

Collections Research News

Spring 1999

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.)

HANDLING MUSEUM OBJECTS

or

WHY CAN'T I PICK IT UP BY ITS HANDLE?

Improper handling is the cause of more damage in museums than any other factor, damage not only to collections, but also to personnel. Metals can be etched by the oils, salts and dirt present on the bare human hand. Paper collections can be torn from carelessness. Handles break off. Painting canvas can be torn; paint surfaces and ornate frames can be damaged. Vintage clothing can be torn. Staff can be "damaged" from lifting objects that may be too heavy or too awkward for one person to move. Weapons can be dangerous-- edged weapons (e.g. swords, knives & bayonets) can cut & poke & firearms may be loaded. Therefore, taking time to learn & practice careful handling can go a long way toward protecting collections & staff.

The first step is to think about what you are doing. Do you have to move it--is this trip *really* necessary? How do you plan to transport it? Do you have a place to set it down

WHAT'S NEW AT CRM

Our principle has just returned from our most recent Cataloging/Collections Management training class. It was in a pretty little town nestled in a high mountain valley in California's Sierra Mountains called Quincy. The Plumas County Museum hosted several of their neighbors in a week long session that discussed the basics of museum record keeping, handling and cataloging. The class seem to be well received and our principle was delighted with the hospitality afforded her.

FILEMAKER® PRO CATALOGING

TEMPLATES NOW AVAILABLE FROM CRM

Collections Research for Museums has created a collection database using the commercial software FileMaker® Pro. Cataloging templates are available for object collections, photographic collections and archival collections. We will also customize a cataloging screen for those of you who have specialized collections. We can also connect your database to an imaging system to allow photographs of the collection to be incorporated into the database. Contact us for details and pricing.

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your destination? Are there doors to open? Stairs to climb? Thresholds to trip over?

Now that we know where we are going & how we are going to get there, what do we do next?

First, you want to examine the artifact. Even those that do not look fragile may be, so always be very careful when handling all objects.

Always use both hands when picking up an object and place one hand underneath its base to support it. For large, awkward or fragile objects use a padded tray, padded cart and/or helper.

Do not pick up objects by their handles or other protruding appendages. While handles were originally intended to be used, by the time an object enters a museum there is a very good chance that the handle has been repaired. Certainly it has been weakened from use over the years and now is the most fragile part of your object.

Do not wear dangling jewelry or large rings when working with museum objects. Chains, necklaces and dangling earrings can get caught in textiles, baskets, and other easily snagged objects. Large rings can scratch the surfaces of objects as well as get caught on them.

Always wear gloves, either cotton or latex, or have clean hands (no lotions or creams) when handling objects. White cotton gloves are the standard for handling most materials and are readily available from photo shops, band supply stores or conservation supply houses. Latex exam gloves should be powder-free to prevent the powdering material from transferring to your objects when the gloves are removed. These gloves can now be found in grocery and drug stores or through medical supply houses.

Gloves are especially important when handling metal artifacts. The acids, moisture and salts from bare hands aids corrosion and can even etch fingerprints onto the artifact.

Latex gloves are recommended for artifacts with rough or flaking surfaces, because they are not likely to get caught on the surface. Cotton gloves may dislodge pieces or leave threads on this type of object.

Clean hands, with no gloves, are recommended only for slippery objects like those made from glass, china, porcelain or pottery. Latex gloves are also acceptable if you feel they provide you with a secure enough grip. You would not want these artifacts to slip through your fingers and shatter on the ground! Remember, do not use any hand lotion or

creams on your hands!

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 (see article on Pg 1). 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**. 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 Research News is a service of Collections Research for Museums, Inc, 4830 E Kansas Dr, Denver, CO 80246 (303)757-7962. Questions, comments or story suggestions are always welcome.)