

Registrar's Quarterly

Summer 2019 /



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Linked in

Since 1979, the RC-WR has cooperated with the CS-AAM in advocating for the profession of Registrars and Collections Managers across the states of Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington, and promotes high standards and best practices in registration.



Cover:

Chobe, Jay McCafferty, 2005
Burned cardboard collage on canvas

Gift of Ron Linden, 2006.3.1

Image courtesy of
Chapman University Art Collections

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Free headshot provided courtesy of AAM and ONEbyONE Community Portraits

Dear RC-WR Members,

This past May I ventured to New Orleans to represent RC-WR at the American Alliance of Museums Annual Meeting. The

conference began on a stormy note—as I met with our AAM Collections Stewardship Professional Network (CSAAM) leadership at the NOLA Marriott, we watched from our conference room windows as a dark storm rolled over the Mississippi River and drenched the French Quarter in rain. Luckily, Sunday’s weather gave way to an overcast, but rain-free remainder of the week. Conference attendees comfortably roamed through the French Quarter and other districts and enjoyed the many museums, restaurants, and live bands The Big Easy has to offer. To mirror the energy of the city, this year’s Annual Meeting was packed with informative sessions, inspiring keynotes, and exciting events centered on this year’s theme – “Dynamic, Relevant, Essential: Sustaining Vibrant Museums.”

Over the next few days, I joined many beignet-toting museum professionals on our daily shuttle ride to the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center a few blocks away, practicing our best willpower after being informed of the no-eating-beignets-on-the-bus policy. The rule’s necessity became abundantly clear later on after I cracked a

joke while my colleague was mid-bite, causing him to send a cloud of powdered sugar snowing down on an unsuspecting armchair—but I digress.

This year’s sessions were varied and interesting, with a refreshing focus on Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusion (DEAI) permeating the conference as a whole. After boning up on procedures required by the 1990 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) and swapping tips and tricks on successful and ethical deaccessioning, I attended a session titled “Mistakes Were Made,” which encouraged all attendees to share their professional blunders and how they were able to learn and grow from them. I walked out of that session with an embarrassingly large trophy topped with a gold fireman (of all things!) and engraved with the words “Biggest Museum Mistake,” which now sits proudly in my office—that’s a story for another day.



All levity aside, it’s always wonderful as a museum professional to participate in an environment filled with growth and progress, and

a great contributor to that environment was the keynote speech by writer, curator, and activist Kimberly Drew. Drew spoke with candor and grace about the fluid status of her career at present and her advocacy for black artists, museum accessibility, and salary transparency, among many other things. Downstairs, the bustling MuseumExpo was packed with innovative tech, display, and shipping solutions and boasted fun features such as free headshots, portable 360-degree video planetariums, and a latté artist who painted attendees' portraits in foam.

I'd like to extend a special thanks to CSAAM's leadership, who hosted members of their professional network at a wonderful lunch and an evening reception complete with a wildly entertaining Collections Stewardship/Wizard of Oz-themed shadow puppet show written by the wonderful Suzanne Hale and performed by the evening's sponsors. I highly recommend reading the transcript for a good laugh with your coworkers—feel free to email me for a copy if you didn't catch it on CSAAM's listserv several weeks ago.

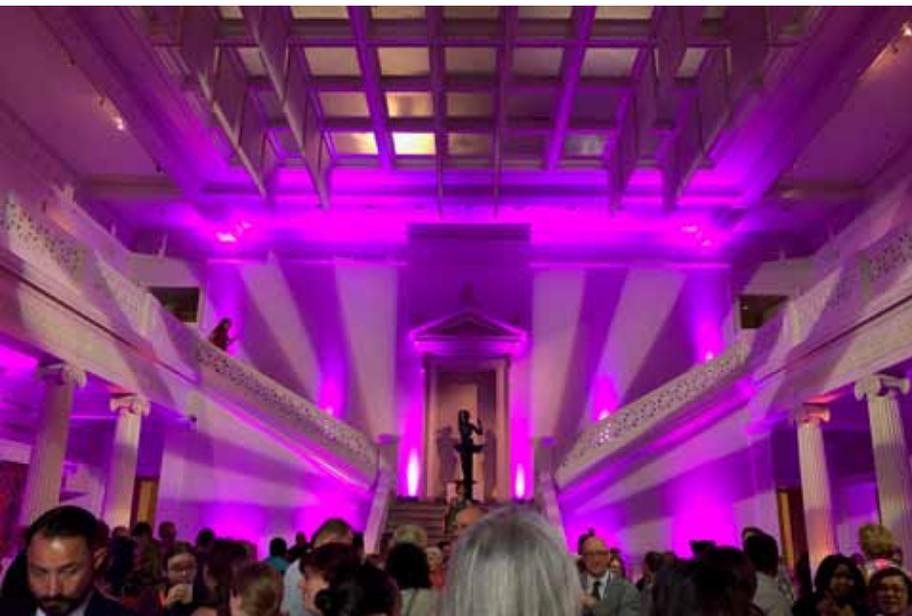
Museum of Art and then took a leisurely stroll through the New Orleans Botanical Garden, networking among the array of interesting sculpture on the grounds. The following evening's event took place across three museums in NOLA's vibrant Arts District: The National WWII Museum, the Ogden Museum of Southern Art, and the Contemporary Arts Center. All in attendance gathered to celebrate the city's museums in true New Orleans style with lively jazz, drinks, and delicious local food—a perfect way to end the conference.

And speaking of sustaining vibrant museums—the theme **Preserve & Protect** for this quarter's newsletter is all about safeguarding ourselves and our collections by taking a more active approach to disaster planning, hazardous materials safety, archival digitization, and more. Despite the importance of these processes to the overall health of our collections, they tend to be pushed to the bottom of our to-do lists by more pressing tasks. I hope that the experiences of my fellow Board officers will inspire you all to engage in similar

learning opportunities—because not only are they good for your collection, but for your professional development as well. If you have any professional development events coming up and would like to write about them for our next newsletter, please let me know!

I hope to see many of you at this year's **Western Museums Association (WMA) Annual Meeting** for our annual **CSI: Registrars** event and Business Luncheon in Boise, ID. Until then, as they say in New Orleans, *laissez les bons temps rouler!*

Katy Hess | RC-WR Chair
Registrar, Bowers Museum, Santa Ana, CA
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A stunning view from the evening event at New Orleans Museum of Art

AAM's evening events were held at some of NOLA's beautiful museums. Monday night, attendees ascended the steps of the New Orleans



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MISSION: TO PROTECT COLLECTIONS FROM DISASTERS (But how?)

Cory Gooch | *RC-WR Treasurer*
Chief Registrar/Head of Collections, Frye Art Museum,
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As collections professionals, one of our chief responsibilities is to protect our collections in the event of a disaster. Our institutions presumably have some kind of disaster response plan, maybe a phone tree and some supplies assembled ... but what does it mean to be truly prepared to deal with the reality of

a disaster? How can we be better educated, trained and organized to be ready?

First, we must be galvanized into taking preparedness action. Often, that is a result of hearing about a real disaster in the news or personally knowing someone affected by one. Sometimes it happens after being scared silly by a published article. As an LA native, I experienced my share of major quakes, but after I moved to Seattle I got really scared after reading, in reference to Seattle post-Megaquake, “Our operating assumption is that everything west of Interstate 5 will be toast.” (I live in West Seattle...)

This was in an article by Kathryn Schulz, published in *The New Yorker* in July 2015, titled “The Really Big One: An earthquake will destroy a sizable portion of the coastal Northwest. The question is when.” After this article went viral, we could no longer avoid being painfully aware of the overdue Cascadia Megaquake. Another great source for earthquake preparedness (for Californians specifically) is a 9-episode podcast from NPR affiliate station KPCC titled *The Big One: A Survival Guide*, which outlines in detail the circumstances that may occur on both a small and large scale as the result of a large earthquake and how to prepare yourself. Their website also has a great earthquake risk map that helps you determine whether your home or office are in areas of high risk. When shaken up like this (pardon the pun), there are basically two reactions: Denial/Inaction (head in sand) or Action/Preparedness. I’m betting that 99% of the RC-WR membership has the personality that demands the latter!

So what opportunities and resources can we use – often on a limited budget—to step up our disaster preparedness and feel more confident about our ability to protect our collections? The following are some suggestions, using examples of some recent offerings in Seattle.

Prepare Personally

Start with yourself, your home, your family. Being prepared personally is crucial for being prepared professionally. After all, if our homes, families or selves are in a state of chaos or panic when a regional disaster strikes, we won’t be present or focused and effective at our workplaces. So, let’s get our personal

disaster kits and plans in place; there are lots of online suggested lists for disaster kits. Make some lists (we love lists!) and get shopping.

In the Seattle area there has been a steady increase in public awareness, much of it spearheaded by county and city governments. For example, free classes are offered year-round on such cheery subjects as Stop the Bleed, Light Search & Rescue, How to Earthquake Retrofit your Home, etc. Take advantage of these resources whenever possible.

Prepare Professionally

There are a variety of professional resources that we can use, including museum conference sessions, webinars, regional workshops, public symposia, non-credit college courses, and institutional networks. Many are free of cost.

1 | Regional Networks

Consider having your institution join a regional disaster preparedness network. These are a great way to pool resources, share ideas, and foster training. They also provide the psychological benefit of reminding us we are not alone in our efforts. As an example, the Seattle Heritage Emergency Response Network (SHERN) was formed in 2010 and comprises 20 member institutions (museums, archives, and libraries), each having signed a mutual-aid agreement. SHERN provides periodic hands-on training and has a cache of shared disaster response supplies and equipment for its members. Bi-monthly meetings, often with guest speakers, are held at rotating institutions so that members can become familiar with each other's facilities, collections storage areas, and disaster preparations.

There are similar networks in other states: For California, check the **California Preservation Program**.

Another good resource is a booklet that you can download from the website of Americans for the Arts titled *Cultural Placekeeping Guide: How to Create a Network for Local Emergency Action for Arts Agencies, Arts and Culture Organizations, and Artists*



SHERN members paint their disaster supply container

2 | Hands-on and Webinar Training

Seek out opportunities for online—or even better—hands-on training. In 2018, the Seattle Heritage Responders program was organized by the Foundation of the American Institute for Conservation (FAIC) and SHERN, with grant support from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Modeled on similar programs that took place in New York, Miami, and Houston after major hurricanes, some 40 collections-care professionals—Registrars, Conservators, Archivists, and Librarians—participated in this intensive program. The first two-day session was held at the Seattle Art Museum and covered the following: a comparison of two real university library disasters, emergency management, building a response team, safety issues in emergency recovery, personal protection equipment for responders, drying methods for buildings and collections, and an overview of salvage methods for paper, books, parchment, vellum, skin, and leather.

Later in the year another two-day session was held at a University of Washington library. After a review of drying methods, we received a walk-through of a disaster from the perspective of a service provider (Belfor), then broke into pairs to practice a telephone-assistance scenario, followed by a group tabletop exercise. On day two we divided into teams to practice disaster assessments at various sites around the UW campus, including the Burke Museum and the Henry Art Gallery. We assessed the sites, recorded the

damages (indicated on signs posted on walls and objects), discussed appropriate actions, and reported to the Incident Command Post. We even had to contend with volunteers posing as pesky reporters and over-zealous members of the public! It was invaluable to actually practice these activities.

Additionally, participants watched a series of webinars on their own on the subjects of disaster-recovery funding for cultural institutions, psychology of disaster situations, health and safety in a disaster, and salvage techniques for paintings, textiles, photos and electronic media, books and paper, and wooden and upholstered furniture. We also completed some online courses: FEMA's introduction to the Incident Command System and a disaster planning course offered by Connecting to Collections Care. The C2C online community is a terrific free resource. Go to their website to access many archived webinars. If you search the word "disaster" you will see 24 webinars to choose from!

3 | Regional Seminars & Special Initiatives

Chances are there are special programs happening in your region – opportunities that can inspire you to take action, learn some new tips, and network. For example, each year in honor of Preservation Week the Living Computers Museum + Lab in Seattle offers a two-day "Preserve It!" program for collection professionals and the public. This year the theme was Disasters, with emphasis on "real life institutional stories." The most tragic story was shared by the volunteer director of the Aberdeen Museum of History who described the devastating fire that destroyed the museum in June 2018. Another presentation, given by RC-WR Washington State Rep Nives Mestrovic, described a basement flood event that damaged part of the Frye Art Museum's archives. By frankly

sharing the circumstances—and especially the lessons learned—from disasters, we can help our colleagues be better prepared.

Disaster preparedness applies to all areas of cultural preservation, not just collections. To this effect, in 2017 the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation rolled out the Performing Arts Readiness (PAR) project. Similarly, this year the Mellon Foundation funded a new initiative, CERF+ The Artist Readiness Project (CARP) to strengthen and expand efforts to prepare diverse populations of artists for when disasters strike. Seattle, federally designated a "disaster hot spot," was one of the lucky cities chosen for both programs.

In conclusion, while disaster preparation can seem daunting and insurmountable, when one strikes you'll be thankful for whatever prior education or preparation you managed to do. Take advantage of the many resources out there when you can and remember to delegate tasks so that not all is resting on your shoulders. The important thing is to simply take steps—small or large—toward the end goal: Preserve and Protect! ●



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JOIN US THIS YEAR'S CSI: REGISTRARS EVENT

Each year, in conjunction with the Western Museums Association Annual Meeting, RC-WR organizes its members to volunteer their professional skills at one of the museums near where the meeting is being held. This all-day event is known as CSI: Registrars (Collections Services Initiative). We are happy to announce that this year's event will be held at the Idaho State Historical Society!

When: October 4, 2019 | 9am to 3pm

Free lunch provided, courtesy of RC-WR

Where: Idaho State Historical Society Off-Site Storage Facility

Meet in the Grove Hotel lobby, transportation to and from venue will be provided

Cost: FREE to RC-WR Members

We will be assisting the Idaho State Historical Society in processing a collection of uncatalogued Chinese objects by condition reporting, numbering, photographing, and re-housing. Join your fellow Registrars and Collections Specialists for a fun day of teamwork and collections service!

You must be an RC-WR Member to attend this event

(visit RCWR.org to join for just \$15/year!) Space is limited to 25 participants.
To RSVP for this event, send an email to rcwrsecretary@gmail.com.

JOIN US RC-WR ANNUAL LUNCHEON

The Registrars Committee Western Region (RC-WR) Annual Business Meeting Luncheon is open to RC-WR members, as well as non-member Registrars, collections professionals, and related vendors. Join your fellow members for a great lunch, updates from 2019, and news about the future! This year's event is generously underwritten by U.S. Art Company. We will also be raffling off \$350 towards an early bird registration to next year's WMA Annual Meeting (raffle generously sponsored by Atelier 4) and there will be other freebies and surprises as well!

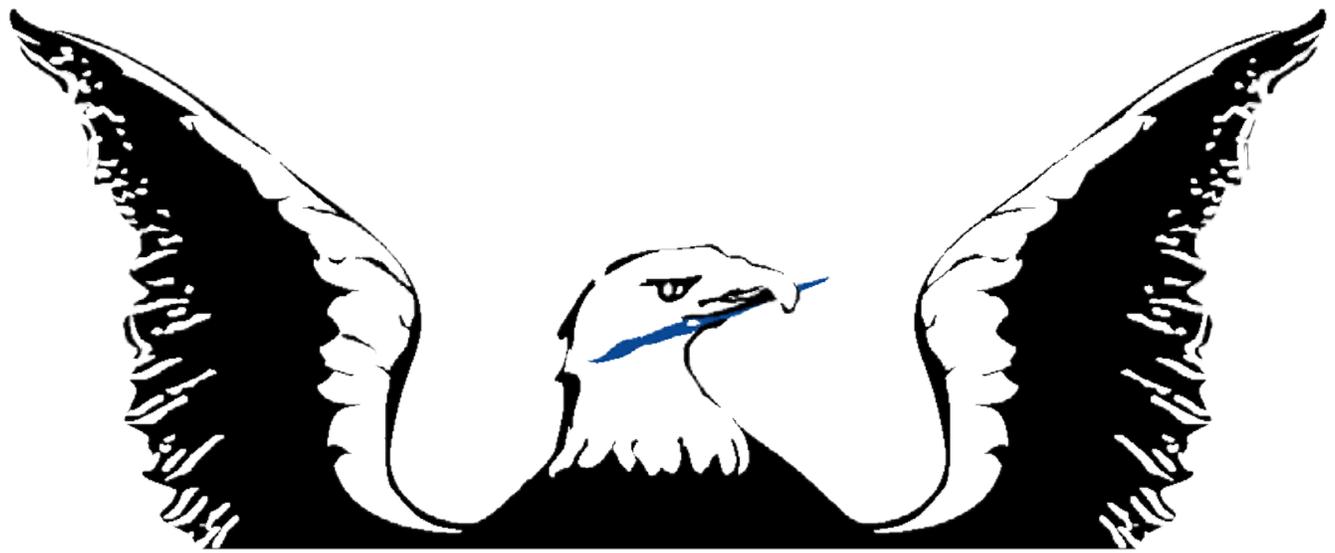
When: Monday October 7th | 12:45–2:00 pm

Where: Grove Hotel, Boise Centre 110C

Cost: \$20 per person

RSVP by purchasing a ticket for the luncheon when you sign up for WMA's Annual Meeting!





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ANNUAL MEETING 2019

Kathrine Young | *RC-WR Vice Chair*
Collections Manager, Puget Sound Navy Museum,
Bremerton, WA | rcwrvicechair@gmail.com

This May, I did something a little different in the way of professional development. I wandered into the world of Archives to attend the Northwest Archivists Conference and Annual Meeting in Bozeman, MT. The first day I attended a class hosted by the Society of American Archivists (SAA) titled *Managing Digital Records in Archives and Special Collections*. This is one of the courses taught for those pursuing a *Digital Archives Specialist Certificate* from the SAA. A mere nine courses are required for the certificate, and only two must be attended in person.

The goal of the course was to walk us through the **Five Organizational Stages of Digital Preservation:**

1. Acknowledge—Understand that digital preservation is a local concern
2. Act—Initiate digital preservation projects
3. Consolidate—Segue from projects to programs
4. Institutionalize—Incorporate the larger environment
5. Externalize—Embrace inter-institutional collaboration and dependency

Before we got into the details we were asked to consider what defines a “record.” Our instructor taught us that a record is a “persistent representation of activities created by participants or observers of those activities.” A record is something that represents an event or occurrence, like a letter, photo, or meeting minutes, for example. By that token, digital electronic records are records that need to be “performed,” in the sense that a process must be undertaken to read all the digital bits so that we can view what was recorded.

While the basic procedures of processing archives are similar to those used in museums, there are major distinctions when it comes to digital archives. One of the main issues surrounding digital records is security. People find it convenient to use and create digital records because they are easy to change; this newsletter article, for example, is much easier for me to type on my computer than on a typewriter. However, as an Archivist, Registrar, or Collections Manager, it is hard to trust a digital record for that same reason—*because* it is easy to change.

Other sessions I attended included: “Learning from Disasters: Emergency Planning and Response,” “ArchivesSpace: A Step Further” (ArchivesSpace is a collections-management database used by archivists), “You Got This! Empowering Archivists to Use Open Tools to Process A/V Materials,” “The Forecast for 2020 and How to Survive and Thrive,” and “More Product, Less Process (MPLP): What We’ve Learned and Where We’re Headed.” MPLP is a research project that calls for archivists to rethink the way they process collections. Many archivists have used it in an attempt to improve archival processing—according to the presenters it has pros and cons. I truly enjoyed my time in Montana, meeting new people, connecting with archivists, and eating a very tasty bison steak one night for dinner. ●

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MITIGATING THE DANGERS OF HAZARDOUS MATERIALS IN MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

Helen Fedchak | RC-WR Secretary
Curator of Collections, Oregon
Historical Society, Portland, OR
rcwrsecretary@gmail.com

This May, I attended a workshop hosted by the Oregon Museums Association about handling hazardous materials in museum collections. Sarah Samson, Collection Manager/Curator at Renton History Museum in Washington, and Joseph Govednik, Museum Director at Cowlitz County Historical Museum in Washington, presented the workshop at Benton County Historical Museum in Philomath, Oregon. The workshop comprised a great combination of pertinent information, networking, and a fabulous collection-space tour from Benton County Historical Museum. Samson's presentation covered various categories of hazards in museums, including environmental dangers, exhibit installation hazards, and of course, the many types of hazardous collection objects. Govednik gave a presentation about safe handling of various sorts of firearms found in museum collections. I was already aware of many of the sorts of hazards that I am likely to find in my collection (an extensive and varied artifact collection at the Oregon Historical Society), but as Samson talked us through her presentation I realized that we have every category of hazard she discussed!

Starting with environmental hazards, we are in an earthquake and volcanic eruption zone here in Portland, and ash and smoke from wildfires have also been an issue in the past. Many of us in the Western region share similar types of risk from these hazards, with coastal museums adding the potential threat of tsunamis to their disaster-planning conversations. Physical hazards from large artifacts that could tip or fall are also a common museum hazard, especially large artifacts suspended in the air. Facilities issues such as lighting or electrical systems are a potential problem as well, particularly during an earthquake or tsunami. Samson made the very good point that the ideal time to discover what kind of air-filtration system you have is not *after* a volcanic eruption!

Moving on to collections issues, it became apparent that many kinds of artifacts are potentially dangerous. At the Oregon Historical Society (OHS) we have a general collection, a costume collection, and an ethnology collection—and they all have their issues. In the past, basketry and taxidermy were often treated with pesticides (commonly arsenic) and may still contain residue from those chemicals. Certain costume items, especially furs and hats, were sometimes processed using mercury. The Connecting to Collections webinar listed at the end of this article has helpful information about arsenic and other textile-collection hazards.



▲ The Revigator was intended to add radioactivity (radon) to drinking water, for health purposes. It was commonly sold between 1924 and 1930. OHS Museum 91-97.846

▼ Fire Grenade, a glass bulb most likely containing carbon tetrachloride, used in the late 19th to early 20th century as a fire suppressant. OHS Museum 91-97.420



Finally, our general artifact collection contains the most potential hazards! We have medical tools and old medications containing mercury, lead, and even more dubious substances. Luckily, we don't own any medical specimens at OHS (phew!) but if you do, you should check out the

Mütter Museum webinar listed in the resources below. Radioactive items are frequently found in museum collections (Fiestaware from certain dates has a radioactive glaze) and at OHS we have a radioactive water cooler from the 1930s, when radioactive water was apparently considered invigorating, rather than deadly. “Fire grenades” also seem to be a common item —Samson told a near identical story to an experience I had at OHS of finding one of these early 20th century fire suppressants and realizing that the chemical housed inside the thin glass is carbon tetrachloride, a very nasty substance. Hers was taken away by her local hazmat team. In our case, we are working with Portland Metro hazardous waste to dispose of it. Old agricultural tools, vehicles, and apparently old computers all can contain problematic substances. Asbestos abounds in historical objects! It's a great insulator, so it pops up everywhere – just in our collection we have found it inside irons, inside gas masks, blacksmith's tongs, tableware, pipes, and a portable foot heater for early automobiles, to name a few examples. Cellulose nitrate film is a well-known fire hazard, but happily, here at OHS we have staff with expertise in handling nitrate film, and we have dedicated cold-storage vaults to keep the film stable.

So, what can collection professionals do to protect themselves and the rest of their collections from all these hazards? Samson presented several suggestions, some of which we have already implemented here at OHS, and others that we are working towards.

- Artifacts can be tested with XRF material testers to see what substances are on them, although this is not a piece of technology which most museums possess!
- Call an expert—larger museums may have staff with specialties in handling specific types of artifacts, e.g. textiles or medical specimens.
- Suspect items should be isolated, bagged, and labeled.
- Radioactive items can be detected with a Geiger counter, and stored under double layers of glass or thick plastic to mitigate the risk. Lead-lined storage bags can also be purchased.
- Nitrate film should be placed in cold storage.
- Implement strict handling procedures for hazardous collections and locked storage for particularly problematic objects.



Early "Plains" percussion rifle. OHS Museum 419

- Consider deaccessioning hazardous artifacts, and work with local authorities to dispose of them.
- Get to know your local fire and police department! (I would also add that we have gotten to know our local Explosive Ordnance Division of the National Guard, who have identified some potentially explosive military artifacts for us and certified them inert.)

Following Samson, Joseph Govednik from Cowlitz County Historical Museum focused on the specific hazards of firearms in museum collections. He gave us a great show-and-tell about different kinds of firearms found in museum collections, using examples he brought with him, and explained different types of mechanisms and how to check if they are loaded. Obviously, firearms are something that should always be kept in secure storage, and he also suggested taking a firearm safety course. Laws regarding firearms vary from state to state, so staying up-to-date with local laws and whether museums are exempt from those laws is important.

Finally, I am including here a list of resources for further information that Samson and Govednik made available at the end of their workshop. Many thanks to the presenters, hosts, and the Oregon Museums Association!

Radioactive Artifacts, a blog post by Sarah Everts on June 5, 2012

Radioactive Artifacts—A Radium Reprise, a blog post by Sarah Everts on June 26, 2012

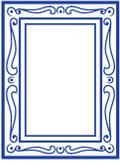
Arsenic Contamination of Artifacts, a blog post by Sarah Everts on February 1, 2012

Nitrate Films, a guide from the American Museum of Natural History

A Short Guide to Film Base Photographic Materials: Identification, Care, and Duplication, from the Northeast Document Conservation Center

Arsenic & Old Lace: Controlling Hazardous Collection Materials, a Connecting to Collections webinar

The Cabinet of Death: Tales of Conservation & Storage from the Mütter Abditory, a Connecting to Collections webinar ●



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New Reads

Nancy Arms Simon, New Reads Editor

Active Collections

Edited by Elizabeth Wood,
Rainey Tisdale,
and Trevor Jones

Published by Routledge,
New York, 2018

www.activecollections.org

A funny thing happened after Marie Kondo wrote her now-famous book, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* (2014). Nationwide, secondhand stores like Goodwill and the Salvation Army saw an enormous uptick in donations—and the surge does not appear to be waning. I looked at *Tidying Up* in a bookstore and when I opened it to a random page, Marie described why I needed to get rid of my books. I thought she was crazy. But later I picked up other books that gave me guidelines on de-cluttering that I could live with, and I too have taken loads to the thrift stores and re-gifted things I thought I would never part with (including some books!)

So, there is something going on here, and more people know about it than Marie and her followers. It is as if the entire population is suddenly realizing they have too many treasures and too much Tupperware. Some museums have stopped collecting contemporary objects because our culture suffers from so much materialism that there is little unique value to objects anymore. I suspect that our nation's mass attitude towards possessions is starting to change.

But if you've ever tried spring cleaning in a household of two or more people, you know that multiple voices can complicate things. So, when a collecting institution attempts to do some house cleaning, it can be difficult to get the entire staff on board. Deaccessioning is difficult. It should be in some ways because without protocols and oversight in place, it is too easy for the ill-intentioned to make a ruin of our collections. No one wants to be the legal case study for what brought the institution down. Because of this and many more reasons, when faced with out-of-control collections, the default becomes “don't do anything.”

Active Collections is a series of essays outlining a new way to consider our collections and their role as a benefit to society. It starts with a thesis that we should re-examine our priorities in regards

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to collections (move the focus from things to people). Successive chapters build on that theory, convincingly arguing that the way to shift the status quo is through prioritizing and downsizing. Case studies underscore the points through specific examples. The book is broken into two sections: A Conceptual Framework manifesto and New Ideas and Tools for Change. Some essays cover archives and libraries, some cover museums, but they are such close cousins that the information easily translates. (Full disclosure: by the end of the book, I was a Believer.)

Change is constant. The standards for our field were created 40 years ago, and now they're being tested. We are dealing with legacy objects at the expense of programming that engages the public with the objects they have entrusted us to steward. *Active Collections* points out that everyone has a responsibility to change this dynamic. The authors show that there is more at stake than just objects being overlooked or damaged. Indeed, our collective attitude towards objects is woven into the longevity of the planet and our ability to have a healthy existence in mind, body, and spirit.

The manifesto at the beginning of the book is so clear in its approach, vision, and philosophy that it is hard to believe there are more chapters to follow. It explains the difference between prioritizing objects over people. It proposes questions to ask yourself about museums as agents of colonialism, collections and equity, our material world. It offers studies on relationships between clutter and stress. It questions the carbon footprint of loans by offering a formula for determining carbon footprint and proposes ideas like requiring borrowers to purchase carbon offsets for object and courier travel.

The crux of the argument is that all this *stuff* is not healthy for us or the museum. The authors encourage us to look at the museum like a living organism that needs a holistic approach to keep it healthy. Ideas include bringing your board in to see the cost of inactive collections, museums agreements around smart sharing of generic objects, deepening the educational curriculum by changing language to be more broadly accessible, careful deaccessioning and collecting, and giving your useful objects room to sing.

One of the approaches that impressed me most was the professional accounts and scholarship around subjects like emotional development, the complexity and nuances of feelings and how they function in the brain, and disorders like hoarding (How can you tell if there's a problem? What are the standard arguments? What are the steps to dealing with it?) Then the authors translate the solutions that field experts use into language applicable for museums and provide concrete solutions that museums can use.

I enjoyed the authors' fearlessness in holding museums accountable for their participation in the global crisis of climate change and separation of economic classes, simply because museums believe themselves to be doing work in service to the public elsewhere by caring for objects. I also enjoyed the chapter on how object meaning changes over time. (Knowledge is shifting. It is made and remade, not gathered.) They used the example of 9/11 and how the significance of that day will eventually need to be reframed in addition to explaining how an object relates to the event.

The authors question everything, including "who is using your database and can they find what they are looking for using the language you are using"? They provide a list of questions to reveal inactivity and recommend a full-participation tiering system to better prioritize the care of the objects that are most useful in sharing the museum's mission with the audience. Tiering allows you to conserve resources, it reveals duplicates, split collections, fortes and weaknesses, and tiering has been a long-standing part of emergency preparedness for museums and libraries.

The change is coming. We are in an era of increasing volume and decreasing uniqueness. We don't know what the future will be but we know what the mistakes of the past are. We can recognize it now or we can recognize it later at the moment of crisis.

To preserve isn't enough. Personal meaning and collective wisdom are imperative. According to *Active Collections*, this boils down to "using," not "keeping." Hopefully this is the beginning of a movement to reexamine consumerism and not

a fad spurred on by Oprah's suggested summer read. Museums would be wise to see themselves as part of it, and possibly lead the way.



In addition to the new read in this issue, three great online articles were published about museum collections earlier this year. They were passed around quite a bit at the museum where I work, so it is very possible that you have seen them already, but I've included the links here for easy reference.

The first one deals directly with issues of overcrowding in museum collection storage that are the reason that *Active Collections* was written. I highly recommend it as further evidence of a need for a change in how we think about collections. Bonus: there's an art history quiz you can take!

New York Times, Arts Section, from March 12, 2019:
Clean House to Survive? Museums Confront Their Crowded Basements by Robin Pogrebin.

Oddly, the other two articles share a partial duplicate title, and both focus more on exhibitions and loans. I mention these because either one is a great way to explain to your extended family what it is you do for a living at your next get-together, particularly if you are in exhibitions or loans.

British Guardian, The long read, from March 21, 2019:
How to move a masterpiece: the secret business of moving priceless artworks, by Andrew Dickson

New York Times, Arts Section, from May 1, 2019:
How to move a masterpiece? If it's this big, very carefully, by Ted Loos ●



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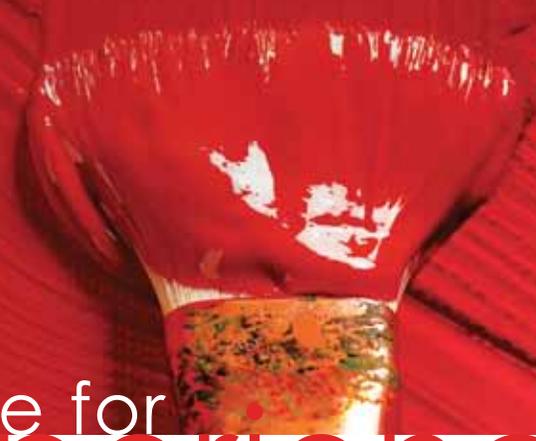


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ARIZONA

—Lindsey Vogel-Teeter

One of the **Arizona Capitol Museum's** largest collections is from the 1949 Merci Train and it is celebrating its 70th Anniversary this year. The people of France filled boxcars, one for each state, with gifts for the people of the United States. For 2019, the collection has been rehoused with new archival materials. Objects have been researched, letters translated, and object files updated with condition reports and photos.



Five Arizona museums are participating in the **Conservation Assessment Program (CAP)** this year—the 390th Memorial Museum, Arizona Commemorative Air Force Museum, Fort Apache Heritage Foundation, San Carlos Apache Culture Center Museum, and Pueblo Grande Museum and Archaeological Park.



2019 Cowgirl Up Group. Photo by Stan Strange, Arizona

The Desert Caballeros Western Museum recently completed its 14th annual Cowgirl Up! Art from the Other Half of the West exhibition and sale, March 29 – May 12, 2019. Since its inception in 2006, Cowgirl Up! has become one of the major national shows for Western women artists, raising over \$400,000 this year in support of the 56 participating artists and the Desert Caballeros Western Museum.

The **Museum Association of Arizona's** awards recipients of 2019 are: Individual Award of Excellence to Michelle Reid (Heritage Square Foundation and Rosson House Museum) and Jody Crago (Chandler Museum); Institutional Award of Excellence to the Vail Preservation Society; Community Support Award to Catherine 'Rusty' Foley (Arizona Citizens for the Arts), Robert Sutz, and Sheila Kollasch; and the Roger Lidman Distinguished Service Award to Jo Falls (Tohono Chul).

Mary Kershaw started as the new Executive Director of the **Museum of Northern Arizona (MNA)** in June. She comes to MNA from the New Mexico Museum of Art in

Santa Fe, where she was Director for nine years.

Amada Cruz, the Sybil Harrington Director and CEO of **Phoenix Art Museum**, has been appointed as the Illsley Ball Nordstrom Director and CEO of the Seattle Art Museum following an extensive international search. Cruz concludes her service with Phoenix Art Museum on July 10, 2019.

Willem de Kooning's 1955 painting *Woman-Ochre* is being conserved and studied by conservators at the J. Paul Getty Museum and scientists at the Getty Conservation Institute. *Woman-Ochre* was stolen from the **University of Arizona Museum of Art** on the day after Thanksgiving 1985. The painting was missing for more than 30 years before being discovered by the owners of an antiques store in New Mexico who immediately returned it to the museum. Conservators and scientists at the Getty will work together to study, repair, clean, conserve, and document the painting. The project will take approximately a year and, in the summer of 2020, the painting

will go on view at the Getty Museum before being returned to the University of Arizona Museum of Art.

Arizona State Rep:
Lindsey Vogel-Teeter
Museum Curator, Pueblo Grande
Museum, Phoenix, AZ

IDAHO

—Nicole Inghilterra

The Idaho State Museum wins The American Alliance of Museums MUSE Award for “The Big Burn” media interactive, and an AASLH Leadership in History Award for “Idaho: The Land and Its People.”

Idaho Association of Museums and the **Western Museums Association** are excited to welcome colleagues from the region to the Treasure Valley in October for the WMA 2019 Annual Meeting. Registration is now open!

Idaho State Rep: Nicole Inghilterra
Curatorial Registrar,
Idaho State Museum

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

—Linda Waterfield

Janet Turner Print Museum, California State University, Chico was recently awarded a Henry Luce Foundation award to begin digitization of the Janet Turner Print Collection to create a web-based image/information profile. Work

commences this summer!

The Magnes Collection of Jewish Art and Life at the University of California, Berkeley received three major collection gifts, including approximately 7,000 photographs and 15,000 negatives and slides taken by Roman Vishniac, along with his archive; a smaller but significant donation of EL Lissitzky’s hand-printed Chad Gadya (a song from the sacred text for Passover) from 1917 from the Fink and Huddis Family; and over 400 works of art and the archive of Polish-born illustrator Arthur Szyk that will inform an upcoming traveling exhibition focusing on Human Rights.

The **Asian Art Museum** in San Francisco is building a new, 13,000 square-foot exhibition Pavilion and Art Terrace on the east, Hyde Street side of the museum’s historic Civic Center building to open in the summer of 2020. Staffing changes at the Asian Art Museum include the retirement of **Sharon Steckline** after 28 years. **Liz Aldred**, previous Registrar at the Princeton University Art Museum, will join promoted Assistant Registrar **Stephanie Reeves**, Collections Database Administrator **Celeste Ohta** (who started last fall from the Honolulu Museum of Art), and new Collections Manager **Cynthia Murphy** (who worked previously worked at the Museum.)

Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley considers the complex social and economic dynamics behind 10 mind-altering drugs in its current exhibition,

Pleasure, Poison, Prescription, Prayer: The Worlds of Mind-Altering Substances on view until December 15, 2019. From ancient beer drinking to the contemporary opioid crisis, this timely exhibit empowers visitors with the context to understand the complicated stories of mind-altering drugs both near and far, past and present. Why have some substances become widely available and used on an international scale while others have gained less widespread traction or even been deemed illegal? Drawing from the Hearst Museum’s permanent collection, this exhibit highlights the incredible range of tools people have made to process, consume, and transport mind-altering substances. Also on view are works of art inspired by these substances that shed light on the inner visions experienced by their users. The Hearst invites visitors to question their assumptions about these drugs and the people who use them.

Art Pro Net 2nd annual Art Linx Conference, a networking and professional development event for arts and collections professionals of all levels, will be held on July 20, 2019 at the Doug Adams Gallery in Berkeley from 8:30 am to 3:30 pm. This day-long event is dedicated to helping art-logistics professionals to network and find professional-development resources. Discussions around freelance frameworks include information on technical processes of collections work (like framing and fabrication) and the growing freelance economy. The program includes a tech talk with Chris Barnett of Sterling Art Services;

freelance panel discussion with David Corfield of Life Work; networking lunch and resource swap; roundtable discussions about networking, interviewing tactics, mount making and fabrication planning, and freelance management. Facilitators include mount makers and fabricators Denise Fordham and Harvey Newman, and networking and event management professional Colleen Fischer.

Northern California State Rep:
Linda Waterfield
Head of Registration,
Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of
Anthropology, UC Berkeley

OREGON

—Meg Glazier-Anderson

Oregon Museums Association partnered with **Benton County Museum** in Philomath, Oregon to host a spring workshop, focusing on identifying and dealing with collection items that are potentially hazardous or dangerous.

A generous gift of \$1.5 million from longtime trustee Peter Brix to the **Columbia River Maritime Museum** will help accelerate the digitization of collections and library records, develop a Collections Plan that identifies areas for both new collection and deaccessioning, and create three major new exhibits over the coming years: Shipwrecks, River Commerce, and Indigenous Coastal Peoples.

The Pittock Mansion celebrated a 100-year history of the changing



Configurations by Wendy Hill, on display in *On the Edge: An Exhibition by SAQA Oregon Artists*. Photograph by Gary Alvis

landscapes of the Historic House Museum through a rotating exhibit on view until July 14. Included are original proposed drawings and sketches of the landscape.

The **Oregon Historical Society** opened two exhibits this spring. *On the Edge: An Exhibition by SAQA Oregon Artists*, on view from April 26 - August 15, 2019. The Studio Art Quilt Associates (SAQA) were invited to interpret a response to being “on the edge,” in a representational or abstract way. The works selected are part of a juried show filling two galleries. *Ladies and Gentlemen... The Beatles!* on view from May 10

–November 12, 2019 is an exhibit curated by the GRAMMY Museum and Fab Four Exhibits. This exhibit takes viewers back to the 1960s and shows how The Beatles had a major effect on fashion, art, advertising, media, and music during that time and long after.

Oregon State Rep:
Meg Glazier-Anderson
Registrar, Columbia River Maritime
Museum

UTAH

—Zaira Arredondo

Since 2017, the **Utah Division of Arts and Museums** has been partnering with Thanksgiving Point (a multi-museum complex in Utah) on a pilot study of the social impact state museums have on the communities they serve. The preliminary results, *Brace for Impact*, are featured in the May/June issue of *Museum*, the member magazine of the American Alliance of Museums.

The **Utah Sports Hall of Fame** has a home of its own! Fifty years after the organization's founding, the Utah Sports Hall of Fame opened its doors to the public on May 18, 2019 in downtown Salt Lake City.

State Rep: Zaira Arredondo
Registrar, Nora Eccles Harrison
Museum of Art,
Utah State University

WASHINGTON

—Nives Mestrovic

Rivaling the evolution of feathers in dinosaurs, one of the most extraordinary transformations in the history of life was the evolution of baleen—rows of flexible hair-like plates that blue whales, humpbacks and other marine mammals use to filter relatively tiny prey from gulps of ocean water. The unusual structure enables the world's largest creatures to consume several tons of food each day, without ever chewing or biting. Now, Smithsonian scientists have discovered an important



An artistic reconstruction of a mother and calf of *Maiabalaena nesbittae* nursing offshore of Oregon during the Oligocene, about 33 million years ago.
Illustration: Alex Boersma.

intermediary link in the evolution of this innovative feeding strategy: an ancient whale that had neither teeth nor baleen. The 33-million-year-old fossil is in the collection of the Burke Museum, Seattle, and scientists have named it *Maiabalaena nesbittae* after Dr. Elizabeth A. Nesbitt, the **Burke Museum** curator of invertebrate paleontology and micropaleontology, to honor her lifetime of contribution to the paleontology of the Pacific

Northwest. The name combines *Maia*, meaning mother, and *balaena*, meaning whale.

Chihuly Studio in Seattle has been busy shipping and installing multiple exhibitions this year. Currently they are celebrating *Chihuly at Kew: Reflections on Nature* at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, London, through October 27, 2019. The

exhibition presents the perfect marriage of art, science, and nature, as the artist's installations are presented amid the spectacular landscapes of one of London's few UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The majority of artwork featured in the exhibition has never been seen before in the UK, including a specially designed sculpture for Kew's iconic Temperate House. Highlights include Chihuly's celestial *Sapphire Star*, along with selections from the artist's body of work including *Drawings, Venetians, Seaforms, Baskets, and Rotolo*. For more information on Chihuly exhibitions, visit their website.

Security guards at the **Frye Art Museum** recently voted unanimously to form the Art Workers Union, the first group of its kind at an art institution in Seattle. The guards say that the Frye's wages are too low and that its benefits are lacking. This made national news along with several New York City museums, including New Museum, Museum of Modern Art, MoMA PS1, and Guggenheim Museum, where worker unions have formed or are in the process of doing so. "As all eligible staff have now had their chance to formally vote, the Frye respects the results of the election and recognizes our security staff's right to collectively bargain as the Art Workers Union," a representative for the museum said in a statement. "We look forward to a productive discussion approached in good faith. The Frye remains committed to providing an inclusive and respectful environment for all of its staff, volunteers, and visitors." In a statement, a Frye security guard said, "This is a victory

for security guards here at the Frye. We urge management to work with us and bargain in good faith so that we can make the museum a stronger institution where workers have a seat at the table and a voice on the job."

The exhibition currently at the **Museum of History & Industry** titled *Seattle Style: Fashion/Function*, was curated by RC-WR member Clara Berg, Collections Specialist for Costumes and Textiles. This exciting exhibit, on view May 4–October 14, 2019, features more than 120 garments and accessories from MOHAI's collection and reveals captivating stories about the city's sartorial spirit. In other MOHAI news, **Kristin Halunen** has been appointed Director of Collections Resources. In addition to her regular duties as Museum Registrar, she will be the Director of the Collections and Library Departments.

The **Seattle Art Museum** presents *Victorian Radicals: From the Pre-Raphaelites to the Arts & Crafts Movement*, June 13 – September 8, 2019, exploring how three generations of rebellious British artists, designers, and makers responded to a time of great social upheaval in an increasingly industrial world. The exhibition features 150 works from the collection of the Birmingham Museum of Art—many of which have never been shown outside of the United Kingdom—including paintings, drawings, books, sculptures, textiles, stained glass, and other decorative arts.

The **Seattle Asian Art Museum**, located in Volunteer Park, closed its doors in February 2017 to prepare for renovations to the historic building. The renovations are nearly complete and summer 2019 will be spent preparing a fresh new installation in anticipation of a reopening in the fall. **Reva Main**, previously of the Princeton University Art Museum, will be joining the SAAM Registrars this summer to help with the collections move back to SAAM.



Seattle Asian Art Museum new addition from rear of building. Image courtesy of Carol Binder.

The **Washington Museum Association** annual conference took place June 19–21, hosted by the **Northwest Museum of Art & Culture** in Spokane, with the theme "All Stories Are Told Here." The annual volunteer pre-conference event **Registrars to the Rescue** took place at **Jundt Art Museum** at Gonzaga University. Seventeen registrars and collections specialists spent a full day volunteering their time and skills to assist with several projects in the storage vaults. The team inventoried more than 300 framed works while consolidating them on 20 hanging racks to make room for collection growth.



Tour group and hosts at the Washington State History Research Center ▼

R2R crew 2019 at Jundt Art Museum ▲

Additionally, Jundt staff and volunteers archived nearly 4,000 postcards and exhibition brochures while clearing redundant materials to make room in storage. The event was organized by **Rebecca Engelhardt** of **Museum of Glass** and Sarah Samson of **Renton History Museum** and, for the eighth year, sponsored by **Art Work Fine Art Services**. If you missed the event and would like to participate, start planning ahead: The conference is headed to Olympia in 2020, and R2R we will be looking for recommended sites for projects and volunteers. Contact Rebecca Engelhardt for more information, rengelhardt@museumofglass.org



Eight members of the Washington RC-WR chapter attended a behind-the-scenes tour at the **Washington State History Research Center** in Tacoma on May 14, 2019. Lynette Miller, Head of Collections, Ed Nolan, Head of Special Collections, and Nancy Jackson, Collections Manager, welcomed the group at the original Washington State History

Museum building on Stadium Way. In 1996 the museum moved into downtown Tacoma and the Stadium Way facility was re-designated as the Washington State History Research Center. The building serves as the storage facility for the Washington State Historical Society's artifacts, special collections, and digital materials, available to the public for research. The group viewed storage areas for special collections com-

prising photographs, archives and manuscripts, posters, maps, printed ephemera, books, and finding aids, as well as for artworks, clothing, archaeological artifacts (including an Egyptian mummy!), ethnographic materials, historical tools and equipment, and furniture. Also included was the controlled cold storage room for nitrate negatives, added in a 2008 renovation of the building.