A Place for Everything

And Everything in its Place:
Conducting (and Maintaining!) a Collection Inventory
4 October 2016
Poll #1

What job title is closest to yours:
- Registrar or Collection Manager
- Curator
- Archivist
- Director
- Most or all of the above: I do it all!
- Museum studies student
- None of the above
Just an Ordinary Day in the Life of a Registrar
Sisyphus undertakes an inventory of his collection
Poll #2

What percentage of objects in your collection have a (pretty reliable) location record (“I know where it is” does not count)?

- 75% to 100% (why are you taking this webinar?)
- 25% to 75% (hey, it’s a start)
- less than 25% (don’t feel bad, you have a lot of company)
Why inventory?

or:

Do I have to?
Registrars, through the records maintained, are accountable for the objects in custody of their museums and must be able to provide current information on each object, its location, status, and condition.

From Code of Ethics for Registrars. The Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museums. Accepted and endorsed 11 June 1984.
A Museum is

- a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment.

- ICOM (International Council of Museums) Statutes, adopted by the 22nd General Assembly in Vienna Austria on 24 August 2007
Oxymoron?
Access AND Preservation?

No Problem!
Fiduciary

Fi-du-ci-ar-y (fi-doo’shē-er’ē) adj.
1.a. of or relating to a duty of acting in good faith with regards to the interests of another;
b. Of or being a trustee or trusteeship.
c. Held in trust.

Fi-du-ci-ar-y (fi-doo’shē-er’ē) noun
A person who holds assets in trust for a beneficiary.
In order for a collection inventory to succeed it must be an institution-wide priority!
1. Know what stuff you have
2. Know where it is
3. Take good care of it

AAM’s National Standards & Best Practices
Know what stuff you have
Know where it is
Take good care of it
1966 Florence
Time = $$$
Abandoned property?

Start the clock ticking!
Ignorantia juris non excusat!
There’s no such thing as bad publicity,

~ P. T. Barnum
Hermitage, St. Petersburg
Type of Inventories #1

Random (or Spot) Inventory:

- Extremely limited in scope
- Used to verify the location of a representative sampling of objects
- Better thought of as an audit than a true inventory
Type of Inventories #2

- Partial (or Section-by-Section) Inventory:
  - Limited in scope, usually by a particular display or storage location
  - More useful than random/spot inventories but
  - Can *not* be definitively reconciled against museum records
Type of Inventories #3

Complete Inventory:

- Aka a 100% Inventory, a Wall-to-Wall inventory, a Baseline inventory
- Documents the location of every object that is in (or is supposed to be in) a museum’s collection as well as in its custody (e.g. loans)
- Can be authoritatively reconciled (or justified) against museum records
PLANNING
Collection Management Policy

From Malaro & DeAngeles, *A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections:*

- The purpose of the museum and its collection goals
- The method of acquiring objects for the collections
- The method of disposing of objects from the collections
- The handling of objects left in the custody of the museum
- The care and control of collection objects generally
- Access to collections
- Insurance procedures relating to collection objects
- The records that are to be kept of collection activities, when these records are to be made, and where they are to be maintained.
What?!? You Don’t Have a Current CMP?!?

Buy This Book!

*Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies*

See webinar resources for full information
What?!? Don’t own this book???

Buy it!!

A Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections

See webinar resources for full information
What will it cost?
How long will it take?
Define your standard inventory record:

What fields of information will you capture?

At minimum:
- Accession or unique inventory control number
- Current location
- Staff member confirming location
- Date object is located
Additional information to consider including:

- Brief condition assessment
- Direct digital capture
- Confirm (or take missing) dimensions
- Storage needs assessment
- Documentation of accessories (frames, mounts, etc.)
Step #2: Planning Assumptions

- What resources and/or constraints are available?
  - Will it be possible to close galleries or freeze storage areas?
  - Will it be possible to impose moratoria or otherwise limit activities?
- Existing staff or dedicated staff?
- Interns and/or volunteers?
- Will inventory staff work independently or in teams?
- Specialized tasks or cross-trained?
Planning Assumptions cont.

Logistical considerations:
- Is there sufficient room in your storage areas to work?
- Will you need to move objects to another location?
- Can you otherwise dedicate space for the project?
- What equipment do you have on hand?
- What will you need to purchase?
Planning Assumptions cont.

Documentation considerations:

Collections Management System (CMS)
- Is there a record for every object in the museum’s custody in the CMS? Is retrospective data entry needed?
- Will you enter inventory data directly into your CMS?
  - If yes: does your museum wireless? Do you have or will you need to purchase laptops?
  - If no: will you use your CMS to generate checklists and retrospectively enter inventory data?
- Will you barcode?
But my museum doesn’t have a Collections Management System!!!!!

Hmmm.
Maybe that should be a higher priority?
To Digitize or Not to Digitize?

Digital Photography PROS

- A picture really is worth a thousand words
- May minimize handling in the long run
- Documents condition
- Makes the inventory ’sexier’ and easier to fund-raise for
- Is fast becoming an expectation, especially for museums associated with colleges and universities
To Digitize or Not to Digitize?

Digital Photography CONS

- Will seriously slow down the project
- Added complexity in processing, naming, uploading and storing/archiving digital assets
- Added hardware costs
- Added software costs
- Added staffing costs
Step #3: Testing
Step #4: Proposal & Budget

SAMPLE MUSEUM OF ART

A Proposal to Inventory the Collection
Step #5: Fund Raising
Step #6: Preparation

- **Organize your Records:**
  - If you will enter data directly into your CMS
    - Do any necessary retrospective data entry or “scrubbing”
    - Design queries and data entry screens specific to the inventory project
  - If you will annotate lists & retrospectively update your CMS
    - Design queries and reports to generate forms
If you will use Excel or other spreadsheet application:

- Determine the fields of data you will collect
- Stored on a shared drive?
- If on a stand-alone device: how to backup?
- Password protection?
- Create dropdown lists to control vocabulary for key fields (location, object type, etc.)
# SAMPLE MUSEUM INVENTORY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accession no.</th>
<th>Title/Description</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>Height in.</th>
<th>Width in.</th>
<th>Depth in.</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2016-020</td>
<td>Mona Lisa</td>
<td>Painting</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td>MM</td>
<td>10/4/16</td>
<td>The Louvre</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TAKE HOME POINT #2

Work from your records to your objects, not from your objects to your records!
Preparation cont.

- Organize Storage

- Create a Hierarchical Location Authority
  - All storage areas
  - All display areas
  - All off-site areas
  - From general to specific
  - Label all rooms, painting screen, drawers, racks, etc.
  - Create a map where labeling is not practical
# Sample Location Authority

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building</th>
<th>Room</th>
<th>Storage/Display Type</th>
<th>Storage/Display Unit</th>
<th>Unit Detail</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>Gallery 1</td>
<td>Wall</td>
<td>North wall</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>Gallery 1</td>
<td>Freestanding vitrine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>Gallery 1</td>
<td>In-wall case</td>
<td>Case 13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>Storeroom 1</td>
<td>Painting Screen</td>
<td>Screen 47</td>
<td>Left side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>Storeroom 1</td>
<td>Cabinet 6</td>
<td>Drawer 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>Storeroom 1</td>
<td>Mobile Rack 3</td>
<td>Shelf Unit B</td>
<td>Shelf 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum</td>
<td>Conservation Lab</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Storage Annex</td>
<td>Painting Storage</td>
<td>Painting Bin</td>
<td>Bin 16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Museum Storage Annex</td>
<td>Object Storage</td>
<td>Aisle 4</td>
<td>Rack 7</td>
<td>Shelf 2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preparation cont.

Produce an Inventory Manual that includes:
- Documentation guidelines
- Vocabulary and Location authorities
- Art handling guidelines
- Condition assessment guidelines and nomenclature
- How or if to document accessories
- How to document objects with multiple components
- How to document objects without numbers or other identifying information
Preparation cont.

- **Build your team(s)**
  - Hire new staff or volunteers
  - Retrain staff who are being reassigned to the project
GO!
TAKE HOME POINT #3

The easiest part of conducting a collection inventory is conducting the inventory!
Expect false starts
Reconciling the Inventory
Buy This Book!

*Collection Connundrums: Solving Collections Management Mysteries*

See webinar resources for full information
Congratulations!
Maintaining the Inventory

- It’s simple 😊
- But it’s not easy 😞

- Record object movement at the same time an object is moved +
- Update your collection records asap thereafter +
- Do this 100% of the time =
- An accurate inventory!
Some strategies:
- Limit access (as per your CMS)
- Develop procedures *with* the folks who move the objects
- Writes these down
- Share them widely
- Review and revise them often
- Make the time

100% of the Time???
Keep it Simple

“Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler.”
Albert Einstein
Maureen McCormick

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