

Alaska State Museums Bulletin 42

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From Cannery to Curator: Paul Gardinier shares strategies for successful exhibits



Paul Gardinier's career in Alaska began in the seafood processing industry, but when he saw Juneau's Alaska State Museum for the first time, he knew that would be where he would do his best work.

More than three decades later, Gardinier holds the position of Curator of Exhibits. He has designed and installed hundreds of shows at the state-owned facility, but he tends to remain out of the spotlight.

“I want to set a stage for the objects and not get in the way,” he said.



Yupi'k display with contemporary mask

Much of Gardinier’s challenge lies in presenting the appropriate level of interpretation for objects, whether they are contemporary paintings or centuries-old artifacts. He and his staff must be conscious of how an object’s context may affect its meaning, especially since nearly every item on display in a museum is inherently out of context.



Athabascan life ways

“Once utilitarian or religious objects are in a museum, they become something different than what they originally were,” he said. “I try to set a mood in the galleries that might be something like the original context that an object would have been viewed in, knowing fully well that I can’t really recreate that environment.”



Klondike Gold Rush exhibit

Contextual aids Gardinier may use could include maps, timelines, photographs of objects in use and interactive opportunities for audiences. However, he uses these methods sparingly to avoid over-interpretation, or as he puts it, a “book on the wall.”

“My own personal learning style is to sort of wander between things and find out about the things that really interest me,” he said. “Other people are really uncomfortable with that kind of undirected learning and need more of a directed study to tell them what facts they need to take away from an exhibit.”

He has successfully worked at remaining humble in the story that he is telling through his exhibits, honing the details down to limited but poignant supplements to the objects on display.



Fran Reed exhibit

“I don’t want to get in the way of people seeing what the original artist had in mind,” he said. “It’s about presenting their work in a professional and respectful manner, in the way that the artist would want to see their own work projected.”

ON A SHOESTRING

Gardinier has risen time and time again to the challenge of creating high caliber exhibits with a very limited budget — both in funds and time. His current staff consists of himself and Exhibits Specialist Jackie Manning. Between the two of them and a handful of volunteers, they must execute Gardinier’s “grandiose” ideas.



Entry to Lure of Alaska Exhibit



Entry to Raucous Raven

Gardinier credited much of the exhibit installations to the museum's volunteers, who log about 10,000 hours per year. However, most of the heavy lifting is done by staff members who execute everything from conceptual design to the actual fabrication and construction of exhibit elements.



Arctic Winter Games display of pins. Gardinier soldered the brass frames himself.

As if that isn't enough work, Gardinier must also consider the needs of other museum team members, including security, curators, artists, lenders and conservators. The latter group has provided unique challenges to Gardinier during his career, but he has chosen to integrate conservation constraints as just another element of his design.



Paul discussing the finer points of a conservation appropriate exhibit mount

“I’ve always relished the challenge of working with conservators to not compromise my vision as a designer, yet not put any objects at risk in the process.”

The fact of his museum’s location and limited local resources has also posed challenges that Gardinier has risen to. He has acquired and put to use skills and techniques on jobs that in a metropolitan area may otherwise be contracted out. But by acting as designer, builder and finisher, he has “amazing control” over the entire process. By working with limited resources, he has become an expert at making something grand out of very little.



Entrance to the Ray Troll Exhibit Sharkabet

MAKING EXHIBITS PERSONAL

Presenting opportunities for audiences to connect with exhibits is key in Gardinier's designs. He harnesses the common ground of family, relationships, religion, work and play — subjects that everyone shares no matter what country or time period they're from. By highlighting these connections, audiences are able to engage with exhibits in a personal way, bringing more enjoyment and a higher takeaway value.



Fun and games in the Great Alaska Game Show exhibition

Gardinier is constantly taking note of the way ideas are visually displayed, whether they are in other museums, retail marketing situations or theme parks. He calls it “manipulating an environment,” and his method of doing so has the audience’s best interests in mind.



Kids can admire their own hat creations in hat shaped mirrors

“I’m not interested in controlling people,” he said. “I’m interested in putting materials out to provoke wonder, excitement and awe in people, and maybe spark some sort of interest for them to go out on their own and do further research into something.”



WWII Exhibit Case explores Alaska's important role during the war

In order to successfully reach his audience, Gardinier has to consider the range of visitors to the museum, from local members to out-of-state visitors. With each group in mind, Gardinier must attend to details such as low-light label legibility, cross-cultural interpretation and the proper translation of ideas. If given the proper tools to understand what's being presented, visitors will implant their own stories in the objects and take their exhibit experience with them through the rest of their lives.

Gardinier said the most rewarding thing he sees in the museum is discovery and communication. Whether it's a child dragging a parent across the gallery to explain something they've seen or a dialogue between friends provoked by an element in an exhibit, audience activity is confirmation that the job has been done right.

Ask ASM

Question: When you are accessioning multiple items, such as shoes...is it 2008.001.001a and b? Or do you give each shoe its own number such as 2008.001.001 for the right shoe and 2008.001.002 for the left shoe?. Just wondering. I am of the thought of a and b, but I could be wrong.

ASM : As a general rule of thumb, if something is a set it gets A, B, C such as a pair of shoes, a bottle with a lid, or the parts of a sewing machine. In general, if we would accept it on its own as



a complete thing, it would get its own number. So if someone just brought in one shoe, we might tend not to take it because it was incomplete. But if someone brings in campaign buttons from the 2008 election, I would probably give Obama and McCain buttons their own separate numbers. Also, if there is a huge amount of data, I might separate things into their own numbers in order to make capturing the information easier. Ultimately, it helps if there is a guiding philosophy such as “we want to make sure people can capture and find the data,” “we want to make sure a researcher understands that all these things belong together and are incomplete without these parts,” or “we give a single number with A, B, C to parts of a thing that would generally only be exhibited or loaned all together.” Once you come to a conclusion you really believe in, write it down in your collections manual with a lot of examples. As for the stuff already in the collection? Sheesh! Who has time to change the past?

Shaking the Money Tree

Grant Deadlines

IMLS

Ten weeks to apply for Conservation Project Support. The deadline is October 3, 2011. These grants take a long time to write and are very competitive so don't wait until the last minute.

If you are thinking about applying, please feel free to contact Scott Carrlee, Curator of Museum Services at 1-888-913-6873 to discuss your project.

<http://www.ims.gov/applicants/grants/conservProject.shtm>

Federal Funding Update: NEH and NEA Could Face Additional Cuts

July 8, 2011 – Yesterday the House Appropriations Subcommittee on the Interior – which provides funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) – passed a bill including steep cuts for both agencies for FY12.

Approved by an 8-5 vote, both the NEA and the NEH would be funded at \$135.2 million, representing a \$20 million cut from current funding and \$11 million less than the President's FY12 request.

Submit Your Ideas on IMLS's Strategic Plan

IMLS is developing a strategic plan to guide their work and priorities over the next five years. Your input is important. The comment period will continue until Friday, August 12. To submit feedback, please visit <http://ims.ideascale.com>.

Spotlight on Grant in Aid

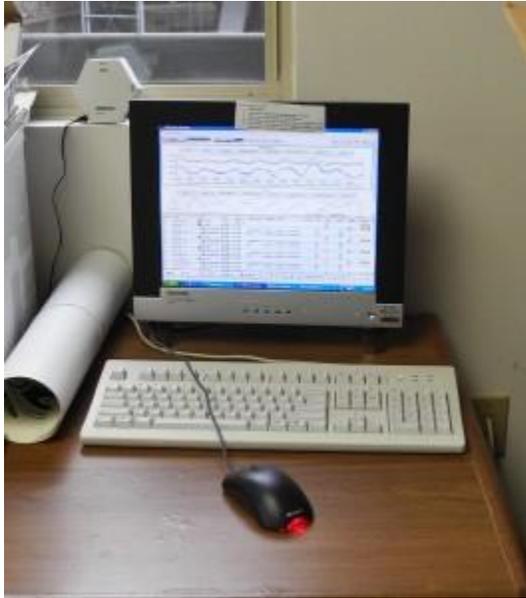
The FY 2011 Grant in Aid program allowed the Ketchikan Museum to modernize their hydro-thermographic monitoring program which helps the museum maintain the objects in their care for the long-term benefit of the citizens of Ketchikan and visiting public. In addition to upgrading their arsenal of traditional dataloggers and monitoring software, they were able to install a wireless hydro-thermographic monitoring system using equipment from Onset Computer Corporation at both the Centennial Building and the Totem Heritage Center.



Datalogger in position

The hydro-thermographic monitoring points at the Totem Heritage Center range in location from the Chief Johnson shed on the basement level, an exterior ground level site, to the upper level of the central gallery housing the standing totem poles. The equipment at the Totem Heritage Center is monitored in the museum programming staff office. The Centennial Building has a monitoring station in the collections staff office with data gathering stations in several gallery cases, the library stacks, archives office and storage as well as collections storage, again on two levels and in several out of the way spaces. By using the HOBO ZW series wireless equipment, museum staff may now monitor in real time the current temperature and relative humidity throughout the two buildings from centrally located monitoring stations, without the need to physically retrieve the data, then upload the data to a laptop, transfer the data to the network at the Centennial Building, and print out individual graphs.

The ability to carry out statistical analyses of the data has been greatly enhanced and simplified as the data is wirelessly sent to a database maintained on a dedicated workstation in each building.



Monitoring station

The monitoring station can display the data from individual sensors, or any combination of the sensors combined on one graph covering a 4-hour, a full 24-hour, or a 7-day period. Additionally, custom graphs for longer term study are easily generated from within the HOBOWare Pro software, or exported in a number of standard formats for analysis in other software applications. The period between individual sensors data collection can be adjusted from the monitoring station for any interval of one second or greater, and the period of time between data transmissions to the workstation can be adjusted in similar fashion. They have a few sensors that are located inside cases operating battery power, but most of the sensors are attached to an AC power source with internal battery backup power. They also back up the database from the individual work stations to the City of Ketchikan's network which is backed up on a regular schedule to insure long term data security.

The system can automatically notify museum staff via email if temperature or humidity measurements meet or exceed points set by museum staff.



Datalogger in place in an exhibit case

The grant enabled the museum to replace their dataloggers which output data via a serial cable with equipment that uses USB cabling, allowing them to continue to monitor their off-site storage spaces and individual exhibit cases during short term exhibits. They can also monitor items in transit with this equipment, as it is small enough to be incorporated in the packing crate when transporting items.

ASM on the Road



Scott Carrlee, Curator of Museum Services, traveled to Anchorage and Seward June 20-24 to assess the condition of the Kenai Fjords National Park's artifact collection. The Park has collections stored both at their new central curation facility in Anchorage and at the Park Headquarters in Seward.

Alaska Museums in the News

Juneau Douglas City Museums Wins award

<http://juneauempire.com/art/2011-07-06/juneau-douglas-city-museum-wins-2011-aaslh-award-merit>

<http://juneauempire.com/local/2011-07-09/juneau-douglas-museum-wins-second-leadership-history-merit-award>

Alaska's missing moon rock reappears.

http://capitalcityweekly.com/stories/062911/new_851560339.shtml

<http://www.ktoo.org/audiofile.cfm?clip=5474>

Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center wins IDEA award

<http://www.adn.com/2011/07/16/1970882/artist-becomes-poster-art-for.html>

Professional Development/Training Opportunities

Registration is now open for the Museums Alaska, Alaska Historical Society Joint Annual Conference! Visit museumsalaska.org and register for this amazing conference, today! Early registration ends August 31st, so register before the price goes up. Come to gorgeous Valdez!

<http://www.museumsalaska.org/conferences/registration.php>

There will be an Angels Project in connection with this year's Museums Alaska Meeting in Valdez. The project will take place at the Maxine and Jesse Whitney Museum on Tuesday, September 20th starting at 9 am. This year we will be helping our colleague Wendy Goldstein with her artifact labeling efforts. If you are planning on attending Ellen Carrlee's Objects labeling workshop you might want to participate in this year's Angels project as well since she will be supervising the project and teaching the practical side of artifact labeling.

So, come a day early and take an opportunity to have fun with your colleagues while helping out another Alaska museum. Someday it might be your museum that gets the Angels project.

For more information or to sign up please contact:

Scott Carrlee

Curator of Museum Services

Alaska State Museums

1-888-913-6873

Email: scott.carrlee@alaska.gov

Connecting to Collections Online Community presents:

Cold Storage for Photographic Materials

Tuesday, August 2 at 2:00 pm EDT

Theresa Anne Voellinger, Paper/Photograph Conservator, Harpers Ferry Center, National Park Service will join us to discuss the Connecting to Collections Online Community's Featured Resource for August - the online video series [Cold Storage: A Long-Term Preservation Strategy for Film-Based Photographic Materials](#).

To join this event, go to <http://www.connectingtocollections.org/> and click "Access Meeting Room". We look forward to meeting you online!

SLAM Dunk

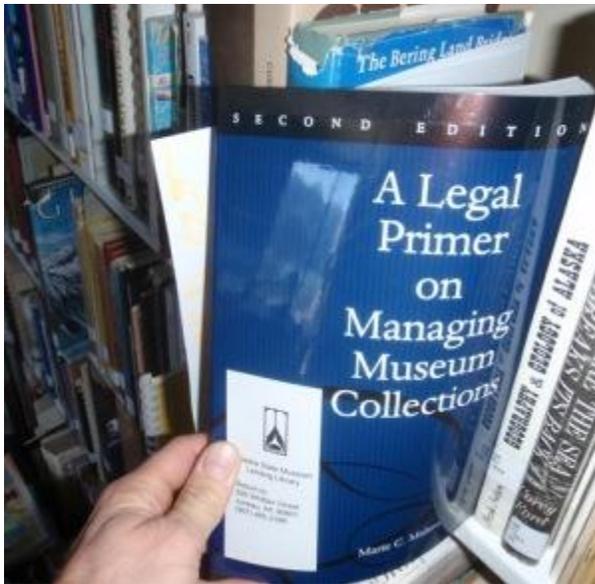
The Digital Initiative Report is available online.

<http://www.alaskalamp.blogspot.com/>

Book Report

By Bianca Carpeneti, Museum Volunteer

Malero, Marie C. *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 1998.



In 1985, Marie C. Malero wrote what would come to be known as the bible of U.S. collection management. Thirteen years later, Malero updated and revised that text in this second edition. While the title and heft of this volume, not to mention the table of contents may seem intimidating, the content is thoroughly accessible for professionals and non-specialists, alike. Moreover, the information is invaluable. And not just for large institutions, but also for more modest groups interested in collecting and caring for cultural and historical material.

Malero, attorney for the Smithsonian Institution and acknowledged expert on the law and ethics of collections management, has spent much of her career as an educator and advisor in the field. Her organizational approach is systematic and logical, which makes this complex field

manageable. Beginning with two chapters discussing the museum – what it is and to whom it is accountable – Malaro then focuses the majority of the volume on the collection, addressing issues from accession to visitor access. In each, Malaro covers the legal questions, important cases, and court decisions. Additionally, she includes sample documents and checklists that may be useful for people working in the field.

This book is an important reference that outlines the legal obligations associated with any kind of collecting. Whenever any group, no matter its size, takes responsibility for an object or collection, there is an entire host of considerations that must be addressed. Some of these issues may be obvious such as providing for proper care, but some are perhaps less apparent like transferring copyright to ensure completeness of title. Responsible caretakers must have a clear understanding of what is at stake, and Malaro provides this understanding.

Professional Time Wasting on the Web

The Edison Museum plays 123 year recording for a talking doll.

<http://news.sciencemag.org/sciencenow/2011/07/scientists-play-worlds-oldest-co.html>

Want to see a big Museum Crate?

<http://www.indcrate.com/projects.html>

Kayak X-ray

<http://oliverkodiak.blogspot.com/2009/03/kayak-x-ray.html>

An exhibit of hats

<http://www.dezeen.com/2011/06/29/akio-hirata%e2%80%99s-exhibition-of-hats-by-nendo/#more-136015>