

# *Collections Research News*

Spring 1998

## 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 III

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. In Part I four methods of marking objects were outlined. Part II discussed proper numbering materials and the first of the four marking methods: the use of tags for marking museum objects. In this installment we will discuss appropriate materials to use as a barrier layer on which the number can be written.

Always consider removal prior to applying a base coat and be aware that the solvent used to dissolve the base coat can cause damage to the artifact. Even water-based emulsions must be removed with a solvent. Never use a barrier layer on plastic or on a porous surface, as they can cause permanent damage to the object. (NOTE: There is some disagreement in the field regarding using a barrier coat on porous objects. Some say you should, to keep the number from soaking into the object, and some say you should not because the barrier coat will soak into the object. Apparently this is a point that needs to be addressed further.)

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### FALL TRAINING CLASSES WELL RECEIVED

The Fall of 1997 was busy for our cataloging/ Collections management classes. October found our principle in Rock Hill, SC where she taught our two-week training class for employees of the Museum of York County. She had a full class of 10 participants and covered all aspects of collections management from museum administration, environmental issues, marking and handling to cataloging and conducting inventories. Classroom instruction was punctuated with hands-on cataloging sessions. These sessions allowed attendees to practice techniques discussed and helped the museum with the cataloging of objects in their collection. Most participants seemed pleased with the experience and our principle enjoyed her time in this small town ablaze with fall

colors.

The beautiful, snow-covered mesas of northern New Mexico were the setting for a three-day training class at the Bradbury Science Museum in Los Alamos in mid-November. This intensive one-on-one class covered a lot of material in a short time, but was designed to give the collections manager the tools to improve the care and documentation of the museum's collection. Our principle was impressed with the dedication of the museum staff and enjoyed the opportunity to learn more about the history of Los Alamos. In addition, the hospitality and scenery were wonderful.

(cont. from Pg 1)

Please remember: solvents and base coats dissolved in solvents should only be used in a well-ventilated area. Many of these substances can be toxic. Also, do not use fingernail polish or white-out as a barrier coat (see Part I).

#### **Barrier materials and**

**overcoats:** Acceptable clear barrier materials are those which possess the following traits: stability, reversibility, fast drying, resistance to water; it must be safe for the artifact, thin enough to flow and thick enough to form a film. Currently accepted solvent-based clear varnishes include: polyvinyl acetate resins (AYAA, AYAC, AYAF, AYAT); Acryloid B-72 and B-67; or Winsor & Newton Winton Varnish. A water-based clear varnish called Aquasol is available and Winsor Newton Acrylic Gloss Medium may also be used.

In addition to the traits listed for clear varnishes, colored base coats should possess good adhesion, be non-flaking, and be pigment-based rather than dye-based. The following are acceptable colored base coats: Acryloid B-72 with pigment colorant such as titanium dioxide (Liquid Label); or water-based products such as Liquitex Basics acrylic gesso; Rotring white artist color opaque waterproof acrylic; Golden; or Aquatex. A note of caution, water-based products may not be as durable as solvent-based varnishes and when dry must still be removed with solvents.

#### **The most common solvents**

**are: Acetone**, which can dissolve paint, ink, plastic and coatings; **Toluene**, which is much more toxic than acetone and dissolves the same kinds of materials; **Ethanol**, which can dissolve shellac varnishes on furniture, inks, paints and plastics; **Petroleum benzene**, which is also toxic and damages waxes and waxed surfaces but usually leaves most paints, plastic and other surface treatments alone.

Proper materials for applying the number to these base coats were discussed in detail in Part II of this series.

If your object is subject to excessive handling or the number is likely to be worn off by abrasion, a top coat can be applied over the number. It has been suggested that the top coat be a different material than the barrier layer, so that the top coat and number can be removed without disturbing the barrier layer, but this is not required.

All these products can be obtained through various conservation supply houses, such as Conservation Materials, Light Impressions, or The Jerry's Catalog.

The Upper Midwest Conservation Association has put together a marking kit which contains many of the products discussed in this series. The kit costs \$40.00 and can be obtained by calling or writing UMCA at 2400 3rd Ave South, Minneapolis, MN 55404. Phone: 612-870-3139, Fax: 612-870-3118.

The final installment will discuss writing the number directly on objects.

#### **SERVICES**

Collections Research for Museums can now **assist small museums with computerizing their collection documentation** using off-the-shelf database software. Our current specialty is FileMaker® Pro databases. For more information, give us a call at (303) 757-7962.

In addition, Collections Research for Museums is still offering **classes for small museums in Cataloging and Collections Management** (see article on Pg 1). 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.

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