

MUSEUM

ARCHIVIST

Newsletter of the Museum Archives Section

Society of American Archivists

September 1997 Volume 11 Number 2

From the Chair...

There are several important pieces of Section business that need to be highlighted here.

At the Section meeting at SAA in Chicago, we need to elect a Vice Chair/Chair elect who will serve in that office for a year and then become Chair. I will call for nominations at the meeting and would be extremely glad to hear from anyone ahead of time who has ideas or would like to volunteer. Being Chair consists of coming up with ideas for the annual meeting, helping shepherd through session proposals, keeping track of projects (and occasionally being a bit of a nag), reporting to SAA, writing columns for *Museum Archivist*, and fielding questions from people interested in museum archives. It's a great chance to be in touch with other professionals in our field, and I highly recommend it. Don't be shy!

We will be having an informal meeting of Section officers in Chicago to talk about the Section meeting and plans for the year. I would like to invite anyone who is interested to attend; please give me a call or send an email and I will let you know where and when as soon as I do. The more the merrier. Some of our subcommittee chairs have served for several years. Volunteers are welcome!

This is the last issue of *Museum Archivist* to be mailed to non-SAA members. We hope to have

the next newsletter available on a website, although plans are not yet final. Two possibilities are SAA's site (<http://www.archivists.org>) and the Canadian Heritage Information Network (<http://www.chin.gc.ca>). One other thought is to pair up a Section member with each non-member who does not have Web access and have these partners mail out a copy. A letter to non-SAA members will be sent out with this issue for comments and suggestions.

As you will see elsewhere in this issue, several sessions of interest to museum archivists made it to the program this year--our discussions in the Section meeting bore fruit. I would like to spend part of our meeting this year on similar brainstorming. Have your ideas ready!

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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: December 15, 1997

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From the Chair continued

Connections

Someone once asked my why I go to SAA every year. Interesting question. When I was first a

member, I went to soak up every bit of information I could get my hands on. I still do a lot of that, but I find that the most important, useful, and enjoyable thing I do for those three or four days is talk and talk and talk with colleagues. Local and regional archival organizations are valuable, but nowhere can I find a concentration of people who do exactly what I do as at SAA. I suspect it is the same for many museum archivists, who are often "Lone Arrangers." Is it egotism to think that museums have a unique atmosphere and institutional culture? Probably not, or the Museum Archives Task Force wouldn't have become the Museum Archives Roundtable wouldn't have become the Museum Archives Section. I've been in sessions and workshops on institutional archives and business archives and we do have much in common with them in terms of core functions. But what a museum does--collecting, installing, and interpreting objects--is unique and it affects what we do and how we are able to accomplish it. This year, I'd like to spend some time in the Section meeting on an open discussion of at least one topic of general concern. This should help members connect with others with similar interests and needs and may also lead to future working groups, such as this year's one on appraisal. Looking over the responses to the survey that Maureen Melton compiled as Chair two years ago, I saw several requests for information, articles, sessions, or discussion of our position within our institutions. How do archivists, registrars, and curators interact and cooperate? What is the Archives priority in the institution? Can it be improved? Are we integrated or isolated? How can we initiate change? I'll propose this topic in the Section

meeting but will also call for others. Give it some thought! What topic is burning a hole in your archival pocket?

SECTION BUSINESS

From the Editor

Thanks to our wonderful section members, we have a great newsletter. Cheryl Leibold reports on institutional anniversaries. Two new museum archivists, Sarah Demb and Doug Stark, have written articles on their projects and will keep us filled in as the projects progress. Thanks also to Melissa De Medeiros and Maureen Melton for allowing me to share two previously published articles with you.

Maureen's article brings up some of the issues we want to talk about in special pre-conference meeting on appraisal. If you haven't read Deb's column, "From the Chair..." go back and do so now. This is a really exciting opportunity for us to talk about the kind of appraisal decisions museum archivists make daily. Plan to come to the annual meeting a day early and join us.

And speaking of the annual meeting, Fred Calabretta highlights activities of interest to section members in his column, "From the Program Subcommittee Chair."

Remember, this newsletter is written by and for museum archivists. It makes a wonderful outreach tool. (Show it around your institution and to your patrons!) So, let everyone know what you are doing. Write an article and send it to me! My telephone and number fax numbers, address, and email address are in the leadership list on page 2.

Paula Stewart

Amon Carter Museum

From the Program Subcommittee Chair

I look forward to seeing many of you in Chicago during SAA's annual meeting. Please bring ideas for session proposals to the Section meeting.

Discussion during last year's Section meeting was extremely productive and resulted in several sessions that are part of this year's program. Your input is important. If you will not be attending the meeting but have ideas for sessions, please feel free to forward them to me. My address and telephone number are in the leadership list on page 2.

If you will be in Chicago, the following sessions may be of particular interest:

Wednesday, August 27

TOUR: Chicago Historical Society and Newberry Library Repository Tours

Thursday, August 28

2 The Politics of Celebration

Alan L. Bain, Smithsonian Institution Archives, chair

Robert W. Rydell, Montana State University

Katharine T. Corbett, Missouri Historical Society

Nancy Birk, Kent State University

Leslie H. Gordon, Arts Festival of Atlanta

TOUR: The Art Institute of Chicago & Chicago Symphony Orchestra Repository Tours

Friday, August 29

22 Native American & Australian Aboriginal Participation in the Archival Process

Donna Longo DiMichele, Mashantucket Pequot Museum, chair

Craig Howe, Newberry Library

Anne-Marie Schwirtlich, Australian Archives

Karen Underhill, Northern Arizona University

30 Digging the Treasure: Access to Anthropological Records

Mary Elizabeth Ruwell, Consultant, chair

Nancy Parezo, Arizona State University

Deborah Wythe, Brooklyn Museum

J. Karyl Winn, University of Washington

SECTION BUSINESS

From the Program Subcommittee Chair continued

TOUR: Behind-the-Scenes: Museum of Science and Industry Archives Tour

Saturday, August 30

****Museum Archives Section Meeting****

Sunday, August 31

61 Negotiating with On-line Image Services

Susan Seyl, Oregon Historical Society, chair

Russell Lewis, Chicago Historical Society

Ed Karlin, Seaforth, Shaw and Fairweather

Bonnie Wilson, Minnesota Historical Society

63 Visual Ephemera in Archives

John H. Slate, Texas African American Photography Archive, chair

Hermina G. B. Anghelescu, University of Texas

Nancy Hadley, Houston Public Library

67 Exhibition and Preservation: An Uneasy Partnership

Mary Todd Glaser, Northeast Document Conservation Center, chair

Catherine Nicholson, National Archives and Records Administration

Robert Herskovitz, Minnesota Historical Society

Kathy Ludwig, Minnesota Historical Society

Louise Brownell, Chicago Historical Society

Fred Calabretta

Mystic Seaport Museum

WORKSHOPS & SEMINARS

Architectural Records Workshop Announced

The Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA) announces a day-long architectural records workshop, "Have You Got

the Blues: Architectural Records: Their Identification, Management, Storage, and Treatment," on Wednesday, November 5, 1997 at Syracuse University Library, Syracuse, NY.

The workshop is intended for architectural historians, architects, and library, archives, and museum professionals who have architectural records and drawings or other oversized paper-based materials in their care or collections. Speakers include Lois Olcott Price, Conservator of Library Collections, Winterthur Library; Joan Irving, Conservator, CCAHA; and Martha Hanson, Preservation Administrator, Syracuse University Library.

The workshop will be held from 9:00 am to 4:30 pm. Enrollment is limited to 30 participants. The \$75.00 registration fee includes supplementary materials and a box lunch. For a registration form, contact Susan W. DuBois, Preservation Services Representative, CCAHA, 264 South 23rd Street, Philadelphia, PA 19103; telephone: 215-545-0613; fax: 215-735-9313; email: ccaha@shrsys.hslc.org.

NEWS, NOTES, & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Haller Presents Watts/Petersen Lecture

Douglas Haller, Archivist of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, presented the Elizabeth Watts and Howard C. Petersen Annual Lecture on Wednesday, March 19, 1997. Doug's lecture, entitled "The Museum at Home and Abroad in the '20s and '30s," covered the museum's physical expansion and archaeological field work during the 1920s and 1930s, periods of extreme contrast in the nation and at the museum. Approximately 80 museum members attended the talk.

Douglas Haller

University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology

NEWS, NOTES, & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Carter Museum Receives Getty Grant

The Amon Carter Museum has received a generous grant from The Getty Grant Program to complete the arrangement and description of the Roman Bronze Works Archives. The Roman Bronze Works, established in Brooklyn, New York, in 1899 by Riccardo Bertelli, was the leading American fine-arts foundry during the first half of the twentieth century. Once the company's records are available for study, scholars will be able to examine the sculptor-foundry relationship in detail and translate their findings into important new scholarship about American sculpture.

The archives (1902-1977) comprise seventy-seven linear feet of records on bronze sculpture--freestanding figures and public monuments as well as architectural and decorative works--by almost every important American figurative sculptor active between 1900 and 1950. Among the sculptors represented in the collection are Anna Hyatt Huntington, Frederick MacMonnies, Paul Manship, Elie Nadelman, Frederic Remington, Charles M. Russell, and Augustus Saint-Gaudens. In addition, the archives includes 791 oversized architectural drawings documenting the decorative elements and fixtures cast by the Roman Bronze Works for ten major municipal and commercial buildings erected during the 1930s and 1940s.

Implemented in May 1997, the grant enables the Museum to provide staff to complete the arrangement and description of the paper files and the architectural drawings, prepare a finding aid, create a Research Libraries Information Network entry, and make the finding aid available through the Internet via the Museum's website.

Paula Stewart

Amon Carter Museum

Walker Art Center Receives NEH Grant

The Walker Art Center Archives was awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities Preservation and Access Grant for one year in the amount of \$22,000. The grant provides for one part-time archivist to process the papers of two former directors as well as curatorial, exhibition, and programming records from 1939 to 1960. These records measure 150 linear feet and represent a vibrant and important part of the Walker's

history--the transition from a gallery housing an individual's collection to a public art center established through the Works Projects Administration. The materials follow the growth of the Walker during the 1950s into a major contemporary art center, known internationally for its influential and innovative exhibitions, tours, educational, film, and performance planning. In addition the records chart the growth and development of the Walker's multidisciplinary permanent collections, including works by major American artists.

The goals of this project are to organize and describe these rich archival materials and to make them accessible to scholars, researchers, and the general public. This project will create access to a previously untapped source of information on the arts of the twentieth century. The final product will consist of a finding aid available in printed form as well as MARC-AMC records for the Research Libraries Information Network database.

For additional information contact Jill Vetter, Archivist, Walker Art Center, Vineland Place, Minneapolis, MN 55403, 612-375-7551, fax: 612-375-7681, email: JillV@wac.mus.mn.us.

Jill Vetter

Walker Art Center

REPORTS

Celebrating Institutional Anniversaries

At the November 1996 meeting of the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference in Wilmington, Delaware, there was a very well attended roundtable discussion of Archives in Cultural Institutions. It was apparent that a fair number of those present were quite interested in the subject of institutional anniversaries. There was some discussion of the internal and external politics of such events, the importance of the archivist to their success, and the potential for increased visibility for the archives.

As a result of the interest shown at that time, a session on "Celebrating Institutional Anniversaries" will be on the Fall 1997 MARAC program at Wilmington. Organized by Ira Galtman of American Express, the speakers will describe recent celebrations at The New York Times, Carnegie Hall, and Trinity Church.

In a few years the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts will begin to plan for its 200th anniversary in the year 2005. This had led me to collecting information about anniversary celebrations at other institutions and to keeping a kind of running list. For example, in addition to the three above are The Carnegie/Pittsburgh (founded 1895), University Museum of Archaeology of the University of Pennsylvania (1897), Brooklyn Museum of Art (1897), Smithsonian Institution (founded 1846, celebrated 150th anniversary in 1996), Philadelphia Orchestra (1900), Juilliard School of Music (1905). There's surely an article waiting to be written on the decade from 1895 to 1905 and why these years saw so many cultural institutions come into being.

I'll put together short pieces on institutional anniversaries as often as I can. Please send press releases, ideas, founding dates, and any other information or thoughts relating to institutional anniversary celebrations, and I'll try to share

ideas in this forum. Contact me at Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 118 N Broad St, Philadelphia, PA 19102; 215-972-7600; fax 215-972-5564; email pafa9@pond.com.

Cheryl Leibold

Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts

[Editor's note: Institutional celebrations also will be discussed in Session 2, "The Politics of Celebration," Thursday, August 28, at SAA's annual meeting]

Peabody Museum Archives Receives Grant For Re-Housing Of Historic Accession Files

In July 1997, the Peabody Museum Archives (Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University) entered the seventh month of a sixteen month grant from the Institute of Museum Services. This grant enables us to rehouse the Museum's 100 linear feet of accession files, many of which date back near the museum's establishment to 1867. The grant also has allowed us to reformat the Museum's catalog cards, which date back to 1932 and contain unique data and metadata relating to the Museum's acquisition history. Both accession files and catalog cards continue to be used daily by staff and researchers.

The accession files contain vital provenance information such as correspondence and field notes from the expeditions that collected the PM's vast archaeology and ethnology holdings. The catalog cards track the Museum's acquisition process. Both files and cards are crucial to staff and researchers, and a separate project to migrate the card information to a database is underway.

To date, the 49,000-plus catalog cards have been microfilmed by Harvard University's Imaging Services Department. The accession files are being rehoused in archival quality folders--we're up to the year 1940--and will be placed in

REPORTS

Peabody Museum Archives continued

archival document boxes in new cabinetry. Fragile items are sleeved in mylar, and some items will be transferred to the Archives from the Collections Department Reading Room. New and/or improved finding aids to the accession files are being produced, and folder and box labels will be generated from a database.

The IMS grant has enabled the Archives to hire 2-3 work-study students per term for the duration of the project to rehouse materials. They work under the supervision of the Archivist, who is working in tandem with T. Rose Holdcraft, Peabody Museum

Conservator. We look forward to reporting on the completion of the project in February 1998.

Sarah R. Demb

Peabody Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Harvard University

Whitney Museum Archives Project

Founded in 1930 by Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, the Whitney Museum of American Art was created to provide a place for American artists to exhibit their work. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, contemporary American artists went largely unnoticed by museums, collectors, and the public. It was not until Mrs. Whitney began buying and displaying the works of living American artists that American art became recognized and appreciated by American society. Beginning as early as 1907, Mrs. Whitney arranged an exhibition of American art at the Colony Club in New York City. A year later, she purchased four paintings from The Eight show, a historic exhibition in which a group of American artists chose to depict everyday life as they saw it rather than idealize it as in the European tradition. In 1914, Mrs. Whitney created the

Whitney Studio for artists to exhibit their work and to meet on a regular basis. Many artists, such as Edward Hopper, John Sloan, and Reginald Marsh, had their first one-man shows at the Whitney Studio and its successors, the Whitney Studio Club and the Whitney Studio Galleries. It was in 1929, after the Metropolitan Museum of Art refused to accept Mrs. Whitney's offer to donate her collection of over 500 works of art, that she decided to establish the Whitney Museum of American Art. The Museum opened to the public in November 1931 in a brownstone on West Eighth Street. Since that time, the Museum has moved twice; once in 1954 to land donated by the Museum of Modern Art and again in 1966 to the present Marcel Breuer building on Madison Avenue. During that time, the Museum has continued to reflect the changes and continuity in American art. Today, the Museum is the world's leading institution in collecting, interpreting, exhibiting, and preserving twentieth century American art. The Museum still champions living American artists much as it did in Mrs. Whitney's times.

Beginning in September 1996, the Whitney Museum began establishing an archival repository to maintain and make accessible its institutional history. Allotted \$50,000 from the building fund, the Whitney Museum Library hired three archives consultants to access the collection and to begin developing a program for the long-term care of the Museum's records.

Prior to last year, the Whitney Archives had progressed slowly in terms of organizing and making available its vast collection that spans most of the twentieth century. Beginning in the late 1960s, the Archives of American Art processed and microfilmed a small selection of the Whitney's archival records dating up to the present. Whitney Museum records now part of the Archives of American Art include the papers of Juliana Force (1916-1958), the first director of the Museum; artist files (1914-1966); American Art Research Council records (1942- 1948); the papers of Lloyd Goodrich, director

REPORTS

Whitney Museum Archives continued

from 1958-1968; and the papers of Mrs. Whitney. During the mid-1980s, the Whitney Library hired an archives consultant to process and to create a detailed finding aid of the Museum's historical records dating from 1930-1963. Housed in the Library, this collection consists of the founding papers of the Museum, Trustees' minutes, curatorial records and research notes, letters from artists, records of exhibitions and loans, and many other papers relating to the mission and achievements of the Museum. In the late 1980s, the New York State's Documentary Heritage Program prepared over 30 MARC-AMC entries for the Research Libraries Information Network (RLIN). These entries focus on curators, directors, artists, the Studio Club, administrative functions, and various photographic resources.

The current archives project focusing on administrative files from 1963 to the present is divided into two categories: long term and medium term. Permanent records totaling about 550 linear feet consist of material from the Office of the Director, curatorial departments, departments of education, development, finance, film, and video, and the library. Additional materials document the Museum's satellite branches in Manhattan and Connecticut, over sixty years of exhibitions, publications, and general museum operating procedures. The Archives also collects exhibition catalogs, posters, and merchandise produced for certain shows. Architectural drawings and models of the famed Breuer building and the present renovation project exist and are currently being maintained in the Archives. In addition to the institutional records, the Archives also houses a small collection of photographs. These photographs chronicle the early stages of the Museum with Juliana Force as Director and Mrs. Whitney's brief career as a sculptor. Accordingly, the Archives is particularly strong

in charting the history of the Whitney Museum as a leading museum of American art and in chronicling the development of American art in the twentieth century.

Within the permanent archives is a special collection relating to the career of Edward Hopper. After the death of Hopper and his wife, Josephine, the Museum received the entire artistic estate of Hopper's work. With over 2500 works, the Hopper Bequest is the largest gift in the Museum's history and reflects the long association between Hopper and the Whitney Museum, dating back to his first one-man show at the Whitney Studio Club in 1920. The Edward Hopper Archives, which totals 70 linear feet, chronicles the early life of Hopper through photographs, life documents, and correspondence. Other materials relate to the recent publication of the Edward Hopper catalogue raisonné and to selected exhibitions beginning in 1980. The Whitney Archives is planning to process and microfilm the Hopper materials and is in the early stages of researching possible funding sources for such an endeavor.

The second category of records are less permanent and totals approximately 650 linear feet. Half of this collection consists of files that are still being used regularly by the staff. The rest is no longer of value to the Museum and a records retention schedule is being

researched and established to aid in the disposal of noncurrent records. This project should be completed and implemented by the end of the summer.

Since being hired to design and implement an archival and records management program, we have conducted a records survey, assigned record groups, and prepared inventories of all the boxes. After we finish arranging and labeling the boxes in our off-site storage facility, we will begin processing the collection, writing finding aids, and integrating the collection into the larger mission of the Museum. After the collection is processed, it will be stored in acid-free folder

REPORTS

Whitney Museum Archives continued

and boxes. To assist with the processing, we plan to bring in interns from the Program in Archival Management, Historical Editing, and Historical Society Administration at New York University. Processing the collection will take a minimum of two years, possibly more, depending on staffing and the budget.

Information about the collection can be found on RLIN or through printed finding aids and inventories available in the Library. In the future, we would like to make the collection accessible through the Web, but for now the printed guides will suffice. Due to the fact that the collection is largely unprocessed, access will be given on a limited basis. For additional information, contact the Archives at 212-570-3624 or the Library at 212-570-3648.

Douglas Stark

Whitney Museum of American Art

ARTICLES

The Knoedler Archive and Library

*This article originally was published in **The Rise of the Art World in America: Knoedler at 150** (New York: Knoedler & Company, 1996), an exhibition catalog celebrating Knoedler & Company's 150th anniversary. The Archive is open to researchers by appointment. Contact Melissa De Medeiros at 212-794-0567 for more information or to schedule an appointment.*

The Rise of the Art World in America: Knoedler at 150 marks the first public presentation of the Knoedler Archive, even though the artifacts on display represent only a tiny fraction of the millions of individual items carefully compiled by Knoedler & Company since 1863. The Archive includes sales records, stock books, provenance

records of all works handled by Knoedler, records of restoration and framing at the gallery, an extensive photographic archive, and correspondence with artists, clients and other galleries. The Archive was also drawn upon for research on the loans from the

collaborating museums, and to everyone's delight new information about a number of works in the exhibition was discovered during this period.

In documenting the gallery's 150-year history, the Knoedler Archive provides an unparalleled record of the emergence and flowering of the American art world. Through the Archive one can trace the parallel trajectories of art connoisseurship, the growth of the art market, the appreciation of America art, and the building of the great private and public collections across the country.

The Knoedler Archive also provides a unique perspective on the social history of the nation. It reflects the economic growth of communities, shifts in taste, and even the evolution of America's cultural sense of place within the world. Above all, the Archive gives insight into the civic-minded patronage that led to the founding of great museums across America.

A number of catalogues on display in the exhibition have been drawn from the Knoedler Library which comprises more than 60,000 volumes. The library's holdings include many early auction, gallery, and museum catalogues and is considered to be among the finest art historical libraries in private hands in this country.

The Knoedler Archive has been a priceless resource to museums across the country because many of the works in their collections can be traced back to Knoedler. It has also garnered a reputation among scholars as an indispensable resource for original research, catalogues raisonnés, and major exhibitions. It has recently been drawn upon for the 1996 exhibition *Winslow Homer* organized by the National

ARTICLES

The Knoedler Archive and Library continued

Gallery of Art and *Whistler and Montequiou: The Butterfly and the Bat*, held at The Frick Collection in 1995.

Despite its daily use by scholars, the Archive is still largely untapped as a resource. Virtually every visit reveals exciting correspondence and other material that sheds new light on America's cultural heritage.

The archival portion of this exhibition honors years of dedicated service by generations of Knoedler librarians without whom this exhibition would have not been possible. In particular, I am indebted to my mentor and predecessor, Nancy Little.

Melissa De Medeiros

Knoedler Gallery

Preserving Love's Labors in the Museum Archives

The following is the text of a speech presented in Providence, Rhode Island, at the annual convention of the Art Libraries Society of North America. An edited version of this

presentation was published in the ARLIS journal, "Art Documentation," Volume 15, Number 1.

After agreeing to speak on this ARLIS/NA program, I learned that the session was entitled "Love's Labors Lost." Since the word "lost" is a bit of an anathema in the archival lexicon, I prefer to retitle it "Love's Labors Carefully and Permanently Preserved and Made Available to the Scholarly Community." I realize that this title is a little cumbersome, but as the archivist of an art museum, that is one of my top priorities: to insure that important records documenting exhibitions are carefully preserved for current and future researchers. And, in order to properly explain how and why these records should be preserved, I have to describe briefly how and why they are generated. We have to examine the anatomy of an exhibition in order to plan its archival fate.

To begin at the beginning, where does an exhibition start? Well, often in the imagination of a curator who is particularly learned or interested in a subject. At the MFA, there are eight curatorial departments, each of which has many staff members, interns, and supporters who contribute to a very creative climate for the generation of exhibition ideas. The chief curator of each department usually has the difficult task of choosing which ideas will be developed into full and formal exhibition proposals.

At many museums, after the curatorial staff has selected the subject matter for a potential exhibition and written a preliminary proposal, that proposal is reviewed by a museum administrative board or officer whose duties include overseeing the exhibition activities of the institution as a whole. At the MFA, curators present ideas for exhibitions to our director, who plans the exhibition schedule and accepts or rejects proposals for that schedule.

Approval of an exhibition proposal at the MFA begins what is always months and often years of exciting and demanding work that at some point will encompass almost every department in the museum. And the end result, hopefully, will be a visually beautiful and intellectually rich event for visitors to enjoy. It is during this transition from idea to reality that most exhibition records are created, documents that eventually will be preserved in the archives.

Once an exhibition is approved and placed on the schedule, an intense period of scholarly research begins. Artistic genres, historical movements, and cultural trends are examined. The lives and works of artists are closely studied through the use of printed materials as well as original documentation when available. In their capacities as research centers, the museum archives, library, and photographic services

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Preserving Love's Labors continued

department are usually consulted during this phase of the project.

Another crucial aspect of curatorial research involves the objects selected to illustrate the intellectual themes of the exhibition. Curators search their own departmental holdings, as

well as those of other museum curatorial departments, for objects that will illuminate the exhibition concept. The difficult work of tracing object provenance and identifying works of art in the collections of other institutions and individuals for loan requests continues. If the show is of sufficient size and scope to warrant a catalogue, the curatorial staff prepares catalogue entries as well as the important introductory, summary, and descriptive texts that reveal how the objects chosen fit into the intellectual framework of the show.

As the exhibition's opening date draws closer, the pace of curatorial activity is feverish. But fortunately, curators are not working alone. Many other departments have joined the cause. When funding from outside the institution is needed to mount a show, the development staff makes proposals for financial support to local, state, and national funding agencies, as well as to corporations, foundations, and private charitable organizations. The registrar's office carefully documents the arrival and departure of all loaned objects. The conservation staff completes object condition reports and provides restoration and preparation services when needed. The photographic services department produces or acquires photographs of all exhibition objects for the catalogue, for public sale, and for publicity purposes. They also verify credit lines and manage copyright issues. The publications staff designs and edits the exhibition catalogue. The design department plans appropriate settings for the display of objects. The education staff prepares brochures and pamphlets to enhance the visitor experience, as well as writing or reviewing interpretive labels and text panels. The library staff makes related materials available to visitors, updates the citation index for museum objects, catalogues the exhibition publications, and distributes publications to exchange partners.

Throughout this entire process, the financial staff tracks income and expenses. The public relations staff works to develop public interest and excitement through carefully orchestrated advertising and publicity campaigns. The buildings and grounds staff is responsible for most of the physical preparation of the show: they paint the walls, lay the carpet, and hang or mount the objects. Other public service departments, such as the restaurant, retail shop, and special events office, coordinate their menus and sales items for the anticipated rush of exhibition viewers. Those who work in museums know that the planning and implementation of an exhibition involves an amazing amount of time and effort. And, not surprisingly, it also involves an amazing number of records.

From the time the first proposal is drafted until the last acknowledgment is received, the records documenting an exhibition are active, that is they are needed on a continuing basis by the office that creates them. But once a show is over and a few months or years have passed, the interest and need of most departments for those exhibition materials lessens to the point where they can be considered inactive, rarely used. In a museum without an archives, this is the point at which loves labors begin getting lost. When there is no longer a frequent need to refer to the records of a previous exhibition, people have a tendency to begin moving those documents around to make room for new materials. That is when records are boxed up and stuffed onto shelves in the back room, relegated to old file cabinets, or worst of all, banished to dreaded attic and basement storage areas. In order to insure that exhibition records, as well as other vital museum documents, don't get lost in the space crunch and shuffle, a museum records keeper is essential.

ARTICLES

Preserving Love's Labors continued

At the MFA, some departments are strident about cleaning out their files quickly, calling almost before the ink has dried on exhibition records to request that documents be transferred to the archives. Other departments treat their records more like a fine wine--they like to age them for a very long time in the warmth of their offices.

Both approaches are perfectly valid and reflect differing work habits of the staff. Some departments, especially curatorial ones, do often refer to older records, using research materials from one exhibition to help plan another. Other departments have little need to keep records of completed work. While some archivists do establish retention schedules detailing how long records can remain in departments before being transferred to the archives, I prefer to let the departments decide how long they feel they need to keep exhibition records in their office. I do not see an advantage to forcibly removing materials that a department wants to retain. By working with the staff, by providing the service and access they want when they want it, the archives can become a friend and ally to each department. As long as the staff is aware that the archives is waiting to take their exhibition records as soon as they no longer need them, and as long as the archives staff knows which departments are holding onto their exhibition records and why, this cooperative approach can be as effective as a standardized records management schedule, while allowing flexibility and engendering good will.

There are a few guiding principles that should be followed in organizing exhibition records once those materials are in the custody of the archives, and a brief look back in time will help explain how and why those principles developed.

In the 19th century, the bad old days of archival practice in this country, museums, like other

institutions in America, valued records mostly for their current administrative use. As a result, early museum records were often routinely discarded when they were no longer needed by the staff who created them. Their potential historical value was seriously underestimated. Even when records were retained, they were often organized in ways that made using them at a later date quite difficult, if not impossible. Materials were arbitrarily grouped together in subject orders devised by well-meaning staff and usually accompanied by some Byzantine system of identification, the purpose and key to which were almost always lost over time.

By the 1920s and 1930s, things were looking up on the archival front. Museum workers were beginning to understand that their records might have enduring historical value, so staff began preserving documents more carefully. At the same time, record keepers across the country were starting to realize a fundamental flaw in arranging archives by subject matter alone. It finally occurred to archivists that if files created by different departments were arbitrarily removed and then joined together in some unholy alliance by subject matter, one could easily lose sense of who originally created the records and why, thus sacrificing the ability to understand the mission and activities of each

administrative unit. That loss of departmental wholeness was what eventually prompted archivists to understand that it was crucial first to organize records according to the office that created them, and then to develop subject access points as intellectual cross-references rather than by physical integration of materials from different administrative units. Thus American archivists came to accept what their European colleagues had been practicing and counseling for several decades, and a basic tenet of archival practice was adopted, complete with a French accent--"respect des fonds," respect for the office of origin.

Of course, this important change in archival policy has had a major impact on the organization of exhibition records. If we were

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playing by the old rules, when records documenting the exhibition-related activities of any museum department arrived in the archives, those materials could be separated out from the rest of that department's records and placed into an all-inclusive, museum-wide collection documenting a specific exhibition. To use a recent example from the MFA, it would mean that the records documenting the activities of all 37 MFA departments for the Monet exhibition would thus be joined together into one giant Monet subject collection. However, we don't play by those rules anymore. Archivists have to be concerned with more than just exhibition materials. We have to protect the integrity of all the museum's records. In order to accomplish this, we have to insure that all records received by the archives are organized and permanently preserved according to the office that created them.

Since exhibition records created by different departments do not arrive in the archives at the same time, and will not be integrated into exhibition subject collections, you might well ask how archivists keep track of what exhibition records have been transferred to the archives, what records need to be preserved, and where to store all those documents.

Archivists have to be adept at creating systems and procedures to accurately track the transfer, accession, disposition, and storage of records within the repository. The good news for financially constrained institutions is that these procedures do not necessarily require sophisticated technical equipment. Transfer authorizations, accession registers, record inventories, and location guides, some of the tools of the archival trade, can be handwritten, typewritten, or entered into a computer database. Of course, the ability to easily amend, update, and share information concerning records does increase dramatically if an archivist is lucky enough to have a PC or access to an institutional or external computer network.

After records are accessioned, the archives staff faces a range of organization, preservation, and storage challenges. In order to properly prepare records for permanent preservation, a series of steps are taken to "process" the records. During the processing stage, documents are removed from the acidic file folders and boxes in which they usually arrive, and then paper clips, staples, and other harmful items are removed. In

addition, original documents are separated from acidic materials, such as news clippings and photographs, for their mutual protection. This can be accomplished by using acid-neutral envelopes and other special materials for separating or interleaving. Each folder is also evaluated to determine whether there are photocopies, duplicates, or other repetitive materials that may be discarded. Once the files have been carefully culled, the records are transferred into acid-neutral folders and boxes for permanent preservation.

While the archives staff physically processes records, they also conduct an intellectual evaluation of those materials. If the department of origin has organized and transferred records in a clearly defined order, that order will be retained. If records arrive in no discernible order, an order will be established for them, usually an alphabetical, chronological, or subject arrangement. As records are processed and organized into logical groupings, known as record series, a careful list of the titles of each folder in each box is made. This box and folder list, along with notes about the provenance, arrangement, scope, content, and accessibility of the materials, constitute a finding aid to each record series. If and/or when the records are opened to the public, these finding aids are the starting point for researchers seeking access to any record series, the archival equivalent of the library card catalog. In archives that have access to computer equipment, more sophisticated finding aids can be created for internal databases,

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or a MARC-AMC series level description prepared for submission to bibliographic networks such as RLIN or OCLC.

While each record series is unique, there are often similarities and overlaps between groups of records received from different departments, especially when records document an institution-wide event such as an exhibition. That is why during the intellectual evaluation thought is given to what each series has in common with records previously received from the same and other departments. In the case of exhibition records, multiple copies of documents may have been preserved and transferred to the archives by several different departments. Sometimes these duplicates can be discarded. For example, the public relations department at the MFA regularly preserves a copy of all the press releases it issues to promote an exhibition. As a courtesy, they usually also send copies of those press releases to the curator who organized the show, for informational purposes. Subsequently, when curators transfer their exhibition records to the archives, duplicate copies of press releases are often found. Since the creation and distribution of press releases reflects a function of the public relations office, the duplicates in the curatorial files are usually discarded, since we know that the public relations staff has retained a record copy in their files.

Sometimes, however, multiple copies of records are retained for research purposes because the duplicated records reflect important functions of more than one administrative unit. At the beginning of my presentation, I described how at the MFA curators create exhibition proposals that are then presented to the director for approval. Curators almost always keep copies of these proposals in their files, copies which

eventually come to the archives along with the rest of the curatorial records documenting that exhibition. The original proposals, which have

been sent to the director, also eventually arrive in the archives, along with other records created or received by the director concerning exhibitions. A case could be made for discarding the curator's copy of each proposal and retaining only the originals in the director's files. Researchers could be referred to the original through a cross-reference. (These intellectual cross-references can be recorded manually or on a computer database, depending on what equipment is available.) Despite the fact that there is duplication, I usually retain both the original and the curator's copy because these proposals reflect an important joint function of two museum departments. Keeping a copy in the records of both offices insures more immediate access to these critical documents, and thus helps researchers more easily understand the mission and activities of both departments.

If you find these examples a little confusing, you're not alone. Archivists get confused about these issues all the time, and this is our profession. I could easily describe dozens of other problems arising from the issue of when and why an archivist chooses to keep certain documents and discard others, but I won't. Because the bottom line is that there are no hard and fast rules, no uniform and universal codes that effectively govern every aspect of how exhibition records should be preserved. Instead, we rely upon shared philosophies and some general yet flexible guidelines that can be adapted to deal with problematic records issues. Like all my colleagues in the field of museum archives, I hope that as a result of my education and training as an archivist, and after years of experience on the job and interaction with museum staff, I have come to understand the process of planning an exhibition well enough so that I can effectively preserve the records which best document that process and thus insure that loves labors will never be lost.

Maureen Melton

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Beyond "Just in Case" -- Appraising Museum Records

Invitation to a Museum Archives Section working group at the Art Institute of Chicago 1:00 - 5:00 PM on Wednesday, August 27, 1997

Does your museum archives appraisal policy sometimes come down to "let's keep it just in case"? Do you keep records, or do you select them? Is your storeroom about to burst?

Most museum archives are relatively new and our universe of records is relatively small (compared to, say, government archives). It sometimes seems easiest and most prudent to keep just about everything and, as a result, appraisal has gotten short shrift. We usually have a collections policy and records management schedule, but rarely any well-thought out appraisal policies or procedures.

As museum archives mature and grow, appraisal becomes more and more important. We usually keep most or all of Director's files and curatorial records, but others are more problematic. How should we handle records that span several departments and may involve significant duplication? If there isn't a central exhibitions office, how do we handle the records overlap among departments dealing with various components of an exhibition? Does the Registrar's Office handle all object documentation, or is some scattered in archival records? What to do with grant proposals and related files? Are marketing and product

development files significant enough to keep in their entirety? How should we document public programs? What about catalog drafts and working papers?

The working session will consist of discussions on developing appraisal policies and procedures for records specific to museums. Our goal will be to gather the results of our discussions into an article for *Museum Archivist* and possibly publish them as an official SAA "white paper." We will also report to the Section at the Chicago meeting.

Participants should have experience working in a museum's institutional archives and be willing to spend some time doing background reading and thinking about the topic ahead of time. There is a limit of 25 people for the group, so we ask that you register in advance with the form below. A reading list will be sent to participants.

Looking forward to seeing you!

Deb Wythe

Return (ASAP!) to: Deborah Wythe, Brooklyn Museum of Art Archives, 200 Eastern Parkway, Brooklyn, NY 11238

Name and job title:

Institution:

Address:

Telephone and email address:

Please summarize your experience working with museum records and note any types of records that are of particular interest or concern. Would you be interested in leading a portion of the discussion? On what topic? (keep going on another sheet if you want to!)