Square Pegs, Round Holes: Thinking creatively in terms of housing and storage

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Square Pegs, Round Holes: Thinking creatively in terms of housing and storage

Abstract
Providing proper housing and storage of archival materials is a primary goal undertaken in all archives. Standard containers for manuscripts, documents, photographs, three-dimensional objects, and other archival materials are readily available. However, for nonstandard, unusual, or complex objects that require additional support, developing housing or specialized storage can be problematic. Thinking creatively about housing and storage of archival materials increases the wealth of housing options available to archives even when a conservator is not available. Archivists can incorporate premade and traditional archival supplies in innovative ways to create structures that store and protect, while at the same time, limit handling during use and exhibition. Three basic methods (sink mats, boxes with fillers, and archival sleeves and wrappers) can assist in this process and are illustrated with examples from the Iowa State University Library Special Collections.

Disciplines
Archival Science

Comments
Square Pegs, Round Holes

Thinking creatively in terms of housing and storage

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Considerations

- Use & handling
- Storage space
- Storage decisions
- Size & weight
- Condition & original structure
- Time & space
- Staff
- Budget
Margaret Stanton Death Mask

- Issues:
  - Plaster mask
  - Breakable if dropped
  - Loose in a box with tissue
  - Difficult to handle and display
  - Frequently used for tours and exhibits
  - Of great value to the University
Margaret Stanton Death Mask

Housing need:

- Flexibility of housing to serve as both storage and exhibit foundation
- Elimination of handling for display and viewing purposes
- Housing that provides complete support of the object
- Physical protection of the object in a container that fits on the artifact shelf
Margaret Stanton Death Mask

Solution:
- Attractive custom-fit archival box
- Angled support made of museum quality foam and covered in unbleached muslin
- Partial drop-front to provide better viewing for exhibits
Atlases & Plat Books

- Typical atlas treatment:
  - Cleaning, deacidification & mending of pages
  - Encapsulation of pages between sheets of polyester & post- or side-binding
Des Moines Atlas

Issues:

- Fragility of paper and binding
- Oversized (23 in x 19 in)
- Maps open to (23 in x 39 in)
- Frequently used
- Copying requests
- Transportability from storage to the Reading Room
Des Moines Atlas

Problem:
- Polyester adds significant weight
- Binding makes handling & use more difficult
- Oversize, heavy sheets require more support adding to the weight & handling issues
Alternate solution:
- Cleaning, deacidification & mending of pages
- Retain encapsulation of pages
- Remove post-binding and create box with Coroplast (corrugated polypropylene board)
- Store encapsulated sheets loose in box
Adonijah Welch Journal

- Issues:
  - Value to the University—inaugural speech by the University’s first president
  - Loose manuscript pages stored in folder
  - Fragile and sooty condition of pages
  - Clippings rubber cemented to pages
  - Need for improved storage & handling
Adonijah Welch Journal

Solution:
- Remove adhered clippings
- Clean & deacidify pages and clippings
- Encapsulate pages & spot weld clippings to maintain positioning over manuscript page
- Post-bind
Miniature, Artist & Spiral Books

- Issues:
  - Problem integrating into standard shelving
  - Susceptible to damage due to structure or materials used
  - May cause damage to nearby items because of structure or materials used
  - Ease of misplacing small items
Miniature, Artist & Spiral Books

- **Miniature book**
  - Standard size box with foam support
  - 16 cm x 10 cm x 2+ cm
  - Allows for integrated shelving with standard size books
Miniature, Artist & Spiral Books

- Artist’s or fine press book
  - Bare, soft wood boards with grommets
  - Wedge shaped

- Solution:
  - *Colibri* to prevent acid burn from the covers
  - Box with plinth to accommodate wedge shape and protect nearby books from uneven surface
Colibri

- Polypropylene protective sleeve
  - Protects book covers and dust jackets
  - Can be used as a carrier for call numbers, barcodes, etc.
Miniature, Artist & Spiral Books

- Iowa Cookbook Collection
  - Custom-fit box
  - Foam support to protect spiral or comb
  - Cookbooks can stand-up on shelves
Another Small Object

- Loose cyanotype
  - Taken out of a scrapbook and donated to the Archives
  - No accompanying materials
  - Encapsulated and mounted on mat board
  - Filed in archival folder
Mixed Media

Issues:

- Differing sizes
- Ease of disassociation of related materials
- Intent of creator to use items together
Mixed Media

- Solutions:
  - House pieces separately according to medium or size and relate pieces back through the catalog record or guides
    - Potential loss of items
    - Record maintenance
    - Efficient use of storage space
Mixed Media

Solutions:
- Or, create a housing that supports all pieces together
  - Potential inefficient use of storage space
  - Keeps all associated materials together
Glass Plate Negatives

- Issues:
  - Fragility of glass plates
  - Weight & size
  - Broken plates
  - Use & handling
  - Identification
Glass Plate Negatives

Solutions:

- Sleeve plates in envelopes & store in archival “shoe box”
  - Easy to re-house & label
  - Need to sort plates by size
  - No protection for broken plates
  - Plates must be handled for viewing
Glass Plate Negatives

Solutions:

- Standard size sink-mats stored in boxes
  - Establishment of standard size enclosures
  - Added protection of slides
  - Ease of handling, use and labeling
  - Resource intensive
Digital Projects

- Decisions beyond Special Collections and Preservation
  - Priorities based on criteria other than condition, use, value/rarity and storage
  - Often unplanned & needed immediately
  - Selection of parts of collections not entire collections
  - Need for handling & tracking procedures
  - Scanning is the fastest step in the process
Digital Projects

Mary Barton Fashion Plates:
- Several thousand plates in the collection
- Value as a collection, not individual plates
- Frequently used by classes
- Housed in folders in 27 document boxes
- Only ~350 plates selected for scanning
Digital Projects

- Issues for Special Collections:
  - Selection of plates
  - Paperwork & tracking plates
  - Reintegration of plates into collection
  - Metadata is an important and time consuming step
Mary Barton Fashion Plates

Issues for Preservation:

- Unexpected project Plates of random size housed together in folders
- Need to maintain organization of plates made batch processing impossible
- Too much focus placed on the digitizing aspect & procedures and not enough on preservation needs
- Only selected items were treated
Discussion & Conclusions

- Limitations
- Stumbling blocks
- Communication
- Setting priorities
- Future projects
Future Projects—Recommendations?

- Forestry Tree Survey volumes
  - Extremely oversized (36 in x 12 in)
  - ~200 pages per volume
  - Fragile, thin, cockled paper
Future Projects—Recommendations?

- Andreas’ Historical Atlas of the State of Iowa 1875
  - 17 in x 14.5 in, heavy
  - 296 leaves
  - Covers detached
  - Sewing broken
  - Creased, torn, sooty pages—several with extensive edge damage
  - Printed color maps, no fold-outs