Forget the Best: Good and Better Approaches to Preservation

DYANI FEIGE, DIRECTOR OF PRESERVATION SERVICES, CONSERVATION CENTER FOR ART & HISTORIC ARTIFACTS
Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts

In a typical year:

• Preservation Services specialists complete 50+ survey projects

• Approximately 60 CCAHA-sponsored workshops, conferences, webinars, and training sessions are presented

• The Digital Imaging Services staff digitizes thousands of pages of fragile archival documents, books, and photographs

• Conservators assess and treat more than 6,000 individual artifacts, from over 400 clients

• Housing & Framing Services house approx. 75% of the artifacts treated (folder, sleeve, box, mat and frame, or sealed package)
CCAHA Preservation Services

Writing and assistance with developing ...
- Preservation Needs Assessments
- Preservation Plans
- Risk Assessments
- Emergency Plans
- Collections Policies
- Digital Preservation Assessments

Educational programs
What are “Best Practices” Anyway?

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

- Not rules or laws, but suggestions of care based on knowledge of what can harm collections
- Best practices apply to all areas of work
- Field-wide best practices vs. best practices for YOUR institution
Establishing the benchmarks

- **Getting Started**
  - The minimum level of care necessary for responsible stewardship

- **Good**
  - Taking actions that are above the “getting started” phase, but there is still room for improvement

- **Better**
  - Optimal stewardship of cultural collections based on current research, methods, and available resources
Topics for Today

- Housing and Enclosures
- Storage Space
- Environmental Management
- Policy Development and Institutional Planning
- Grants & Cold, Hard, Cash
Housing and enclosures

Best practice:

- All items are housed in archival materials
- Housing is customized to the specific needs of the item

Topics to cover:

- Materials
- Packing
- Suppliers
Getting started: put things in boxes

- **Short-term (0-1 year)**
  - Cardboard boxes
  - Wrapped in bubble wrap
  - Wrapped in packing blankets

- **Mid-term (1-10 years)**
  - Sterilite Tubs, unsealed
  - Wrapped in muslin

- **Long-term (10+ years)**
  - Acid-free and lignin-free archival boxes
Good: understanding “archival”

- **Archival quality**: materials that are inert and therefore, help extend the life of collection objects and records by protecting them from agents of deterioration
  - *Museum Registration Methods 6*, eds. Simmons and Kiser

- The term archival is *not* regulated!
Other manufacturing terms to know

- Lignin-Free
- Acid-Free
- Buffered or Unbuffered
- P.A.T. (Photographic Activity Test)
- Polyester
- Polyethylene
- Polypropylene
Better: Be smart about supplies

- Hardware stores
- Fabric/craft stores
- Art supply stores
- General suppliers
- Specialty vendors for archives, libraries, and museums
  - Archival Methods
  - Hollinger Metal Edge
  - Gaylord
  - Masterpak
  - Talas
  - University Products

- CCAHA’s Inclusive Vendor List:
  https://ccaha.org/resources/conscientious-consumption-inclusive-vendor-list
Better: customized for object needs

http://stashc.com/
More resources

• American Institute for Conservation (AIC) Wiki: https://www.conservation-wiki.com/
• CAMEO: http://cameo.mfa.org/wiki/Main_Page
• Connecting to Collections Care: https://connectingtocollections.org/
• Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts (CCAHA): https://ccaaha.org/resources
• Documentary Heritage & Preservation Services for New York (DHPSNY): https://dhpsny.org/resources
• National Park Service Conserve O Grams: https://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/conserveogram/cons_toc.html
• Northeast Document Conservation Center (NEDCC): https://www.nedcc.org/free-resources/preservation-leaflets/overview
• Society for the Preservation of Natural History Collections (SPNHC) Wiki: https://spnhc.biowikifarm.net/wiki
• Storage Techniques for Art, Science, and History Collections (STASHc): https://stashc.com/
Storage Space

Best Practices:
• All materials are housed on furniture 6” off the floor.
• Storage spaces can accommodate 10 years worth of growth.
• All storage furniture is made of powder coated metal specifically designed for the space.

Topics to Cover:
• Furniture
• Arrangement and Organization
Getting started: know what you have

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COLLECTIONS</th>
<th>FURNITURE</th>
<th>SPACE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Materials</td>
<td>• Archival quality</td>
<td>• Size</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Size</td>
<td>• Sturdiness</td>
<td>• Availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Importance (historic or monetary value, significant to mission, etc.)</td>
<td>• Durability</td>
<td>• Access and location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Frequency of use</td>
<td>• Available surfaces</td>
<td>• Environmental conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Housing needs</td>
<td>• How they can be modified</td>
<td>• Load bearing capabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Condition</td>
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</tbody>
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Getting started: one room (or closet) at a time

Before and after organization at the Wharton Esherick Museum
RE-ORG: https://www.iccrom.org/publication/re-org-method-reorganize-museum-storage
Good: adapt what you have

NOT SO GOOD
ADAPTATION

GREAT ADAPTATION!
Good: adapting historic furniture

• Use primary enclosures to provide a barrier between an object and wood surface
• Alternatively, line wood with archival blue board, Mylar, or Volara to provide a barrier layer

Storage in the Wharton Esherick Museum
Better: create or purchase what you need

Left to right: National Baseball Hall of Fame; National Museum of African Art; Philadelphia Athenaeum
Environmental management

Best practices:

- Temperature and RH are within recommended ranges (59°- 77°F and 45% - 55% RH)
- There is no UV exposure, visible light is kept at recommended levels
- The institution practices Integrated Pest Management (IPM)

Topics to cover:

- Temperature and relative humidity
- Light
- Pests
Getting started: know your situation

https://ccaha.org/resources/environmental-datalogger-quick-comparison-chart-0

$82.00

$125.00
Getting started: know your situation

“Control” card that is stored in total darkness.
An example of a card that has been exposed to UV light and has faded.
Getting started: know your situation

HI, HOW ARE YA?
Good: regulate
Good: block what you can

Curtain installation at the Wharton Esherick Museum
Good: block what you can
Better: HVAC system

- Plan and budget for repairs and upgrades with a cyclical maintenance plan
- Have a sinking fund
- Perform scheduled maintenance on any system (old or new)
  - Change filters regularly and use the right filters for your system
  - Have a service contract in place
  - Keep track of the warranty and use it!

HVAC system installed in 2021 at the McAllister Museum (www.mcallistermuseum.org)
Better: switch to LEDs

Benefits:
- Emit much less UV and heat
- More energy efficient
- Bulbs last longer
Clockwise from top left: Carpenter Ants; Furniture Carpet Beetle; Brown Rat; American Cockroach (www.si.edu)
Institutional Management

Best practice:
• Routinely conduct preservation needs and risk assessments of collections care issues
• Have all collections-related policies, plans, and guidelines in writing, formally approved, and subject to regular review

Topics to cover:
• Evaluation
• Policies

Getting started: assessments

- Preservation Self-Assessment Program (PSAP)
- CAP Assessment (FAIC)
- MAP Assessment (AAM)
- DHPSNY Assessments
- CCAHA Assessments
- Risk Evaluation & Planning Program (FAIC)

A CCAHA assessment in action.
Good: start small

https://ccaha.org/collections-management-policy-toolkit
Better: AAM Core Documents

- Mission Statement
- Code of Ethics
- Strategic Plan
- Emergency Response Plan
- Collections Management Policy

- https://www.aam-us.org/
Grants & funding

Best Practices:
- Have a line item for preservation in the institutional or departmental budget
- Regularly apply for grant funding to support collections care initiatives

Topics to cover:
- Managing budgets
- Available grants

Getting started: manage the budget you have

- Advocate for a dedicated line item or fund for preservation
- Have your wish list ready!
Good: look locally

Porch repair at Historic Sugartown, Inc. in Malvern, PA, using a PHMC grant
Better: NEH, NEA, IMLS

- NEH Preservation Assistance Grants
- NEH Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections
- IMLS Inspire! Grants
- IMLS National Leadership Grants for Libraries
- IMLS Museums for America
- IMLS Collections Assessment Program
Questions and Discussion

Dyani Feige
Director of Preservation Services
Conservation Center for Art & Historic Artifacts
215-545-0613 ext. 309
dfeige@ccaha.org