



Collections Care and Stewardship

**Innovative Approaches
for Museums**

Edited by Juilee Decker

FOR EDUCATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY

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Innovative Approaches for Museums

About the Series

The *Innovative Approaches for Museums* series offers case studies, written by scholars and practitioners from museums, galleries, and other institutions, that showcase the original, transformative, and sometimes wholly re-invented methods, techniques, systems, theories, and actions that demonstrate innovative work being done in the museum and cultural sector throughout the world. The authors come from a variety of institutions—in size, type, budget, audience, mission, and collection scope. Each volume offers ideas and support to those working in museums while serving as a resource and primer, as much as inspiration, for students and the museum staff and faculty training future professionals who will further develop future innovative approaches.

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Titles in the Series

Technology and Digital Initiatives: Innovative Approaches for Museums

Engagement and Access: Innovative Approaches for Museums

Collections Care and Stewardship: Innovative Approaches for Museums

Fundraising and Strategic Planning: Innovative Approaches for Museums



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Introduction

On January 6, 2015, conservators from the Museum of Fine Arts (MFA) opened the oldest time capsule in America, first buried by Patriot and metalsmith Paul Revere and Sam Adams, who was governor of Massachusetts in 1795. It had been unearthed in 1855 when additional items were added and the contents were placed in a brass vessel before being re-deposited to the site of the granite cornerstone. The capsule's contents were coins and newspapers from the 1650s through 1850s. This collection from the most unlikely of places will undergo conservation treatment and will be put on view at the MFA before being returned to their home underneath the State House.¹ The retrieval, care, display, interpretation, and storage of these items bear witness to the ways in which museums function as institutions that preserve cultural heritage and also offer a critical and reflecting voice of societal issues. Museums are spaces where people, place, history, and memory come together with artifacts and digital assets. They invite participation and dialogue that, in turn, becomes a synthesis of future visits. Museums and collections have the capacity to inspire as well as reflect.

A second example of this ability of collections to reflect as well as inspire comes from a series of events launched in fall 2014 by the University of Cambridge Public Engagement team. They initiated "Curating Cambridge," a program focusing on connecting the university's collections to the area community provided a five-week opportunity to explore the public's relationship with objects, places, and nature through experience and narratives of the museum's relationship with its objects.² Specifically, the project aimed to redefine collections in the eyes of the community and to imbricate new collections. Taking cues from the program's tagline "our city, our stories, our stuff," "Curating Cambridge" translated the notion of collections and curation to the public. The programming brought a slate

of cultural events focusing in and around the University of Cambridge museums (including the Fitzwilliam, Museum of Zoology, The Polar Museum, and six others) to draw attention to other cultural and educational organizations in the region and to showcase their offerings. In addition, artist Caroline Wright collaborated with Cambridge residents to connect objects in area home to narratives of place, time, and people by executing an exhibition (*My Home Is My Museum*) and performance that, together, paid heed to domestic, private museums historically and in the present.³ In total, “Curating Cambridge” foregrounded the collections housed in Cambridge and offered these as a “starting point” to “tell stories about . . . connections to these objects, one another, and the rest of the world.”⁴ Particularly interesting in this example is the notion of curating as both an act and a descriptor. Specifically, the program authorized individuals to curate on many levels: for the organizers, curating referred to their entire process of orchestrating the events, venues, promotion and collaboration. One the part of the attendees, participants, and contributors, curating referred to the ability to: curate one’s own experiences by selecting events to attend and collections to view; curate by mining one’s own collection and authorizing it for the public to view; and curate by fusing the notion of a formed, orchestrated collection—the university’s—with an extemporized one. The notion of curating also takes on its participial form in that *curating* modifies Cambridge. Curating describes Cambridge as an entity that curates. What a fascinating way to think about an entire city!

A third example of collections reflecting as well as inspiring is the British Museum–led initiative *Teaching History with 100 Objects*—a partnership among museums across the UK funded by the Department of Education in England. Here, emphasis is on an object from a museum’s collection and the ways in which that item can serve as nexus for lifelong learning. Each item, from a museum within the UK, is explored in terms of form and content through a richly annotated “object file” for each work. The object file includes links to sources outside of the museum, including maps as well as imagery from Flickr and Wikimedia commons as well as other museums and institutions in the UK. Additional source material is available from the BBC, National Archives, regional history sites, among other sites. Suggestions for making a field trip to local resources are included, along with ample material to craft a single classroom or multiple classroom experience(s). Keyed to the primary education structure in the UK (referred to as “Key Stages”), the resources are freely available on the *teachinghistory100* site.⁵ Each object file is an exemplar of object-based learning.⁶

All three of the examples above show the ways in which museums and collections inspire and reflect. Those actions come together to define the key theme of *Collections Care and Stewardship: Innovative Approaches for*

Museum. That theme is praxis. To explain, the case studies presented here-with demonstrate how the theory of museums can be applied or enacted by staff, professionals-in-training, co-creators, and researchers looking to replicate constructions of knowledge. The chapters address stewardship in myriad ways, as the term itself involves activities related to collections management, collections planning, collections care, and legal and ethical issues. Each of these areas has sub-areas, such as access (including digitization), cataloguing, documenting, and archiving. Stewardship is a guiding principle for all of us who work with collections and who work with the individuals who serve as stewards of their collections.⁷

ABOUT THE “INNOVATIVE APPROACHES FOR MUSEUMS” SERIES

This series offers case studies, written by scholars and practitioners from museums, galleries, and other institutions, that showcase the original, transformative, and sometimes wholly reinvented methods, techniques, systems, theories, and actions that demonstrate innovative work being done in the museum and cultural sector throughout the United States and in England, Australia, and Peru. The authors come from a variety of institutions—in size, type, budget, audience, mission, and collection scope. Their geographical, authorial, and institutional diversity was an intentional part of crafting this series as a means of offering a range of perspectives on issues confronting museums, and collecting institutions at large in some cases, that may be replicated entirely or scaled up or down by colleagues elsewhere.

Each chapter carefully examines a core issue by describing background information before turning to the identification of the problem, a solution to the issue, implementation, results, feedback and assessment as well as next steps. Many chapters are enhanced with notes and/or resources to point the reader to contextual and additional information. Written with attention to the audience of peers and colleagues-in-training, each chapter is intended to offer ideas and support to those working in museums while serving as a resource and primer, as much as inspiration, for students and the museum staff and faculty training future professionals who will further develop future innovative approaches.

The volumes in this series are grouped under the following themes: technology and digital initiatives; engagement and access; collections care and stewardship, and fundraising and strategic planning. While each volume has a particular focus, the chapters in each volume rarely address the framing theme of that volume alone. Instead, the reach of the content often dapples in other aspects of that institution’s operations. Such intersection and overlap speak to the integrative nature of museum work,⁸ as

museums function optimally when their areas of operation are not constrained to silos but, rather, when collaboration becomes the driver. An example of this “optimization for innovation,” as I like to think of it, is the pioneering work done by the team at the Cleveland Museum of Art who, in their efforts to bring the museum into conversation with its audiences in multiple, meaningful ways and, ultimately, to become more visitor-centered. Their collaboration yielded Gallery One, an innovative space that fuses art, technology, and interpretation. This space in the museum has become a destination for visitors interested in learning more about art through a variety of hands-on interactives, including the 40-foot microtile multi-touch Collection Wall. Not content merely to implant digital technology and interactives in the gallery, this museum’s refocusing on the visitor—as a recasting of the triangulation between the museum, its collections, and its viewers—required changes beyond those in the physical space of Gallery One, such as clearer pathways through the galleries and other new amenities that enmeshed the onsite visitor with an entirely new experience-based, interactive visit. Such optimization for innovation required a team of collaborators, who are cited prominently on the museum’s website which notes that this project and the broader initiatives associated therein represent “a true and equal collaboration among the curatorial, information management and technology services, education and interpretation, and design departments at the Cleveland Museum of Art.”⁹ The chapter addressing this project appears in the volume on technology and digital initiatives, although the case study speaks to each of the other foci of the other three volumes in this series. Just as this project’s design, implementation, and maintenance required the collaboration of a number of museum staff from many departments, so too may the case study, and all others in this series, find a home among many departments in your museum.

ABOUT THESE CASE STUDIES

The case studies in this volume address collections care and stewardship. They examine best practices and innovations related to collections with regard to display, interpretation, engagement, storage, conservation treatment, and preservation. Several chapters address undergraduate and graduate coursework and internship experiences in a variety of contexts to offer best practices as well as evaluation of such training opportunities.

While the visitor is assumed and present in the case studies across this series, a key differentiation with *Collections Care and Stewardship* is the presence of the undergraduate student, the graduate student, and/or the intern who are brought into contact with collections items, the stewards

who care for them, and the standards regarding excellence in collections stewardship which call for activities that cover ownership, exhibition, and use of collections; management documentation, and care of collections; research of the collections to a high standard; plans for the use and development of collections; access to collections while ensuring their preservation; allocation of space and use of facilities to meet the collections and staff needs; and ensuring the safety and security of objects.¹⁰

The framing of this volume of the series was informed by my work, since 2008, as editor of the journal *Collections: A Journal for Museum and Archives Professionals*. Established in 2004 by Hugh Genoways and published by Rowman & Littlefield, the journal interrogates issues of collections under the banner of both the practical and philosophical. As such, the contributors to this volume come from a variety of institutions—museums, colleges, universities, and communities—and offer wide-ranging approaches to the concept of stewardship. What is shared by each of these authors is the way in which they approach their museums as places of inspiration and reflection and how they empower their sites to serve as crucibles of activity and sites of wonder. Finally, the range of topics in *Collections Care and Stewardship* is vast, and that spread serves as an intentional reminder of what we mean when we address stewardship in terms of the practical as well as the philosophical. For isn't that what praxis is, after all—the convergence of the practical and the philosophical—the application of a theory?

The first three case studies present an issue facing a botanic garden, nature and science museum, and art museum. Although focused on each specific environment, each one of the issues presented has relevance to museum professionals for they are key responsibilities we have as stewards of collections. Katherine A. Johnson, Eileen Prendergast, and Jennifer Schwarz Ballard discuss and analyze the emphasis on education taken by the Chicago Botanic Garden to establish a destination for programs. Their learning campus is a building project, but it is also a visionary address of a museum's priorities. Kelly Tomajko introduces us to the newly-created Avenir Center as the fulfillment of a strategic plan initiative to reaffirm her museum's obligations to collections stewardship. Allison McCloskey shares PreVIEW, a venue for public programs within the Textile Collection of the Denver Art Museum that serves as a work area for staff from across the museum (curatorial, conservation, education, exhibitions, and collections management). PreVIEW brings collections and their care into the eyes of the visitor by pulling back the curtain to reveal the handling, care, and study of textiles.

Shifting from specific issues facing a collection, Michael Jones (the University of Melbourne) turns the tables in considering the perspective and practice of a researcher in galleries, libraries, archives, and museums

(GLAM). Taking a broad and theoretical view, Jones introduces us to an experiment that he conducted to replicate the steps of a researcher using artifact and archival collections of the British Museum. He asks how research and production done in the museum can ignore the historical origins of the internal divisions in large GLAM institutions and refute the impact of these on such organizations today.

Six contributions in this volume focus on connecting undergraduate and graduate students with collections in a formalized way while interrogating the purpose and value of the museum studies/historical administration/public history curriculum. In some of these cases, even, the partner institution becomes the locus of experimentation while in others the campus museum performs that function. These examples are written by museum studies faculty and, in most cases, museum professionals, to demonstrate the importance of authenticity in terms of institutional and educational need and draw attention to best practices in terms of collaboration between the museum and the educational institution.

Mary Coughlin (the George Washington University) and Shari Stout (National Museum of American History) discuss a graduate-level practicum to rehouse collections and to research object histories to yield additional research and analysis that would not be possible given the time constraints of museum staff. Thus, the project demonstrates a needs-based experience that benefits all parties involved and has become discussed as a model for other departments in the museum. Nicolette B. Meister (Logan Museum of Anthropology at Beloit College) discusses the place of an anthropological teaching museum as a locus of object-based instruction and the focused development since 2008 of cross-campus curricular connections and collaborations to expand usage of collections. Carrie Wieners Meyer, the Durham Museum, describes the reconceptualization of the internship experience at the museum through the creation of a formal undergraduate and graduate internship program that is agile and responsive to the needs of the institution and student interns. Marjorie Schwarzer (University of San Francisco) and Glori Simmons (Thacher Gallery) and Marlena Cannon de Mendez (formerly of the Mexican Museum) describe the planning, implementation, and results of a graduate-level curating partnership that sought a less-authoritative approach to university art gallery programming. Working in Tennessee and Peru, Robert P. Connolly, Rebecca E. Bria, and Elizabeth K. Cruzado Carranza, tell of the origins and sustainability of Museo Comunitario de Hualcayán, a new museum developed in collaboration with the Andean community and PIARA (Proyecto de Investigación Arqueológico Regional Ancash) which conducts archaeological research on the prehistory of the region and co-creates socio-economic development projects. Looking at an entire curriculum, Terry A. Barnhart of Eastern Illinois University discusses the

four-year assessment process and the resultant realignment of courses in the graduate program in historical administration that reflects both continuity and change.

In each of these examples, the courses, practicum, internships and related experiences act as a museum studies incubator of sorts—a crucible of activity, an idea lab. What does a museum incubator need to thrive? Space, primary and secondary point people (staff, faculty, interns), collections, an audience, and a budget are critical. How can we be innovative in our planning and management of resources, our stewardship? How can we—as practitioners, scholars, and facilitators—best shepherd collections; shepherd research accumulated about these collections; and shepherd students, volunteers, interns, and staff through the processes involved in caring for collections.

Collections Care and Stewardship brings together the voices of a range of professionals. The chapters examine collections in terms of display, interpretation, engagement, storage, conservation treatment, and preservation. They ask us to think about the responsibilities that we have, as museum professionals, to be stewards—a challenge for all of us in terms of the obligations and responsibilities therein, but also in terms of the challenge to frame our collections as having the capacity to reflect as well as inspire.

At my institution, a small group of visual culture, history, and theater faculty have joined forces with museum professionals on our campus and in the community to provide a platform for discussion among our college, our broader campus community, and the public. This interdisciplinary cohort have collaborated to create a slate of exhibitions, referred to as “Exhibitions Across the Curriculum.” The first exhibition in the spring 2014 focused on the centenary of World War I and featured posters from the collections of the Rochester Historical Society. The second brought together items from area libraries and personal collections sources and documents (primary documents, oral histories, films) and authorized the creation of new material from visitors to the exhibition to focus on one hundred years of Rochester’s history to illuminate the co-existence of wealth and progress with poverty and lack of opportunity. The following two exhibitions are in the works and will mine the collections of the university. The sesquicentennial of the birth of suffragette and engineer Kate Gleason (1865–1933) will be celebrated in the third exhibition in 2015 and a selection of posters from the university’s collections of more than 550 travel posters will be exhibited in 2016.

Why did we take this on? For each of us, there may be personal and professional reasons, however a shared goal may be in stewardship and opportunity for we recognize that objects from our collections, and those of area institutions, can be researched, displayed, viewed, and discussed

in order to connect with disciplines. Moreover, we see ourselves as vital partners in advancing the educational goals of the university. Just as the case studies in *Collections Care and Stewardship: Innovative Approaches for Museums* illustrate, our collections can (and should) be mined to reveal that ways in which a single item can, indeed, inspire and reflect. I look forward to the fruitful results of these collaborations over the next several semesters.

NOTES

1. Karen Frasca, "Massachusetts State House Time Capsule Opened at Museum of Fine Arts, Boston" January 7, 2015. <http://www.mfa.org/news/time-capsule>. The capsule was unearthed on December 11, 2014, following an engineering firm's confirmation of the presence of the capsule while they were undertaking a water infiltration project in the summer 2014.

2. "Curating Cambridge" began two weeks prior to the university's Festival of Ideas. See <http://www.curatingcambridge.org.uk/>.

3. "My Home Is My Museum," <http://www.curatingcambridge.org.uk/projects/my-home-is-my-museum/>.

4. See the Press Release, "Curating Cambridge: Our City, Our Stories, Our Stuff," http://www.curatingcambridge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/using_the_curating_cambridge_icon.pdf. The extract continues, "The collections in museums can connect you to the past, or to an idea, as can a more personal connection to an object in your daily life. For us curating is to select, to organise and to care for things, but it is also to tell a story or to ask a question, to pause for reflection or to enjoy a link to those who came before us."

5. See "Teaching History 100" <http://www.teachinghistory100.org/>.

6. This education project is an extension of the BBC Radio 4/British Museum series broadcast in 2010 that positioned British Museum Director Neil MacGregor as a very knowledgeable docent inviting us to enjoy the arms, art, artifacts, and works of industry and technology from the museum. The popularity of the addresses spawned their release as podcasts and a subsequent publication. A companion website offered viewers the opportunity to post comments about the 100 as well as the opportunity for individuals and institutions to upload their own selections as representative of their own histories. To view "A History of the World in 100 Objects" see The British Museum, http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/a_history_of_the_world.aspx. For information regarding the items uploaded my museums, resources for schools, commentary, and the blog, see BBC. "A History of the World," <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/> (archived site as of 2010).

7. As defined by the AAM Accreditation Commission's Expectations Regarding Collections "Stewardship is the careful, sound and responsible management of that which is entrusted to a museum's care. Possession of collections incurs legal, social and ethical obligations to provide proper physical storage, management and care for the collections and associated documentation, as well as proper

intellectual control. . . . Effective collections stewardship ensures that the objects the museum owns, borrows, holds in its custody and/or uses are available and accessible to present and future generations. A museum's collections are an important means of advancing its mission and serving the public." See "Standards Regarding Collections Stewardship" in American Alliance of Museums, *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, Washington, D.C.: The AAM Press, 2008, 46–47. This volume offers an overview of standards and best practices was issued in 2004 to replace the 2001 (initial) version issued by the Accreditation Commission. A useful resource about addressing particular collections management situations is Rebecca A. Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore, *Collection Conundrums: Solving Collections Management Mysteries*, Washington, D.C., American Association of Museums Press, 2007. This resource provides guidelines, policies, and procedures as well as presenting conundrums and their solutions. Two case studies, twelve appendices, and a bibliography round out this invaluable resource.

8. For instance, technology and digital initiatives require financial support (as does everything!) while informing strategic planning which, in turn, may aim to enhance engagement, access, collections care, and stewardship, among other areas of concentration and action. (Every title of the books in this series is included in the previous sentence!)

9. Cleveland Museum of Art, "Collaborators," <http://www.clevelandart.org/gallery-one/collaborators>. The statement continues, "The development process was guided by CMA's chief curator and deputy director, Griff Mann—an atypical and noteworthy approach among museums in the design of interactive technology spaces. Museum educators were instrumental in curating the space and its related experiences, and IMTS staff worked closely with internal and external partners on both concept and interactive design. This collaborative organizational structure is groundbreaking, not just within the museum community, but within user-interface design in general. It elevated each department's contribution, resulting in an unparalleled interactive experience, with technology and software that has never been used before in any venue, content interpreted in fun and approachable ways, and unprecedented design of an interactive gallery space that integrates technology into an art gallery setting." The site also recognizes their partnership with Local Projects who, under the direction of Jake Barton, designed all of the media and collaborated with the CMA team on concept design development.

10. See "Standards Regarding Collections Stewardship" in American Alliance of Museums, *National Standards and Best Practices for U.S. Museums*, Washington, D.C.: The AAM Press, 2008, 46–47.

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ONE

An Outdoor Museum Perspective on Education and Audience Engagement

Katherine A. Johnson, Eileen Prendergast, and
Jennifer Schwarz Ballard, Chicago Botanic Garden

After years of balancing the needs of diverse audiences within the main gardens, leaders at the Chicago Botanic Garden (the Garden) decided it would be in the best interest of the public to create a new space dedicated to the needs of children. With completion of the first four phases in September 2013 and the remaining two phases scheduled for completion by summer 2016, the Learning Campus promises to become a premier destination for high quality, meaningful learning experiences that foster an appreciation for the natural world.

PLANNING

Outdoor museums with living collections (e.g., public gardens, zoos) face challenges that set them apart from other kinds of museums. While audiences and educational goals are similar in all museums, outdoor institutions must cope with changing weather conditions, births/deaths of specimens, and other environmental variables that have little impact on programs in a climate-controlled, indoor setting. The environment itself—the space surrounding the plants and animals on display and the aesthetics of that space—is an integral part of the educational experience. However, misunderstandings as to appropriate engagement with plants and challenges of balancing enjoyment and preservation emerge. Few people would help themselves to a piece of artwork in a gallery or borrow a trinket from a history museum exhibit, but people feel less inhibited about picking flowers in a garden. Different boundaries between the plant collection and the visitors must be established. Where walls and doors separate spaces in a building, pathways and barriers must be created to achieve the same spatial definition in the outdoors.

These circumstances are accompanied by other peculiar issues. First is finding the balance between interpretation and aesthetic engagement with the garden. A related challenge is satisfying audiences with competing demands for the same spaces. Where some visitors come to relax in silent contemplation, others come to smell the roses or discuss varieties they would like to add to their yards. Still others come to learn about bees or to get their exercise by walking through lush greenery. There is room for all, but the Garden must plan for the various kinds of visitors in order to avoid conflicts.

Perhaps the greatest potential for conflict happens when engaging children. Most people speak positively about the need to educate and nurture the next generation, however, children are curious, energetic, and impetuous by nature, and may, if not carefully supervised, inadvertently damage the collection or interrupt someone's contemplative experience. Furthermore, best practices in teaching point to experiential learning, which requires students to move around and explore plants and other objects in the garden by manipulating and interacting with them. At the Garden, this means digging in the soil, picking fruits off the plants, and dissecting flowers. Goals for the new campus, therefore, were to create a space that allowed educators freedom to have children do gardening activities—digging, planting, weeding, watering, and harvesting—on Garden grounds, and provide educators with a place where standards could be relaxed and exhibit labels could address children.

Though the Chicago Botanic Garden is fairly large, encompassing 385 acres, there remained limited suitable space on the Garden's grounds for a campus that would serve the tens of thousands of school children, other youth, and families that visit each year. The only available space with close proximity to parking was the northern edge of the Garden. There, an undeveloped gravel "overflow" parking lot was selected to become the center of children's activities.

The Garden strives to provide a satisfying, enjoyable experience that stimulates the senses and inspires wonder at the natural world through stunning floral displays and plant-based programs. This high standard of visual appeal and horticultural excellence needed to extend to the Learning Campus, though the main audience might not be old enough to appreciate the aesthetics. Additionally, the Campus was designed as a safe destination that helps alleviate symptoms of "nature deficit disorder," allowing children to exercise their bodies as well as their minds, and to develop physically, socially, emotionally, and cognitively.¹ The Learning Campus would also serve as a living laboratory for the study of nature and provide real world encounters with phenomena studied in classrooms. Furthermore, as an environmental and conservation focused institution, it was important for the Garden to address climate change,