

Collections Research News

Spring 1997

NAGPRA UPDATE

On January 13, 1997 the Department of the Interior published in the Federal Register an interim rule regarding the procedures for assessing penalties upon museums who fail to comply with the provisions of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA). This rule became effective on February 12, 1997 and will remain in effect until the final regulations are adopted. The NAGPRA Review Committee emphasizes that the civil penalties outlined in this rule be used to insure compliance rather than simply imposing large fines. The Secretary of the Interior, as a matter of policy, does not intend to pursue civil penalty action for violations which occurred prior to the effective date of these regulations if a museum has made a good faith effort to comply with the basic requirements of NAGPRA. In general, the penalty amount will be .25% of a museum's annual budget or \$5000, whichever is less, plus an additional sum determined by the Secretary of the Interior after taking into account the archaeological, historical or commercial value of the human remains or cultural object(s), including, but not limited to their importance to performing traditional practices; the damages suffered by the aggrieved party or parties; and the number of violations that have occurred. There are also provisions for assessing an additional penalty of \$100 per day for continued violations after an administrative decision has been rendered, or for reducing the penalty amount if certain provisions are met. To receive a copy of this interim rule contact the Archaeology and Ethnology Program of the National Park Service at 202-343-4101 or contact us here at Collections Research for Museums.

CRM ATTENDS OBJECT DOCUMENTATION WORKSHOP AT TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS MEETING

During the Texas Association of Museums annual meeting in Midland, TX, April 9 - 12, 1997 our principle attended a pre-conference workshop put on by the Getty Information Institute on The AAT, ULAN and Object Documentation. The AAT (Art and Architecture Thesaurus) and ULAN (Unions Lists of Artists Names) are two attempts by the Getty Institute to provide standards for automating museum collections. In this age of increased use of computers for documenting museums collections and the potential for sharing data via the internet, data standards are becoming increasingly important. Standards provide quality, consistency, compatibility, and long term value for data and facilitate information retrieval and exchange. While there are no common data structures (the fields we put data into) in the museum community, there are a few data value standards (what we put into the fields) available. The AAT and The Revised Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging are two of the most widely used in the museum community.

The AAT is continually being updated and expanded to address the needs of its users. It's subject scope covers Art, Architecture, Decorative Arts, Material Culture, Libraries, Archives, Museums, Visual Resources Collections and Conservation. The AAT is a list of single concepts used to describe an object's appearance, size, condition, style, etc. - all the descriptors museums use to document objects in their collections. It is arranged in a hierarchical format under major categories called Facets. It can be displayed both hierarchically or alphabetically. The AAT

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PROTECTING MUSEUM OBJECTS WITH OBJECT ID

OBJECT ID IS A PROJECT OF THE GETTY INFORMATION INSTITUTE THAT WAS DEVELOPED THROUGH INTERNATIONAL CONSENSUS AMONG MUSEUMS, CULTURAL HERITAGE ORGANIZATIONS, LAW ENFORCEMENT AND CUSTOMS AGENCIES, THE ART TRADE, APPRAISERS AND THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY. OBJECT ID IS AN INFORMATION STANDARD WHICH CONSISTS OF TEN CATEGORIES OF INFORMATION CONSIDERED ESSENTIAL TO DOCUMENT AN OBJECT. THIS STANDARD WAS DEVELOPED IN ORDER TO FACILITATE THE DISTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION IN THE EVENT OF A THEFT. TIMING IS CRITICAL FOR LOCATING STOLEN OBJECTS. HAVING A STANDARDIZED CORE OF DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION AVAILABLE FOR AN OBJECT WILL INCREASE THE CHANCES OF GETTING THAT INFORMATION OUT TO ANY STOLEN CULTURAL PROPERTY REGISTER BEFORE THE OBJECT DISAPPEARS.

THE TEN CATEGORIES OF INFORMATION ESSENTIAL TO OBJECT ID ARE: TYPE OF OBJECT (WHAT IS IT); MATERIALS AND TECHNIQUES; MEASUREMENTS (INCLUDING WEIGHT, IF APPROPRIATE, UNIT OF MEASURE AND WHICH DIMENSION IS BEING MEASURED); INSCRIPTIONS AND MARKINGS; DISTINGUISHING FEATURES (PHYSICAL CHARACTERISTICS THAT COULD HELP IDENTIFY IT E.G. DAMAGE, REPAIRS, DEFECTS); TITLE (IF IT HAS ONE); SUBJECT (WHAT IS REPRESENTED); DATE OR PERIOD; MAKER (MAY BE AN INDIVIDUAL OR CULTURAL GROUP); AND A SHORT DESCRIPTION INCLUDING INFORMATION THAT MAY HELP IDENTIFY THE OBJECT (COLOR, SHAPE, WHERE IT WAS MADE, ETC.). ANOTHER IMPORTANT PART OF IDENTIFYING AN OBJECT IS A PHOTOGRAPH. IN ADDITION TO AN OVERALL VIEW OR VIEWS, INCLUDE CLOSE-

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is designed solely for indexing and retrieval of data and can be used with any software. It not only contains preferred descriptors but has form variants, synonyms, spelling variations and cultural equivalents built into it. Many of you may already be familiar with the AAT and be using it right now. For those of you who are not and are interested and are connected to the internet the AAT can be accessed at //www.gii.getty.edu. It is worth a look.

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ups of inscriptions, markings and any damage or repairs.

Keeping this minimum level of documentation in a secure location and scheduling periodic collection inventories are important ways of maintaining object security. For more information contact The Getty Information Institute, 1200 Getty Center Dr, Los Angeles, CA 90049-1681 or visit www.gii.getty.edu/pco.

SERVICES

Just a reminder, Collections Research for Museums is offering **classes for small museums in Cataloging and Collections Management**. If you would like more information on topics covered and costs, give us a call at (303) 757-7962 or drop us a line.

We are also still offering a variety of **other services** to museums, large and small. These **range from simple inventories to complete and thorough cataloging of collections**. Feel free to contact us for more information. We still provide a **free initial consultation**.

Also, if you need help preparing your NAGPRA summaries or inventories, we can help. Give us a call.

COLLECTIONS KORNER

(Collections Korner is a regular feature of *Collections Research News*. If there is any topic you would like to see covered in the future, give us a call or drop us a line.)

NEW DEVELOPMENTS IN MARKING MUSEUM OBJECTS PART I

In the last few years registrars and conservators have been conferring on the best materials and methods for associating permanent numbers with museum objects. Unfortunately there is no definitive answer available which will work for every type of object. The one point all seem to agree upon is that finger nail polish is not a stable barrier material for use on museum collections. The main ingredient in fingernail polish is cellulose nitrate (yes, that is the same material those flammable movie films are made of) and over time it

yellow, shrinks, stains and oozes acid! Another commonly used material not recommended is white-out or a similar product. The formulas in these materials vary considerably and they will yellow and flake off over time.

In general, materials used for marking museum objects should not damage the object or be harmful to the person applying the label and they should be reversible. The ideal numbering system should also be easy to use and teach, and use easily obtainable materials. There are four techniques for attaching numbers: placing the number on a separate material and attaching it to the object; apply a barrier layer and write the number on that layer; write directly on the piece; or a combination of these. When choosing a technique and/or material, one should consider not only the material itself but the solvent used to remove it. This can be critical for objects made of plastic or other sensitive material.

In Part II we will discuss specific materials and how and when they are used.

(*Collections Research News* is a service of Collections Research for Museums, Inc, 4830 E Kansas Dr, Denver, CO 80222 (303)757-7962). Questions, comments or story suggestions are always welcome.)