



# *Collections Research News*

SPRING 2006

## WHAT IS *THAT*? THE IMPORTANCE OF DONOR RECORDS.

By Jeanne Kaufmann

Thinking about putting up a new exhibit and need some ideas? Take a look through the museums' collections and see all the wonderful objects that are just waiting to be put on display.



But wait, what is *that*? What was it used for?

You're not sure about what an object is or its use so you go to the accession or donor records to get the answer, but all you find is the donor's name and an object number. Where is all the information that should tell you what the item is and the story behind it? Where is the donor record? Did it ever exist?

Do you really think it is that easy to perform a quick internet search and get all the answers? What happens if after an exhaustive amount of research you still cannot find the information? Maybe you decide to contact the donor only to find that they don't remember or worse yet, have passed away. How can you tell a story if you do not know the history or background associated with an object?

The inability to find information or just the lack of information is not only frustrating, but could also lead to a significant loss of historical knowledge. It is important to gather as much information about an object as possible when it is offered to the museum for consideration to avoid future time consuming research trying to figure out what the mysterious item is and what it was used for.

Enter the importance of Donor Records.

Donor records not only transfer ownership to the museum via a Deed of Gift, they can capture and record historical value. If you decide that the item in question is valuable to have in your

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### **COLLECTIONS RESEARCH FOR MUSEUMS HAS A WEBSITE!**

Now you can visit us on the web at <http://museumcollectionmgmt.com>.

### **NEW TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES FROM COLLECTIONS RESEARCH FOR MUSEUMS**

#### **ONLINE TRAINING CLASSES**

Collections Research for Museums has teamed up with the Northern States Conservation Center to offer two new Online classes: **The Basics of Museum Registration and Collections Management: Cataloging Your Collections.**

Check the Museum Classes Online website at [www.museumclasses.org](http://www.museumclasses.org) or contact us for more information. Other classes are available.

**OUR 2006 MUSEUM CLASSES ONLINE SCHEDULE July 5 through 31, 2006:** MS 207: Museum Collections Management: Cataloging Your Collection

**Look for the Basics of Museum Registration in 2007.**

#### **HANDS-ON TRAINING SEMINARS IN ESTES PARK, COLORADO**

Collections Research has teamed up with the Westend Training Center in Estes Park, Colorado for  
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institution, the next step is to get as much information about it as possible. It is easy to create a donor form and questionnaire to include, at the very least, the donor's name, address and phone number; and the name of the object, what it was used for or its historical significance, and any history related to the object. Examples of donor forms can be found by contacting other museums in your area or state or in the *Museum Forms Book* published by the Texas Association of Museums.

With the donor standing in front of you, fill out the forms and get the facts. If they can't seem to remember very much, start chatting with them about any stories they may have heard from relatives or memories they have regarding the item. The conversation may trigger memories and facts that the donor did not think important or significant, but in actuality are. It's amazing how much you can learn when someone starts talking and reflecting. This enables you to reconstruct what the item was used for, its value and may even provide a little history behind its use.

Don't procrastinate! Soon after you have accessioned an item or collection, do your own research to see if there is any additional information to be found and verify any major points in the donor's story. If you need to follow up with the donor, do it as soon as possible as they may forget pertinent information or have passed away in the interim and then the information may be lost forever. Not

everyone is a born researcher or is willing to spend a lot of time trying to figure out what that thing is!

Future registrars, collections managers and curators will appreciate your efforts and thoroughness when they go through the collections to create new exhibits, assess the collections' value for insurance purposes, provide information to researchers, loans to other institutions, or when deaccessioning the object to donate it to another institution if it no longer fits the mission or goal of your museum. Just one form and a few minutes time can prevent future headaches and frustration and ensure retention of essential historical data and maintain necessary recordkeeping.

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**Training Opportunities, Cont. from page 1**  
4 day workshop in Collections Management for small Museums entitled Collections Management in Times of Change. This workshop is paired with a one day Grant Writing workshop. Check our website or contact us for more information.

**WESTEND TRAINING CENTER  
2006 SCHEDULE**

**Collections Management in Times of Change:**  
May 22 through 25, 2006  
October 23 through 26, 2006

**Grant Writing:**  
May 26, 2006  
October 27, 2006

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**SERVICES**

**FILEMAKER® PRO CATALOGING  
TEMPLATES**

*Collections Research for Museums can assist small museums with computerizing their collection documentation using off-the-shelf database software.*

*Training is available for our database and in general FileMaker Pro techniques.*

**ON-SITE TRAINING**

*Collections Research for Museums offers classes for small museums in Cataloging and Collections Management. The course is designed for those museums which have small, non-professionally trained or volunteer staffs. It covers the basics of marking, handling, measuring, and cataloging, plus general care and storage for all types of objects and materials.*

**PROJECT SERVICES**

*We also offer 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 provide a free initial consultation.*

*(Collections Research News is a service of Collections Research for Museums, Inc, 4830 E Kansas Dr, Denver, CO 80246 (303)757-7962, Toll free: 1-877-757-7962, email: schaller@rmi.net. Website: <http://museumcollectionmgmt.com>. Questions, comments or story suggestions are always welcome.)*

**REMEMBER US FOR  
CATALOGING/COLLECTIONS  
MGMT HELP OR TRAINING**

**COLLECTIONS RESEARCH  
for MUSEUMS**  
4830 E. Kansas Dr. Denver, CO 80246  
(303) 757-7962

