Lessons Learned: Adapting Collections Care in a Global Pandemic

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The Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA)



Non-profit paper conservation lab with lots of other functions:

- Housing and framing
- Digital imaging
- Preservation services



Agenda for the Session

- Impact of COVID-19 on Archival Collections
- COVID-19 and Collections Basics
- Collections Care Considerations
- Discussion



Several observations from the field



Concerns with leaving collections

- Environmental controls
- Pest issues
- Housekeeping
- Security
- Slower response to emergency or disaster
- Pause in physical processing = pause in intellectual control



The reality for cultural institutions

Type of Struggle/Challenge	Percentage	
Environmental monitoring (including HVAC outages, RH, T, light) and Integrated Pest Management	43.7%	
Housekeeping (dusting, emptying dehumidifiers, regularly inspecting)	19.0%	
Lack of collection accessibility (for processing or digitizing)	18.3%	
Security (custodial neglect, intruders, theft)	11.1%	
Communication between departments	4.0%	
Loans logistics	3.2%	
Working on large project that required more than one employee	0.8%	
Total	100.0%	

The reality for cultural institutions

- * "One silver lining is that maybe the lockdown was a moment for people to assess what they were doing and how they were doing their job. Having to slow down ... made me rethink about the way our preservation team can operate and how much work we can handle."
- * "One of the advantages was that without visitors in the space we had full range to perform routine cleaning, treatments, and repairs. Projects that usually take a long time, we were able to complete in a short amount of time because there were no visitors in the space ... Some of the disadvantages were that it was really difficult to work on projects that required more than one person because of the safety aspect."
- "Very upsetting not to be able to care for the collection, especially when we are out of the building."

Preparedness pays off!

- Mitigate risks when able
- Cyclical preventive maintenance plans
- Monitor, monitor, monitor
- Integrative Pest Management (IPM)
- Maintain good communication with Facilities staff
 - Fully incorporate them into emergency plans



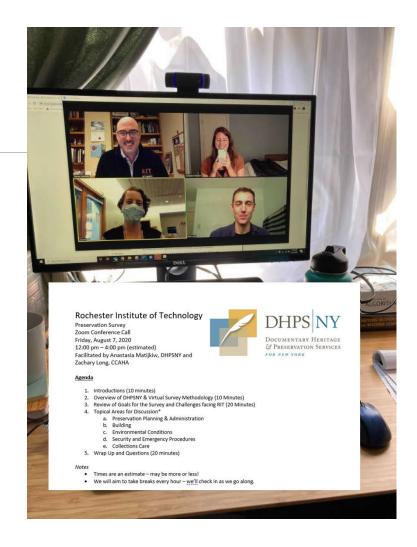
Digitization efforts

- Collecting of digital materials increased
- Increasing access to collections
- Don't forget digital preservation!



Virtual assessments

- Collect lots of information in advance through a pre-visit questionnaire
- Collect photos, videos, and floorplans
- Series of shorter meetings focused on specific areas of interest



COVID-19 and Archives

LODGE HALL COBWEBS

Grip Ban on All Meetings Until Places Are Renovated; 21 Theaters Reopen,

Dr. Robertson Warns Against Relaxing Precaution, Despite Wane of Epidemic

Orders to arrest any . - and industring in the "open face" appears or Joseph in

HEALTH ORDER DOOMS POLICE RAID SALOONS IN WAR ON INFLUENZA; KEEP

Stringent New Orders Are Issued for Preventing Spread of Epidemic; Police Ambulances Are Drafted: 100,000 Doses of Vaccine on Way.

1.613 NEW CASES SHOW DECREASE IN CITY; DOWNSTATE HIT WORST

Persons Not on Business Expected to Quit the Streets at 9 o'Clock.

The curfus will ring as, rather, blaw a Chicago tomorrow sight. Promptly at 8 a clock the whistles of

'NONESSENTIAL' CROWDS BARRED IN EPIDEMIC WAR

Churches and Saloons Exempt; Conventions, Athletics, Parties Hit.

FREE DOCTOR

Health Department Gives Out New Rules in Fight on influenza.

CHICAGO DEP'T. OF HEALTH - CUT 400

CHART XXI.

Headlines in Chicago Newspapers.

What we know about SARS-CoV-2 transmission

- Direct or close transmission with an infected person
- Indirect contact/foamite transmission (through contaminated objects or surfaces)

What this means for collections

- It's the people interacting with the collections that make the biggest difference
- Disinfect spaces, not collections
- Quarantine collections objects that may have changed hands

Always the first place to check!



REopening Archives, Libraries, and Museums (REALM) is a research project conducted by OCLC, the Institute of Museum and Library Services, and Battelle to produce science-based information about how materials can be handled to mitigate COVID-19 exposure to staff and visitors of archives, libraries, and museums.

https://www.oclc.org/realm/home.html

Hand sanitizer

- Paper yellowed when directly exposed to hand sanitizer
- Coated paper yellowed more than uncoated
- Alcohol-based hand sanitizers yellowed the paper more than water-based
- "While hand washing is recommended over sanitizing, because the former removes dirt and oils where the later does not, if sanitizers continue to be offered at various institutions, water-based formulations are recommended."

Manage human traffic

- Enforce social distancing
- Maintain vigilance with mask-wearing, hand-washing, etc.
- Use your best judgement, better safe than sorry



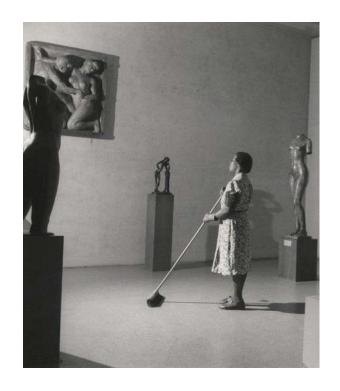
Keep spaces clean and ventilated

- Frequently clean high-touch surfaces
- Facilitate air flow
- Be very careful when cleaning in proximity to collections!



Cleaning near collections

- Know the ingredients in cleaning products.
- Use cleaning solutions with the fewest ingredients possible.
- 30% water, 70% ethanol (ethyl alcohol) or isopropyl alcohol
- Do not touch collections with cleaning materials, avoid splashing



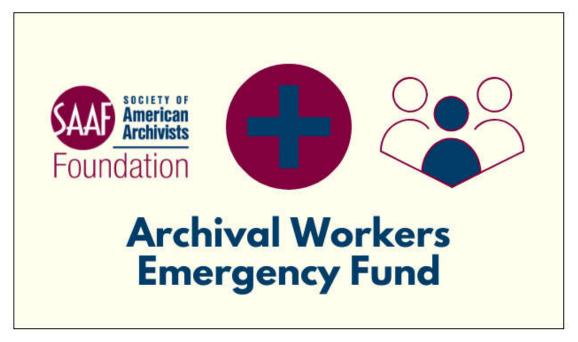
Quarantine collections (if necessary)

- Establish a space where collections can be left alone
- If that's not feasible, they can be bagged
- Use guidance from REALM to determine quarantine times
- Devise and standardize an approach to quarantine and collections handling that is suitable to **your organization's local context.** E.g.

https://guides.nyu.edu/coronavirus/handling-library-materials



Seek help if you need it!



https://www2.archivists.org/groups/saa-foundation-board-of-directors/archival-workers-emergency-fund

Practical
Considerations:
How Can (and
Should) We
Actually Take
Care of Our
Collections?



Archives' role in a crisis

"COVID-19: The duty to document does not cease in a crisis, it becomes more essential"

- International Council on Archives, International Conference of Information Commissioners, ARMA International, CODATA, Digital Preservation Coalition, Research Data Alliance, UNESCO Memory of the World and World Data System

"Archives keep decisions, actions and memory" and "they are reliable sources of information that guarantee the security and transparency of administrative actions."

- Universal Declaration of Archives (UNESCO, 2011)

Lists of work ideas

- Develop and/or update written policies
 - Especially a processing plan!
- Work on your emergency plan
- Metadata
- Document and refine workflows
- Analyze environmental data
- Research, professional development



https://www2.archivists.org/resourcesfor-response-to-covid-19-health-crisis

Pandemic collecting



Global Health Events web archive

Collected by: National Library of Medicine

Archived since: Oct, 2014

Description: A selective collection of over 12,000 web resources archived by the National Library of Medicine beginning in 2014 related to global health events, including the 2014 and 2016 Ebola outbreaks, Zika virus disease in 2015-2016, and the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) outbreak. Included in the archive are websites and social media of government and non-government organizations, journalists, healthcare workers, and scientists in the United States and around the world, with an aim to collect and preserve a diversity of perspectives. Archived websites are primarily in English. NLM will continue to develop, review describe, and add content to the collection.

https://archive-it.org/collections/4887



Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Collected by: International Internet Preservation Consortium

Archived since: Feb. 2020

Description: A collection created by the Content Development Group of the International Internet Preservation Consortium in collaboration with Archive-It to preserve web content related to the ongoing Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19) outbreak. Identification of seed websites and initial web crawling began in February 2020, and the collection will continue to add new content as needed during the course of the pandemic and its containment. High priority subtopics include: coronavirus origins, information about the spread of infection, regional or local containment efforts, including vaccine development and implementation of vaccinations, medical and scientific aspects, social aspects, economic aspects; and political aspects. Websites from anywhere in the world and in any language are in scope.

Subject: Science & Health, Spontaneous Events. Epidemics, Coronavirus infections. COVID-19

Creator: International Internet Preservation Consortium
Collector: International Internet Preservation Consortium

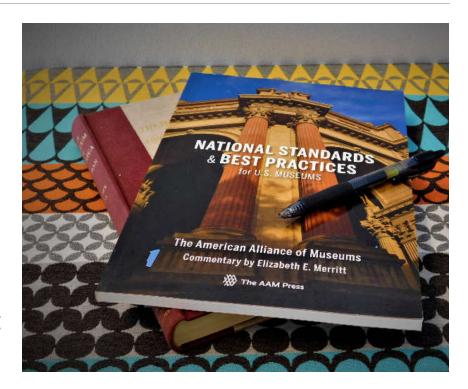
https://archive-it.org/collections/13529

Changes in collecting decisions

- Changes in collecting urgency
- Physical, human considerations about accepting collections
- Loss of access to space
- Employing student workers or other nonprofessional staff in a different capacity

What are "Best Practices" Anyway?

- Best Practices apply to all areas of work
- A set of standards for the care of collections in the public trust
- Not "rules" or "laws" but suggestions of care based on knowledge of what can harm collections
- Field-wide best practices vs. best practices for YOUR institution



Establishing the Benchmarks

Getting Started

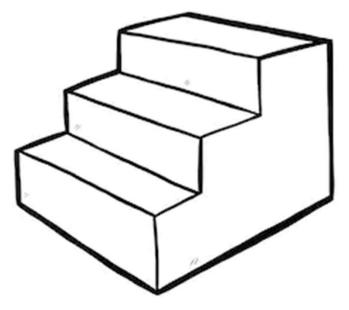
 The minimum level of care necessary for responsible stewardship.

Good

 Taking actions that are above the "getting started" phase, but there is still room for improvement.

Better

 Optimal stewardship of cultural collections based on current research, methods, and available resources.





National Postal Museum, Smithsonian Institute

Housing and Enclosures

Best Practice:

- All materials are housed in archival grade materials.
- Housings are customized to the specific needs of the material.

Topics to Cover:

- Materials
- Packing
- Suppliers

Getting Started: Put Things in Boxes





Short-Term (0-1 year)

- Cardboard boxes
- Wrapped in bubble wrap
- Wrapped in packing blankets

Mid-Term (1-10 years)

- Sterilite Tubs, unsealed
- Wrapped in muslin

Long-Term (10+ years)

 Acid-free and lignin-free archival board boxes

Good: Understanding "Archival"

BUZZ WORDS TO LOOK FOR

- Lignin-Free
- Acid-Free
- Buffered or Unbuffered
- P.A.T. (Photographic Activity Test)
- Polyester
- Polyethylene
- Polypropylene



Better: Be Smart About Supplies

Where to Find Supplies (in addition to specialized vendors):

- Amazon
- Hardware Stores
- Comic Book Stores
- Fabric and Craft Stores
- Art Supply Stores
- Uline





Better: Customized for Object Needs





http://stashc.com/



HGTV New HVAC System

Environmental Management

Best Practice:

- Temperature and RH are within recommended ranges (68°- 72°F and 45% 55% RH).
- There is no UV exposure and visible light remains low (below 15 footcandles/165 lux).
- The institution practices Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

Topics to Cover:

- Temperature and Relative Humidity
- Light
- Pests

Getting Started: Know Your Situation



https://ccaha.org/resources/en vironmental-datalogger-quickcomparison-chart-0



Getting Started: Know Your Situation



"Control" card that is stored in total darkness.



An example of a card that has been exposed to UV light and has faded.



Getting Started: Know Your Situation







Good: Regulate







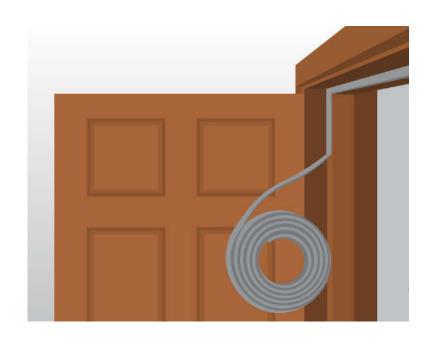
Good: Blocking What You Can







Good: Block What You Can





Better: HVAC System



Better: Switch to LEDs



Benefits:

- Emit less UV
- More energy efficient
- Emit less heat
- Bulbs last longer

Better: Service Contracts









Incorporating pandemic preparedness into emergency plans

Pre-pandemic	1	New influenza virus is detected, no vaccination is available, and it begins to spread among humans in a limited area.
Pandemic alert	2	The virus poses a substantial risk of transmission and spreads rapidly beyond the locality of origin. The public is informed that a new virus is successfully spreading.
	3	The virus spreads globally, is transmitted quickly among humans, and creates widespread infection.
Pandemic	4	The WHO declares the virus to be a global pandemic.
	5	Virus becomes prevalent in the local community and authorities invoke measures in order to slow the spread of the virus. Operations may be affected by a significant rate of staff absenteeism.

National Network of Libraries of Medicine

Emotional/mental health care is critically important

Work Culture - How we approach our work during the pandemic

- * We are all currently experiencing some level of discomfort.
- We need each other.
- We encourage cooperation over comparison, individually, departmentally, and institutionally.
- We know that circumstances change quickly during a pandemic. We give ourselves space and time to adapt to those changes.
- We embrace diversity, including a diversity of opinions and, as always, strive to reach diverse participants.
- We acknowledge that we are all trying to find a new work-life balance, and that there is no reasonable timeline or deadline to adjust, since our situation is unprecedented and continues to change.
- We acknowledge that our levels of productivity will be compromised and inconsistent. We acknowledge that we often feel external pressure to produce, and work to keep this pressure in perspective and not pass it along.
- We acknowledge that we feel stress and understand that it comes from caring deeply about important things. We strive to shift our mindset about stress in order to focus our thoughts on the important values behind our stress.
- We acknowledge that connecting digitally leads to digital burnout.

Questions for discussion

- What have been the biggest collections-related challenges your organization has faced over the past 18+ months?
- Were any specific resource or procedure gaps identified and if so, how?
- What are silver linings your organization has experienced over the past year?
- How do you think you will be better prepared to face unexpected shutdowns or different emergencies in the future?



Questions?

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