

The Collection Inventory Handbook for Museums and Historical Societies

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The Collection Inventory Handbook for Museums and Historical Societies

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Inventory Background

- **Calvin Klein Fashion Archive**
- **Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum**
- **Brooklyn Children's Museum**
- **National Museum of Mongolia**

Bethany Romanowski, Head Registrar,
National September 11 Memorial and Museum
New York, NY

Inventory Background

- **Cooper-Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum**
- **South Street Seaport Museum**
- **Currently overseeing 9/11 museum's first wall-to-wall inventory**

About Us

The Collection Inventory Handbook for Museums and Historical Societies

Presentation Outline

- I. Backstory on the Book
- II. Collections Inventory Survey
- III. Inventory Case Studies
- IV. Connecting Survey to Case Studies
- V. What's Next?

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The Collection Inventory Handbook for Museums and Historical Societies

- Will be comprised of two parts
 - Part 1: Theory
 - Part 2: Case Studies
- Emphasis on incorporating current technologies into inventory processes
- Rowman & Littlefield, expected publication 2018



I. Backstory on the Book

The Collection Inventory Handbook for Museums and Historical Societies

Survey Topics

- Planning the inventory
- Documenting the inventory
- Conducting inventories in the digital age

Question Format

- Respondents rated topics in each category by level of interest
- Space provided for questions and comments

Very interested I'd skim through Not that interested

☐ ☐ ☐

Collections Inventory Survey (2016) Locations and Types of Institutional Affiliations Shared by 47 of 202 Respondents



II. Collections Inventory Survey

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Survey Results

Topics In which the Most Respondents Were “Very Interested”

Planning the Inventory

Determining resources needed: 83%

Documenting the Inventory

Reconciling documentation discrepancies: 94%

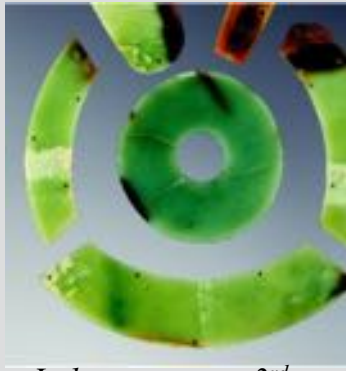
Conducting Inventories in the Digital Age

Preparing your database to receive inventory data: 78%

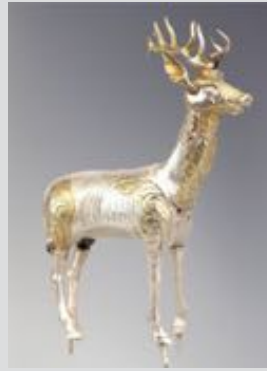




Beads, 4,000-3,000 BCE



Jade ornament, 3rd c. BCE-1st c. CE



Deer figurine, 7th c.



Archery set, 11th-12th c.



Flag, 1910s



Mongolian script typewriter, 1920s

The collection features about 50,000 objects dating from prehistory to the late 20th century.

CASE STUDY National Museum of Mongolia

OBJECTIVE
Make Inventories Faster by Barcoding



National Museum of Mongolia in Ulaanbaatar.

III. Inventory Case Studies

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Gilded Buddhist figures



*Silver & gold headdress
embellished with gems*



Jade ritual objects

These objects are among more than 1,000 that a curator stole and sold in the 2000s. This and other cases of unlawful possession and sale of Mongolian cultural heritage lent impetus to new laws requiring museums to inventory collections every two years.

CASE STUDY National Museum of Mongolia

OBJECTIVE Make Inventories Faster by Barcoding



Inventory took two years using a pencil-and-paper methodology.

III. Inventory Case Studies

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CASE STUDY

National September 11 Memorial & Museum

First Wall-to-Wall Inventory

OBJECTIVES:

- Capture baseline inventory documentation
- Accurate location data for 100% of collection

III. Inventory Case Studies

Survey Topic 1: Planning An Inventory



4. Which aspects of inventory planning are you interested in boning up on?

	Very interested	I'd skim through	Not that interested
Gaining institutional support for an inventory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Establishing the scope of the inventory for example, whether it'll be partial or wall-to-wall, or whether projects such as imaging will be achieved in tandem	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Determining resources needed, such as time, money, and equipment	83% <input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Securing funding for an inventory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Aligning inventory goals with your budget/resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Establishing inventory procedures	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hiring and training inventory staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Is there an inventory planning topic we missed?

IV. Connecting Survey to Case Studies

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Case Study

Barcoding at National Museum of Mongolia



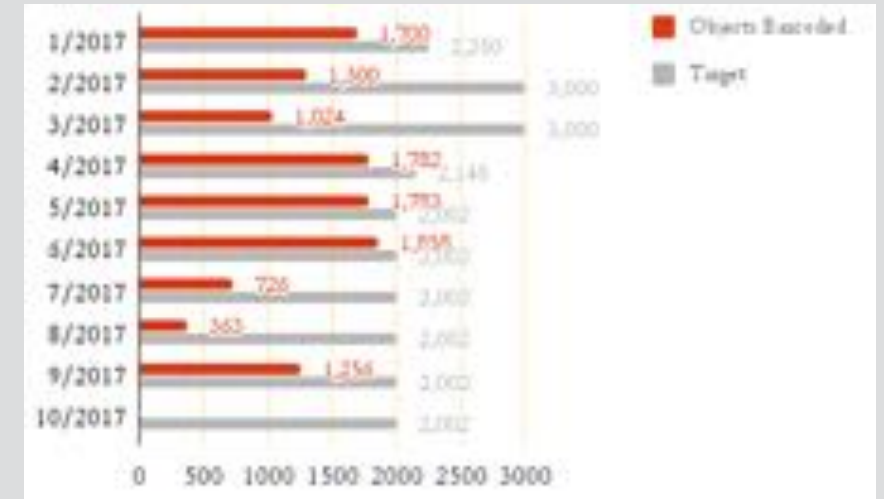
An up-to-date laptop (left) supported a faster work flow and higher morale. An older desk top computer (right) was also used, but slowed work.

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Time

Issues Working from an Arbitrary Timeline



Money & Equipment

Knowing & Investing in Technology Needs



Source: Amazon.com



17γ-12-38

Mongolian Cyrillic must be encoded as a QR code, with Unicode text encoding. Scanners that support Unicode are scarce and cost nearly double the budget projection.

Survey Topic 1: Planning

Determining
Resources Needed,
Such as Time,
Money, and
Equipment



- ✓ Estimating time through prototyping
- ✓ Creating a sound budget
- ✓ Equipment checklists and vendors
- ✓ Synthesize data from case studies of high and low budget inventory projects

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Survey Topic 2: Documenting the Inventory

5. Which aspects of documenting an inventory would you like to see represented?

	Very interested	I'd skim through	Not that interested
What information to document during an inventory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How to record information during an inventory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Where to put the information you collect during an inventory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Measuring inventory progress	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Controlling the quality of information captured during an inventory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reconciling documentation discrepancies encountered during an inventory	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Using inventory documentation to strengthen other areas of collections practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Is there an inventory documentation topic we missed?



94%

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RESULTS (16/100)

Editing Ephemera:
Flier (7/14/2015 1:51)

9/11

Created
1 year, 4 months ago by Stephanie Schmeling

Last changed
7 months, 12 days ago by Sean Britton

Part of lot: NN 2015.1

BASIC INFO

NUMBERS

Object Status
Accessioned

Object Number
NN 2015 . 1 . 51

Object Name
Flier

Title
Question the 9/11 Investigation

Type
Creator Title

Add label

“NN” record generated for “Question the 9/11 Investigation” flier found in storage

Most Common Documentation Discrepancies

- Objects with no documentation
- Objects from a known source, lacking database records
- Numbering problems linked to component documentation

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Head Registrar



Survey Topic 2: Documenting An Inventory

Reconciling Documentation Discrepancies



- ✓ Anticipating Discrepancies
- ✓ Resolving Discrepancies: How & When
- ✓ Legal Parameters Connected to Disposal, Missing Objects, & Other Inventory Issues
- ✓ Case Studies

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Survey Topic 3: Conducting Inventories In the Digital Age

6. Which topics related to collections inventories in the digital age would you like to read about?

	Very interested	I'd skim through	Not that interested
Inventorying digital objects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Barcoding collections	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Inventorying a barcoded collection	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Preparing your collections database to receive inventory data	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Creating a database or using other information technology to streamline an inventory	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Is there a topic about collections inventories in the digital age we missed?

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9/11 Museum Inventory Record:

Minimum Inventory Documentation

- Object Number
- Object Name
- Brief Description
- Current Location
- Date Inventory Information Recorded and Recorder's Name

Additional Inventory Documentation

- Object Type
- Medium
- Dimensions

IV. Connecting Survey to Case Studies

Challenge

Collective Access database not configured to:

➡ Record that an object was found during inventory, inventory recorder's name, and date


➡ Track object components

➡ Record location history



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RESULTS
123/300



Created
5 years, 7 months ago by Stephanie Schmeling

Last changed
1 year, 5 months ago by Sean Britton

Part of lot: C.2012.107

GEOREFERENCING

MEDIA

HISTORY

DOCUMENTS

LOCATION

RELATIONSHIPS

OBJECT REPRODUCTION

PERMISSIONS

MEMEX

PUBLIC SITE

EXHIBITIONS

INVENTORY

Save Save and return Cancel Delete

Inventory 2015

Located

Not Located

Entered by

Sean Britton

Date inventoried

April 22 2016

Save Save and return Cancel Delete

Components (5)

Evidence Tag (C.2011.1255.1.1)

Front Piece (C.2011.1255.1.3)

Button (C.2011.1255.1.5)

Strap (C.2011.1255.1.2)

Button (C.2011.1255.1.4)

Add component

Object location

Current location

History

Site → National September 11 Memorial & Museum → Center Passage → OM-97 (September 5 2017, Temporary Location, Exhibition)

Site → National September 11 Memorial & Museum → Center Passage (December 21 2016, Temporary Location, Exhibition)

Update location

Inventory Log
Feature

Component
tracking feature






Location
tracking feature

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9/11
MEMORIAL
& MUSEUM

Inventory Report Exported from Database

Object Identifier	Object Title	Description	Inventory 2015	Date Inventoried	Entered By	Object Media Representation	Storage Location
C.2011.976.4	Shorts	Well-worn denim cut-off shorts owned by Robert Francis Wallace	Located	June 24 2016	Waguel Geller		Site → Warehouse → 8th Floor → Unit 04 → Shelf D → ATF-159 (December 8 2016, New Home Location)
C.2011.976.5	T-Shirt	T-shirt belonging to Robert Francis Wallace, the front of the shirt has an image of a three leaf clover with the words "House of Pain" printed above it, and the words "Fire Walk With Me" written below it. The back of the shirt reads "Boom Shalock Lock Boom"	Located	October 12 2016	Valeska Mancilla		Site → Warehouse → 8th Floor → Unit 01 → Shelf I → TEX-158 (October 12 2016, New Home Location)
C.2011.976.6	Whiteboard	Small rectangular dry erase whiteboard belonging to the family of Robert Francis Wallace, illustrating day to day life in the family	Located	October 12 2016	Valeska Mancilla		Site → Warehouse → 8th Floor → Unit 02 → Shelf I → ATF-177 (October 12 2016, New Home Location)
C.2011.976.7	Card	Mother's day card framed in a silver double frame with a personal message from Robert Francis Wallace and his wife, Nancy (May 10, 1998)	Located	October 12 2016	Valeska Mancilla		Site → Warehouse → 8th Floor → Unit 03 → Shelf C → ATF-101 (January 9 2017, New Home Location)
C.2011.976.8	Drawing	Framed colored tattoo drawing of the Twin Towers flanked by an American Flag with praying hands in front. "In Loving Memory of" is above the drawing "Bobby" is below. To the left of the drawing is a handwritten note "To my dearest friend I got this tattoo in memory of you till we meet again I pray for you I miss you Love Mike 9/28/02." The drawing is in a brown frame	Located	October 12 2016	Valeska Mancilla		Site → Warehouse → 8th Floor → Unit 03 → Shelf C → ATF-101 (January 9 2017, New Home Location)

IV. Connect Survey to Case Studies

National September 11 Memorial & Museum

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Case Study

National Museum of Mongolia

Register

Музейн үзмэр, эд өлгийн зүйлийн Ерөнхий бүртгэлийн програм

эсний тү Ш.Эрдэнэцэцэг

Дурсгалууд Шинэ бүртгэл хөөрөг, даалин Тохиргоо Тайлан

МУЗЕЙН ҮЗМЭР, ЭД ӨЛГИЙН ЗҮЙЛИЙН ЕРӨНХИЙ БҮРТГЭЛИЙН ПРОГРАМ

2012 оны улс, аймгийн музейн сан хөмрөгийн улсын тооллогын үр дүнг нэгтгэн боловсруулах

Тооллогын дараагаар музейн дотоод үйл ажиллагаанд ашиглагдаж бүртгэл мэдээллийн сангийн үйл ажиллагааг

В. Цуглуулсан (холбогдох он цаг)

12. А. Сан хөмрөгийн байршил Б. Төрөлжсөн бүртгэл дэх дэсийн дугаар

А. Сан хөмрөгийн байршил сан хөмрөг №7, Э1.Б1.Т1.Х1

Storeroom No7, Row1.Column1.Shelf1.Box1

Угсаатны сан хөмрөг 2, тавиур 1, тавцан 3

The database location feature impedes staff from tracking objects to the desired standard. Nevertheless, scanning barcoded locations into the field was faster and more accurate than typing the data.

Issues Recording Inventory Data

- Location
- Inventory log
- Multiple Components of the Same Object



Agate snuff bottle with coral stopper. We were unable to record different locations for components of the same object, or that a component was not found during inventory.

Survey Topic 3: Inventories in the Digital Age

Preparing Your Collections Database To Receive Inventory Data



- ✓ Comparison of Inventory Features Across Databases
- ✓ Linking Database Fields to Drop Down Lists and Standard Nomenclatures
- ✓ Creating Inventory Data Short Cut Screens

IV. Connecting Survey to Case Studies

What's Next?

- *The Collection Inventory Handbook for Museums and Historical Societies*
(Rowman & Littlefield, 2018)



- Share Your Inventory Story, Questions, or Feedback at:

CollectionsInventoryProject@gmail.com

V. What's Next?

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