



COLLECTION MANAGERS COMMITTEE
Texas Association of Museums

Collections Communiqué

Fall 2011

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TAM Job Bank

AAM Job Center

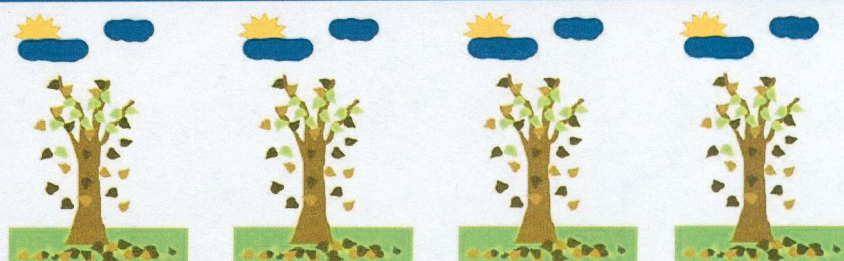
Have something for the next newsletter?
Email submissions by November 15, 2011,
to Elizabeth Martindale at
elizabeth.martindale@thc.state.tx.us.

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CMC Welcomes New Officers

We welcome two new officers to the CMC Board: Toyia Pointer, Curator at the A.W. Perry Homestead Museum as Secretary, and Elizabeth Martindale, Certification Program Coordinator at the Texas Historical Commission Officer-at-Large, Newsletter Editor. Lisa Worley, Registrar at Carrabba Conservation, will serve as CMC's Vice Chair.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Jennifer Cook, Director at the Mary Kay Museum, and Kathleen Stiefel, Registrar at the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum for all of their service and hard work over the years.

Workshop Announcement: Museum and Institutional Archives

CMC will be presenting its next all-day workshop on October 28, 9am to 3:30pm, at the Mayborn Museum Complex in Waco. Registration is \$30 for CMC members and \$45 for non-members. Lunch is provided for \$10.

What are Museum and Institutional archives? How are they different from each other and from 3-D collections? How do we organize them? How do we make them useful to our institutions and for the public? Come learn how professionals deal with archival collections, including, working with paper and audio-visual materials, how to catalogue and describe archives, why institutional archives are important for your organization, and how to plan and execute a digitization project for archival materials. We end the day with a tour of the Riley Digitization Center.

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Featured speakers are Claudia Anderson, Supervisory Archivist at the LBJ Library and Museum, Julie Holcomb, Lecturer in the Department of Museum Studies at Baylor University, and Eric Ames, Resources & Collection Management Services – Digital Projects in the Electronic Library at Baylor University.

Contact Lisa Worley at worley.lisae@gmail.com if you haven't received a registration form via email.

Large-Scale Deaccessioning: Letting Go of Your Collections Without Losing Your Mind Session Review

Ruth Goerger
Museum Technician
LBJ Library and Museum

I can't think of a better way to start TAM 2011 than the session I attended on Large-Scale Deaccessioning chaired and presented by Cliff Vanderpool of the Panhandle-Plains Historical Museum (PPHM) with co-presenter Michael Duty of Michael Duty Fine Art of Dallas. Cliff began the session relating that, in 2004, the PPHM was coming to grips with a storage crisis. Their vast collection was quickly filling up available storage space, and the museum was left with little choice than "to get rid of"... er...let me rephrase that... "find new homes in the best way possible" for the items that were out of the collections scope or redundant. Several large items (like cars and windmills) were deaccessioned. The cars were auctioned, and additional items went to other regional museums for no profit.

The decision about what items to deaccession started with the curator and registrar – and a detailed collections management policy. Their recommendations were then passed on to the staff collections committee, then to the board collections committee, then on to the general board for final approval.

Ownership questions hampered the deaccessioning of some "out of collection scope" objects. For these items, because of unclear or missing donor records, ownership by the museum could not be established. Yes, possession is 9/10 of the law, but that undetermined 1/10 was enough to make the museum uneasy about getting rid of an item. Cliff stressed the importance of having clear donor agreements to prevent ownership issues like this.

The PPHM also worked to reduce redundancy in their art collection. They owned many paintings by the artist Frank Gray. After deciding which ones were best to deaccession, they made the decision to dole out five per year to be auctioned "so as not to flood the market with Frank Grays."

The discussion was then taken over by Michael. He first stated that even museums of stature deaccession parts of their collection. He also echoed Cliff by recommending a solid deaccession plan, and urged museums to "do so not because you *have* to" but because it is smart to have one in place.

Michael related several items that should be a part of any deaccession plan:

- He recommended "looking all along" for deaccession candidates. Rather than having a tidal wave of deaccessions all at once, continually look thorough your collections for items that no longer fit your collections scope. It will make deaccessioning a much more manageable task.
- Don't look at how much money an item is worth, but rather if it makes sense to the mission. Every item is costing the museum money, keeping an out-of-scope item in the collection is "eroding resources."
- Get your board involved at every level of deaccessioning. The last thing you want is for the board to be surprised by your deaccessioning. Let them know from the very beginning what your plans are.
- Develop a plan of how to communicate what you are doing to the both the public and the members/donors. Michael recommended "programs about collecting" or bits in newsletters to help educate people about museum policies.
- Prepare for dissenters – and realize that when they do become vocal they may not come forward with "reasoned or logical arguments."

Michael then went on to help us wade through how to best auction your deaccessioned items. First you need to research which market is best for your items. Larger auction house like Christie's or Heritage are more expensive, but they have a larger customer base. But, larger auction houses are not the best place to sell more obscure items. Other auction websites mentioned were AskART, Artifact (for the more obscure), and Artnet.

How do you decide to price your items? Michael recommended searching auction records for final sale prices – but don't rely solely on those numbers. Every auction house charges a fee to sell an item – which is

called a buyers premium (usually around 15%). The final price is then "the hammer price plus the buyer's premium." Also, the seller is also usually charged a 15% premium. BUT, museums provide a certain amount of class to an auction house. Auction houses know that if an item is from a museum, it automatically lends credence to the sale. People will pay more. An auction house will often decrease a seller's premium by 5% "without thinking" if the seller is a museum – the museum just has to ask. Also be sure to ask if there are any added fees attached to the sale. Often there will be unanticipated fees (like photo fees, insurance fees, or storage fees), which a museum may be able to negotiate as well.

The question-and-answer period followed. Some of the highlights:

- Don't roll your eyes at Ebay. Cliff happened to find a piece by Texas artist Allie Tennant on Ebay – which he was able to get for the PPHM for \$4000. "If you see staff surfing on Ebay, don't worry. They are just working..."


- Don't worry about an auction house using your institution's name during a sale. The seller can dictate that a name not be used. However, for the sake of transparency, Michael recommends you allow your institution name to be used. "People will find out eventually."

TAM and CMC Restructuring Relationship

Chris Godbold
Curator of Collections
Fort Bend County Museum Association

At the Annual Business meeting in Irving membership voted to including the affinity groups, i.e. CMC, as official parts of TAM. CMC will operate under the TAM's nonprofit status. This will not change things much for CMC members. Members of CMC will have to be members of the TAM but this is already the rule. Members will be able to renew their membership to TAM and the CMC at the same time. Other arrangements for accounting, workshop administration, etc. are still in the works. Look for implementation in January 2012.

The CMC board has established an ad-hoc committee comprised of members of the board that will work with the TAM office to help better define our relationship with TAM and make any transition as smooth as possible. We will also make sure to keep CMC members informed as this restructuring process proceeds. If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions, please contact CMC President Kim Cupit, CMC Vice Chair Lisa Worley or anyone on the Board and we will be happy to pass your



feedback on to the TAM office. Officers' contact information can be found on the Officers page.