

REGISTRARS' REPORT

From The Editor: Museum Archives

The concept of an institutional archives is relatively new to most museum professionals. We are aware that some papers should be retained, but are uncertain of which ones, for how long, and under whose care. We wonder whether specific documents belong with the director, the curator of the registrar — being unsure, we sometimes place copies in each location!

Most registrars choose to retain as much paperwork as possible, from the deed of gift to the casual memo reporting the visit of a donor or lender. Many registrars consider all their files to be perpetually active and have long been unable or unwilling to consider releas-

ing any documents to a more central 'archives.' We might add that this tendency is shared by many museum professionals other than registrars.

Today, a new understanding of museum records is evolving. The idea of a museum archives, documenting the growth and development of an institution as a whole is emerging. The archivist, a specialist in the care and organization of documentation, is entering the museum field. The Archives of American Art has long taken an active interest in the preservation of museum records. The Archives' staff has enthusiastically provided guidance and support to any museum which ex-

pressed concern about the care of its own documents. In late 1979, the Archives organized a conference on the subject of museum archives at the Smithsonian Institution Belmont Conference Center. At the meeting, it became clear that museums must take steps to more effectively protect and care for institutional documents.

All of the contributors to this issue were participants at the Belmont Conference. It is our hope that this issue will inform the reader of the need for museum archives, and will further provide some basic suggestions for establishment of institutional records centers.

LET'S MAKE AN ARCHIVES

By Hugh A. Taylor, Provincial Archivist, Public Archives of Nova Scotia

We all live in a world of switches which distinguish our electric age. These give us instant light and instant darkness, instant communication and instant silence. The binary system of automated calculation is a form of switch from zero to one and back to zero. These examples should serve to remind us that artifacts and archives (which are specialized forms of artifact) either exist or they do not and to discard them is to turn off the switch, suddenly, drastically and finally; unlike the switches with which we are familiar there is no reversal, no reset button.

I believe that this reality is often overlooked when museums, (or any other institution) consider saving their records. Much thought is given, perhaps prematurely, to "minimum standards" when the first essential may be to make sure that the dusty heap of plans in the corner does not go to the garbage, or that all correspondence over two years old is not junked. There are two stages involved: saving the records and setting up an archives, although the two tend to merge together. There is a real danger that nothing will be done because "minimum

standards" cannot yet be achieved and a sub-standard operation might be viewed as unprofessional, or open to criticism by archivists. In fact, almost anything may be better than nothing if the one-way switch is not to be turned off. Please do not misunderstand me. I entirely support the *Draft Guidelines* and helped to prepare them; they suggest realistic standards for setting up an archives, but meanwhile there is the heap on the floor . . . and that is where you may have to begin!

The first item you will have to create in a "do-it yourself" archives is time, and by this I mean survival time for the records, not staff time to work on them. If these records have been lying around for a few years there is a fair chance that they will be worth keeping. Get them into a cupboard with a lock or onto a shelf marked "archives" and you may have preserved your earliest material which will be more important at this stage than worrying about how to find the time for processing or listing. In the museum world of more spectacular artifacts, stray bundles of papers of no great antiquity will be the cinderellas and orphans, and these should be secured first of all. Other papers may be jealously guarded by curators, often for very good reasons, but at least they are guarded and

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REGISTRARS' REPORT

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Why
Create

an
Archives?

A formal archives program will ensure that institutional records are preserved and arranged so that valuable information can be easily retrieved. The establishment of a professional archives ensures that all of an institution's documents will be carefully reviewed and retained or discarded on the basis of their administrative, legal, fiscal or historical value.

In a time of increasing demand for institutional accountability, museums must be able to document their programs and activities. Files created by past administrators and curators, or acquired by a museum in the course of its work, document internal museum development and external relationships with a wide variety of museum constituencies. The museum archives can be a valuable tool in institutional management and in research of our cultural history. ■■

What is Records Management?

In the publication, *Information and Records Management*, Norma Hinds defined records management as "the application of control over recorded information . . . having the right information, in the right order, in the right place, in the hands of the proper person." When correctly applied, the principles of records management aid in controlling the flow of data and information to record users; permit easier faster examination and processing of records; improve operational efficiency of the institution, and, as a side benefit, can improve the appearance of the work environment. The records manager is prepared to advise on the storage, retention and disposal of all institutional records, both active and inactive; aid in the development of consistent filing systems; advise in the development of forms; provide information on contemporary methods of information control, including micrographics and automation. An effective records management program greatly facilitates the work of the archivist. ■■

LET'S MAKE AN ARCHIVES

Continued from page 1

stand a reasonable chance of survival. All I would ask is that if you do come across papers in some sort of order, try and keep them that way when you box them.

Contrary to popular belief, archives are remarkably tough. They will stand high temperatures and very dry air (if nothing better is available) for a limited period of time, and damp conditions for considerably less time, so don't feel badly if your precious boxes are dumped next to the hot water pipes for a while. This will not be the end of the world, but is certainly not a final solution.

I cannot emphasize too strongly the importance of this first stage. As one who has started up three government archives, I have nothing but praise and thanks to those who have gathered a few dusty boxes or defended a cupboard full of material until such time as an archives was set up. These were very practical acts of faith which involved little of the believers' time, but a good deal of their perception.

Assuming that the next stage is imminent and some kind of archival provision appears possible, make sure that there is enough space to operate so that papers can be laid out and arranged prior to description. A great deal of time (and therefore money) can be wasted sorting a box at a time when no order exists. As with a jigsaw puzzle, you need all the pieces on the table. Once a rational order is evident or has been determined, and the final arrangement effected, then the boxes may be taken one at a time for a more detailed description of their contents and sorting space is no longer a problem.

Just how much space you will get is going to depend on priorities, and archivists are like secretary birds who look for crocodiles with the clout to give us what we need! You can care

for the archives in a quiet backwater of the institution where you may be either ignored or even extinguished; how much better to be placed close to the seat of power as suggested in the *Guidelines*. If you now have a toehold for your archives and some time to devote to them, you must first establish control over the material by accessioning the various groups. The simplest accession number is by year and collection, for instance 80/6 would be the sixth collection received in 1980. The accessioning process is basically similar to museum procedures and may be sufficient overall control for a while unless the archives is a large one. No attempt will be made here to describe subsequent archival arrangement and description. There are several manuals and courses available; a neighboring archivist may also help with advice.

A measure of physical control is also necessary and a storeroom with a lock will prevent informal access to the material by staff which could result in misfiling and losses due to absent minded "borrowers" who fail to return what they take. All this will require firmness with a smile. The fact that you have saved and described material will quite properly lead to its use and this you will have to control in a purely custodial sense. Curators should appreciate this point.

In archives, you should be aware of all media and include maps and plans, photographs, slides, pictures, posters, film and video tape as well as the traditional manuscripts. Knowing what to keep and what to destroy requires experience and good judgement. Don't hesitate to seek a second opinion from an archivist who is used to decisions of this kind.

Don't try to do more than you feel you can manage in the time available, especially in the detailed organization and description of collections which may require considerable work and the advice of an experienced archivist if the "contextual" value of the various elements is not to be lost. For the rest, use the *Guidelines* and adapt them to your situation. Good Luck! ■■

TOTASS or Not?

By Carole Schwartz, Archivist, Cincinnati Art Museum

The most puzzling decision for new archivists is which documents to discard and which to retain. Judgement must be made about categories of records to accept for the archives, and, after their arrival in the repository, which items within the file to retain or discard. Fear of losing something useful most often prompts the archivist to keep too much. However, unnecessary documents occupy expensive space and complicate retrieval. This archives discards thirty to forty percent of the pre-selected records it receives. Other institutions report much higher percentages.

An account of the selection process at this art museum should help inexperienced archivists realize the decisions are not as frightening or difficult as they may imagine. Common sense is most often the rule. Some categories of records (curatorial files on the Museum's collection, conservation records and personnel files) are outside the domain of the archives at the Cincinnati Art Museum.

DOCUMENTS DISCARDED:

From early Director's correspondence:

- vendors cards (unnecessary)
- letterpress copies (duplicated in bound letterpress volumes)
- acknowledgement cards for receipt of publications (ephemeral)
- newspaper clippings (duplicated in historical scrapbooks)

From exhibition files:

- copies of catalogues (kept permanently in publications section of archives). Exception: those catalogues from the Registrar's files which include loan numbers noted in the margins.

Departmental monthly budgets (financial reports appear in other documents retained)

Catalogs, invitations, programs in departmental files (stored permanently in the publications section of the archives).

Departmental memos announcing meetings and other routine procedures (judged inconsequential). Important meetings are usually recorded in minutes which are retained.

Literature from professional societies, agenda from professional meetings, except for those showing active participation of a museum staff member.

Purchase orders for supplies (routine)

Check stubs from payroll and payment of invoices for supplies and services (routine and unimportant).

Routine semi-monthly and monthly accounting records (a larger, more significant view of financial activity appears in other records).

Cash receipts for payment of monies owed to the museum (routine).

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Payroll records (a voluminous record of a routine procedure). However, we are keeping those from before 1900 and one month's records for one year in each decade to reveal changes in staff size, positions, and salaries.

Records of museum payment of taxes (totals appear in fiscal summaries which are retained)

GI bill loan payments to art students (routine accounting records).

Daily attendance sheets from two departments (record copy kept by a third department)

Insurance forms for loan works (specific values for each piece are reported in loan agreements which are kept)

Contracts for permission to publish a photograph of a piece owned by the Museum (use of a photograph is noted in a separate record which is retained)
separate record which is retained)

DOCUMENTS RETAINED:

All early correspondence to directors including letters from artists, exhibition entrance forms (these contain artists' signatures and their own titles for their works), telegrams, acknowledgements of Museum memberships given to prominent individuals

Agenda and minutes of important meetings

Communications to and from important committees (Board of Trustees committees, Centennial Committee, and Development Committee)

Personnel procedures and policies handbook which includes job descriptions

Departmental annual reports since they are more complete than the version in the published annual report

Grant proposals

Files on past temporary exhibitions
Statistics on art classes, tour groups, and other functions (show patterns of development)

Files on special events and activities

Women's Committee newsletters

End of event reports from the Assistant Director's Office (evaluate the success of particular events)

Weekly activity sheets (list tours, lectures and other events)

Press releases (show the range of publicity and the Museum's public relations activity)

Text of speeches delivered and articles published by staff members

Treasurer's checks for restricted funds (show proof of purchase of works of art)

General ledgers (give summaries of all accounts for the fiscal year).

Journal vouchers for each fiscal year (provide the basis for entries in the general ledger).

Balance sheets for the last month of each fiscal year (give a total for financial transactions since the Museum's founding).

Worksheets for the last month of each fiscal year (show operations for the entire year: endowment and other income, gifts, bequests and expenses).

Curatorial files for deaccessioned objects.

Loan files of our objects to other institutions including receipts for works of art (often the only verification that a piece has actually been loaned for exhibition) and shipping orders for Museum objects (often the only record of loan numbers).

Subject card file on loans to the Museum (provides cross reference to loan cards in the Registration Department).

Blueprints and renderings of building elevations.

Historical photographs and negatives.

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Profile: The Archives of American Art, Washington, D.C.



Research in American art history has increased substantially in recent years. The number of graduate students, curators and historians specializing in American art is far greater today than could have been imagined twenty-five years ago when the Archives of American Art was established. The purpose of the Archives is to encourage scholarship in what had been a sadly neglected field of knowledge by assembling relevant documentary resources.

The Archives, since 1970 a bureau of the Smithsonian Institution, embraces every aspect of American art from the 18th century to the present. Holdings of the personal and professional papers (correspondence, journals, photographs, press clippings, exhibition catalogues and business records) of painters, sculptors, dealers, critics, collectors and curators approach seven million items in some three thousand separate collections. A revealing letter by Winslow Homer, a David Smith sketchbook, an Armory Show catalogue with prices, the Edwin Dickinson diary, the correspondence of Stuart Davis with his dealer — these and similar riches are on hand to be consulted and put to good use.

This material is organized, catalogued, and eventually microfilmed. Duplicate sets of film in each of the five regional Archives centers (Boston, New York, Washington, D.C., Detroit and San Francisco) and the availability of microfilm through interlibrary loans assure ready access to an immense source of information on a nation-wide and even international basis. By gathering the records together and by enabling researchers to use them easily, the Archives has contributed significantly to the growth of scholarly interest in American art.

Among the more substantial holdings in the Archives are records of art societies and museums. They tell us a great deal about the rise, the policies, and the specific activities of American art institutions, and, more indirectly, about patronage and pub-

lic response to art. They also reflect changes in taste and in the way museums function and the social role they play. The records of commercial galleries constitute an important supplement to museum archives. Those of the Macbeth Gallery, for example, New York's first gallery to concentrate on American art, include correspondence from museum directors and curators over a sixty year period and contain much information on the exhibition and acquisition of paintings and sculpture.

Taking a broad approach to documentation, the Archives has not confined itself to personal papers and institutional records. Over 1800 taped interviews with artists and others have been conducted under its Oral History Program, and transcripts of three-fourths of these are available for reading. Copies of twelve thousand American art auction catalogues and a larger quantity of exhibition catalogues are on film. The Archives photograph collection includes some 60,000 photographs of American paintings, sculpture, and prints, and nearly a thousand of American artists.

Archives finding aids come in a variety of forms. The basic one is the card catalogue which briefly describes the chief elements of each collection as well as a large quantity of individual items. The catalogue will be published in book form towards the end of 1980. *Archives of American Art; A Checklist of the Collection*, Second Edition, Revised, September, 1977, is a comprehensive listing of all Archives collections and tape recorded interviews as of that date, with information on the quantity, time period, forms of documentation, and microfilm roll numbers of each collection. *Archives of American Art; A Directory of Resources*, published by Bowker in 1972, briefly describes 555 collections. Finally, the quarterly *Archives of American Art Journal* publishes articles based on Archives material including reports from the regional offices, descriptive listings of recent acquisitions, and occasionally, extended accounts of major collections. The *Journal* is indispensable not only for keeping up with Archives holdings and activities, but also for information on American art research in general.

Now that the history of the visual arts in this country has gained its rightful place as a worthy field of study in colleges and museums, the Archives will continue to serve scholarship by acquiring and preserving records and by emphasizing the importance of documentation.

Garrett McCoy, Deputy Director, Archives of American Art

A PROFESSIONAL ARCHIVIST can be expected to:

Find a place, however temporary, where all the archival records can be brought together.

Locate and bring archival records together, probably visiting each office to determine the nature and extent of inactive records curators and others may be holding.

Familiarize himself with the administrative history of the institution in order to differentiate various record groups.

Familiarize himself with the history of the institution's activities and personnel.

Prepare a preliminary inventory, probably at the box level to gain an overview of the records.

Attempt to restore the order, noting especially valuable letters, identifying missing records, and in general gaining intellectual control over the entire body of archives.

With the assistance of the present museum apparatus, enlist, train and supervise interns or volunteers to assist in the more routine aspects of archival work, such as unfolding letters, arranging, filing in archival folders, typing labels, humidifying and flattening blueprints, boxing, etc.

Identify special conservation problems and take steps necessary to solve them, probably in cooperation with the museum conservator.

In cooperation with other museum staff, establish guidelines for retention of records, and timetables for their turnover to the archives or safe discarding. These guidelines would be based on legal requirements, and administrative and scholarly needs.

Prepare finding aids to facilitate use of the archives by staff and outside scholars.

Answer letters requiring information from the archives and assist scholars who must use the institution's records for their research. Familiarity with the records and their now logical arrangement will make this much simpler than it was under previous conditions.

Having identified missing records (eg., the files of a former curator or director), the archivist might attempt to locate these documents and arrange for their return to the collection.

Be responsible for seeing that all supplies and equipment be up to archival standards.

Consult with and advise the director of the institution regarding the requirements for an archival storage and research center.

PROFESSIONALS JOIN IN BEMONT CONFERENCE

By Arthur J. Breton, Curator of
Manuscripts, Archives of American Art

It is safe to say that the majority of museums in the United States and Canada do not have programs for the care of their records. As a result, much important documentation has been lost through careless storage, misguided efforts to "clean house", staff appropriation, indifference, lack of protection against natural disasters, etc.

In an effort to ensure the preservation of such material, the Archives of American Art, as early as 1964, began a program of soliciting museum records in order to arrange and microfilm them. Starting with the exhibition records of the Carnegie Institute Museum of Art, the Archives has, since then, microfilmed records of the Corcoran Gallery, Phillips Collection, Allen Memorial Museum, Cooper Union Mu-

seum, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Provincetown Art Association, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, and many others. As more and more institutions sought the help of the Archives, it became evident that the job was too big for one organization to handle, and, that the greatest results would be achieved if museums could be convinced of the need to establish archival programs of their own. As a step in that direction, the Archives of American Art organized a conference on the subject of museum archives.

On December 9-11, 1979, twenty two archivists and museum professionals met at the Smithsonian Institution's Belmont Conference Center, outside of Baltimore, Maryland. In those peaceful surroundings, 365 acres of rolling fields and woodland, the participants came to grips with such matters as how to initiate an archival program in a museum, costs and funding, methods for determining the historical or

other value of records, use of the archives by staff and scholars, relationship between the archivist and other museum staff, and forms of developing access to records. Practicing archivists from such museums as the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the Denver Museum of Natural History, the Cincinnati Art Museum, the Detroit Institute of Arts, and the Smithsonian Institution exchanged experiences and ideas with art historians, museum directors, private archival consultants, and other museum staff.

On the last morning, with this discussion fresh in their minds, the participants drew up a set of guidelines to stand as a statement of their consensus in the matter. The purposes of the guidelines are to draw the attention of museums to this subject, encourage the responsible care of this important form of documentation, and provide a framework around which a suitable archival program may be developed.

Draft Guidelines for Museum Archives

1. *Definitions and Scope:*

A museum's archives preserves and administers museum records of permanent value (legal, fiscal, research) but not in current use. Records are documents in any form—paper, tape, film, etc. Records in a museum's archives would normally include:

- a. Institutional records, in particular those which relate to administration at all levels. This includes staff files but not personal papers (see #2 below.)
- b. Records relating to objects within the collection.
- c. Acquired records, such as papers of individuals and organizations which relate to the subject areas (art, science, railroads, Indians, etc.) of particular interest to the museum.

2. *Institutional and Personal Records:*

The museum should have a statement of policy which clarifies the difference between the official records of the museum and papers which might be considered the personal property of curators, directors, members of governing bodies, etc. This is to discourage such persons from taking as their own property records which are truly part of the museum's archives. This would also facilitate the acquisition and preservation of personal and other records not created by the museum itself.

3. *Status of the Archives:*

The archives should be an entity within the museum administrative structure, supervised by an individual having custodial and related authority delegated by the director of the museum. When practical the archives should be a separate department.

4. *Criteria for Retention:*

The archivist must be involved in the determination of how long and under what conditions particular records are to be kept. The criteria for permanent retention include:

- a. Evidence of the administrative structure and evolution of the museum.
- b. Legal and fiscal value.
- c. Research and informational value.

5. *Current Records:*

The advice of the archivist should be sought to avoid the creation of unnecessary records, to promote effective record keeping, and to recommend disposal of those records which do not have permanent value.

6. *Staff:*

The museum should have a professionally trained archivist. If resources do not permit this, expert advice should be sought in the development of the museum's archives and archival training provided to the staff member made responsible for them.

7. *Location and Physical Conditions of the Archives:*

- a. The archives should be located in a separate and secure area with adequate protection against fire, flood, vermin, theft, and other hazards.
- b. Temperature and humidity should be controlled in the same way as for museum objects, preferably at 70 degrees F and 50% relative humidity, although certain records may have special requirements.
- c. Archives should not be placed below ground level.
- d. If neither suitable accommodation nor adequate staff can be provided for the archives the museum should:
 1. Place them in a nearby archival repository willing to administer them on a continuing basis.
 2. Form or join a consortium whereby several institutions cooperate to ensure that their archives receive adequate care.

3. Expect to contribute to the cost in either of the above choices.

8. *Arrangement, Description and Preservation of the Records:*

- a. The functions of the archivist are to acquire, arrange, describe, and preserve the records of the institution and to assist in the acquisition of related records such as the personal papers of former staff, etc.
- b. The archivist should produce written descriptive inventories, guides, and other finding aids in accordance with accepted archival standards and make them generally available.
- c. "Preventive conservation", such as the use of acid-free folders and boxes, should be practised at all times.

9. *Access:*

Subject to reasonable restrictions on the grounds of fragility or confidentiality, records should be available to staff members, scholars, and other persons demonstrating a need to consult the material for research purposes.

10. *Archives Acquisition Policy:*

The governing body, with the assistance of the archivist, should define and make public the scope of its archives acquisition policy, that is the collecting of records other than those created within the institution itself. The acquisition policies of other institutions should be taken into account.

11. *General Policy Statements:*

All general policy statements concerning the archives should be in writing and approved and promulgated by the director and/or governing body.

Museum Archives: Thoughts from Non-Archivists

By Claudia Hommel, Archivist, Detroit Institute of Arts

Dolores Slowinski is Executive Director of the Michigan Museums Association. The MMA has 496 members, including 150 museums. At its next annual conference, June 17-19, 1980, a session will be devoted to "Archives: A Two-Sided Coin." Slowinski is projecting several statewide archival workshops for museums as well.

When asked why she felt museums needed archives, she replied, "Too many museum administrators deal with their records for the first time when they wake up one day wanting to celebrate the anniversary of the beginning of the museum and can't find the documents from which to draw an historical essay for a catalogue.

"It's interesting to realize that a museum is more than a collection of objects; it is an object. And in the same way that each new object has an impact on a collection as a whole, the establishment and development of a museum has an impact on the whole community; its history will document the development of the community's cultural life.

"But where is the human element in a museum to be found if no notes are kept on what went on in building the collections and developing the exhibitions? It's as important to have reflections of the personalities who worked in the museum as it is to have background data on each object. It is important to preserve the

curatorial files in addition to exhibition catalogues because such files are a record of the thinking that was applied to the museum's activities. Thus the museum's archives become a record of that consciousness."

In response to the *Draft Guidelines*, Slowinski replied: "I have always been afraid to throw old records away. I felt they were important but did not know how to handle them. After reading the *Draft Guidelines*, I found out that there is a systematic way to deal with records rather than letting them pile up in boxes and become an uncontrollable problem. The *Guidelines* are so sensible and logical. I feel that museums have been in such a rush to serve the public that they have lost sight of the historical importance of their own operations. Museums are in the business of giving the community a perspective of where we've been as people. If the records of the museum are not preserved, it loses its human perspective and the subsequent lifelessness is communicated to the public."

Linda Downs, curator of Education, heads the largest curatorial department of the Detroit Institute of Arts and is also the museum's expert on the Diego Rivera masterpiece, "The Detroit Industry Frescoes."

She was asked her response to the establishment of a museum archives at the DIA. "The Detroit Institute of Arts is an historical art museum and the same principle that is applied to art historical research should be applied to the museum itself. That is why I tried to piece together a history of the Education Department when I became department head. Before the Archives was established, if we needed to find something from the museum's past, we'd be thrown into a panic, knowing how difficult our task would be. To get any sense of history, we had to do it orally. For example, when I was looking for the Rivera

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Some of the many regional archival organizations able to provide opportunities for training, conferences, meetings with professional archivists, etc.

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NORTHWEST ARCHIVIST
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University of Washington Library
FM — 25
Seattle, Washington 98195

SOUTH ATLANTIC ARCHIVES AND RECORDS CONFERENCE
% Louis H. Manarin
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Virginia State Library
12th and Capitol St.
Richmond, Va. 23219

SOCIETY OF SOUTHWEST ARCHIVISTS
% H. Glenn Jordan, Director
Oklahoma Historical Society
2100 N. Lincoln Blvd.
Oklahoma City, Okla. 73105

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N.B. A more detailed listing can be obtained from the Society of American Archivists at the above address.

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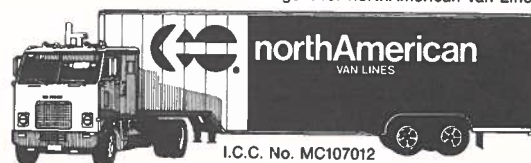
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Thoughts from Non-Archivists Continued from page 10

cartoons, I went to a retired curator who remembered having seen them but did not know where. Meanwhile his own working files, where information about the cartoons might have been contained, were sacrosanct and I couldn't look through them either.

"Just knowing now that the Archives has put together the files is reassuring. The written documentation is accessible. The Archives' role in organizing the current files is important as well. The help we've received in organizing central files for our department, for example, has simplified and clarified many of the department's procedures."

"It's surprising to see the variety of archival records; they are more than just curatorial files; there's a wealth of architectural records, photographs, museum publications, personal papers."

(The Rivera cartoons, now valued at \$250,000 were discovered by the Archives staff while searching storerooms for museum records. Their possible existence in the building has been verified by correspondence inventoried earlier by the Archives department.)

comments

By Dennis Barrie

Director, Midwest Area Center, Archives of American Art

The Detroit Institute of Arts Archives was born out of the efforts of the staff of the Midwest Center of the Archives of American Art. In 1976, my staff and I became aware of the sorry condition of the museum records when we found most of them stacked in uneasy piles in the loft-like space we were about to

remodel for our new offices. We resolved that we would find a way to ensure the proper preservation of these documents.

The resulting Detroit Institute of Arts Records Project evolved into the D.I.A. Archives, a permanent department of the institution. Currently, the project receives funding from the National Historical Publications and records Commission and the D.I.A. Founders Society. The project has two full time archivists and several part-time assistants. The records of the Institute have been inventoried and, in many cases, catalogued. All of the records are now housed in a secure space. A records management program has been developed to assure the conservation of future records.

We made many mistakes in the initial stages of the project. readers may benefit from consideration of the following:

1. Our early efforts, using student interns, were totally inadequate and, ultimately, did little to accomplish our goal. Museum records are too voluminous and complicated to be handled by inexperienced personnel.
2. In securing funding, grant writing was extremely time-consuming — almost counter-productive. It might be wiser to seek monies from special museum funds, existing programs, trustees who might have a particular interest, etc.
3. Work done by the interns was not respected. Records were often shifted without our knowledge. The project developer must make certain that the entire museum staff is informed of the project and, further, that the project has the support of key museum personnel.
4. It is easy to underestimate the size of a records project. Timetables and funding requests should be generous. ■■

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SETTING UP A RECORDS PROGRAM

By May Elizabeth Ruwell
Archivist, The National Archives

An institutional records program forces the staff to evaluate the papers which they discard or retain. A records or archival program has several important aspects:

Inventory. Determination of what records exist, where they are located and how they are used. An inventory is accomplished through discussion with staff, as well as through actual physical investigation of the premises.

Recommendations. Identification of valuable records, no longer in current use, which should be centralized; of duplicate or unnecessary records which can be destroyed; and of documents of legal value to the institution.

Records Schedules. Listing of types of records in the museum and the length of time each should be retained.

Collection Policy. Determination regarding acquisition and/or retention of non-administrative records such as personal papers of former staff members or prominent artists.

Preservation. Recommendation of archival supplies, filing systems and special care and conservation procedures. ■■

■■ ■■ ■■
In one of the East's more prestigious historical societies, each year, for twenty years, the director's secretary would go through his correspondence and throw out "unimportant" letters. The Society has not been able to find the letters which establish its ownership of two extremely important collections. Any connection?

■■ ■■ ■■

A building manager in one of the East's oldest public museums threw out several cartons of 19th century photographs. "Get rid of this junk." Do you want your building manager to make these decisions?

■■ ■■ ■■

One of the oldest art academies in the United States has none of the records of any of its directors for the first 100 years of its existence.

■■ ■■ ■■

A northeast museum, already missing some of its earliest records, enlisted the services of a retired gentleman as a volunteer, to "work" on the archives. The relationship ended when the gentleman was observed methodically tearing "unimportant" letters in half and throwing them into a trash can.

■■ ■■ ■■

An art museum in the southwest recently lost most of its records when its below-ground storage area was flooded by heavy rains. What have we learned from Florence?

■■ ■■ ■■

■■ ■■ ■■
At the suggestion of an architect-designer, the "entry records" listing every work of art to ever enter this mid-west museum were thrown out. Un-sightly and oversized volumes, they didn't fit in with the new look.

■■ ■■ ■■

A large mid-west museum has no conservation records prior to 1975. "The conservator took them home and won't give them back!" Would written regulations prevent such a loss in your museum?

■■ ■■ ■■

A prominent curator, while in the employ of one of our more distinguished art museums, prepared numerous exhibitions over the course of many years, and in doing so managed to acquire a fine collection of letters from prominent artists. A conscientious fellow, he left xerox copies for the museum when he retired. Does your institution have a policy for retention of such material?

■■ ■■ ■■

Last fall one of the most reputable and highly publicized museums in the East lost more than 1000 8 x 10 glass plate negatives due to water damage in its below-ground storage area when the city was "touched" by a hurricane. It hasn't yet been determined just how the water came in. And it will soon be hurricane season again! Does your institution have an up-to-date disaster prevention and recovery plan?



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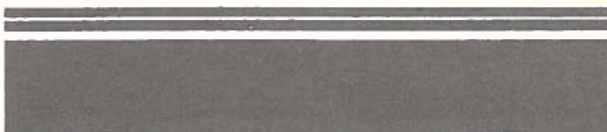
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