

Alaska State Museums Bulletin 56

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“Oh, the Humanity!” – Disasters in Museums

Tune in to any cable news network. Every week there’s a new disaster. Hurricanes. Earthquakes. Tsunamis. War. Flesh-eating bacteria. Zombies (remember June’s CDC “Zombie Apocalypse” story?)

This summer saw floods in Florida, wildfires in Colorado and, closer to home, flooding, washouts and mudslides in British Columbia, the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, Canada. Last summer, political protests in Cairo led to vandalism and looting of the Egyptian National Museum, home to some of the world’s most precious antiquities, some 120,000 artifacts in all. A year later, curators are still assessing the extent of the damage.

In the wake of these and other recent events, cultural institutions have learned, often the hard way, just how important adequate preparation can be to effective disaster response—not to mention just how heroic staff and community efforts can be to collections preservation.

A few examples:

For two straight days in June 2008 flooding inundated Iowa’s Cedar Rapids Museum of Art, submerging some of the collection in a foot of sewage. It took a year for staff to reinstall the galleries and return the remaining collection to proper storage—one painting at a time. Community members, businesses, government agencies and foundations also joined the recovery effort; CRMA was even ultimately able to lend a

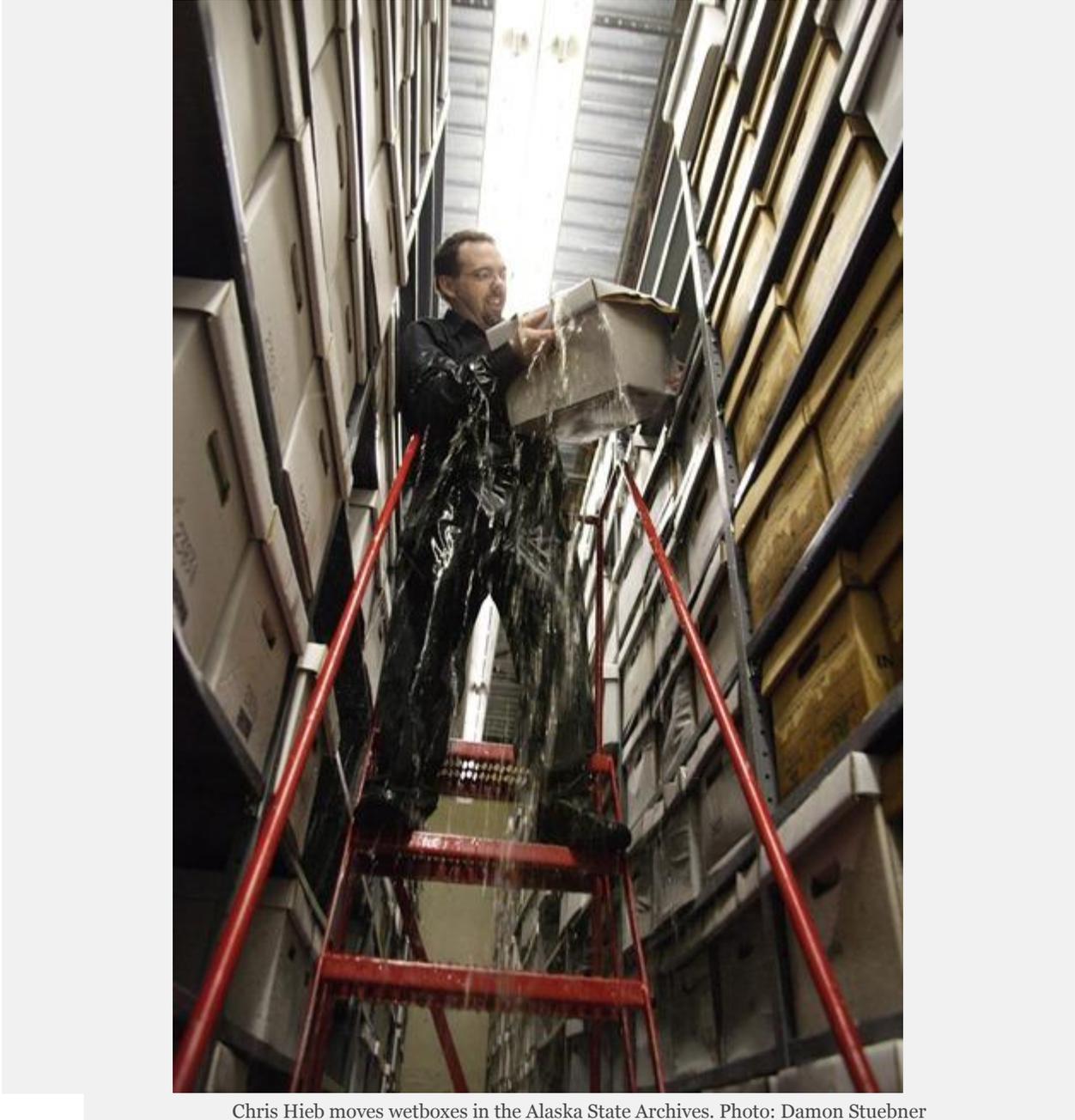
gallery to the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library, which lost its primary building in the flood.

In a similar instance with a decidedly Alaskan twist, in 2009, record flooding of the Yukon River devastated the beautiful, historic town of Eagle, Alaska – itself a National Historic Landmark. When floodwaters—and ice chunks(!)—threatened the century-old customs house, site of Eagle Historical Society & Museum, town residents passed the entire collection of frontier-era artifacts, one-by-one, through a window as the building filled with water. Some did so as their own homes and possessions floated away.



Customs House Eagle, Alaska Photo: Jean Turner

Here in Juneau that same summer a rainstorm ripped through a construction bubble at the Alaska State Archives and flooded the entire collection. Thanks to state and local efforts, meticulous staff recovery techniques and widespread community support, as well as a group of volunteer conservators who happened to be in town for the Western Association for Art Conservation's annual meeting, the entire collection was saved. (Read ASM Conservator Ellen Carrlee's "Anatomy of an Archives Flood" at <http://ellencarrlee.wordpress.com/2009/10/13/anatomy-of-an-archives-flood>.)



Chris Hieb moves wetboxes in the Alaska State Archives. Photo: Damon Stuebner

Some museums, such as the Saskatchewan Western Development Museum—which lost its roof in a 2003 windstorm—and the Oakland Museum of California—which suffered damage during the 1989 earthquake—even made exhibits of their disaster response. In fact, the Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry (MATI) in Wasilla owes most of its collection to a 1973 fire that destroyed the Alaska Transportation Museum in Anchorage. Other surviving objects are displayed at the Alaska Aviation Heritage Museum in Anchorage.

While the word “disaster” implies a major occurrence, disasters come in all shapes and sizes. Water mains can break, electrical wires can malfunction and climate control

systems can fail. During a recent renovation at University of Alaska Fairbanks' Museum of the North, for instance, a construction worker accidentally drilled through a water pipe, dousing the collections room.

Truth be told, most collections disasters are smaller in scale. The most common risks to museum artifacts: dust and mold contamination, custodial neglect (i.e. artifact mishandling), UV/light exposure and incorrect environmental conditions. In other words, little things can cause big damage, especially if ignored while preparing for more catastrophic events. Small or large, natural or manmade, effective disaster response is determined by effective disaster preparedness. Unfortunately, most cultural institutions are unprepared to handle disasters. Not only are staffs not trained in recovery efforts, but they are often unaware of OSHA health and safety requirements. In other words, disaster preparedness means more than learning how to pack wet books.

Increasingly, cultural institutions are implementing tools borrowed from the insurance industry to identify risks to their collections, codify preservation procedures, reduce the potential for disasters that can be avoided and mitigate the effects of those that can't.

The first step is conducting a risk assessment. Formal or informal, extensive or on a portion of a collection, risk assessment tools prioritize preservation efforts in an attempt to limit, or even prevent, damage.

Risk assessment determines:

- Percentage of a collection susceptible to specific risk
- Resulting loss of value
- Likelihood of a disaster event
- Extent of the event, worst-case to best-case scenario

Obviously, not all disasters can be prevented. Institutions and staff must be prepared to assure the safety of personnel, visitors, collections and data. For this, libraries, archives, museums, historical societies, or any other collection-holding entity should develop a disaster plan.

A disaster plan allows an institution to:

- Prevent or mitigate disasters
- Prepare for the most likely emergencies
- Respond quickly to minimize damage if disaster strikes
- Recover quickly while continuing to provide services to the community

Four Basic Rules of Museum Disaster Response

1. Minimize additional damage – don't begin recovery until the disaster is over; once it is, begin sorting immediately so additional damage isn't done by walking on

collections; don't be satisfied with damage appraisal until you have checked EVERYTHING. Even seemingly unaffected items may have suffered damage. For example, films and tapes inside containers can be far more damaged than the container's condition might appear.

2. Document the disaster and your recovery (not just for your insurance company and superiors—who knows, it might make a nice exhibit one day)
3. Think before doing – too many people rush into recovery. The first rule of recovery is “do no harm.” That means care and thought, as opposed to fast action.
4. Care for yourself and your staff – disasters often do damage far beyond the obvious, and that extends to emotional damage to museum staff. Look out for them—and yourself—as carefully as you look out for your collection.

In almost every case, you'll want to call in preservation and conservation experts to assist in salvaging your collection. And remember: human life is far more valuable than any collection. First thing to consider in any disaster situation is safety.

The American Museum of Natural History offers a comprehensive list of risk management and disaster planning websites, tutorials, readings and other information with copious downloads and links to resources. Visit and bookmark <http://collections.paleo.amnh.org/9/risk-management-and-disaster-planning>; well worth your time.

Northeast Document Conservation Center offers a customizable online disaster planning service, dPlan, geared toward small and medium-sized institutions without in-house preservation staff. Learn more at www.dplan.org

Museum SOS (www.museum-sos.org) is also an excellent hub for disaster preparation and response, as is Heritage Preservation (www.heritagepreservation.org) which offers a wide variety of free and pay disaster preparedness resources. There is a new post on the Connecting to Collections blog about the Pocket Response Plan. Check it out here <http://collectionsconversations.wordpress.com/2012/08/28/pocket-response-plan/>

For something with more home state appeal try the new Library Guide for Disaster Information Resources from the Alaska State Library

http://lam.alaska.gov/disaster_resources

General Resources Online

[Coping with Disasters](#) (MedlinePlus)

After any type of disaster, people feel relieved to be alive. But then they often feel stress, fear and anger. Most people will also find that they can't stop thinking about what happened. Learn how to cope with these emotions effectively.

[Disaster Apps and Mobile Optimized Web Pages](#)

During a disaster, mobile devices may be your only way to connect with others. Learn how to use NLM's disaster apps and mobile optimized web pages *before* disaster strikes.

[Disaster News](#)

Check out this RSS feed to the CDC's Emergency Preparedness and Response site.

[Disaster Preparation and Recovery](#) (MedlinePlus)

Preparing for a disaster can reduce the fear, anxiety and losses that disasters cause. Be prepared.

[Personal Preparedness](#)

Explore this list of NLM resources on all types of man-made and natural disasters.

[Ready.gov](#)

Maintained by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), this site is designed to educate and empower Americans to prepare for and respond to emergencies including natural and man-made disasters. The three tenets of Ready.gov are: (1) build an emergency supply kit, (2) make a family emergency plan and (3) be informed about the different types of emergencies that could occur and their appropriate responses.

[Special Populations: Emergency and Disaster Preparedness](#)

Certain populations have unique needs during emergencies and disasters. Be prepared to help these groups.

[Sources of Emergency and Disaster Health Information from the U.S. Government](#)

Discover these sources of emergency and disaster health information.

Ask ASM



Question: We found a really cool object (that IS accessioned), but are debating how to handle it. We definitely want to keep it, but we're uncertain about how to handle its contents. We have a nurse's syringe kit. That kit still contains strychnine sulfate, etc. We are curious about storage for this item. Tips, ideas, and/or contacts would be appreciated.

ASM: Editor's note: normally the responses to a museum query follows from one line of thinking. Occasionally there can be differing responses amongst museum professionals. Here are several responses to this query that show there is sometimes more than one way to think about things.

Response 1: My suggestion would be to dispose of the "medicine" at the toxic waste dump after reading the MSDS sheets for the different chemicals. I would then pack each piece individually, marking each as part of a whole.

Response 2: Would you scrape the poison off South American darts? My feeling is this: any true museum professional who accidentally stuck themselves with the darts would relish the opportunity to fully document the use of poison darting from the point a view of a monkey, and would take notes for as long as they could as the poison took hold. Personally, I would love to leave this life via some exotic mechanism that expands our knowledge of history and culture.

Seriously, we don't know what research interests will arise in the future. New technology even in the past couple years has greatly expanded our ability to analyze materials. Do

we know if there are intact nurses' kits preserved somewhere else, in case someone is looking for samples of certain antiquated drugs or chemical preparations?

In this increasingly digital age, filled to the brim with simulacra, the only thing separating museums from Disney World is authenticity.

Response 3: I remember how thrilled I was when, as a child exploring my great grandfather's old ranch in eastern Oregon, I (literally) stumbled into a root cellar and found rows and rows of mason jars filled with the fruits of a harvest long forgotten. The energy from those hot, dusty summers of toil preserved in translucent batteries. Some had clearly gone bad, but others were amazingly fresh looking. Empty jars are just not nearly as evocative. I feel the same way about other such items. For research, keeping contents, dangerous or not, might be very important, so unless it's leaking toxicity, ticking, or too otherwise too intrinsically dangerous to have around (a large glass jar with ill-fitting cap full of mercury comes to mind...something that we deaccessioned and disposed of), I think the best approach is to simply contain and label it accordingly.

Response 4: I know I am in the minority on this one, but I always wonder why these "dangerous or potentially dangerous" materials are not considered a part of the artifact. If I were the curator, I would containerize the artifacts and the constituent parts in multiple layers of housings with careful labels and signage, perhaps skull-and-crossbones signs too. I would make a detailed note in the database record and in the hard copy file about exactly what the chemical is and what its threat is, as well as info about what to do if someone is exposed. However, I get the impression that current museum practice often involves getting rid of toxic materials.

Response 5: In most museum settings, there are enough restrictions on access to these types of materials that they can be safely stored or displayed. I also believe that in some cases getting rid of the hazardous part is not that easy and sometimes involves destroying or damaging other parts of the artifact. Obviously if it is oozing or deteriorating because of the contents (such as canned goods for example) then it is advisable to get rid of the contents.

Shaking the Money Tree

NEH

Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections

Division of Preservation and Access

Deadline December 4, 2012 for Projects Beginning October 2013

Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections (SCHC) helps cultural institutions meet the complex challenge of preserving large and diverse holdings of humanities materials for future generations by supporting preventive conservation measures that mitigate deterioration and prolong the useful life of collections.

Apply for planning grants of up to \$40,000 (with an option of up to \$50,000) to bring together interdisciplinary teams that might reevaluate environmental parameters for collections and examine passive (non-mechanical) and low-energy alternatives to conventional energy sources and energy-intensive mechanized systems for managing collection environments. Testing, modeling, or project-specific research may help applicants better understand collection environments and formulate sustainable preservation strategies; therefore, with planning grants you might measure energy consumption; use blower door tests to identify air leaks in buildings; create mock-ups of lighting options; test natural ventilation methods; conduct thermal imaging of buildings; test the effect of buffered storage enclosures on moderating fluctuating environmental conditions; re-commission small-scale climate control systems; or adjust the operating protocols for climate control systems.

Apply for implementation grants of up to \$350,000 to manage interior relative humidity and temperature by passive methods; install heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems; install storage systems and rehouse collections; improve security and the protection of collections from fire, flood, and other disasters; and upgrade lighting systems and controls to achieve levels suitable for collections that are energy efficient. Projects that seek to implement preventive conservation measures in sustainable ways are especially encouraged.

Guidelines: <http://www.neh.gov/grants/guidelines/SCHC.html>

FAQs: http://www.neh.gov/files/grants/sustaining-cultural-heritage-faqs_2012.pdf

For more information: <http://www.neh.gov/grants/preservation/sustaining-cultural-heritage-collections>

Spotlight on Grant in Aid

The Sheldon Museum in Haines Protects Its Exhibits

Even with "Do Not Touch" signs near most exhibits, visitors to the Sheldon Museum seemed to have a hard time not touching the artifacts on display. In recently changed permanent exhibits, more artifacts were exposed and vulnerable. After much discussion and research, the staff decided that Plexiglas walls could be an attractive, unobtrusive solution.



Townsite and Gold rush exhibit before. Photo: Jerrie Clarke

Additional vitrines for the museum's pedestals were also needed. Not all of our pedestals were supplied with covers, and a few years ago volunteers built an additional seven pedestals for the Six-Week Spotlight, local artist shows.

Staff consulted ASM Curator of Museum Services Scott Carrlee and local carpenter Gordon Whitermore about design and construction, and purchased Plexiglas sheets and vitrines. A volunteer had offered to transport the Plexiglas from Seattle to Haines but when the time came, was not able to bring the items, so the original plan and budget had to be adjusted. After shipping, there was not enough left to build walls in the upper gallery. However, the shipping was less than the cost of the upper gallery walls so we were able to purchase additional vitrines and sheets of Plexiglas to replace the broken Plexi on two "Sleeping Beauty" cases that are used in temporary exhibits and on four multi-plex panels on which additional information about local history is given.



Mr. Whitermore designed the walls, purchased the wood and hinges for the frames from the local hardware store, and then constructed the walls. His invoices included the cost of the materials he purchased. The walls are attractive and professional-looking, and the artifacts and photographs are protected. Vitrines now top our pedestals and protect objects on permanent and temporary exhibit. The three-dimensional art displayed by our local artists during the Six-Week Spotlight solo and duo shows are now also better protected. We have received many comments indicating that the new Plexi walls add to the professional look of the permanent exhibits. The Six-Week Spotlight artists are delighted to be able to protect their three-dimensional art under the vitrines on the pedestals. The museum staff is delighted and grateful to have the ability to better protect the museum artifacts and art as well as those on loan for temporary exhibitions.

Alaska Museums in the News

Copiously illustrated book traces Alaska Airlines' colorful past

<http://www.adn.com/2012/09/01/2608486/copiously-illustrated-book-traces.html>

Ziegler painting donated to UAS library

<http://juneauempire.com/art/2012-08-16/original-ziegler-oil-painting-donated-egan-library-uas>

The Mysterious Death of Robert Kennicott

<http://blogs.smithsonianmag.com/aroundthmall/2010/08/the-mysterious-death-of-robert-kennicott/>

3D sculpture brings history of Kennicott back to life

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/video/3-D-Scanning-Bringing-History-Back-to-Life.html>

Living with the Old Things

<http://www.nps.gov/akso/beringia/beringia/library/Living-with-old-things.pdf>

Professional Development/Training Opportunities

Creating and Funding Preservation Projects to Enhance Collection Care

Where: Anchorage Museum, Reynolds Classroom, 625 C Street, Anchorage, AK 99501

When: October 17, 2012, 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Sponsored by Western States & Territories Preservation Assistance Service (WESTPAS)

Workshop instructor: Gary Menges

Do you want to get a preservation grant to take care of your collections? Many institutions have used grant-funded projects to enhance the level of care they can provide for their collections, and sometimes even to jump start their preservation programs.

“Creating and Funding Preservation Projects to Enhance Collection Care” is a one-day workshop that begins with identifying and setting priorities among collection needs. With a clear sense of needs, the second part of the workshop reviews sources of grant funding available to your institution. The third part of the workshop addresses the key preservation questions asked on grant applications – participants answer the questions

on behalf of their institutions, building the elements of a proposal for their own collection. The workshop emphasizes working collaboratively with colleagues to develop and receive feedback on project proposals.

By the end of the workshop day, participants will have:

- Outlined a preservation project proposal specific to their institution
- Identified possible funding sources
- Tested their ideas with other workshop participants

Who should attend: Administrators and staff responsible for care of the collection in all types of libraries and archives, with an emphasis on small-to-medium sized institutions without preservation grant writing experience. By registering for the workshop, the institution commits to supporting the attendee(s) to achieve the workshop's goals to develop and submit proposals for preservation projects to enhance collection care. When possible, TWO attendees from an institution should attend so they can work together on project development.

Cost: No charge to the institution. WESTPAS is funded in part by the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Registration: Pre-registration required. Register online at: WESTPAS workshop <http://tiny.cc/ZePOL>

For registration assistance contact: Alexandra Gingerich gingerich@plsinfo.org for general & content information contact Gary Menges, menges@uw.edu

October is Archives Month, and Archives & Special Collections at the UAA/APU Consortium Library will be celebrating by offering four FREE workshops!

Descriptions are below. All workshops are open to the public and will be held at the UAA/APU Consortium Library. Space is limited, so register soon!

TO REGISTER FOR A WORKSHOP: Email archives@uaa.alaska.edu or call 907-786-1849. No registration is necessary for the Archives Roadshow workshop on October 27th.

Saturday October 6 – Preserving & Identifying Photographs

10:30am – 4:30pm. UAA/APU Consortium Library Room 307. Maximum 25 participants.

Presenter: Megan K. Friedel, Archivist

Do you have shoeboxes stuffed with photographs? Are most of them unidentified and undated? Do you want to learn how best to store, preserve and identify them so that they last for future generations? This full-day workshop will teach you how to identify

and date significant photo and negative types from the 19th and early 20th centuries; best practices for storing and preserving a wide range of photographic material, including slides, glass and film negatives, photo albums, scrapbooks and more; hands-on exercises in identifying the format and subject of photographs; and one-on-one consultation with a UAA archivist to help you determine the needs of your photo collection. Participants should bring 2-3 photographs from their collections to share with the class.

Saturday October 13 – Making Book Enclosures

10:30am – 12:30pm. UAA/APU Consortium Library Room 307. Maximum 20 participants.

Presenter: Arlene Schmuland, Head of Archives & Special Collections

Do you have worn books that you need to keep? Can't repair them? Need to protect some of your rare volumes? This two-hour, hands-on training will show you how to make quick and simple book enclosures from sheets of folder-weight paper. You're welcome to bring a book of your own or we'll have some on hand for you to wrap for us.

Saturday October 13 – Introduction to Scanning and Organizing Digital Photographs

1:30 – 4:30pm. UAA/APU Consortium Library Room 307. Maximum 20 participants.

Presenter: Mariecris Gatlabayan, Archivist

Bytes, pixels, resolutions... oh my! The idea of scanning or organizing digital photographs can be overwhelming, so grab a bunch of your photographs and participate in this half-day workshop. The workshop will provide an introduction to scanning, resizing, editing, and organizing photographs, as well as guidelines on how best to preserve digital photographs to ensure long term access for future generations. Participants will have the opportunity to scan and edit a few of their photographs. As a result, please bring a USB drive or media on which you can save your scanned images.

Saturday October 27 – Archives Roadshow

1:30 – 4:30pm. UAA/APU Consortium Library Room 307. NO REGISTRATION NECESSARY.

Got old stuff? Want to know what it is, what historical value it has, and how to preserve it? Bring your photographs and negatives, moving image and audio recordings, letters, diaries, manuscripts, and other family or personal papers, and meet one-on-one for free consultations with archivists from UAA, the Anchorage Museum, Alaska Moving Image Preservation Association, National Archives, and other institutions. No monetary appraisals will be given, but we'll help you find resources for valuation and conservation. There will also be a behind-the-scenes tour of the Archives & Special Collections collections vault at 2:30pm and a raffle for a free in-home consultation with an archivist!

Heritage Preservation Announces Fall Live Chat Schedule

- “Why Do Old Books Smell and Other Adventures with Odors in Collections” – Wednesday, September 26 at 10 am AKST Eastern with Tara Kennedy, Preservation Field Services Librarian, Yale University Library
- “Tour of the Canadian Conservation Institute’s Online Light Damage Calculator” – Wednesday, October 17 at 10 am AKST with Stefan Michalski, Senior Conservation Scientist, Preservation Services, Canadian Conservation Institute, Department of Canadian Heritage
- “Museums for America: Grants from IMLS: An Overview of the Program Including New Guidelines for 2013” – Wednesday, November 7 at 10 am AKST Eastern with Connie Bodner, Senior Program Officer, IMLS
- “Protecting Collections During Special Events” – Wednesday, November 28 at 10 am AKST Eastern with Barbara Heller, Director and Conservator of Special Projects, Detroit Institute of Arts

Registration is not required to participate in these live chat events. Simply go to the C2C Online Community Meeting Room (<http://www.connectingtocollections.org/meeting/>) and provide your name and location.

Digital Curation Resource Guide Created

Digital Scholarship has released the Digital Curation Resource Guide.

<http://digital-scholarship.org/dcrg/dcrg.htm>

This resource guide presents over 200 selected English-language websites and documents that are useful in understanding and conducting digital curation. It covers academic programs, discussion lists and groups, glossaries, file formats and guidelines, metadata standards and vocabularies, models, organizations, policies, research data management, serials and blogs, services and vendor software, software and tools, and training. It is available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 3.0 Unported License.

The Digital Curation Resource Guide complements the Digital Curation Bibliography: Preservation and Stewardship of Scholarly Works, which was released in June. <http://digital-scholarship.org/dcpb/dcb.htm>

It is also available as an EPUB file (see How to Read EPUB Files).

<http://digital-scholarship.org/dcrg/dcrg.epub>

<http://digital-scholarship.org/dcrg/epub.htm>

Intern Report

Kaleigh Paré, Masters student in Museums Studies at the Harvard University Extension School, interned this past summer at the Pioneer Air Museum in Fairbanks.



My first project upon arrival at the Pioneer Air Museum was to determine what from its 2011 Museum Assessment had been accomplished already and what still needed to be done. I spoke with both the Director and the Secretary of the Board and made notes accordingly in my copy of the report. From there I began to research and write a Mission Statement, a Collections Policy, an Integrated Pest Management Plan, and a Code of Ethics. During the June board meeting, I presented my plans for the summer to the Governing Board and collected their email addresses so that I could send them the policies I wrote for approval.

In addition to writing administrative documents, my other major project was working with PastPerfect. After I loaded the database onto the desktop computer, I instructed certain members of the staff in how to use the program as well as basic cataloging. We also participated in an official PastPerfect online training program. This included the Director, two of the younger staff, me, and a board member from the Tanana Railroad Museum, from across Pioneer Park. During the July board meeting I briefly showed the board members how to use PastPerfect as well.

Finally, I spent most of the last few weeks spread out on the floor of the office going through the boxes and folders of donor information that do exist for the museum. I tried to pull out what I could on recognizable objects. However, donations such as engines I

had more difficulty with since I do not possess the knowledge to differentiate between all the different types of engines in the collection. I spoke with the Director about this and he noted that he would be able to identify them and with the help of some of the younger staff, enter the catalog information into PastPerfect. Therefore, I cataloged what I could and established a tripartite accession system (with year and FIC number for those objects found in the collection), as well as file folders for the individual objects' paperwork. I ordered archival tags for labeling the objects with their object IDs but they had not come in the mail by the time I was due to leave. As a result, I left in my notes instructions to number and attach the tags to the objects already cataloged, as soon as the tags arrive.

As in my concluding notes for the Board President and Director, I listed what I accomplished and my list to the next intern of projects I would have undertaken had I had the time – the purchase of supplies such as gloves and archival tags which would be helpful when budgets permit, instructions for continuing the cataloging over the winter, and book and web resources they may find helpful. I put this together with a binder of the documents. All of the documents were also saved to the desktop so that they may be edited in the future.

I hope this gets the PioneerAirMuseum off to a good start. I had an amazing summer and I know I will be back to visit!

Professional Time Wasting on the Web

LEGOs save Egyptian Mummy

<http://www.itv.com/news/anglia/update/2012-09-08/museum-restores-mummy-using-lego>

Elderly woman destroys 19th century fresco with DIY restoration

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/9491391/Elderly-woman-destroys-19th-century-fresco-with-DIY-restoration.html>

The Horse that went outside

<http://youtu.be/CtAyZYzyVfw>

Demo how to write in hieroglyphics

<http://oi.uchicago.edu/museum/special/writing/>

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