SESSION: Physical Care and Storage of Audiovisual Materials

SPEAKER: Marcia Segal, Processing Archivist, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress

DATE: Tuesday, 9/15, 9am-10:45am

Inspecting and Inventorying: Digital and Analog:

Basic tasks
- Account for the materials you have - take an inventory
- Gather basic Information (metadata) about the materials
  - Try to identify the Who, What, Where, When
- Handle and store materials with care

Taking inventory
- Lots of different types of recording, find one that fits your size, needs, and scope
  - Database
  - Spreadsheet
  - Paper form
- Don't wait!
- You need to know what you have to properly preserve it, and so you can let other people know about it
- Users need to know what you have to be able to make use of it
- Donors need to know what you have to invest their money in working with it, or to donate other related materials
- Information for possible digitization projects (this is where a lot of funding lives)
- Insurance against theft or disaster

Gather basic metadata for digitization
- Digitization vendors need to know all of this descriptive information (eg: 60 vs 90 minute cassettes will make a big labour cost difference, since most digitization takes place in real-time)

- So you know what you are sending out to vendors
    - And can check the inventory against what you get back
- Accountability for every partner in the project

Before you begin the inventory
- Your work area should be
    - Flat
    - Stable
    - Clean
    - Away from drafts (fans, windows), and direct sunlight (and ongoing fluorescent lights)

While you do your inventory
- Stabilize materials, do not "mend" them
    - Scotch (and other) tapes are extremely nasty, archivally speaking
- Take note of damage, and use non-permanent solutions (eg: tying a book shut with an acid-free ribbon to keep the covers in place, rather that trying to re-glue the covers)

Unique Identifiers
- Differentiate (disambiguate) between similar items
    - eg: part 1 and 2, concert vs concerts
- Help ensure your item count is accurate
- Create a number that can be used to form a digital file identifier
- Assign your own type of identifier system that makes sense for your institution
- Used in a computer inventory
- Every single item should have its own unique identifier
    - Both physical and digital items need a unique identifier
    - Multi-part items (eg: 2-tape album) should each have their own
- Record on item container and on inventory

Conservation advice (slight digression from presentation)
- "Flat roofs leak"
- "Speed is the enemy of good work"
- Don't hurry, be methodical, take your time
- Get it right the first time
- Haste (not speed) is only allowed when trying to rescue damaged or degrading materials of significant value

Identifiers
- Helpful to create a number that can be used to formulate a DIGITAL identifier too - so they look similar and can be associated with each other
- Can use initials for format type
    - eg: P for photo, SR for sound recording
- Use sequentially increasing numbers, it makes things easier.

- Example
  - Analog ID: AFC 2010/003: SR2051
  - Digital ID: afc2010003_sr2051.wav
  - These two are related, but the digital file is taking out the capital letters and spaces for ease of consistency across programs and operating systems

- Use leading zeroes!
  - Because you want your numbers to be in order
    - Computer sort files from left to right, so 021 would come before 20
  - Depends on how many items you have (in hundreds - add 2 leading zeros, in thousands - add 3)
    - eg: 1000+ items, start with 0001

Where to find information
- On the label
- On the container - include anything written, sometimes take pictures
- On documentation or papers that come with the items
- Another inventory
- Sometimes information can only be found by digitizing and then listening
  - Especially if there is no information, or it turns out be wrong

What information to include
- The more detail, the better
- Descriptive information - who, what where, when, and what purpose
- Format details (eg: duration)
  - If outsourcing, ensure that your vendor can actually work with that format and won't simply outsource to another, third, party
- Commercial recording, or not (copyright issues)
- Condition, preservation information
- Access, permission, release information

AFC inventory example
- AFC ID number
- Original ID number
- Category
- Description
- Information from box
- All of this is information that can go into other spreadsheets later

Can have more detailed inventories, depending on your process and needs

Inspecting materials
- Look at all aspects of materials including the container
- There might be literal layers of information! Labels, tape with writing
- Information might also be on the inside of housing, or tucked inside
- Make sure the contents match the container
- Note weak or falling apart containers, consider rehousing if really needed
- Tie together, put in an envelope or folder - as long as it can be stored properly
- Some conditions and damage are easy to SEE
  - Wire recordings - can get easily tangled
  - When you can tell something won't play correctly
  - Uneven tape pack
    - Crumpled
    - Pulled
- Some condition issues easy to SMELL
  - Vinegar and Plastic are bad smells for AV material
  - Plastic - degrading PVC, replace with a new container
  - Vinegar - acetic acid, tape is degrading
  - Nitrite tapes (think old film reels) are literally volatile and can spontaneously combust if too warm, best to keep in cold storage

Key Storage Concerns
Environment
- Avoid extremes
- The most dangerous thing is temperature and humidity fluctuation - warmth and moisture
- Try not to go above 70 degrees, try not to go below 50% humidity
- Consider your HVAC system
- The room, building, and outside environment should all be considered

Storage
- Storage containers for each item
- Physical orientation - make sure things are flat or upright (depends on the media type)
- Store things of similar size next to each other
  - Don't want things leaning at an angle against each other
  - Consider the shelf bearing load
- Shelves - metal shelves are best, as long as they are not magnetized and non-porous (both problems with older shelving units)
  - Wood - less desirable because of chemical treatments, any fragrance or varnish is bad and will off-gas
- Store away from walls
- Avoid touching recorded surfaces of media (eg: flat sides of a vinyl record, handle the edges)

How do I identify formats?
- Resources for format guides in attached handout
- Also Preservation Self Assessment Format ID Guide: https://psap.library.illinois.edu/format-id-guide
- IASA publication is a bit pricey, but very useful, is up to date, and has pictures http://www.iasa-web.org/handling-storage-tc05

Disaster Response
- "Just in case" is better than "just in time"
- Based on known environmental and architectural issues
  - earthquake, tornado, at the foot of a hill? drainage, etc..

Supplies
- Paper towels
- Absorbent material for water - PIG Mats
  - http://www.newpig.com/pig/US/absorbents-503/pig-universal-absorbent-mats-504
- Be able to take safe and basic actions in the moment
  - personal safety - if there is flooding, is there a risk of electrocution as well?
- Do disaster response drills, with your whole department, with your whole building
- Be aware of resources and services that are available
  - know local resources, know who lives closest to the building

Resources for disaster response plans
- There are a lot available
- Make sure it is a match for your institution - a plan from someone in Tornado Alley might not help you in the Pacific Northwest
- Talk to your colleagues!
- Sign up for format/subject specific listservs - or find someone who is on a listserv
- Share what you learn with others

Balboa Art Conservation Center
http://www.bacc.org/

Questions
What is your recommendation for re-housing? Keep in original, move to new containers?
- Depends on the situation
- Want to keep the original container for information
- Only need to remove if it is broken, moldy, damaged
- Rehouse when needed rather than always, and then document or image the container

Architectural Concerns
- Try to avoid basements, windows, and especially skylights
- Often archives and museums have cafes near the entrance, this is a huge hassle
- Try to share your input with administration and building, especially if you are building a new site or renovating
    - Don't let an architect tell you how to protect your collections!

Renumbering collection, moving items from one collection to another?
- Documenting the move is always important
- Depends on the size
    - If only moving a few items, may be simple enough to keep the original record, and include a note there about where it has been moved to
- Have a note in your internal database, but don't share that information with researchers
- Do not recycle identifiers, if an item is removed, so is it the unique identifier!

Identifiers and copies
- Original ID, Preservation Master Copy ID (goes to dark storage), Mezzanine copy, Access copy ID
- Differentiate "generations"
    - Original (analog)
    - Digitized preservation master
    - Digital copy
    - Access copies