



CONNECTING TO COLLECTIONS

Presentation Outline

Note slide changes are noted with underlined text.

1. **Introduction.** Introduce yourself and the host organization.
2. **Collections Care.** Give a quick overview of the workshop and what you will be covering.
3. **Threats: What to Watch For**
 - a. What Threatens Collections? Ask audience to name threats to collections.
 - b. What to watch for. Announce you will be talking about things to look out for in your collections. Signs that will indicate the presence of threats.
 - c. Made for Use.
 - i. Most things we are trying to preserve weren't intended to last forever, they were intended to be used.
 - ii. Artifacts are rarely undamaged at the point they enter collections.
 - iii. INHERENT VICE. Define the notion of inherent vice: that there are integral elements in materials that will actually add to the deterioration of artifacts over time. Examples: Acid used in paper processing, deterioration of nitrate negatives.
 - iv. Touch on difference between preservation/restoration/conservation. Explain that today will be touching on preservation. Restoration of materials should be done in consideration of use of the artifact and conservation with the aid of a trained professional.
 - d. #1 Threat to Collections? Ask audience to guess the top culprit for damaging collections. (Hint on the image on the slide)
 - e. Handling
 - i. Accidents: Bumping or breaking materials happen when we handle collections.
 - ii. Wear: Extended handling can lead to wear. School children were allowed to touch this couch on tour to feel the horsehair. Today, wear marks show where their hands had been.
 - iii. Oils: The oils in our hands do leave a residue. The most susceptible materials are photographs and metals. In this photograph you can see the corrosion left behind in the outline of a fingerprint on this silver teapot.
 - iv. Invisible Dangers: Arsenic and other pesticides were used to help prevent infestations in furs, baskets and other susceptible collections. These materials are toxic to people and can be a danger in handling materials. A good rule of thumb is to treat everything as if it is contaminated.

v. Mitigation:

1. Wash your hands before and after you handle artifacts
2. Wear gloves
 - a. Cotton gloves should be clean and free from rubberized treads
 - b. Nitrile gloves should be powder free.
 - c. When moving materials always lift from most solid parts, not handles!
 - d. Use two hands when handling.
 - e. Plan out and clear your route before you move anything.
 - f. Box or sleeve materials to allow you to carry and handle without touching the items directly.
 - g. For materials frequently accessed, create a reference copy or photograph the materials so you can access the content without having to handle. Always label your boxes so you don't have to unpack and handle materials to see what is in there.

f. Temperature & Humidity: Can affect materials

- i. RH- Means relative humidity. Simple definition: how much moisture is in the air.
- ii. Mildew, Mold and Rust. Can be spurred on by too much moisture in the air.
- iii. Checking: in wood can be caused by fluctuations in the RH in areas.
- iv. Ideal Conditions
 1. 68-70° F
 2. RH 45-55%
 3. Key is Stability: Studies have shown that the most harmful thing to most collections is fluctuations.

v. Mitigation

1. HVAC –Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning Systems can be installed to manage temperature and humidity. They are expensive, though.
2. Monitoring can help you understand your storage area and provide data to help with grant applications for HVAC systems.
 - a. Hygrothermograph – measures and records humidity and temperature in an area.

- b. Data logger- device that will electronically take readings and record results that can be downloaded onto a computer.
 - 3. Microclimate. Storing things in boxes/cabinets can create a microclimate to help protect items against extreme fluctuations.
 - g. Light
 - i. Three kinds of light (Visible, UV, Infrared) all damaging
 - ii. Mitigation
 - 1. Cover materials. Something as simple as a sheet can provide protection.
 - 2. Put duplicates of materials on display, or limit time out on display.
 - 3. Reduce the lumens (intensity) of light fixtures or invest in some filters to cut down on UV light emitted from fluorescent or other light fixtures. Consider timers or motion sensors for light to reduce the time items are exposed.
 - h. Pests
 - i. What to Look For
 - 1. Damage, holes, bite marks, etc.
 - 2. Larval skins
 - 3. Cocoons, webs, casings
 - 4. Frass
 - ii. Mitigation
 - 1. IPM – Integrated Pest Management Plan is a comprehensive plan adopted by an organization to prevent pest infestations before they occur. Require buy in from all staff/volunteers.
 - 2. Eliminate food sources. Designate where people can eat and where food waste can be stored. Take out the trash often.
 - 3. Monitor. Use sticky traps and check frequently
 - 4. Freeze. Make liberal use of preventative freezing, especially for textiles. Use plastic to double bag materials in air tight seal. Place in the freezer until items are frozen through, remove and thaw completely prior to removing plastic bags. Repeat at least 2 times (I usually do three).

4. **Defining Collections: Collection Management Policies**

- a. What are collections? Ask audience to define collections. Example in photos given shows the loom at the Thomas Kay Woolen Mill in Salem and a variety of accessories found with it. Which items are “collections items?”
- b. Collections Management Responsibilities.

- i. **Physical Control.** The ability to find any item in your collection at any given moment. (Example: Do you have a covered wagon? Yes, here it is.)
 - ii. **Intellectual Control.** The knowledge of what content is in your collection at any given time. (Example: What do you have on the Oregon Trail? We have a covered wagon, 5 diaries, 3 letters, and a thimble and a fork that were brought by the Owens family over the trail and here is where you should look for them.)
 - c. **Collections Management Policies.** The Collections Management Policy should be the guiding policy document that helps an organization care for collections and manage its responsibilities for intellectual and physical control of collections. It should generally cover the following points. Distribute handout of sample policy construction.
 - i. **Authority.** Who in your organization is responsible for collections? Has the authority to take in a donation? Describe different ways organizations handle authority when it comes to museum collections.
 - ii. **Types of Collections:** Some museums distinguish between different types of collections, which receive different standards of care. Items to be used in classroom programs, which may be handled or used, should be identified as distinctive from materials in the museum's "permanent collection."
 - iii. **Scope of Collections Statement:** This statement should be like a mini mission statement for the museum and lay out what types of materials the museum is collecting. The statement could answer some the following questions:
 - 1. What types of collections (permanent, education, library)?
 - 2. What types of materials?
 - 3. What time periods are collected?
 - 4. What themes/topics does the museum collect?
 - 5. What geographic location?
5. **ACTIVITY:** Have participants draft a scope of collections statement for the host organization. If host organization already has a SOCS, have them compare what they drafted to what the organization is currently using.
- a. **Collecting Plan:** A collecting plan identifies a prioritized list of materials your organization will seek in the future. This provides a place to begin discussions in cultivating donors in the future and helps prioritize materials coming in.
 - b. **Ethics:**
 - i. **Personal Collecting.** Will your organization allow volunteers/staff to actively collect materials similar to those your organization is collecting? Why might this be frowned upon?
 - ii. Find a code of ethics statement and use it. No need to reinvent the wheel. Check out the American Alliance of Museum's.

- iii. Does your collection have specific concerns? They should be addressed here. For example, at the Oregon State Hospital Museum, they realized that some of their materials, especially photographs of individuals, could be considered medical records which have their own legal restrictions under state and federal law. Additionally, the board felt that they should institute a policy that would be even more restrictive than the policies written into the law to protect privacy of individuals.
- c. Collections Management Activity:
 - i. Acquisitions: How do things arrive at your museum? Donation? Loan? Bequest? Purchase? Who gets to say yes to things and how are they evaluated?
 - ii. Accessioning: Is the legal process of accepting materials into the organization's permanent collections.
 - iii. Loans. Are things loaned to your organization? How do you keep track of these things and know who to return them to? Typically museums try to avoid "permanent loans." What kind of issues might arise with a permanent loan?
 - iv. For the remainder of this workshop we are going to focus on documentation and care and storage of materials.
- 6. **Documenting the Collection.** Artifacts are only as important as their story. Take these two chairs. What makes them important? Worth saving at a museum? Their stories are important and in order to preserve an artifact's story, you need a good documentation system.
 - a. Numbering. One of the easiest ways to keep track of the collection is to implement a numbering system.
 - i. Accession Number. Each group of materials processed in an organization is given an "Accession Number" consisting of the Year the materials entered the collection, followed by the sequential donation number. So the fourth group of materials donated to the organization in 2009 would receive the number 2009.004. This Accession Number becomes the prefix used to number all individual items in the donation.
 - ii. Object ID Number. Is assigned to each individual item in the donation. So the first item in the fourth donation of 2009 would be...2009.004.0001 and so on.
 - iii. Alternative Numbering Systems. For objects and photographs it may make sense to give an individualized number to each item. For large collections of records and documents it may not make sense to number each page. Sometimes we will assign an accession number to a series of related records. Instead of numbering each item, we might create folder list to show what is there, but not number each individual piece. For example, it didn't make sense to take the time to individually number each of 300+ calling card engraving plates donated from a local stationary shop seen in the photo on the slide. Instead, we gave the whole collection one number and then created an index to help identify individuals present in the collection. Since the plates are filed alphabetically it is very easy to locate the individual plate should someone want to find it, and it took a lot less labor for us to process the collection.

- iv. Labeling. A challenge in numbering materials is making sure that the item itself is labeled. There is some debate about what is the best way to label materials, whether labels should be permanent or reversible. Some labeling methods include:
 - 1. Paper tags
 - 2. Pencil demarcations
 - 3. Barrier Labeling – reversible, semi-permanent labeling technique utilizing a reversible lacquer like Acryloid B-72 to put down a barrier onto which can be painted/marked the number. The layer of lacquer can be removed with a gentle solvent.
 - 4. Enclosure labeling- marking numbers on outside of envelopes or folders.
 - b. Cataloging: Is the process of formally documenting the appearance, history and use of an object.
 - i. Provenance: Chain of custody of ownership
 - ii. Provenience: From where (geographically) does the material come
7. **ACTIVITY:** Try your hand at cataloging. See suggested activity worksheet.
- a. Nomenclature: What is the item pictured in the slide? Is it a purse, handbag, pocket book? Using a nomenclature system can help museums use the same vocabulary when identifying specific objects. This becomes especially important when dealing with computerized databases and searching within systems.
 - b. Chenall's Nomenclature: The most frequently used nomenclature system in museums is the Chenall Nomenclature system, although there are numerous others. Chenall's system works by splitting up all man-made objects into (now 2010 edition) 10 different categories, under which subcategories and preferred names are listed.
 - c. Chenall's Example: Handcuffs. For this example of handcuffs, Chenall's system places handcuffs:
 - i. Category: Tools & Equipment for Science and Technology
 - ii. Sub-Category: Regulatory
 - iii. Name: Handcuffs
8. **ACTIVITY:** Nomenclature look-up. See Activity Sheet.
- a. Condition Reporting: Periodic checks into the condition of certain materials in the collection can help spot and treat problems before they occur. One way to record these checks is through condition reporting. Condition reports are a written report describing the current status of an item. Condition reports include:
 - i. Date of report.
 - ii. Description of overall damage observed on object. Be as precise as possible. You can use a drawing to help illustrate.
9. **ACTIVITY:** Cataloging and Condition Reporting. See Activity Sheet.

- a. Collections Management Systems: A system for managing your collections records is important. This can range from vertical files organized by accession number to a computerized database. Databases can be as simple as a spreadsheet to as complex as purchased collections management software like PastPerfect.

10. Storage Concepts. Care and storage of materials in a collection is very important. Here is an overview of some concepts to help make sure your storage is as safe as possible.

- a. Key Words. When looking for storage materials you should look for products with these key words.
 - i. Inert. Some manufactured plastics have the tendency to “off gas” or emit gases over time as they age. This can be harmful to other materials. When looking for plastics, you want something that is “inert.”
 - ii. Acid Free/Lignin Free. When buying paper-based products you are looking for materials that are acid and lignin free. Acids in paper and lignin as it breaks down over time will add to the deterioration of paper causing it to discolor and become brittle.
 - iii. Photo Activity Test (PAT) Passed. The Image Permanence Institute (a non-profit which works on developing preservation practices for photos) has a test they use to help evaluate storage products for photographic materials. If something is PAT passed, it is a good indicator that it is safer to use with photographs.
 - iv. Unbleached/Unsize. When purchasing fabric based materials, look for materials that are unbleached and unsize. And always wash them really well.
 - v. Buffered/Unbuffered. Some archival supply firms will sell products coated in an alkaline substance, with the idea that it could buffer or neutralize the effect of acids in the storage areas. Buffered materials can have negative effects when used with protein-based materials like wool, leather or silk. As a rule of thumb, I use unbuffered materials unless I am absolutely sure what the material I am storing is made out of.
- b. Boxing. Boxing materials is one of the simplest ways to protect materials. Boxes provide a microclimate to help buffer against climactic changes in your storage facility, keep dust out and light, and provide some structure to protect fragile items.
 - i. Use Acid Free Boxes
 - ii. Use Acid Free Tissue Paper to create protective pillows around objects to prevent them from contact with other materials. Archival tissue paper is sold in Buffered and Unbuffered varieties. Again, remember that buffered materials should be used with plant based materials (paper, cotton, linen, wood) but avoided with protein based materials (wool, leather, silk). As a rule of thumb, use unbuffered if you are unsure.
 - iii. Trays/Dividers. Some companies sell pre-packaged trays and dividers that can be used to create layers inside boxes and keep objects from resting on other objects.
 - iv. Labels. Always label your boxes. Keep a current list of what is inside the box visible on the outside. This will cut down on handling, if you are not having to rifle through the box each time you need to find something.

- c. Interleaving. Interleaving works best for flat collections: documents, newspapers, photos, negatives. It is a simple method to help protect materials. When choosing materials for photographic storage ask about if it has passed PAT standards.
- d. Sleeving/Envelopes. Creating a paper sleeve or envelope is an easy (and cost efficient way) to store some prints and negatives. For storage of some photographic prints that are often used, polyester (PET) sleeves can provide a safe way to handle and look at the materials. Keep in mind though, that plastic is not as breathable as paper and a sleeve can seal photographs in their own juices. Again, make sure that materials have passed PAT standards. In this slide you can see both a homemade sleeve for a glass plate negative and a commercial envelope used to house a frequently accessed photo.
- e. Digitizing. Scanning or photographing materials, especially those in poor condition or frequently used can provide both a reference copy to save handling original materials and provide a baseline for what deteriorating materials used to look like. There are many lower cost scanners and cameras that can create high quality images. Digital copies won't replace the original, but they can help mitigate the effects of use.
 - i. When scanning images:
 - 1. Scan to at least 300 DPI
 - 2. Use and uncompressed photo file like a .TIF file. These files will take up more room, but they will last longer than compressed files like .JPG.
- f. Encapsulation. For oversized paper documents like maps or newspapers that are frequently used by researchers or others at the museum, encapsulation makes a nice way to keep the documents safe and accessible.
 - i. You will need sheet Mylar (trade name for Polyester PET), scissors, and adhesive tape.
 - ii. Cut two sheets of Mylar, allowing a margin for the adhesive and a little extra room. You do not want any of the document to come in contact with the adhesive.
 - iii. Place document on one sheet, lay adhesive and then place the top sheet on, sandwiching document. Make sure to leave an "air hole" at the top to allow for some circulation and to make it easier to take a part if needed.
 - iv. Monitor encapsulated pieces to make sure they do not "slip" and fall into the adhesive.
 - v. Not recommended for very fragile or important documents, or of documents with pencil or crayon surfaces that could be affected by static electricity.
- g. Rolling. Textiles can be stored in boxes, but you run the risk of developing wrinkles and creases. Rolled storage for large textiles like blankets and quilts is recommended.
 - i. You will need:
 - 1. Wooden Dowels
 - 2. Cardboard Tubes
 - 3. Tin Foil

4. Acid Free Tissue Paper (unbuffered for wools and silks)
 5. Unbleached Muslin (or a well washed, white sheet from Goodwill)
 6. Rack.
 - ii. Take cardboard tube and wrap it in tin foil. This will keep the acids from leaching out of the tubes into the textile. Wrap on smooth to avoid hard ridges.
 - iii. Wrap a layer or two of acid free tissue around the tube to cover the tin foil.
 - iv. Carefully roll textile onto tube, interleaving with a piece of acid free tissue paper.
 - v. Cover rolled textile in muslin or sheet and loosely tie cover on to keep dust and light off.
 - vi. Use dowel to hang roll on a rack.
11. **Conclusion.** Taking care of collections is a time consuming and expensive chore. Here are 9, low or no cost things you can do to improve collections care at your institution today.
- a. **Glove Up.** Invest in a pair of cotton or nitrile gloves, and use them especially for handling metal or photographs. Look for them in your local drugstore/beauty product store. Cotton gloves shouldn't have any sticky beads or treading and Nitrile gloves should be powder free. If even gloves are out of your price range, make sure to **Wash Your Hands** before and after handling materials.
 - b. **Box It.** Store materials in boxes. This will keep them clean of dust, protected from light, provide a buffer against temperature fluctuations and give easy handles and added protection when moving. If you have a choice, look for Acid Free/Lignin Free materials. Avoid newsprint and bubble wrap as they can discolor and damage fragile materials.
 - c. **Raise It.** Store things 2 inches off the floor. Buys you some time in case of emergency and allows you to clean out under there.
 - d. **Keep Things Where You Are.** What's good for people (stable temperatures) is good for artifacts. Consider keeping most fragile items in the most stable environments. Avoid basements and attics.
 - e. **Monitor.** Set up a schedule to check your collections on a regular basis to look for evidence of deterioration or pest activity.
 - f. **Digitize.** Scan photos and records. This allows you to access and share fragile materials without having to pull them out so often. It will also give you a copy prior to damage that may occur in the future. Scan to an uncompressed file type like .TIF.
 - g. **Record.** Most collections are only as important as their stories. Create a system for keeping records and maintain it.
 - h. **Ban Food** in collections storage and processing areas. Make sure everyone knows where food should and shouldn't be and take out the trash regularly.
 - i. **Freeze It.** Bringing in a new textile? It should go into immediate quarantine until it has been frozen. Put it in double plastic bags and into the freezer. Remember to leave it in the

bag until the materials are back to room temperature to prevent condensation getting in places it shouldn't be.