

Chapter 1: Documenting Museum Collections

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CHAPTER 1: DOCUMENTING MUSEUM COLLECTIONS

A. Overview

1. *What will I find in this handbook?* The *Museum Handbook*, Part II, Museum Records, tells you about the records you need to manage National Park Service (NPS) museum collections. These records are consistent with professional standards. Use the handbook as a reference. Refer to it when you:

- accession material into the museum collection (Chapter 2)
- receive incoming loans (Chapter 2)
- catalog objects (Chapter 3)
- photograph objects (Appendix K)
- mark objects with a catalog number (Appendix J)
- report losses of museum objects (Chapter 4)
- conduct the annual inventory of museum property (Chapter 4)
- complete the annual Collections Management Report (Chapter 4)
- place museum collections on outgoing loan (Chapter 5)
- deaccession museum collections (Chapter 6)

Note: The *Museum Handbook*, Part I: Museum Collections (*MH-I*), tells you how to physically care for your collections. The *Museum Handbook*, Part III: Museum Collections Use (*MH-III*), gives you information on providing access to and using your collection.

2. *How is this handbook different from the ANCS+ User Manual?* This handbook gives you the guidelines for carrying out NPS museum policies on museum records.

The *ANCS+ User Manual* gives you detailed instructions on how to use the ANCS+ collection management system. ANCS+ allows you to automate the procedures in this handbook.

3. *What is ANCS+?* ANCS+ is the NPS collections management system that allows you to automate all your museum records. It is a customized, commercial program from Re:discovery Software, Inc. You must use ANCS+ to:

- accession and catalog your collection
- complete the annual inventory and Collections Management Report
- document incoming and outgoing loans and deaccessions

4. *Where can I get ANCS+?* You must order ANCS+ through the Museum Management Program (MMP), WASO. In 1998 most parks received an appropriated increase of \$3,000 to their budgets to purchase and support the program. If you are a new park, you may not have this increase in your budget.
- Refer to Appendix H in the *ANCS+ User Manual* for information on ordering the program.
5. *What is the purpose for museum records?* Museum records allow you to properly care for and access your collection. You need records to prove ownership, describe the material in the collection, document loans, and locate objects. Museum records insure that museum collections are physically and intellectually available for collections management, interpretation, exhibition, and research. They give you accountability for your collection.
6. *Who must follow the guidelines in this handbook?* The person responsible for the park's museum collection must follow the guidelines and procedures in this handbook. These guidelines and procedures insure that the park's museum records meet NPS standards.
- Note:** Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Personnel Classification Standards require that a GS-11 (or higher) level curator must oversee each park's museum collection. The regional/support office (SO) curator can provide oversight for parks with small collections. The curator provides professional guidance and oversees all documentation work at the park. Equivalent occupation series positions, such as archivist or museum specialist, may serve in this position. Refer to *MH-I*, Chapter 12: Curatorial Programming, Funding, and Staffing for information on staffing for museum collections.
7. *Am I required to follow this handbook?* Yes. You must follow this handbook to accession, catalog, loan, inventory, and deaccession museum collections. You must use NPS forms to document these actions.
8. *What do I do if I know little about museum management?* Start by reading the Basic Requirements page at the beginning of each chapter. These one-page summaries tell you the basics on what you must do.
- Read the section in this chapter on how to get training in museum records and ANCS+.

Refer to the appropriate chapter or appendix in this handbook for detailed instructions before beginning to do the work.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Contact your regional/SO curator or other curators in the area with questions. Make sure your park and region know that you lack experience and are interested in getting training.

9. *What is in this chapter?* This chapter will help you get started with museum record keeping. It includes sections on:
- museum records training
 - preparing a work area
 - forms and supplies

- delegation of authority for museum collections
- records protection

B. Training

1. *Where can I get training in museum documentation methods?*

A number of museums, museum organizations, and academic institutions offer excellent short courses in museum record keeping. These courses can give you an understanding of the basic principles of museum records that are common to all museums. However, each museum has its own system for documenting collections. To learn the NPS procedures for museum records, you must take a training class on documenting NPS collections.

2. *Where can I get training in NPS museum documentation methods?*

See the NPS Employee Training and Development Career Planning and Tracking Kit for your essential competencies, which are the skills you need to do your job. Review your KSAs (Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities) under your essential competency “Research and Inventory” and discuss your training needs with your first-line supervisor. Prepare an Individual Development Plan (IDP) that addresses your training needs. You can access the tracking kit at “The Learning Place” web site under the Park Net Home Page at www.nps.gov/training/npsonly/npscom.htm.

Some regions offer specific training courses on documentation and the use of ANCS+. There are also regional training courses on basic curatorial work that include sessions on museum records.

Contact your Regional Employee Development Officer (EDO) or the Training Manager, Cultural Resources Stewardship Career Field, at Stephen T. Mather Training Center, for information on available courses. You may be able to take a course in another region if your region is not offering training.

Note: Refer to Appendix L in this handbook for a bibliography of some of the standard texts on museum records.

3. *What if I can't find a training course?*

One of the best ways to learn about museum records is to get a temporary detail to another park or NPS center. Make sure the park has an active museum program and an experienced curatorial staff. You can gain valuable experience by working with park or center curators who can supervise and review your work. Your regional/SO curator may be able to help you coordinate a detail or locate a cooperating park.

Some regions may send curatorial staff from another park or NPS center to give you hands-on training at your site. Contact your regional/SO curator to find out if someone is available in your region.

C. Work Area

1. *Do I need a special work area for museum record keeping?*

Yes. You need to set up an adequate, secure work area that is separate from the collections storage area. It should contain space for all the museum files, such as the accession file, and your ANCS+ computer. You must keep all museum files in a locked, insulated file cabinet. Refer to Section F in this chapter for information about insulated files.

2. *Are there special requirements for the work area?*

Yes. There are several requirements for the area:

- Post a written warning against smoking, eating, and drinking in the area.
- Don't keep food, live plants, or flowers in the area.
- Keep the area clean and neat with nothing cluttering work surfaces, walkways, and aisles.
- Only issue keys to the area to the employees who have direct responsibility for the collections.
- Keep a current location map of all exhibit and storage areas. Include the letters and numbers of rooms, exhibit cases, and storage equipment, such as cabinets and shelf units.

3. *What should I consider when setting up the work area?*

When setting up the work area, consider the activities you'll be doing there, such as:

- receiving and unpacking objects
- examining objects for accessioning and cataloging
- measuring and weighing objects
- marking catalog numbers on objects
- photography
- entering data into ANCS+ and printing forms

A large padded table, or other flat surface, will be adequate for most objects. You may also need additional tables or shelves to hold items waiting to be accessioned or processed for loan. Organize your equipment, files, and supplies so that you can quickly find the things you frequently use.

Note: You should isolate objects coming into the collection for the first time to make sure they are pest free. Refer to the *MH-I*, Chapter 5, Biological Infestations, for additional information.

D. Forms, Supplies, and Equipment

1. *Where do I get NPS museum forms?*

Official NPS forms begin with "10-". You can print all official NPS museum forms from ANCS+. The program will complete many of the forms for you from data you enter on the screens. It also allows you to print blank forms that you can type or complete by hand. Use archival paper for printing official forms.

Refer to Figure 1.1 for a list of the forms in ANCS+. The list tells you which forms you can complete using ANCS+. The forms that relate to the chapters in this handbook appear at the end of each chapter.

Order accession books, deaccession books, and gift acknowledgement certificates from the Supply and Equipment Program of the Museum Management Program. See the Tools of the Trade catalog.

Note: You can order natural history labels from the Supply and Equipment Program while supplies last. You can also print the labels from ANCS+.

2. *Must I use the forms in ANCS+?*

Yes. You must use the **official** NPS museum forms in ANCS+ (forms numbered 10-). Don't modify these forms or create park-specific replacements. These forms meet legal requirements and professional standards. They also provide consistency between sites.

Some forms in ANCS+, such as the Repatriation Agreement, are Word documents that allow you to customize the form. These forms are sample forms for your use.

3. *What forms aren't available in ANCS+?*

ANCS+ doesn't have:

- forms for purchasing museum collections, such as the DI-1 Requisition
- forms for documenting loss of collections, such as the Case Incident Record, Form 10-343, or equivalent, and Report of Survey, Form DI-103
- Scientific Research and Collecting Permit

4. *What supplies do I need for museum record keeping?*

The supplies you need include:

- archival paper (for printing forms)
- pigma pen
- crochet hook
- tweezers (stamp handling variety)
- measuring rule (metric and SAE)
- cloth and metal tape measures (metric and SAE)
- white cotton gloves
- magnifying glass or linen tester
- caliper
- magnet (for testing metal objects)
- metric conversion table

Supplies for marking catalog numbers on objects include:

- technical pen (Rapidograph®) or crowquill pen
- clear lacquer (acrylic resin/acetone)
- white lacquer (acrylic resin/acetone with titanium dioxide white pigment)
- permanent black ink (Higgins®, Black Magic®, or Pelikan 17 Black)
- #2H, HB or softer pencil
- artist brushes (small tip)
- textile marking tape
- sewing needles and thread

Refer to Appendix J in this handbook for information on marking objects.

Supplies for record photography include:

- photo identification stands
- magnetic letters and numbers
- metric scale
- roll labels
- magnetic tape

Refer to Appendix K in this handbook for information on photographing objects.

5. *Where do I get museum record keeping supplies?*

Refer to the NPS *Tools of the Trade* catalog:

- Section II, Record Keeping Supplies, for additional information on supplies
- Section I, Introduction, for information on ordering supplies
- Section IX, Equipment and Supply Sources, for supply sources

The MMP publishes this catalog and updates it periodically. You can get some supplies free through the MMP's Supply and Equipment Program.

Depending on your collection, you may need additional supplies, such as weight scales and color charts. Contact other curators, conservators, and your regional/SO curator for other supply sources.

6. *What types of equipment do I need for museum record keeping?*

You must have:

- a computer capable of running ANCS+
- a printer for printing ANCS+ forms
- the ANCS+ software program
- insulated file cabinet(s) and media safe

If you photograph your collections, you will need a 35mm camera, a tripod, and lights. Many parks also use digital cameras to produce digital images for ANCS+.

7. *Where do I get equipment?*

The park pays for equipment. In FY 1998 parks received a recurring \$3,000 increase in base funding for the purchase and support of ANCS+. Your park receives this money every year for catalog-related costs. Use these funds to purchase your annual support and updates to ANCS+. If there is money left over, you may use it to fund cataloging or to purchase cataloging equipment, such as computers, printers, and digital cameras.

Refer to Appendix H, Support, in the *ANCS+ User Manual* for information on purchasing support. Refer to Appendix A, System Requirements, in the *ANCS+ User Manual* for information on the hardware you'll need for ANCS+.

Refer to the *Tools of the Trade* and Section F in this chapter for information on insulated file cabinets.

E. Authorities

1. *Who is responsible for the museum records at a park?*

NPS museum property is accountable property. The accountable officer for museum property is the superintendent or center manager. He or she has the overall responsibility for museum collections and museum records.

The custodial officer is directly accountable and responsible for the physical care and documentation of the museum collection. The custodial officer is the person in charge of the museum collection. At most parks this is the curator or collections manager.

The receiving officer is responsible for documenting the receipt of museum collections. The receiving officer can be one of the museum staff or a staff member from another division in the park.

Refer to the *Personal Property Management Handbook No. 44* for information on property officers.

2. *What are the superintendent's duties as the accountable officer for museum records?*

The superintendent has the authority to approve or disapprove all accessions, loans, and deaccessions.

The superintendent must sign all legal documents that transfer ownership (title) or custody of museum property.

The superintendent is also responsible for verifying and signing the annual inventory of museum property and the annual collections management report. Refer to Chapter 4 in this handbook for information about these reports.

The superintendent appoints, in writing, the custodial officer and the receiving officer for the museum collection.

3. *What forms must the superintendent sign?*

The superintendent must sign the following accession, loan, and deaccession forms. Refer to the chapters in parentheses for information about these forms.

- Deed of Gift, Form 10-830 (Chapter 2)
- Transfer of Property, Form DI-104 (Chapters 2 and 6)
- Exchange Agreement (Chapters 2 and 6)
- Incoming Loan Agreement, Form 10-98 (Chapter 2)
- Outgoing Loan Agreement, Form 10-127 (Chapter 5)
- Outgoing Loan Extension, Form 10-641 (Chapter 5)
- Deaccession Form, Form 10-643 (Chapter 6)
- Conveyance Agreement, Form 10-99 (Chapter 6)
- Repatriation Agreement (Chapter 6)

4. *What are the custodial officer's responsibilities for museum records?*

The custodial officer is in charge of museum records. The custodial officer recommends accessions, loans, and deaccessions to the superintendent and is responsible for justifying and documenting these transactions. He or she is responsible for accessioning and cataloging the collection, conducting the annual museum property inventory, and completing the collections management report. The custodial officer often supervises other staff who are doing the work.

5. *What are the receiving officer's responsibilities for museum records?*

The receiving officer signs the Accession Receiving Report, Form 10-95, the Receipt for Property, DI-105, and any other receipts for museum property. The custodial officer can't serve as the receiving officer.

F. Records Protection

1. *How can I protect my museum records against deterioration and destruction?*

Many of the common threats to museum collections are also threats to your museum records. It's important to take preventive actions against these threats because museum records are a valuable part of your collection.

Threat	Preventive Action
Human error	Training in proper techniques; checking work for accuracy
Fire	Insulated file; media file; good fire

	prevention standards, fire detection devices, and suppression systems; Structural Fire Plan that includes the special needs of museum records
Theft	Locked file; secure storage with adequate key control and access; frequent inspection
Mildew/mold	Environmental monitoring; dehumidification if relative humidity exceeds 60%
Pests	Museum housekeeping program; frequent inspection; active Integrated Pest Management program; fumigation as necessary
Paper deterioration	Acid-free paper for museum forms
Water damage	Keep records away from pipes, basement, or flood plain
Disaster (earthquake, tornado, hurricane)	Emergency Operation Plan that includes the special needs of museum records; duplicate accession book and catalog records kept off-site
Electronic media deterioration	Backup copies (one copy off site); proper storage; media migration strategy

2. *What are the requirements for storing paper museum records?*

To protect museum records from fire and unauthorized use, store them in a locking, insulated file, safe, or vault. The interior of the container or vault must maintain a temperature of less than 350° F during a one-hour exposure to exterior temperatures of at least 1700° F.

3. *What types of storage equipment are available?*

Most parks use two, four, or five-drawer insulated (fire resistive) filing cabinets with combination or key locks. These are convenient to use and fairly inexpensive to purchase. The Underwriters Laboratories (UL) rating is “Insulated Filing Device, Class 350-1 Hour” (Formerly “UL Class D”).

Cabinets in spaces above the grade level of the building must be able to survive a drop through the floor during a fire. The UL rating is “Insulated Record Containers, Class 350-1 Hour” (Formerly “UL Class C”).

Impact resistant Class 350-2 hour and Class 350-4 hour filing cabinets are also available. Consider using one of these in buildings that are likely to burn long enough or hot enough to warrant the extra protection.

You can use one-door and two-door insulated safes to protect records that don’t fit in a filing cabinet. The UL rating is “Fire-Resistive Safe, Class 350-4, 2, or 1-Hour”.

See *Tools of the Trade* and National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) 232, *Standard for the Protection of Records*, for information on records storage equipment.

4. *Where can I get storage equipment for my museum records?*

Section VI of the *Tools of the Trade* has information on fire-resistive filing cabinets and media safes. Sections IX and X have information on sources and current equipment contracts. The park pays for storage equipment. You can get money for museum records storage equipment through the Museum Collections Preservation and Protection Program (MCPPE).

Your regional/SO curator or MMP staff can give you information on storage equipment for museum records.

5. *What if I have a very large amount of records?*

For very large amounts of records, you may find it more cost-effective to use ordinary steel filing cabinets in a records vault. The vault construction must meet the requirements of the NFPA. See NFPA 232, *Standard for the Protection of Records*, for information on the construction of vaults. See NFPA 232AM, *Manual for the Protection of Archives and Records Centers*, for information on protecting large collections of paper records.

Vaults require doors with a UL rating, “Fire-Resistive Vault Door, Class 350-6, 4, or 2-Hour”. This type of door may have a combination lock or key lock. If less protection is acceptable, you can use a door with a UL rating, “Fire-Insulated File Room Doors, Class 350-1 Hour”.

6. *What are the requirements for storing media?*

Computer media are plastic-based and will degrade:

- at temperatures above 180°F
- when exposed to the high humidity (usually 100%) present during a fire in an ordinary fire-resistive filing cabinet or safe

Don't store media in the fire-resistive filing cabinet or safe that you use for your paper records.

Store computer media (floppy disks, CDs, zip disks, tapes) in a container that will maintain an interior temperature of not more than 125° F during a one hour exposure to an exterior temperature of 1700°F. The container can be a media safe or a mixed media file. Media boxes are acceptable if you store them in an appropriately rated insulated records file.

7. *What are the differences between a media safe, a mixed media file, and a media box?*

Media safes or files are designed to protect computer media. The UL rating is “Fire-Resistive Safe, Class 125-4, 3, 2, or 1 Hour”.

A mixed-media container is a fire-resistive filing cabinet or safe for paper records that has a media container. The container may be removable. It gives additional insulation against heat and protection against high humidity. The UL rating for the media container is “Class 125-4, 3, 2, or 1 Hour” when it is inside the cabinet. Outside the cabinet, the media container may have no rating or a rating of only one-half hour.

A media box is a small, portable container, usually with a lock. You can use media boxes to hold a small amount of media at your desk during the work day. Most media boxes have only a 150°F one-half hour rating. Don't use a media box to protect your data unless you keep it inside a fire-resistive filing cabinet.

8. *Are there requirements for the room where I store museum records?*

Yes. You want the room where you store your museum records to be as fire-resistant and secure as possible.

- Don't store flammable materials in the room.
- Lock the room against unauthorized access.
- Install fire detection and suppression systems.
- Install intrusion detection systems.

Consult with the park safety officer and law enforcement specialist, a local fire marshall, or another qualified expert. They can help you assess the room and make recommendations to improve it.

Refer to *MH-I*, Chapter 9: Security and Fire Protection and Appendix G: Museum Collections Protection for additional information.

G. Information Protection

1. *Can the NPS protect sensitive or confidential information that the park has acquired as part of documentation activities?*

No. The NPS may acquire sensitive or confidential information during record keeping and documentation activities. In certain circumstances, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) may require that the NPS release such information. You must inform parties that request confidentiality of information that the NPS:

- won't voluntarily share this information, *but*
- can't guarantee confidentiality

2. *Where can I find more information about protecting sensitive or confidential information?*

Refer to the NPS *Management Policies*, Chapter 5, Cultural Resource Management. For information on the Freedom of Information Act, refer to *MH-III*, Chapter 2: Legal Issues.

H. List of Figures

Figure 1.1

NPS Forms in ANCS+

NPS Forms in ANCS+

Refer to Chapter 5 in the *ANCS+ User Manual* for information on how to complete the forms. You can complete the following forms using ANCS+ or Word.

Accession Forms

Accession Receiving Report, Form 10-95 Rev.
Deed of Gift, Form 10-830 Rev.
Accession Folder Cover Sheet, Form 10-255 Rev. – Word document
Source of Accession Card

Catalog-Related Forms

Museum Catalog Record-CR, Form 10-254 Rev.
Museum Catalog Record-NH, Form 10-254B Rev.
Receipt for Property, DI-105
List of Objects, Form 10-417
Object Condition Report, Form 10-637
Inventory of Museum Property, Form 10-349
Collections Management Report, Form 10-94 Rev.
Object Temporary Removal Slip, Form 10-97

Natural History Labels

Vertebrate Wet Specimen Label, Form 10-500
Vertebrate Specimen Label, Form 10-501
Skull Vial or Box Label, Form 10-502
Invertebrate Specimen Label, Form 10-503
Geology Collection, Form 10-504
Paleontology Label, Form 10-505
Wet Plant Specimen Label, Form 10-506
Invertebrate Label, Form 10-507
Egg Box Label, Form 10-508
Insect Label, Form 10-509
Annotation Label, Form 10-510
Mineral Collection, Form 10-511
Herbarium Collection, Form 10-512

Loan Forms

Incoming Loan Agreement, Form 10-98 Rev.
Outgoing Loan Agreement, Form 10-127 Rev.
Outgoing Loan Folder Cover Sheet, Form 10-640 Rev.
Outgoing Loan Extension, Form 10-641

Deaccession Forms

Deaccession Form, Form 10-643 Rev.
Deaccession Folder Cover Sheet, Form 10-644 Rev. – Word document
Transfer of Property, DI-104
Conveyance Agreement, Form 10-99
Exchange Agreement – Word document
Repatriation Agreement – Word document
Specialist Review Form

Archives Forms

Archives and Manuscript Collections Separation Sheet, Form 10-645 – Word document
Folder List, Form 10-96 Rev. – Word document

Figure 1.1. NPS Forms in ANCS+