



Archives in a Museum Context

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Webinar Outline

1. Introductions
2. Archives 101
3. What materials can be found in museum archives
4. Case study exercise
5. Questions/Discussion

Resources

- ▶ Deborah Wythe, *Museum Archives: An Introduction*, 2004, SSA.
- ▶ Rachel Chatalbash, Susan Hernandez, and Megan Schwenke, *Museum Archives: Practice, Issues, Advocacy*, 2023, SSA.
- ▶ "[Museum Archives Guidelines](#)," SSA, 2022
- ▶ "[Museum Archives Section Standards and Best Practices Working Group](#)," SSA.
 - ▶ "[Standards and Best Practices Resource Guide](#)," SSA
- ▶ Gregory S. Hunter, *Developing and Maintaining Practical Archives*, 3rd Edition, 2020, ALA
- ▶ Mary Lynn Ritzenthaler, Diane Vogt-O'Conner, *Photographs: Archival Care and Preservation*, 2006, SSA

How are you interacting with archives in your museum?

- ▶ Exhibit Research
- ▶ Collections Research
- ▶ Marketing
- ▶ Building an education program
- ▶ Developing a fundraising campaign
- ▶ Or are you an “accidental archivist?”

Example Arrangement for IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts (RG09)

► **Processing Plan--RG09—Records of the IAIA Museum of Contemporary Native Arts**

Suggested Series Arrangement:

Series 1—Directors Office, 1990-2012

Museum Building Renovation, 1990-1992

***Vision Project/Manifestations: New Native Art Criticism* Publication, 2010-2013**

Series 2—Office of Chief Curator/Exhibitions, 1990-2012

Curator Files

Exhibition Files

General Files

Series 3—Office of Curator of Collections/Registrar, 1990-2012

Series 4—Office of Education/Membership, 1990-2012

Education Program Slides will be removed to RG09

Series 5—Audio Visual—photos, slides, video, audio, computer media

Exhibit slides will be removed to RG09

Series 6—Misc

Particularities about stewarding archives for a University Museum

- ▶ The museum is a department of the university, not a stand-alone entity
- ▶ The museum is built into the fabric of the institution and thus, many of the materials cross-over into other departments (and shared record groups)
 - ▶ A/V (RG06)
 - ▶ Printed Matter (RG02)
 - ▶ Press Clippings (RG01, RG10)
- ▶ The division of what stays with the museum and what is transferred to the archives is sometimes unclear
 - ▶ Object Files
 - ▶ Loan Records
 - ▶ Donor records

What are archives?

- ▶ Three possible meanings:
 - ▶ Materials—Items created in the conduct of affairs and preserved because of their enduring value
 - ▶ Place—The building or part of a building where archival materials are located
 - ▶ Agency—Division within an organization responsible for maintaining materials with enduring value

The Archival Mission

- ▶ Identify Records and papers of enduring value
- ▶ Preserve records and papers of enduring value
- ▶ Make records and papers of enduring value available for use

The Museum Context

- ▶ Museum archives is both a resource for the administration and for researchers
 - ▶ The archives assists all department by providing information and documents for internal research
- ▶ Museum records are created to carry out many functions
 - ▶ Governance and Executive Administration
 - ▶ Collections
 - ▶ Curatorial activities
 - ▶ Registrar
 - ▶ Conservation
 - ▶ Programs and Projects
 - ▶ Development, Outreach, and administration
 - ▶ Museum buildings
 - ▶ Special collections

Archives 101



- ▶ An archivist's role consists of several different activities
 - ▶ Acquisition & Accession
 - ▶ Selection & Appraisal
 - ▶ Arrangement
 - ▶ Preservation
 - ▶ Description
 - ▶ Access & Use

Acquisition & Accession

- ▶ For the sake of discussion, we will be focusing on museum archives generated by the parent institution
- ▶ For historical societies and special collections, the primary responsibility involves collecting records not generated by the parent institution
 - ▶ Acquisitions should be in line with a formal collections policy
 - ▶ Must establish legal, physical, and intellectual control

How are museum archives acquired?

- ▶ Museum records are all over the museum
 - ▶ Offices and filing cabinets
 - ▶ On computers and hard drives
 - ▶ In the cloud
 - ▶ Closets, offsite storage, sheds, etc...
- ▶ That said, not all museum records become 'archives'
 - ▶ "Records do not become archives until their usefulness has shifted"
 - ▶ T.R. Schellenberg, *Modern Archives*, 1954
- ▶ Active vs. Non-Active Records Survey

Active vs. Non-Active Records Survey

- ▶ If a museum is starting an archive from scratch, it's best to start with a records management or "Single Repository" survey
 - ▶ Intended to identify all of the records of an organization or institution
 - ▶ Attempts to be as comprehensive as possible, including both active and non-active records in the survey results
 - ▶ Active Records are those currently being used for their original purpose
 - ▶ Non-Active Records are those where the original usefulness is no longer necessary
- ▶ Survey Goals
 - ▶ Assist Researchers
 - ▶ Foster Administrative efficiency
 - ▶ Promote preservation
 - ▶ Improve planning for archival programs
 - ▶ Educate and train

Selection and Appraisal

- ▶ What should we keep?
 - ▶ Does your museum have retention/destruction schedules for records?
 - ▶ What records are essential for the day-to-day operations of the museum?
- ▶ Archival Value System
 - ▶ Operating (Short)
 - ▶ Administrative (Short)
 - ▶ Fiscal (Short)
 - ▶ Archival Value (Permanent)
 - ▶ Includes evidential, informational, historical, and research value

Arrangement

- ▶ Arrangement is the process of establishing physical control over archival holdings to facilitate descriptive media
- ▶ Archives are arranged in aggregates, or, groups of like records based on the concepts of **provenance** and **original order**
 - ▶ Archives do not follow the item level cataloging system used in museums
 - ▶ Archives can be arranged using the Five Level System
 - ▶ Repository (Museum of Contemporary Native Arts)
 - ▶ Collection (Director's Office)
 - ▶ Series (Correspondence)
 - ▶ File (NEH Grant, 2019)
 - ▶ Item (Final Report)
- ▶ Use the organizational chart for the museum as a base line arrangement schema

Description

- ▶ Description is the process of establishing administrative and intellectual control over archival holdings through the preparation of **finding aids** or other visual media
- ▶ Archival materials are described in order to facilitate access
 - ▶ Described in groups
 - ▶ Placed in context by means of historical and biographical notes
 - ▶ Description is multi-level (mirroring the arrangement)
- ▶ Three types of Finding Aids
 - ▶ Internal Control Tools (Accession worksheets, surveys, location registers)
 - ▶ In-house Reference Aids (container lists, indexes, catalogs)
 - ▶ External Reference Aids (Calendars, inventories, guides)
- ▶ Most archival description follows DACS (Describing Archives: A Content Standard) and EAD (encoded archival description)

Access & Use

- ▶ Access to archives is based upon the concept of **competing rights**
 - ▶ **The right to know vs. the right to privacy**
 - ▶ It is sometimes necessary to restrict certain materials
 - ▶ A written restrictions policy is recommended to safeguard both access and privacy interests
- ▶ Reasons for Restrictions
 - ▶ Privileged information concerning administrative affairs
 - ▶ Personal information
 - ▶ Financial records
 - ▶ Culturally sensitive

What permanent materials might be included in a museum archives?

- ▶ Object files
- ▶ Donor files
- ▶ Exhibition Files
- ▶ Education program records
- ▶ Membership records
- ▶ Fundraising records
- ▶ Financial records
- ▶ Staff papers
- ▶ Capito projects
- ▶ Oral histories
- ▶ Blueprints/architectural drawings
- ▶ Ephemera
- ▶ Public Relations Materials
- ▶ Audio/Visual

Case Study Exercise

- ▶ A mixed material donation comes into the museum from a long-time volunteer. It is approved by the acquisition committee, and you begin the process of accessioning the materials into your collection
 - ▶ The donation includes
 - ▶ Four artworks with complete provenance paperwork and bills of sale
 - ▶ 2 boxes of magazines, journals, and newsletters
 - ▶ 1 box of museum related flyers and brochures
 - ▶ 1 box of photographic materials related to museum activities (including prints, negatives, CDs, and a hard drive)
 - ▶ How do you proceed? What goes where?

Questions & Discussion



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