFA and its library, enabling the realization of our mission to become a major resource facility for art historical and humanities research," says Dr. Suzanne H. Freeman, the museum's head librarian.

Originally published August 15, 2006

posted by MAS Blogger @ 3:04 PM 0 comments