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**Museum Archives Reimagined:
Partnering to Manage Museum Information**

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Abstract

The role of museum archives has expanded greatly in the last 20 years. In addition to preserving the history of the institution, museum archives function like curatorial departments, selecting and acquiring archives from artists, dealers, and organizations that support the research mission of the museum. In addition, the museum archives staff is often involved with preparing publications, public relations, digital asset management, legal issues, and providing didactic materials for exhibitions and educational programs. Five projects currently underway by museum archives in the United States illustrate a wide range of day-to-day activities, including documenting exhibition histories, digitizing collections, partnering to create an international research portal, and acquiring and preserving electronic records and email. Museum archivists welcome an open dialogue with CIDOC members about shared goals and developing technologies to better connect the information and knowledge located across the museum.

Introduction by Lorraine Stuart, Museum of Fine Art, Houston

I want to thank David for the opportunity to make some introductory remarks about museum archives. For the past year, I have chaired the Museum Archives section of the Society of American Archivists. Our two organizations share a lot of synergies, with CIDOC traditionally focused on all of the documentation relevant to the museum's permanent collection and museum archivists focused on preserving and providing research access to the corpus of materials that document the museum's activities over time. To some extent, these focuses have often intersected, although traditionally one has been based on the object and the other on context.

A shift in the balance of museum functions from custodial toward education and outreach, coupled with the transformation of information from analog to electronic, have led both of our professions to broaden the scope of our traditional missions in ways that offer new opportunities for productive collaboration. Both David and I wish to congratulate the program committee for anticipating these opportunities and naming archives as one the sub-themes of the meeting.

[David Farneth]

Just as Nicholas Crofts declared at last year's meeting an expanded role for CIDOC to look at all of the museum's documentation, when asked about my job as a museum archivist, I often declare, "We are not just about history anymore."

It is my observation that museum archivists may not be as common in Europe as they are in North and South America (but I hope that is not the case!) At the same time, I feel our European museum colleagues place greater emphasis on documentation and the benefits of cross-referencing. Some of this work, as we are learning at this conference, can be facilitated by technology. In the area of discovery and analysis of archival collections, human intervention remains key.

No one has yet found the silver bullet for connecting information found in archival collections with museum collection information systems or even library systems. One of the reasons for this is purely physical. The valuable information in archives is usually buried deep in a document, which in turn is buried deep in a file, that is located in a box, that might even be stored in an offsite facility. All museum archives need more resources for digitization and cataloging so that their collections can be more easily searched.

As we all know, archives are never described at the item level, and very few museum archives have ever had the time to create an index to where information about collection objects can be found, let alone to specific information to about the institution's buildings, exhibitions, educational programs, publications, etc. Archival research is still very time-consuming. Digitization and full-text searching will bring us part of the way, but for now, human research will still often be needed to analyze the content adequately and provide relevant linking.

In spite of difficulties in accessing the full range of information found in museum archives, archivists recognize that their future, and the future of their institutions, lies in the leveraging of the knowledge embodied in their collections and in their expertise. Over the last thirty years, the role of museum archivists has expanded significantly in response to the changing mission, role, and programs of the museum. For example, they began taking on records management responsibilities, digital asset management, and undertaking documentation efforts such as oral history projects and exhibition histories. In the last ten years, museum archives are responding even *more* proactively to trends in museum management, such as:

- increased attention to research and education in museums
- proliferation of digital image collections and electronic business records
- expanding historical research in the areas of curatorship, exhibition history, conservation, and provenance research
- the importance of documentation for recreating time-based, media-based, and performance-based art
- an urgent need to manage electronic publications, knowledge bases, and "big data"
- a desire to preserve external archival collections related to the museum's mission, collecting areas, or local history.

Why has the work of archivists expanded so greatly in museums? It is due, in part, because their work and sphere of influence cuts across the entire enterprise, and it is their job to understand both the function and longterm value of the museum's records. Much of a museum's work builds upon prior knowledge, and the archives is often the keeper of this knowledge for the next year, decade, or generation. Now that much of the museum's knowledge and information is stored electronically, the archivist's responsibilities have increased to include electronic records management, digital asset management (images, audio, video), and digital storage and preservation. In the electronic environment, preservation activities must begin when the records are created, and not ten or more years after the fact, as was typical for paper-based records.

As stewards of the museum's intellectual property, archivists also become involved in publishing and legal matters. Not only do museum archives identify and preserve the important knowledge, information, and documentation created by the institution through its activities over time, the archives has become an active partner in *leveraging* that knowledge to enhance the current and future work of the museum.

For those of you interested in learning more about museum archives, the Museum Archives Section of the Society of American Archives has published *Museum Archives: An Introduction (2d Edition)*¹ and some very helpful online resources.² In addition, I especially recommend five carefully considered introductions to museum archives written by Susan Anderson,³ Michelle Elligott,⁴ James Moske,⁵ Susan von Salas,⁶ and the present author.⁷ All three of these articles present strong evidence for the research value of the collections and the importance of the archives to the museum's core curatorial and educational missions.

As mentioned previously, many museum archivists are expanding their activities to include the acquisition and management of archival collections coming into the museum from external sources. These might include the personal papers of artists whose work is owned by the museum, of individuals related to the museum's mission (scientists, historians, collectors, conservators, donors, journalists) or the archives of related organizations (such as galleries, dealers, or professional organizations). These collections provide expanded research opportunities by providing points of intellectual connection and context for the work undertaken by the museum.

A number of diverse projects are underway aimed at leveraging the information and knowledge to be found in museum archives. For example, in the paper following this one, Lorraine Stuart (Museum of Fine Art, Houston) will present a collaborative project at her museum to integrate materials from across the institution to capture and document changes made over time to an important house museum. The project also captured a corpus of knowledge from allied fields related to the collection of the decorative art elements.

As we know from the new CIDOC working group on Exhibitions and Performance, some of the most heavily used records in museum archives are the exhibition files. Both the Museum of Modern Art in New York and The Metropolitan Museum of Art are working on projects to make these records accessible.

Museum of Modern Art

Under the direction of Michelle Elligott, the Museum of Modern Art Archives is in the midst of a thirty-month project to fully process and open to the public MoMA's exhibition files from 1929 through 1989. The results of the first phase of the project, from 1929 through 1963, can be seen in the online finding aid.⁸ This project for the first time unites registrar records with those from curatorial departments while presenting a detailed folder-level description of the collection. Additionally, the project has allowed for the scanning and online presentation of exhibition "master checklists" [Figure 1] and the indexing of exhibition-related press releases, all of which are now linked to the finding aid. At the same time, project staff have been indexing participating artists and curators for the 2000-plus exhibitions in MoMA's history, work that has grown to include more than 17,000 unique names. This fall, as part of a multi-year redesign of the MoMA website, the Archive's artist index data, checklist scans, press releases, and installation images will be connected to exhibition data in the Museum's collection management system and deployed online as the Museum for the first time publishes its full exhibition history on its website, moma.org. By next year, content from the Archives will be fueling the Museum's web site as never before.



Figure 1. Museum of Modern Art master exhibition checklist from *Fourteen Americans* [MoMA Exh. #329, September 10-December 8, 1946]. http://www.moma.org/momaorg/shared/pdfs/docs/archives/ExhMasterChecklists/MoMAExh_0329_MasterChecklist.pdf

Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Metropolitan Museum of Art Archives, under the direction of Jim Moske, has just processed 136 linear feet of historical records and administrative files of the museum's Costume Institute, one of the world's leading costume collections. Included are curatorial records, scrapbooks, and publicity materials on more than 100 special exhibitions staged between 1937 and 2008, such as "The World of Balenciaga" (1973), "Romantic and Glamorous Hollywood Design" (1974), "The Glory of Russian Costume" (1976), "Vanity Fair" (1977), and "Costumes of Royal India" (1985-86), which even included a costume for an elephant [Figure 2]. This material provides an incomparable trove of information about the department to engage scholars in new dialogues and studies on costume history, fashion design, and associated fields. A complete inventory is available online.⁹



Figure 2. Gallery 46 from the *Costumes of Royal India* exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, on view December 20, 1985–August 31, 1986.

<http://www.metmuseum.org/about-the-museum/now-at-the-met/features/2010/today-in-met-history-september-14>

The Frick Collection

Also in New York, a different kind of project is underway at the Archives of the Frick Collection, which has been awarded a grant from the Carnegie Corporation to digitize and make available the art files of Henry Clay Frick, 1881-1925 [Figure 3]. The files provide a unique insight into the mind of a major art collector during the Gilded Age and are at the heart of The Frick Collection's archives. The collection is comprised of approximately 13 linear feet of correspondence, memoranda, financial records, photographs, letterpress books and other bound items. In it, for example, researchers will find extensive documentation about Vermeer's *Officer and Laughing Girl*, which Frick acquired in 1911. The project will be completed in July 2016. Julie Ludwig, Associate Archivist, is the Project Manager and Sally Brazil, Chief of Archives and Records Management, is the Lead Investigator. All conservation work and digitizing will be done on-site in the Frick Art Reference Library's Conservation and Digital Labs. The finding aids for these two collections are available online.¹⁰ Once the project is completed, there will be a crowd-sourcing initiative to provide transcriptions of the many handwritten documents in the collection as well as a curated on-line exhibition in Google Open Gallery.

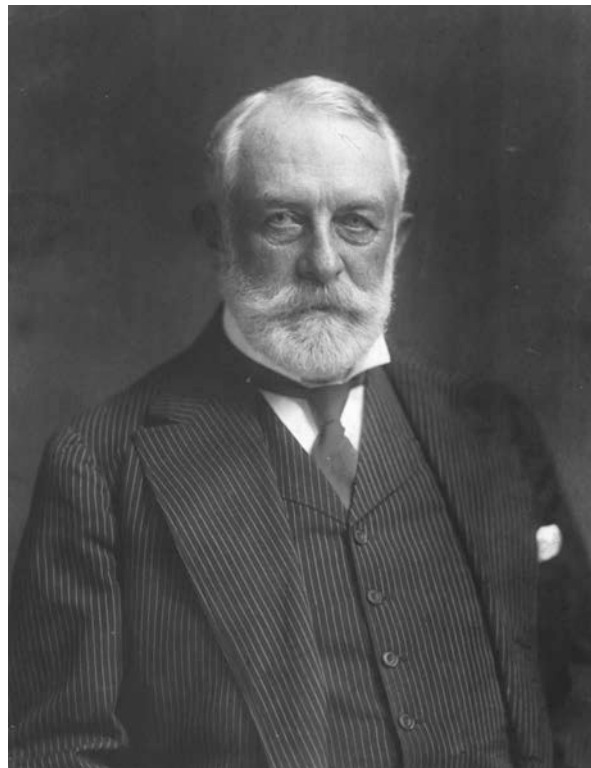


Figure 3. Photographic portrait of Henry Clay Frick. Photo provided by the Frick Art Reference Library.

Philadelphia Museum of Art

In another project, The Philadelphia Museum of Art received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to support planning activities for the first online research portal devoted to Marcel Duchamp scholarship and associated library and archival materials. This is a collaborative project of the curatorial and archives departments of the museum [Figure 4]. The museum is ideally suited to develop this vital reference resource, with the largest and most significant collection of artwork by Marcel Duchamp in the world and an unparalleled collection of Duchamp-related archival materials, including personal correspondence, photographs, and manuscripts. The proposed Duchamp Research Portal will digitally unite Duchamp resources and images held at arts and academic institutions worldwide. Examples include original notes for *Le Boite Verte* from the Centre Pompidou and rare Dada publications from the Association Marcel Duchamp. As a project grounded in the field of library, archival, and information science, all lessons learned are moreover anticipated to be extremely informative to colleagues seeking to create similar research portals for artists' archival materials.



Figure 4. Members of the Duchamp Research Portal project team surveying Duchamp materials at the Centre Pompidou in January 2015. Left to right: Susan K. Anderson (the Martha Hamilton Morris Archivist, Philadelphia Museum of Art), Christiana Dobrzynski Grippe (Archivist at the Dedalus Foundation), and Matthew Affron (the Muriel and Philip Berman Curator of Modern Art, Philadelphia Museum of Art).

Getty Research Institute

In a very different project, Nancy Enneking and her staff at the J. Paul Getty Trust Institutional Archives is making strides to safely capture electronic records from a wide range of legacy storage media, portable hard drives, networked servers, and the internet, and then transfer the data safely to servers. The process involves creating a disk image and capturing metadata needed to support longterm preservation. The team is also using digital forensic software analyze the content of these records [Figure 5]. The project includes developing guidelines for curators as they are acquiring collections that have born digital content. Other museum archives have similar projects to preserve electronic records, including the Cleveland Museum of Art and the Museum of Fine Art, Houston.



Figure 5. Digital forensic equipment used to analyze the content of electronic records at the Getty Research Institute. Photo provided by the Getty Research Institute.

Conclusion

Archivists have always recognized the importance of collaboration across the institution, but the digital environment now makes this collaboration essential. Like Janus, the archivist is constantly looking back at the past and ahead into future.

I would suggest that members of CIDOC might think of archivists as content experts for institutional context, in the same way as curators are experts about the objects in the collection. We are open to collaboration, and we are actively seeking ways of connecting the information and knowledge contained in the archives with the museum collection information, with library services, and with functional areas such as communications, development, and legal. We welcome the opportunity to engage in a dialogue about shared goals and the kinds of technology development needed to achieve those ends.

Author

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¹ Museum Archives: An Introduction (2nd edition). Edited by Deborah Wythe. Chicago: Society of American Archivists, 2004.

http://saa.archivists.org/4DCGI/store/StoreItems.html?Action=Find_Store_Items

² Online resources published by the Museum Archives Section of the Society of American Archivists include: Museum Archives Guidelines: <http://www2.archivists.org/groups/museum-archives-section/museum-archives-guidelines> and Standards and Best Practices: <http://www2.archivists.org/groups/museum-archives-section/standards-best-practices-resource-guide>

³ Anderson, Susan. “Creative Context and Compost Heaps: Artists Records in Museum Archives.” in II International Seminar Museum Archives and Research: Technology, Information, and Access. São Paulo: Grupo de Trabalho Arquivos de Museus e Pasquisa, 2013.

⁴ Elligott, Michele. “Serving Various Audiences” in *Proceedings of Art Museum Libraries Symposium 2010*, edited by Sidney E. Berger and Judy Dyki. (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2010) <http://www.pem.org/aux/pdf/library/AMLS2010.pdf>

⁵ Moske, Jim. “Institutional Archives” in *Proceedings of Art Museum Libraries Symposium 2012*, edited by Judy Dyki and Sidney E. Berger. (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2012) <http://www.pem.org/aux/pdf/library/AMLS2012.pdf>

⁶ von Salas, Susan. “The Role of the Library and Archives in an Art Museum” in *Proceedings of Art Museum Libraries Symposium 2010*, edited by Sidney E. Berger and Judy Dyki. (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2010) <http://www.pem.org/aux/pdf/library/AMLS2010.pdf>

⁷ Farneth, David. “Are Museum Archives Misunderstood?” in *Proceedings of Art Museum Libraries Symposium 2012*, edited by Judy Dyki and Sidney E. Berger. (Salem, MA: Peabody Essex Museum, 2012) <http://www.pem.org/aux/pdf/library/AMLS2012.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.moma.org/learn/resources/archives/EAD/ExhDocChartf.html>

⁹ http://libmma.org/digital_files/archives/Costume_Institute_records_b18646104.pdf

¹⁰ <http://www.frick.org/sites/default/files/FindingAids/HenryClayFrickArtFiles.html>
<http://www.frick.org/sites/default/files/FindingAids/HCFArtCollectionFiles.html>