

Managing A Mess: Tackling A Major Collections Management Overhaul

Clark County Historical Society

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Project Background: The Perfect Storm

How did we get here?

- ▶ A new facility (and an additional exhibit gallery two years later).
- ▶ FLOOD of new donations
- ▶ Endless cycle of new permanent and temporary exhibits
- ▶ Shrinking permanent staff



Heritage Center exhibit
Planning – pre-2001



Exposition Hall – Opened 2003



Technology Exhibit 2007



Defining the Problem -
WHAT do we need to do
and HOW do we do it?

Standards & Best Practices

Duty of Care

- ▶ Mission Statement – “Collect, preserve, interpret”
- ▶ Seeking AAM accreditation
- ▶ Heritage Preservation Risk Assessment
- ▶ Limited physical and intellectual access



Before: Good luck maneuvering through Room 7!

Collections Audit & Audit Reports

- ▶ Estimating Funding- Boxes, tissue, foam, muslin
- ▶ Estimate of what we have, where it is, and in what condition

Collections Condition Audit			Damage categories					Survey Code		Initials Date		
Condition Grades			Check as appropriate					1 to 4				
1: Good- good conservation, stable			MAJ	MIX	SURF	CHEM	BIO	OLD	ACC	COND	DIS	Remarks
2: Fair- Disfigured, damaged, no action								Collection- General				
3: Poor- Probably unstable, action need								Sub-collection				
4: Unacceptable- Actively deteriorating								Storage Room or Area				
								OLD- sub-standard repair				
								Storage Location- Rank, Shelf				
Inventory Number	Object Name	Materials	MAJ	MIX	SURF	CHEM	BIO	OLD	ACC	COND	DIS	Remarks
PC 010.029.0070	DRESS	Satin, lace								4		
22	Spectacles	String, Plastic, mpa								2		Brown safety glasses
22	Spectacles	Glass, Aluminum								1.5		Herbert was Blind
22	Spectacles	Aluminum, glass								4		Edith's vision slightly better than Herb
22	Spectacles	Glass, metal								3		yellow lenses
22	Mrs Lippincott Spec	metal, glass								2		came w/ info card of Mrs Lippincott
22	Mrs Lippincott Spec	metal, glass								2		info
OPC. 988.36.2	Spec case	cardboard like material								1.5		Spec Box needs to be bigger
PC 996.029.326	Spec case	Aluminum								1.5		
PC. 778.200.1884	Spec case	Suede, Alum.										
PC 995.001.082	Specs.	Flasher, glass, metal										celluloid-early fading
PC 995.001.082	Case	Plastic										
PC 996.028.50	Specs.	metal, glass, plastic										
NU	case	plastic										
PC 996.028.44	Specs	Steel								1.5		
PC 996.028.49	Specs	metal, glass										Repackage case fading fraying
2010.030.001	Blue/white coverlet yarn	Silk										
2011.988.2205	a Bodice	wool, thread, silk										
2011.988.2205	loom	wood, plastic										
80- FU 104	table (coffee)	wood, plastic								1		Need Dusting!
Totals for Damage Categories								Con. - 1		2 3 4		

* Blue BX removed on top of BX
 MICOTEL Rank 2 Shelf L

Goals

- ▶ Determine WHAT we have
- ▶ Figure out WHY we have it
- ▶ Figure out WHERE it is
- ▶ Store artifacts properly
- ▶ Create a catalog of collections which includes the first three points, to make them more accessible to us AND the public

Needs

What we need:

Time + Money

Since Time = Money

Therefore, what we need MOST: \$\$

Seeking out Funding

- ▶ Grants we didn't get:
 - ▶ IMLS – Museums for America Grant 2012 - \$79, 209
 - ▶ IMLS – Museums for America Grant 2013 - \$86,888

Seeking out Funding

- ▶ Grants we DID get:
 - ▶ National Endowment for the Humanities – Preservation Assistance Grant 2013 - \$3,310.75
 - ▶ Funds used almost exclusively for museum-quality storage supplies
 - ▶ Ohio History Connection – History Fund Grant 2013 - \$20,000 (\$15,000 received)
 - ▶ Used almost exclusively to fund additional staff hours for collections re-housing and cataloging.

Seeking out Funding

- ▶ Have to demonstrate to grant funders that you know what you're doing
 - ▶ IMLS review criteria: “Are the proposed activities, technologies, and/or methodologies informed by appropriate theory and practice?”
 - ▶ Ohio History Fund: “It is expected that the applicant organization will have or will obtain the requisite professional expertise to carry out the proposed project. Project will adhere to or help the organization to meet accepted professional standards.”



It was all supposed to be
so simple....

Plan of Attack

- ▶ Establish adequate shelving and appropriate housing
- ▶ Institute artifact location tracking system
 - ▶ Assign “location coordinates” – unique identifiers for storage areas, shelving units, shelves, and storage containers
 - ▶ “Room 6, Rank 8, Shelf 4, Box A”
- ▶ Assign ID numbers as needed
- ▶ Enter object information and locations into Past Perfect catalog

Plan of Attack: Where to Start Rooms 5, 6, & 7



Room 5



Room 6



Room 7

Plan of Attack: Moving Experiences



Clearing the Rooms



Temporary Shelving/Storage



Plan of Attack: Pacing the Floors, Creating Space (with the essential help of interns)



New or reconfigured
shelves



Moving & Cleaning

Plan of Attack: Organizing and Filling the Shelves



These are photos of Room 7 – the one we could barely walk into – in process.

Plan of Attack: The Location Scheme

Storage Area
Rank
Shelf
Box Letter

Alcove 1
Rank 1
Shelf 5
Box B

Box List

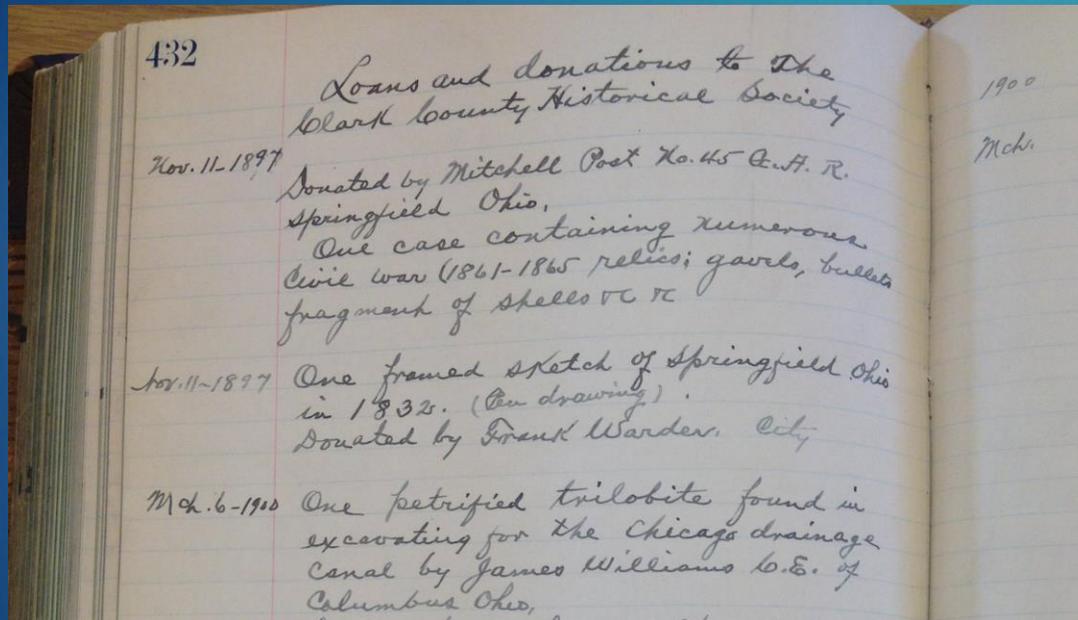


+ Add 📅 Browse ✎ Edit ABC Spell 🔍 Find 🗉 Query ✖ Delete 🖨 Print 📺 Media 🚪 Exit			
Collection	Foos Family Collection		Date
Object ID	PC995.055.0013		Year Range
Object Name	Bodice		Catalog Date
Other Name			Cataloged by
Other#			Status Date
Old#			Status by
Accession#	PC995.055	Ong, Linn Whitelaw	Status
Home Location	2nd Floor Collections:Alcove 1:1:5:B		
Location <input type="radio"/> Archaeology <input type="radio"/> Art <input type="radio"/> Geology <input checked="" type="radio"/>			
Home Location		Temporary Location	
Building	2nd Floor Collections	Building	
Room	Alcove 1	Room	
Wall		Wall	
Cabinet	1	Cabinet	
Shelf	5	Shelf	
Drawer		Drawer	
Container	B	Container	
Last Inventoried Date	06/28/2014	Inventoried by	Dalton, Melissa
Location History			
Type	Date	Location	By Until

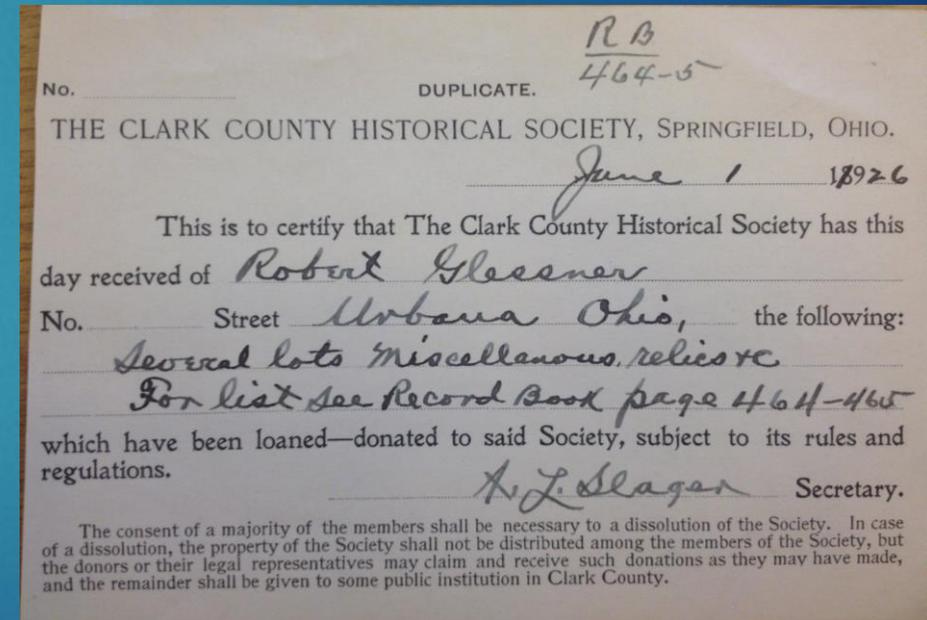
Tackling the Issues

(Some of which we weren't even aware of until we were hip-deep in the project)

Standardizing the Alpha-Numeric Soup



Ledger recording FIRST donations, 1897



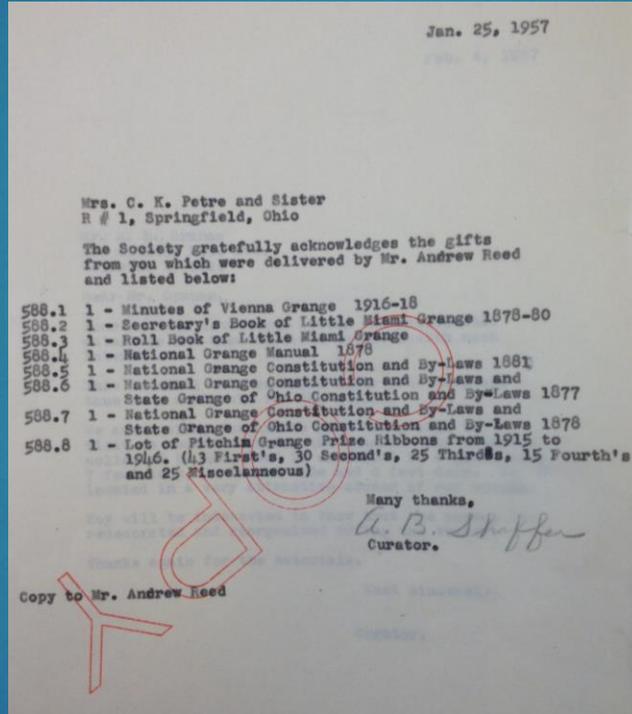
Card system recording early
donations

Tackling the Issues

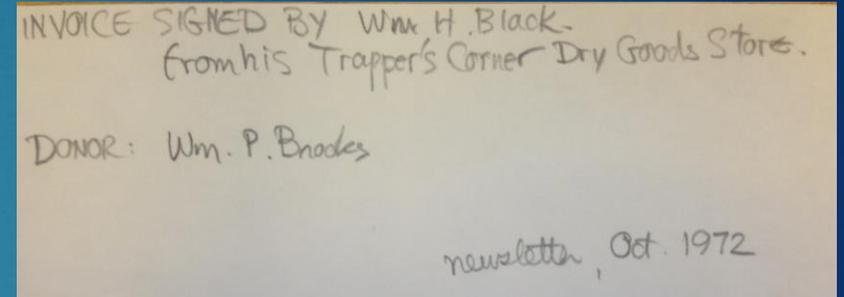
► Standardizing the Alpha-Numeric Soup



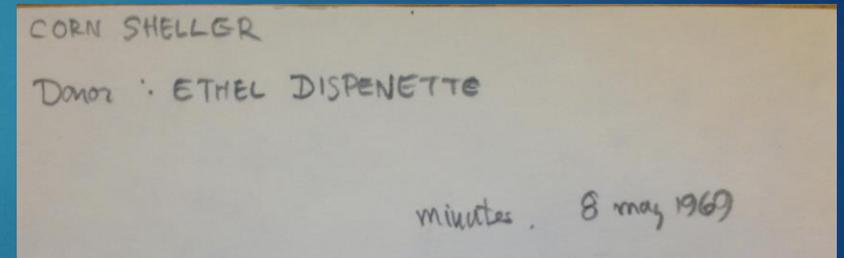
Card system recording donations 1897-1954



Donations ONLY recorded through correspondence 1957-?



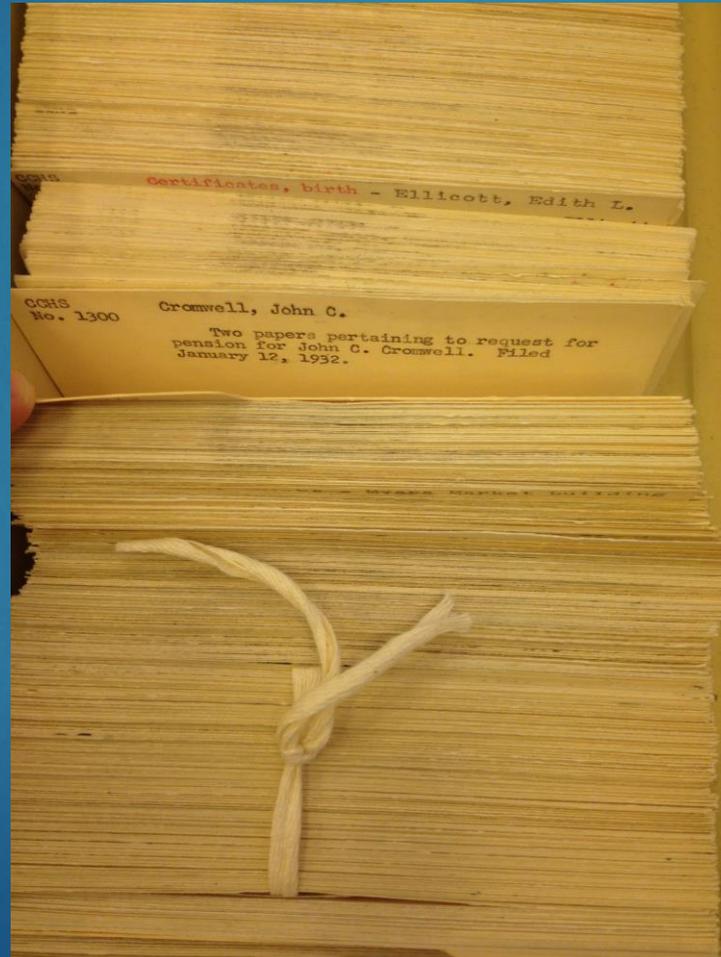
Donations ONLY recorded in newsletter



Donations ONLY recorded in Board Minutes

Tackling the Issues

- ▶ Standardizing the Alpha-Numeric Soup



Inventory AND new accession numbering system, started 1970s

Tackling the Issues

► Standardizing the Alpha-Numeric Soup

THE CLARK COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
MUSEUM COLLECTION WORKSHEET
1983-1984 INVENTORY PROJECT

OP: 83. 2.

ACCESSION NUMBER: OPC 984.80.3a-g NUMBER APPLIED TO OBJECT: Yes (on box)

LOCATION IN COLLECTIONS: _____ rolled pieces in order - left to right
individual pieces not numbered

ARTIST OR MAKER (if identifiable) _____

LOCATION OF MANUFACTURE: _____

DATE OR APPROXIMATE DATE OF OBJECT: 1870s-90s

OBJECT USED BY: _____ DATE(S): _____

MATERIAL OR MEDIUM: Black lace

IDENTIFYING MARKS ON OBJECT: _____

POSSIBLE CATEGORY TITLES: _____

CONDITION OF OBJECT: EXCELLENT GOOD _____ SATISFACTORY _____ POOR _____

IF OBJECT IS IN SATISFACTORY OR POOR CONDITION, DESCRIBE ITS FLAWS: _____

SUGGESTED PRESERVATION METHODS (STAFF ONLY): _____

DONOR: Miss Wilma M Callen ADDRESS: 1132 W. W. Cherry St
Springfield, Ohio

HOW ACQUIRED: d DATE RECEIVED: November or Dec. 1965

DATE ACCESSIONED: _____

OBJECT'S HISTORY: _____

RECORDING DATE: 6-5-84 RECORDER: Jane N. Carter

REMARKS: grouping indicates same pattern

- a - flower pattern, cuff
- b - " " " "
- c - corded, cotton, cuff
- d - " " " " approx 3ft strip
- e - corded pinweeds, 1 1/2" x 3 1/2" strip
- f - " " " " 4 pieces sewn together w/ different lace frings
- g - cotton & silk frings
- h - cotton - see design on back
- i - " " " "
- j - wide lace w/ apple-looking things in center = cut down piece
- k - " " " "
- l - arched head of flower pattern - circle of lace - very delicate
- m - wreath pattern on bottom, flowers declining in size at top
- n - " " " "

o - leaf pattern, @ between flowers in center, @ at bottom
p - bird pattern
q - vertical leaves, wavy bottom edge, dots above leaves
leaf pattern on q

1983-84 Inventory
Provided good info on the
object, but DID NOT identify
the object type!

Tackling the Issues:

So to summarize our alpha-numeric nightmare:

- ▶ At least five different numbering systems in place when we began the project
 - ▶ Some objects labeled with numbers from more than one of these systems.
- ▶ Some objects might have one or more inventory numbers which were either illegible or missing

Tackling the Issues:

So what we wound up with were **FIVE different artifact numbering systems**

- ▶ No big deal, right?
 - ▶ “Best practices” dictate that you shouldn’t undertake wholesale re-numbering for uniformity’s sake
- ▶ UNLESS you’re compiling a digital database and have
 - ▶ A) a multiplicity of numbering *formats* within a single numbering *system*
 - ▶ Artifact listed in an accession as “PC998.028.001” but marked/tagged “PC998.28.1.”
 - ▶ Artifact listed in the inventory as “T&E.M-3” but marked/tagged “TE.m.03”
 - ▶ B) a computer program which doesn’t recognize that “PC998.028.001” and “PC998.28.1” are the same number.
 - ▶ Have had interns/volunteers entering records from paper without having the actual object in hand – duplication of catalog records was a serious problem

Tackling the Issues:

So what we wound up with were **FIVE different artifact numbering systems**

Our ingenious solution (after much debate):

- ▶ Institute standard numbering formats *within the digital catalog*, with each “segment” of the number carried out to a uniform number of places
 - ▶ Thus: an object accessioned as “PC972.74.002, but tagged “PC972.74.2,” would be found in the catalog as “PC972.074.0002”
- ▶ Established similar uniform formats for all of the other numbering systems present in our collections.
 - ▶ Established a hierarchy of numbering systems for objects with more than one number
- ▶ We are relying upon those who come after us to realize that they’ll need to use these standardized formats when searching the catalog.

Tackling the Issues

► Standardizing the Alpha-Numeric Soup

ATTENTION ALL PAST PERFECT USERS! – CATALOGING PROCEDURES

Accession numbers vs. Object ID numbers: An accession “number” is the first part of an identification number; it represents either the donation to which the item belongs (in the case of date-based numbers) or the category and subcategory to which it belongs (in the case of numbers derived from Chenhall’s Nomenclature).

- In the following dated-based ID numbers, the underlined portion is the accession number:

- o PC001.038.0024
- o OPC997.062.0013
- o 2013.090.0001
- o CCHS987.005.0001

- In the following category-based ID numbers, the underlined portion is considered the accession number:

- o FU.LID.0002
- o PA.TA.0014
- o CCHS NO. 2478.0002
- o CCHS NO. 1756.A

When you begin a new catalog record in PastPerfect, it will ask for the Accession # and the Object ID. Make sure the “Pre-fill Object ID with Accession #” option is checked. Enter the Accession number and tab down to the Object ID field; the accession number will appear automatically, then you only need to add ID number.

Changing ID Number Formats: All accession and Object ID numbers are to be entered in PastPerfect in the appropriate standardized format, as described below. Often this format will differ from the exact way the number is written on the object or object tag. In these instances, enter the Object ID number precisely as it is written on the object or object tag in the “Other #” field on the PastPerfect record screen.

Numbering formats

All numbers entered in the catalog must be entered in one of the following formats; each part of the ID number should be taken out to the number of places indicated (three = ###, four = ####), even if it requires additional “placeholder” zeroes:

Date-based accession/IDs

- PCYYY.###.####
- OPCYYY.###.####
- YYYY.###.####
- YYY.###.####
- YYYY.MM.DD.## (format for early accessions entered directly from paper records)
- CCHSYYY.###.#### (this format was a segue between CCHS numbers and the current date-based system – probably only used in 1987)

CCHS numbers

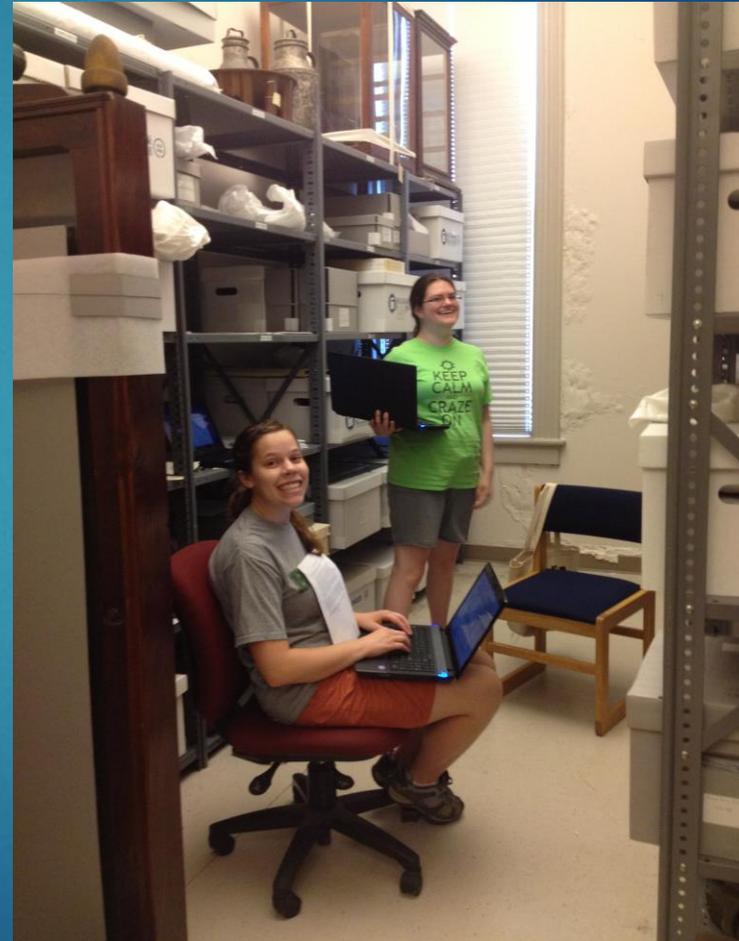
- CCHS NO. ####.#### (last four # represent item number, if present)
- CCHS NO. ####.L (L represents item letter, if present)

Inventory numbers (based on Chenhall)

- Chenhall-based numbers will typically consist of one or more two- or three-letter abbreviations for Chenhall categories and subcategories. Enter these numbers as follows:
 - o Capitalize all letters
 - o DO NOT enter ampersands
 - o Separate each set of letters and numbers with points (.), even if they aren’t written that way on the object. DO NOT use spaces or hyphens
 - DO NOT add a point (.) at the end
 - o Enter ID numbers as four digits, i.e. with zeros as placeholders (Ex.: the number PA.PG.4 would be entered as PA.PG.0004)
 - o Examples:
 - FU.TCD.0001 (originally Fu.Tcd.01)
 - FURN.0056 (originally Furn 56)
 - CA.DA.0061 (originally CA.DA.61)
 - CA.FL.0098 (originally CA.Fl.98)
 - TE.M.FS.0001 (originally T&E.M.FS.1)
 - AR.PH.0138 (originally AR.ph.138)

Tackling the Issues

Checking the Inventory



Tackling the Issues

- ▶ Boxing, reboxing, wrapping, etc. *Should* be simple... but by now we should know better, right?



Tackling the Issues

- ▶ Boxing, reboxing, wrapping, etc. Should be simple, right?



Geo. Willeman, Head of
the Library of Congress
Nitrate Film Vault



110th OVI Flag

Tackling the Issues

- ▶ Object research – What the heck is it?



Previously labelled "Tool"
Not especially helpful...



Any ideas?

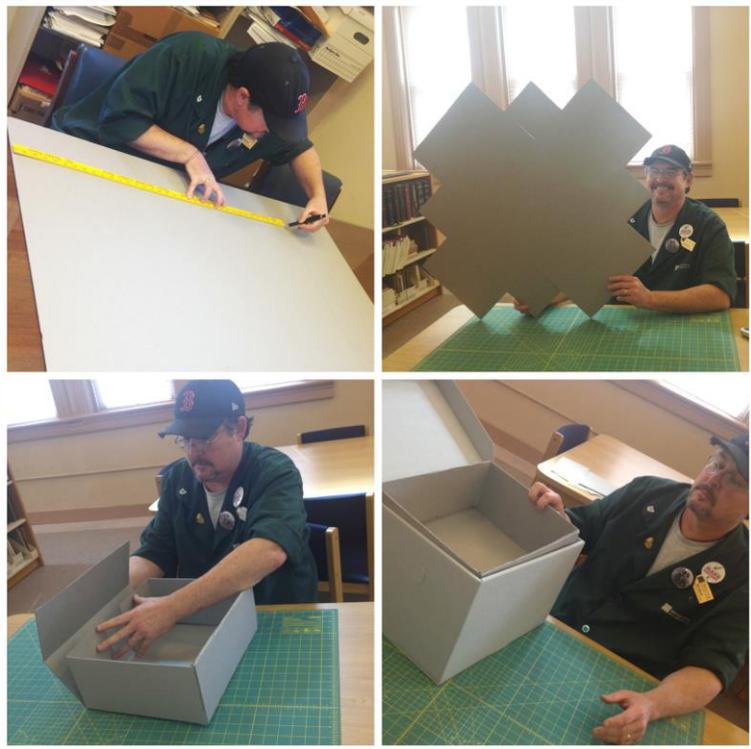
Tackling the Issues

- ▶ SHOULD we have it? Addressing possible deaccession



Tackling the Issues

- ▶ Stretching the Budget – Ingenuity to the Rescue!



Creating tray inserts



Reinforcing older boxes



Getting creative with dividers

What Success Looks Like

► Sharing our discoveries



What Success Looks Like



Room 7



Room 6



Room 6 tray



Boxes with coordinates

What Success Looks Like



Room 5



North Hallway



Room 7

Lessons Learned

- ▶ Define the Problem Carefully
- ▶ Plan the Attack
- ▶ Don't Avoid Thorny Issues
- ▶ Work for Today and Tomorrow
- ▶ Train & Supervise
 - ▶ SUPERVISE.
- ▶ Check Regularly, Evaluate, Correct
- ▶ Share Your Success
- ▶ Keep Plugging Away At It

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