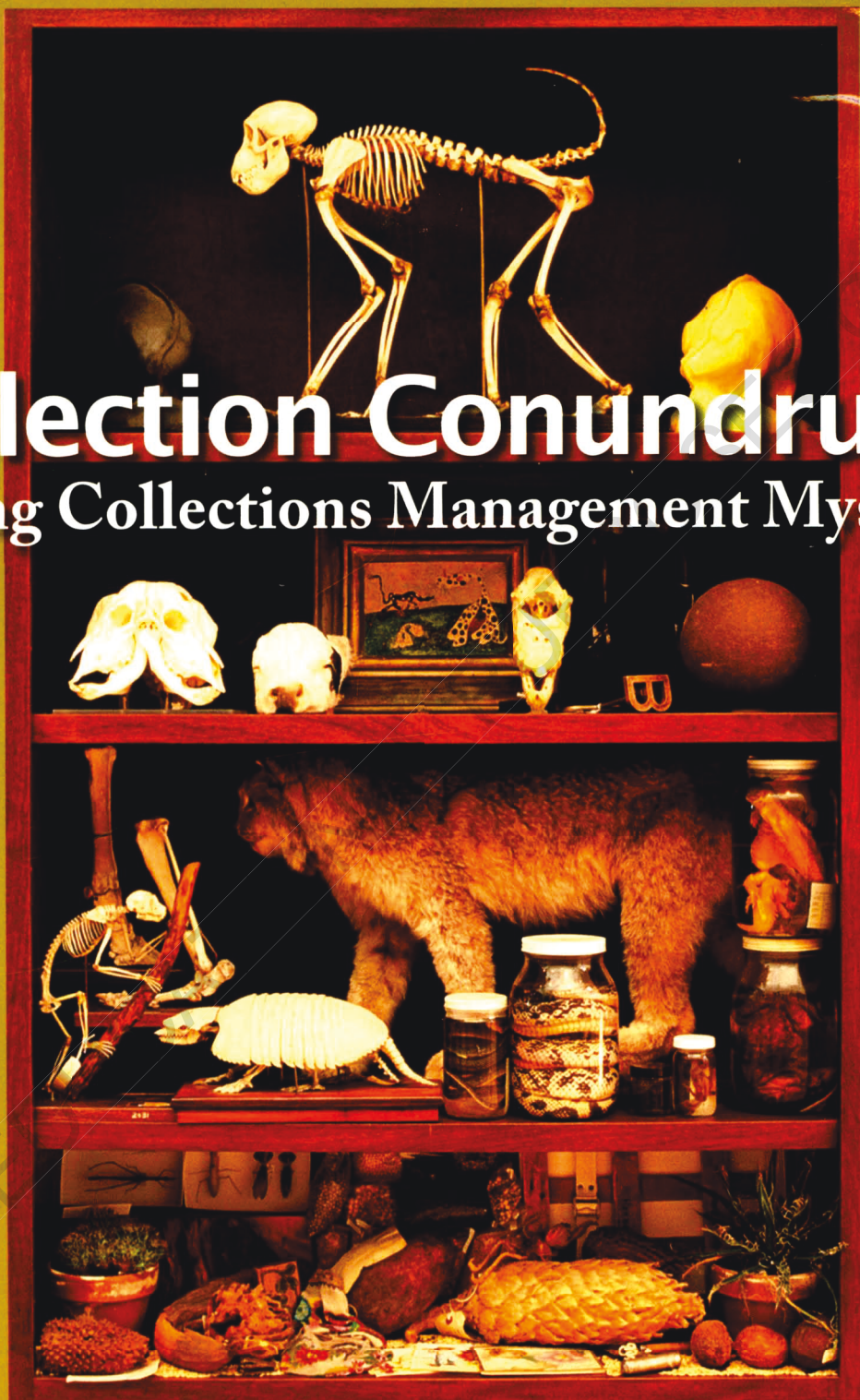


# Collection Conundrums

Solving Collections Management Mysteries



Rebecca A. Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore







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# Collection Conundrums

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# Collection Conundrums

## Solving Collections Management Mysteries

**Rebecca A. Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore**

AMERICAN  ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS

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1575 Eye St. N.W., Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20005



**Collection Conundrums: Solving Collections Management Mysteries**

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## Acknowledgments

Standards and procedures are developed over time by many people within the museum profession. In order to represent what collections staff do and outline solutions that might be best for a variety of museum collections issues, we have relied on numerous people: registrars, curators, collection managers, directors, lawyers, teachers and students. Panels at professional conferences offer clues, as do the myriad questions and responses on listservs. Museum professionals have proven to be open and positive in their advice and in sharing their resources, and all of those who have discussed thorny collections issues have moved the process forward.

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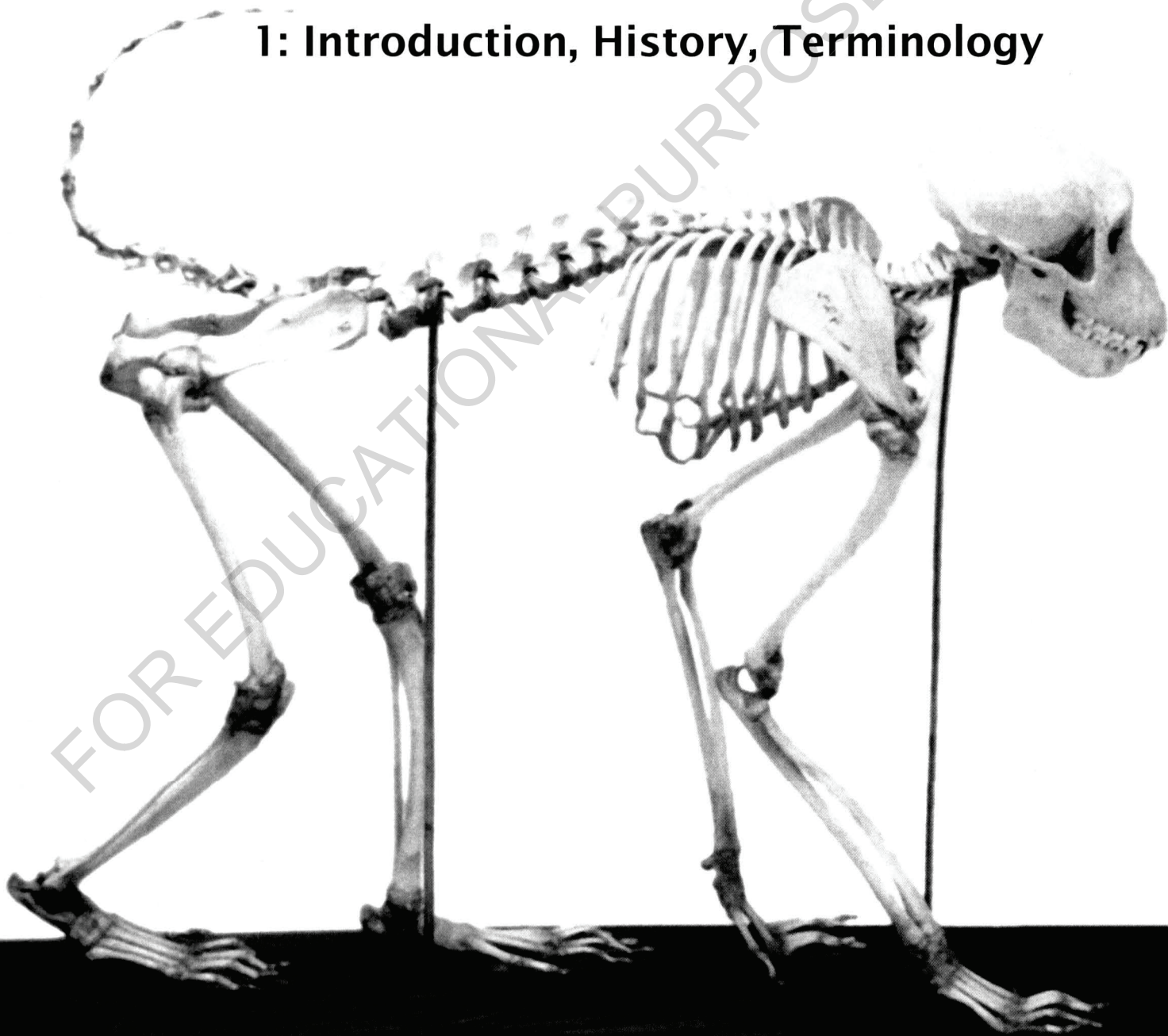
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manuscript skillfully and efficiently; it has been a pleasure to work with her and with John Strand of the American Association of Museums staff. We would also like to thank Christiane Riederer von Paar and Claudia Bohn-Spector of Design35 for their clean and elegant design. Jim Reuter and G. L. Gilmore have once more wondered at our interest in rather quiet and obscure issues, but have been tolerant of our efforts. Thanks, guys!

*Rebecca A. Buck  
Jean Allman Gilmore*



# 1: Introduction, History, Terminology



*All objects are equal but some are more equal than others . . .*

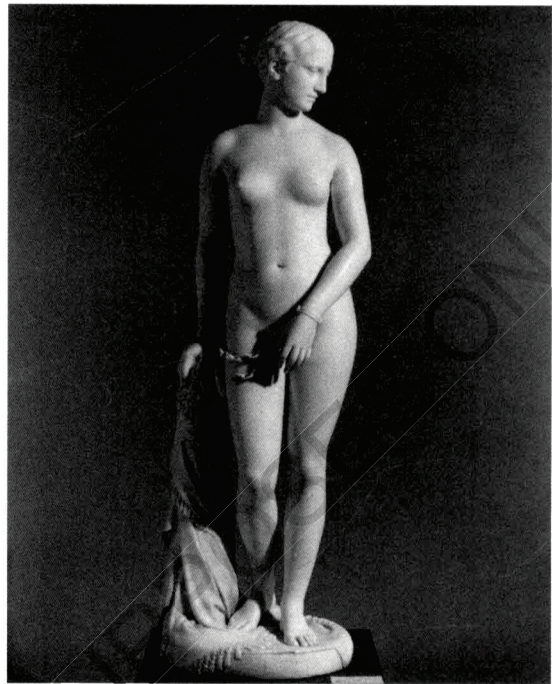
## PUBLIC TRUST

The permanent collections of a museum form the core of the institution. They rise from the mission, they inform the programs and they shape the direction of the institution. If a museum adheres to professional standards, care is taken with everything that is done with them. The well-managed museum provides sophisticated environmental systems, good security, safe exhibition techniques and storage systems that minimize threat to the physical safety of the collection. It takes care to pack, crate and ship collection objects in the best possible way to avoid damage. Its documentation procedures are complex, thorough and geared to tracking the physical integrity and presenting the correct intellectual attributes of each object.

The laws that define governmental museums and those that regulate private museums are complex and change from state to state.<sup>1</sup> Unless museums are commercial (Madame Tussauds Wax Museum, for example), their collections are held for the benefit of the public. Oversight of this public trust in each state rests in the office of the attorney general. The responsibility for care of the collections is guided by law and by the higher professional and ethical standards set by professional organizations. The American Association of Museums, as the organization that accredits American museums, works constantly to upgrade standards and promote excellence.

## THE ACCESSIONED OBJECT

When an object enters a museum's permanent collection, its status changes. There is no more drinking from the cup, no more playing with the doll, no more never-ending display for the watercolor. Housing and environmental issues alien to the object's origin and initial use loom large, and a pedestal awaits for future exhibition. The object, by virtue of the fact that it has been "accessioned,"<sup>2</sup> is accorded higher value than its counterparts on the



The Perfect Accessioned Object: 26.2755, Hiram Powers, *The Greek Slave*, 1847. The Newark Museum, gift of Franklin Murphy, Jr., 1926.

outside. Usually there is no question that the accessioned object deserves this higher esteem.

Museum professionals often idealize the accessioned object while at the same time overlooking the fact that many accessioned objects do not meet the standard. Accessioning is an equalizer for objects within a museum collection. To collections staff, all accessioned objects must be treated in accordance with professional practices that have been transformed into institutional policy and procedure. The standards and best practices for collections care and documentation, which are outlined in texts, taught in museum studies courses and discussed in professional meetings and publications, must be applied equally.

Museum professionals acknowledge problems arising from old collecting and documentation practices, discuss them at length and attempt to formulate solutions but usually have insufficient staff and legal counsel available to pursue resolution. A tension builds between objects of great value and insignificant objects with little relevance to the museum's mission, between objects clearly



owned by the museum and those of shadowy status.<sup>3</sup> Since an object of lesser value is more likely to have unclear status than an object of greater value, the bottom end of the scale becomes increasingly murky. Objects vie for space, care and the time that must be spent to document and resolve issues surrounding them. The lesser objects take away space and time from the greater, and the needs of the greater preclude care, documentation and subsequent disposition of the lesser.

After time, objects of unclear status take on the attributes of the accessioned object. A museum staff member may have given them a number. They are in storage with like objects and may have catalogue cards or some makeshift documentation. They appear on inventories and are given tracking numbers. In essence, they must be treated according to the standards of collection objects until their stories can be sorted out and they can be either disassociated from or made more clearly a part of the permanent collection.

When human nature mixes with chronic lack of space, too few collections staff and informal collecting histories, museums face some form of this problem. Its manifestations include accessioned objects that are not useful to the museum, partially accessioned objects, found-in-collection objects, old loans, deaccessioned objects never discarded, wrongly accessioned property, abandoned property and special supplemental collections. Throw in a few institutional transfers, some special event decorations and a reproduction returned as an object from a white elephant sale or give-away from the past, and the mix becomes extremely difficult to sort out. These problems are not unique to history museums, nor to general museums. Any museum may find itself dealing with one or many of these situations.

In the ideal world there are no lesser objects, nor objects of uncertain status, among the accessioned. Kudos to any museum that has managed to keep its permanent collection clear of such felonies and high misdemeanors! The ideal product of collections policies and practices is to make all accessioned objects within a collection equal. The objects

in a museum collection should be in tune with the mission of the museum; they should be of value to the programs that the museum generates and they should all merit the expense of care, documentation, housing, environment and conservation. This does not mean that all objects must be treated to exactly the same measure of care during storage, loan or exhibition. The history, value, fragility and material components of the objects determine that level. It is not at all unusual to have million-dollar paintings, a local haberdasher's box, a mammoth's tooth and an 1860s salt crock in the same collection. They become equal when they are all valuable to the museum and are all treated with the highest standard of care determined by type of object.

In order to resolve the problems caused by uneven collecting practices and take control of collections, there must be a two-pronged attack. First, every museum should follow clear policies that lead to high-quality collections additions with clear title. A concerted attempt must be made to keep all strange material and borderline objects out of the collection. Do not put the city award plaque in the collection; think it through and add it to the institutional archive. Tell the founder's daughter that trinkets from Tasmania do not matter to a museum with regional historical interests. That bad portrait of the mayor does not belong in the art collection. Keep loan records current. Keep the accessioning process up-to-date. Plan and perform inventories, and resolve historical problems whenever possible.

Second, museums must find ways to resolve problems arising from the hazy collecting practices of the past. Many museums have instituted procedures that help them sort out old loans, undocumented objects and supplementary collections. There is not, however, a body of literature for American museums who wish to undertake processes to clarify collection status without reinventing the wheel. It is with the hope of solidifying some standards already in place and encouraging discussion of others that this book was begun.

It may seem fairly simple to resolve collection issues, but it is not. It may seem even simpler to prevent them. Again, it is not. Many museums, par-



ticularly small institutions without professional staff, continue to invent the legal and practical procedures they believe they should follow. Some replicate the informal procedures of the early part of the twentieth century, accepting material without review, using oral contracts or small handwritten notes. Some accept material without paying attention to the mission of the museum and the practical considerations of taking care of that material in the future. It is not unusual to find a fairly new museum with no idea of the extent of its collections and no proof of ownership of those collections. The enthusiastic individuals who create museums are often more visionary than practical—they are directors and curators, not registrars and collections managers. They do not have staff to balance the vision with the practical concerns. Other museums fold in entire collections from defunct museums and inherit all of the issues that existed in the former institution.

Established museums with staff generally try, especially since the American Association of Museums (AAM) instituted their accreditation program in 1971, to keep problems from occurring in their collections. They also are aware of many of the solutions to problems they have inherited. Some museums have undertaken major projects to clarify title and claim old loans. More museums, however, have not been able to spend the time necessary to review and organize collections completely. In order to understand the problems' origins, and to begin to look for solutions, it is important to know something of the history of collection development and the standards for collection documentation and care.

## HISTORY OF COLLECTING AND DEVELOPMENT OF STANDARDS

Many of the first museums of the United States started with collections of scientific and natural history specimens; this was a direct outgrowth of museums of curios and natural history specimens in Europe. Some of these—such as the Charleston Museum of Charleston, South Carolina—flourished

from the late 1700s. In New Hampshire, Dartmouth College traces its collecting history to a donation of money in 1772 for the acquisition of “philosophical apparatus.” On October 26, 1772, Reverend David McClure wrote to Reverend Eleazar Wheelock, president of Dartmouth: “I have collected a few curious Elephants Bones found about six hundred miles down the Ohio, for the young Museum of Dartmouth, which I shall forward to Philadelphia the first conveyance.”<sup>4</sup> One of the specimens he sent is still extant in the collection of Dartmouth's Hood Museum of Art.



772.1.30192, Mammoth tooth. Courtesy of the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire, gift of David McClure.

Most of the early museums were established in the northeastern part of the country. The Peabody Essex Museum in Salem, Massachusetts, was founded in 1799. The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts began in Philadelphia in 1805, and later, from 1822 through 1828, Peale's Museum of natural history specimens was installed in Independence Hall. That museum moved to Baltimore and was later destroyed by fire. Back in New England, Yale developed its first museum in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1832 and the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art was founded in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1842.

Frederick A. Lucas, curator-in-chief, Museum of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences, in his 1907 paper, entitled “The Evolution of Museums,” published the following year, discusses



the changes that took place from the earliest museums through the end of the nineteenth century:

*Thus museums have passed through several distinct states; at first they were indiscriminate gatherings of curios, objects of art, and specimens of natural history. Then, by the inevitable process of segregation, natural history came to have a place by itself, the collections of scientific societies developed as storehouses of material, mainly for the use of the specialist and the public museums derived from these were largely dryly scientific in their character.*

In terms of use and content, museums moved from cabinets of curiosities held by individuals to collections that represented specific disciplines. Lucas lamented the number of curiosities that remained in museums of the United States at the turn of the century:

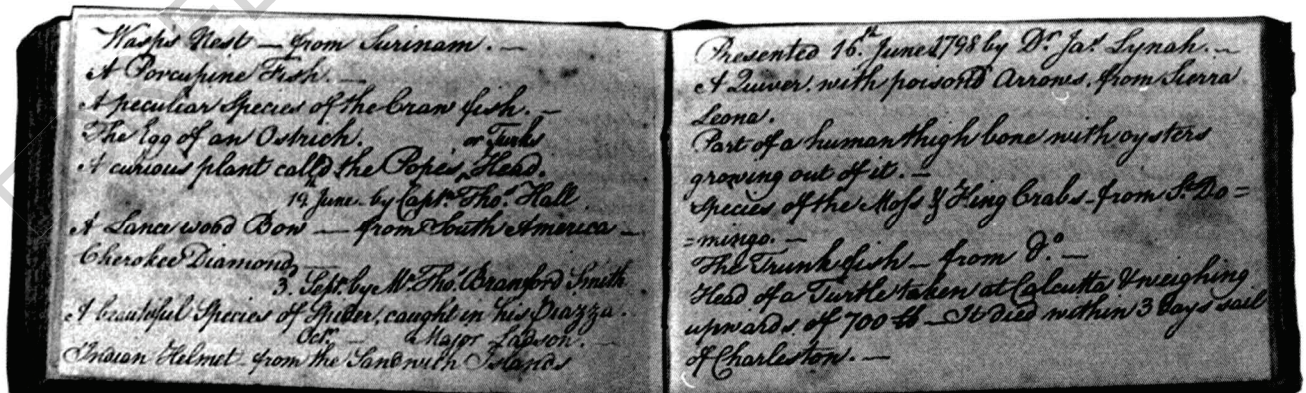
*[A] vast number of objects were of that class rightly called curiosities, a comprehensive term that embraces a vast and miscellaneous category of objects, including the familiar and ever-present petrified potato and four-legged chicken. If there is anything that a museum has no use and no place for, it is the mere curiosity, but, as John Minto says in a recent article, "It will take years to do away with the idea of museums still entertained by many that they are storehouses of curiosities."<sup>5</sup>*

Many museums do retain curios as part of the history of collecting, to graphically illustrate historical events and even, at times, to put local events into a greater context.

The Charleston Museum's telephone answering recording welcomes callers to "America's first museum, founded in 1773." The museum was closed for a few days during the Revolutionary War and again during an evacuation caused by the Civil War, but otherwise it has remained open. Over the years it collected natural history and ethnology; and in the 1900s it began collecting material culture. The age and nature of the collections makes it impossible truly to count the objects, which are estimated to be in the millions. A justified inventory is even more difficult, since the first systematic accession ledger was not put in place until around 1902.

That first ledger, and the extended system it represented, was discussed at the 1907 meeting of AAM in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, by Paul M. Rea, then director of the Charleston Museum. It was devised, he said, to meet the conditions of "extensive collections . . . the accumulations of more than a century . . . data, scattered on loose labels and in old memorandum books, [which] had to be associated with their specimens. . . ." The first of those books was from 1798. In 1902 the museum put in place a four-part record system to control its collections: an accession ledger, with sequential numbers from one to infinity, representing lots; specimen records with unique numbers for each specimen that were then placed on the specimen; a finding list with numbers, specimen name and location; and a list of sources.

Henry Watson Kent developed a business system for Metropolitan Museum of Art accessions around 1905. In 1907 Lucas stated that





collections should not be made haphazardly, that they should have definite purposes and that collections should form a consistent whole (see p. 8). The first surge of standardization was underway, and with the founding of AAM in 1906 and its first full presentations of papers in 1907, professionalism for museum workers was formally launched in the United States.

During the ensuing years many museums were founded, and sometimes museums were developed with careful choices and carefully crafted systems for collecting, collections care and collections documentation. Often, though, wheels were reinvented and curios or uncontrolled collections were the order of the day.

Early collection control systems evolved from prototypes found in the world of libraries, and no major breakthroughs in museum documentation and object tracking methods occurred until computer database programs became commonplace in the 1990s. There were, however, some developments toward the systems that are currently most popular. Museums first used the simple sequential system employed by libraries in their accession ledgers—1, 2, 3, 4, 5—to number lots of objects. By 1909, two-part systems came into use. Some museums bypassed the idea of the accession as a group and applied sequential object numbers in each year, e.g., 9.1, 9.2, 9.3 for the first three objects in 1909, whether or not from the same source. By 1927 there is evidence of the three-part system in some museums: 27.1.1 marks the first object of the first accession of 1927. Such registration evolution has created many of the collection control problems museums now face. It resulted in inconsistent systems within institutions. Museums might have two or three, or in some cases, even fifteen different systems in place. They might have used the three-part system and gone back and forth between that and other systems. Confusion still abounds.

Libraries standardized documentation and care because they could: they deal primarily with multiples that can be easily catalogued and to a great extent homogeneous materials that are eas-

ily housed, and they do not have stringent restrictions on disposing of material. Museums, on the other hand, contend with mastodon skeletons and pinned bugs, with huge sculptures and miniature paintings. They must accommodate high value and unique objects, and an ever-strengthening ethic to use great care and trustee review when disposing of objects.

Some museum collections problems arise from the interactions of great egos. Scholars base career advancement on publications and presentations grounded in collection pieces. Collectors want to showcase their knowledge and wealth and be recognized as benefactors to museums. Trustees, almost always successful businessmen and women and community leaders, often have risen to their places in society because of their assertiveness, clarity and eventual wealth. There are many instances where museums are left with rooms of objects that must be displayed together, according to the wishes of the original collector and donor. There are stories of curators whose prowess in fieldwork was so strong that the incidental personal collection of a thousand toys was accepted without a murmur in order to assure the continued collecting of native artifacts. In short, the world of museums is a world of strong characters.

During its first fifty years, AAM worked to establish standards for the care and use of museum permanent collections and to apply those standards, as needed, to museum activities other than accessions. AAM's first code of ethics, called Code of Ethics for Museum Workers, dates to 1925. Loans became a popular way to develop broader exhibitions than a single museum could do alone. When it became obvious that loans had to be monitored, museums came together and devised procedures to do that.

The decade of the 1950s was vital in the development of standards for collections care, and it culminated in the publication of *Museum Registration Methods* in 1958. The book was written by Dorothy H. Dudley, registrar at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and Irma

Bezold, later Irma Wilkinson, registrar at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. They were joined by a diverse group of registrars, administrators and conservators, including Geraldine Bruckner, registrar at the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania; Richard D. Buck, conservator at the Intermuseum Laboratory in Oberlin, Ohio; and David B. Little, secretary-registrar of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. AAM proclaimed its stance on collection care in the foreword, written by AAM president William M. Milliken:

*The American Association of Museums is deeply concerned with the question of standards in the museums it serves. One of its main purposes is to place the career of the museum employee upon the highest possible professional level, and to do this it has from time to time issued publications which bear upon one or another of the many problems which concerns museums, large or small. One of the most fundamental of them is the basic function of the Registrar.*

*The vitality of the Association depends increasingly upon its usefulness and the cooperation of its members. The Registrars as a group have recognized this and by united action they have prepared the essential information which is contained in this important volume.*

The position of registrar in American museums dates at least from 1880 when Stephen C. Brown, an assistant in the division of reptiles at the National Museum, was named first registrar of the Smithsonian Institution. A reference in Henry Watson Kent's memoir, *What I Am Pleased to Call My Education*, indicates that the title "registrar" was in use by 1906 in art museums. Patrick Reynolds, an assistant curator, became the first registrar at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in that year. Kent says "The Registrar . . . carried a Latin Bible in his pocket, from which he would ask you to read passages, to test your scholarship." By 1925, there was a registrar's job description at the Newark Museum. A title like secretary or secretary-registrar meant

an administrative position, not simply a clerical one. Henry Watson Kent, assistant secretary at the Metropolitan, for example, held a highly placed position concerned with policy-making. He used the term "business methods" to explain accessioning procedures and described taking over the records of the museum from General Cesnola's secretary, saying that they were "docketed in the old-fashioned way and bound up with red tape," noting that his job was to "catalogue and file them in new-fashioned cases of Dewey's devising." His position was thoroughly professional and built on a career as librarian and museum director.

---

## Newark Museum Registrar

John Cotton Dana, director of the Newark Museum, outlined the duties of museum registrar in April 1925 as follows:

- a. Registry and care of collection: combination of schedules of registrar and assistant.
  - b. Receive, record, accession, label, store and follow up all gifts, purchases and loans: prepare and list objects for storage warehouse: care for all storage and working equipment within the building.
  - c. File and care for all labels and posters, replace soiled ones.
  - d. Care of photos and negatives: accessioning, mounting, labeling, filing.
  - e. Books, etc. in Museum library: periodicals, record and binding: catalogue, shelve, inventory.
  - f. Color band files of trade and exhibit catalogues.
  - g. Exhibitions, particularly physical care of objects on exhibition.
-



## Some Business Methods in the Metropolitan Museum of Art

Henry Watson Kent, Assistant Secretary,  
Metropolitan Museum of Art

From *Proceedings of the American Association of Museums* vol. 6, Records of the Sixth Annual Meeting Held at Boston, Mass., May 23–25, 1911, pp. 31–34.

Under the constitution of the museum of which I shall speak, like other museums of its kind, no doubt, the action upon the bequest, gift, or purchase of objects of art is taken by the trustees sitting in committees and approved by the entire board. This necessitates a system of business in the executive offices which, with as little loss of time and energy as possible, shall be thorough and all-informing. I may use this expression to mean the notification of a given action to all concerned—donor, vendor, curator, treasurer, registrar, photographer, sales department, and daily press. At just what point legitimate business methods become red tape has never been clearly defined, but doubtless a business house would place it where system ceases to show a profit. Surely neither such red tape nor slipshod unbusinesslike methods of administration should be tolerated in a museum any more than in a factory, although this is a point which does not seem to have been considered worthy of much attention heretofore, if we judge from the literature on the subject.

By some, a system, which in the telling may seem complicated, may be deemed unnecessary, but when it is remembered that in a large museum many different persons are affected by a single transaction, that the physical safety of the object is an important consideration in a building of long distances where many employees and visitors are coming and going, that thousands of objects are added in a year, and that hundreds of thousands of dollars are

involved in these transactions, it will be seen that a careful and unvarying system must take the place of haphazard communications.

In the following statement I shall endeavor to explain a system which has been found to be necessary to meet the needs both of the executive offices and of those persons whose work is governed by the action of the trustees.

Gifts and bequests are usually offered by letter. This, when acknowledged by the secretary, is copied and sent to the chairman of the committee of the trustees concerned with the statement that the objects offered will be examined by the director and the curator in whose department they would be included if accepted, and that a report of their recommendation will be sent to him later. The donor or representative of an estate is informed that the gift of bequest will be acted upon by the trustees at their next meeting. Copies of the original letter are furnished to the director and the curator, who, after the object has been sent to the Museum, draw up their reports upon blank forms furnished by the secretary, which with other similar forms are sent to the chairman before the meeting of his committee.

If the object is accepted by trustees upon the committee's recommendation, a suitable acknowledgement is sent to the donor. Notification of this action is sent by the secretary to the curator and to the registrar, who will already have received the object, giving a temporary receipt for it. At the time of the receipt of the object, the registrar sends to the secretary a card called from its color "the blue card," upon which he notes as much information concerning the thing itself as has come under his observation. The return of this card, filled in with additional data furnished by the curator, serves as his notification of the trustees' action. The registrar then accessions the object in a volume which follows in its general arrangement the accession book perfected by libraries. The use of this kind of record, by the way, is rapidly being discontinued by the librar-



ies that first adopted it and it is questionable whether the time spent upon it in museums is not unnecessary. The registrar numbers the accession, his numbers running consecutively under the numeral indicating the year, and sends it to the photographer along with the blue card, keeping a copy for himself. Thus the blue card becomes what express companies call a "tracer." The object is photographed in as many sizes as the importance of the subject, the needs of the sales department, and the demands of registration and cataloguing may require. When the photographs are made, the negative is registered by the photographer, the number of it being added to the blue card along with a print four by five inches which is pasted on the back, and both object and card are then returned to the registrar. The card is then filed in the order of the accession book entry, the record being now completed by the photograph, and object itself is delivered to the curator, who, receipting for it, thenceforth becomes responsible for its safe-keeping and display.

The system connected with purchases is somewhat more complicated since objects of this sort are of two kinds, those which are offered unsolicited and those which are brought to the attention of the trustees by the curators who desire their purchase. All objects offered for purchase are passed upon by the curator and the director, each of whom gives his recommendations on a blank form prepared in the secretary's office from information supplied from the vendor's letter or by the registrar, if the object is sent to the Museum on approval. Few of these unsolicited objects, however, are brought to the attention of the committee on purchases, because they are usually undesirable. In the course of a month, fifty such letters on the average, are acted upon without recourse to the committee. The objects recommended for purchase by the curators and the director are brought to the committee by the secretary, who after

the meeting indicates to curator, registrar, and treasurer what action has been taken. The system of notification for the first two officers is the same as for gifts. To the last officer, a card is sent giving facts connected with the purchase, such as the price to be paid, and the fund out of which it is to be paid. This card with others of its kind, arranged by classes, serves as the treasurer's voucher and aids him in making the correct entry in his books. The card remains in his office as an index to his ledgers.

While the blue card of accepted objects is still in the secretary's office, its information is rearranged on a white card—so much of it, at least, as is needed—and this is submitted to the curator for his emendations and corrections, when it becomes a catalogue entry for the new accession. Classed according to a system of classification, and with a photograph of the object pasted on its verso, it is filed in a general catalogue. Copies of this card are given to the curator of the department to which the objects belongs, who in this way secures a catalogue of his own collection. From this card is made the "copy" used by the printer in making labels.

The usefulness of the blue card is not confined to the service which has been described. Unlike the proverbial rolling stone which gathered nothing in its career, the blue card accumulates data as it travels from department to department. Besides what has been enumerated, it furnishes information to the photographer for his records to the sales department for its catalogue and labels. It gives to the Bulletin its list of monthly accessions, and to the annual report its long list of the year's acquisitions.

An account of this system is given here not because it is considered a perfect one, but in the hope that it may be suggestive to other museums and, also, in order that it may provoke such criticism as may be helpful in its perfection. It is written down in order that it may serve as a record for any new museum about to grapple with the problems of organization.



## **“A Piece of the True Cross: Relics and Oddities,” An Exhibition from the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum**

*With thanks to David Ryan, who provided this label from the Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum.*

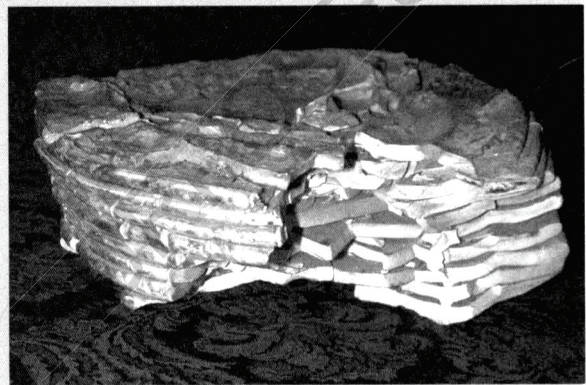
Throughout history relics have been important parts of human life. The word relic means, “something left behind,” and is typically used to describe collected objects that survive from the past.

Relics create powerful and sometimes spiritual links to the past. History is often an abstract and difficult notion full of dates, names and places, however, tangible objects provide us with physical evidence of earlier times. Beyond serving as mementos, they also indicate what people value about their own history. In this way, they can be very personal and intimate.

Typically, relics are objects collected because of a special significance or specific importance to the collector. Many are said to have belonged to someone famous, or are tied to an important historical event. They often have a religious significance and are sometimes possessions or actual body parts of saints. Despite the fact that they were often of questionable origin, these items were exhibited in churches, and visited and revered by believers. For this reason, the phrase “a piece of the True Cross” is often used to describe these objects.

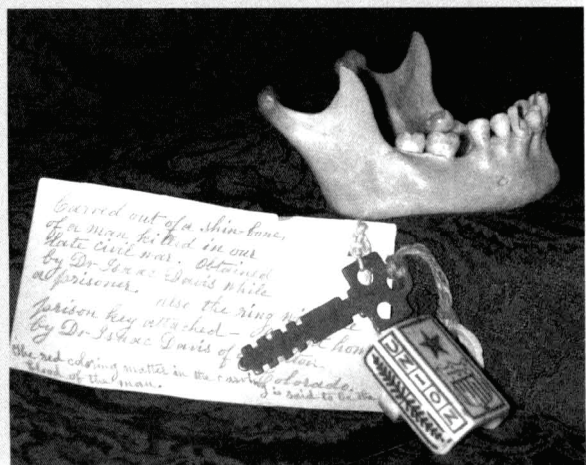
In earlier times American museums focused on collecting these types of “curiosities.” They were eager to display exotic, foreign and unusual items as well as objects relating to national and world events. Modern museums no longer strive to collect relics in this sense, preferring to save only items that relate to a specific collecting mission and with more easily proven history (i.e., provenance).

A wide variety of relics from the Museum’s collection are featured here. Some are specifically relevant to local people and places, such as the Antler’s Hotel fire. Others represent national and international incidents, such as the piece of wood flooring from the White House or the Trans-Atlantic cable. Only some of these objects can be factually proven to be what they are stated. Instead, their real value is found in the beliefs that their collectors placed in them, and in the power of historical objects to evoke such strong feelings.



Plates, October 8, 1871. Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum, gift of Carlos L. Smith, 55.153.

This stack of plates was in the Chicago Fire of 1871, which burned for 27 hours. The plates were heated to the point where the glaze melted, and fused the plates together. The fire destroyed 17,450 buildings and other property valued at \$196,000,000. Two-hundred fifty people died and almost 100,000 people were left homeless.





These rings [opposite, below] were carved from the shinbone of a man killed in the Civil War. Prisoners-of-war often carved to pass the time in the prisons, and as carving material was scarce, utilized anything they could get their hands on. This included human bone. The red coloring in the carving on the ring is said to be the blood of the man, however it is unlikely that blood would remain so brightly colored.

Bessie Bouton's lower jawbone is a relic of the first murder case ever to be solved using dental identification. The murder and the identification occurred here in Colorado Springs in 1904. Her jawbone was used as police evidence.



*Tar and Feathers*, June 23, 1894. Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum, gift of Colorado Springs Police Department, 71.166.2.

Adjutant Tarsney of the State Militia was sent by the Governor to help put an end to the violence in Cripple Creek. Unfortunately, he was kidnapped by the mob, taken north of town and tarred and feathered. This bit of the tar and feathers used on him was police evidence.

—Courtesy of the Colorado Springs

◀Carved Bone Rings and Key, c. 1865. Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum, gift of Carlos L. Smith, 55.117. Jawbone of Bessie Bouton, 1904. Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum, gift of the Colorado Springs Police Department, 71.181.1.

In the 1950s, registrars and their standards became more focused, and their community continued to develop. *Museum Registration Methods* was revised and published again in 1968. The scene was set for the major jump in training and professionalization that occurred in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Accreditation, a hallmark of a professional institution and of a profession, was in the making.

That jump was precipitated by the popularity of museums (by 1967 there were 5,000 museums in the United States) and the finances needed to make them run well. Museums sought federal support from newly created endowments for the arts and humanities. In order to be trusted with public monies, museums needed an accreditation system to assure the federal grant givers of the standard of stewardship in individual museums. President Lyndon B. Johnson formed a commission to study museums, and in 1968 he received the Belmont report: "The Condition and Needs of American Museums," which led directly to AAM's accreditation program. In 1971, 16 museums received accreditation.

## Belmont Report

The 2005 *Museum Accreditation Handbook* offers the following explanation:

Plans for museum accreditation began in earnest in 1967 when President Lyndon B. Johnson asked the U. S. Federal Council on the Arts and Humanities to conduct a study of the status of American museums and recommend ways to support and strengthen them. The council enlisted AAM's assistance and in 1968 the association established a committee to study the idea of an accreditation program for museums. Based on AAM's input, on November 25, 1968, the council issued *America's Museums: The Belmont Report*, which stated: "It is urgent that the American Association of Museums and its member institutions develop and agree upon acceptable criteria and methods of accrediting museums."



### THE NEWARK MUSEUM'S STAFF

Here is a list of the workers in this Museum, with a statement of the duties of each one. These duties are of course not as closely defined as the words used seem to indicate; and they overlap in many cases.

The list suggests the many and varied kinds of work that must be pursued even in a small museum and one that is relatively quite modest in its collections and in its assured income.

April, 1925.

J. C. D.

- I. Curator. Responsible to Assistant Director and Director.
  - A. Administration of Museum: policy and methods.
  - B. Exhibitions: selection, plans and installation.
  - C. Publicity: clubs and societies, other museums, news items, securing gifts and loans, etc.
  - D. Purchases and equipment: follow up sales: round out collections, etc.
- II. General Assistant in charge of office. Responsible to Curator.
  - A. Give assistance to and carry out instructions of Curator.
  - B. Immediate supervision and direction (schedules, routine, general duties) of office staff, attendants, janitor, science assistant; storage in warehouse.
  - C. General care of rooms, property, exhibitions, storage. Paint, glass, cases, damage, etc., noted by daily inspection.
  - D. Special exhibits. e. g. Chinese Traveling Exhibits. Leather show, until taken over by special worker.
  - E. Preliminary preparation of meetings and minutes thereof.
  - F. Correspondence.
  - G. Index museum minutes; keep to date.
  - H. Prepare on request: budgets and financial statements, catalogs, reports.
  - I. Revision and weeding of all files: particularly correspondence and information.
  - J. Indicate all filing.
- III. Registrar. Registry and care of collections: combination of schedules of Registrar and assistant.
  - A. Receive, record, accession, label, store and follow up all gifts, purchases and loans: prepare and list objects for storage warehouse; care for all storage and working equipment within the building.
  - B. File and care for all labels and posters, replace soiled ones.
  - C. Care of photos and negatives: accessioning, mounting, labeling, filing.
  - D. Books, etc., in Museum library: periodicals, record and binding; catalog, shelf, inventory.
  - E. Color band files of trade and exhibit catalogs.
  - F. Exhibitions, particularly physical care of objects on exhibition.
- IV. Stenographers and office assistants: 2 persons.
  - A. Dictation (all).
  - B. Typing: gift lists and form letter (quarterly), membership lists, form letters, notices, cards, minutes, etc.
  - C. Filing.
  - D. Stock: care and distribution as needed.
  - E. Care and distribution of all museum publications, stock and other printed matter.
  - F. Mailing list: keep mailing stencils for addressing machine up to date.
  - G. Cuts: records, care, filing, follow-up.
  - H. Attendance records.
  - I. Care of desks and desk supplies (asst. in charge, curator).
  - J. Cash box and stamps.
  - K. Monthly bills and bill list.
- V. Lending Collections: 3 persons.
  - A. Direction and supervision: records of collections, and catalog of collections.
  - B. Prepare new material, write labels and give general assistance.
  - C. Fill requests, pack and unpack, file, circulation records, notices, etc., clean and repair.
- VI. Miscellaneous and special: 3 persons.
  - A. In charge of cash box and monthly preparation of bills. Supervision of such membership records as are handled in office.
  - B. Museum accounts and bookkeeping. Membership and membership bills.
  - C. Club activities.

John Cotton Dana, *Job Descriptions at the Newark Museum*, 1925. Courtesy of the Newark Museum.

The process of accreditation accelerated everything professional in museums, including the creation of more positions for collection managers, collection technicians, exhibition managers, registrars and curators. There was a growing demand for museum training programs, which had begun early in the century with courses at Harvard and an apprentice program started in the 1920s at the Newark Museum. The Cooperstown Graduate Program, founded in 1964 by Dr. Louis C. Jones, then director of the New York State Historical Association, was positioned to train professional staff for the growing number of history museums. The Winterthur Program in Early American Culture, established in 1952 to foster connoisseurship, was joined in 1972 by the University of Delaware's museum studies program to train professionals in other areas of museum and collections management. The John F. Kennedy University museum studies program in San Francisco began in 1974, and the George Washington University museum program started in 1976. Since the early 1980s, a growing number of professional training programs have sprung up around the country, affiliated with art, history, anthropology or science programs in universities.

AAM continually refines the accreditation process. Museum assessment programs and peer review of museums provide important means to assure standards. On a parallel track, professional committees formed to further ongoing education for AAM members. Among other museum disciplines, these committees include small museum administrators, curators and registrars.

The Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museums (RC-AAM), founded in 1977, has produced a myriad of workshops and publications to further best practices and standards for collections stewardship. These include (but are certainly not limited to) work on condition reports, insurance, loan practices and agreements, ethics, couriering, deaccessioning, emergency planning and the development of a standard facility report.