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Approved by the Department of Museum Studies

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ABSTRACT

Sorting Through the Dust: Creating an Effective Inventory in a Challenging Environment

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For any museum that has been in existence for a long time, one of the biggest challenges is reviewing the records of early acquisitions to ensure their compliance with current standards. Museum records are crucial to interpretation and preservation efforts, providing information on what the museum has and the story behind why an object was acquired. Thus in an effort to exert better physical and intellectual control over collections, the State Historical Society of North Dakota established an internship project to inventory the contents of an off-site storage facility.

To determine how to organize the inventory report, the overarching goals of the project first had to be defined. What was the purpose of the inventory? The goals were as follows: 1.) Identify and process all non-accessioned objects. 2.) Locate all accessioned objects and assess whether these were in need of transfer to another storage facility. 3.) Create an action plan for all exterior objects regarding how they were to be rehoused on the interior. This goal was more involved, because it required the selection of objects on the exterior to be rehoused and those to be considered for deaccession. Second, adequate space within the facility had to be cleared for the introduction of a large number of massive objects. Thus, determinations on deaccession and movement of interior objects were a major component of this goal.

SORTING THROUGH THE DUST

Creating an Effective Inventory in a Challenging
Environment

Megan Kathryn Wilson

Summer 2014 Registration Intern

State Historical Society of North Dakota

OFF-SITE STORAGE PROJECT



- This is the State Historical Society's oldest storage facility and is located 15 miles from Bismarck.

- The Project:

1. Create a plan of action for objects housed on the exterior of the storage building.
2. Create a plan of action for interior objects that should be re-housed at another storage facility.
3. Create a complete inventory of all objects at this storage facility.



WHERE TO BEGIN?

- An inventory report generated from the database is great, if your objects are actually on it. It also helps if you have some way to tell whether the object in front of you is an object on the list.
 - We did not have that luck.
 - Further, we had to know what we had before we could decide what to do with it.
 - Thus we decided to begin at the end, creating a complete inventory of all objects and determining the types of objects we had (i.e. accessioned, non-accessioned, or state equipment.)



Photo #	Object ID (if known)	Location	Description
001		05A	Round metal pole
002		05A	Rubber tire
003		05A	Unknown farm tool, plow

UNCATALOGUED, NON-ACCESSIONED, AND FOUND-IN-COLLECTION OBJECTS



- “Is there a farm tools for dummies book?”
- In other words what is this and how do I know if I should have one?
- Research was key.
 - Checking the database, the accession log book, and consulting the Curator of Research.

If no match was found, we submitted a Potential Acquisition Request (PAR) to the Museum Collections Committee (MCC).

THE COLLECTIONS

- Mission: "To identify, preserve, interpret, and promote the heritage of North Dakota and its people."
- There are three collection classifications (general, instructional, and prop).
- Collecting challenges:
 - The heritage of North Dakota includes the past and present, great and common stories, and must represent the many ethnic communities that have inhabited the state.
 - The increasingly global nature of society challenges traditional conceptions of what makes an object relevant to North Dakota heritage. Should an object be made in North Dakota? Used in North Dakota? Or simply owned by a North Dakotan?



PROCESSING POTENTIAL ACQUISITION DECISIONS

- Following a decision by the Museum Collections Committee on whether to accession or decline a potential acquisition request, an object must be prepared for accessioning/cataloguing or removal.
- Approved Objects: These were added to a list for the Curator of Collection Management to catalogue and mark. A temporary tag was placed on these objects with the PAR # for tracking.
- Declined Objects: a total of 175 objects were declined by the MCC. These objects were offered to other institutions via the listserv, and were to be disposed of after two weeks if no response was received.

Temporary Tags: Neon flagging tape from Menards was our best friend this summer!



ACCESSIONED OBJECTS



Heritage Center Storage is well regulated, but lacks the space for large objects.

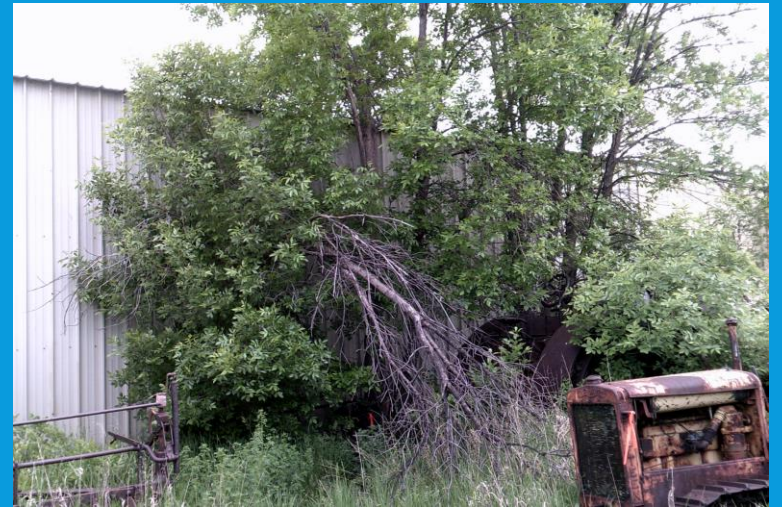
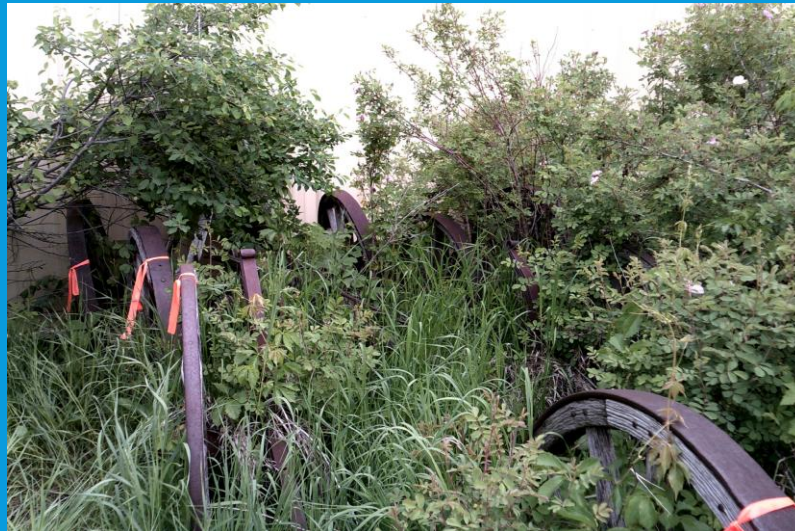
Current off-site storage has the capacity for larger objects, but lacks adequate environmental controls.

- The PastPerfect records for the 500+ accessioned objects we located were updated.
- We also had to assess whether this storage was a suitable facility for each object.
- Alternative storage options:
 - Heritage Center (on-site) storage
 - Auxiliary Storage (off-site)

Identifying objects that could be transferred to alternative storage was crucial not only for preservation, but also for freeing up needed space for larger objects on the interior.

EXTERIOR OBJECTS

- Everything must go somewhere, either to the interior of the building or another institution, if necessary.
- Deaccessions became a necessary task for clearing room for exterior objects.
 - Criteria for deaccession included:
 - Poor condition
 - Duplication in the collection



FINAL THOUGHTS

