Recommendations for Local Museum Planning

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Table of Contents

Introduction and Acknowledgements	**2**
Summary of Suggested Goals for a Local Museum	**3**
Reviewing the Definition of "Museum"	**6**
Organization and Support	**6**
Physical Plant	**9**
Collections Management:	
Overview, Accessions, Loans	**11**
Collections Care	**15**
Collections Use and Exhibitions	**17**
Educational Programs	**24**
Selected State and National Professional Museum Associations	**25**

Introduction and Acknowledgements

Creating a museum is no small undertaking. Not every community museum thinks far ahead when assembling their collections; many neglect to capture the stories that bring the artifacts, and the museum, to life for the visitor. Every emerging museum, moreover, faces many challenges: developing a staff, finding a building, creating a collection, developing funding, gathering community interest and support, and more. The Granville Museum in Granville (Jackson County), to name one example, has successfully dealt with many of these issues. In just seven years, the museum has gathered a great deal of research and artifacts; created an introductory video for visitors; established a regular, seasonal museum schedule staffed completely by volunteers; developed two very successful signature events (Heritage Day and the Jazz Festival/Quilt Show); and developed a presence on the world wide web.

In approaching the Center for Historic Preservation and the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area at Middle Tennessee State University, local museums are expressing their interest in moving towards increased professional standards. It is an honor to be invited to provide advice during this time of transition.

This report has recommendations for both short-term and long-term development, and provides a substantial body of information. Because of the detail and scope, it is certainly meant to be digested in bite-size pieces. For instance, while the addition of a paid staff person is one of these recommendations, many of the ideas presented could be spearheaded by volunteers and the enlistment of such volunteer groups as local Boy Scout troops. Thus, these guidelines are truly intended as a tool box, or a jumping off point, to provide direction for discussion as the museum determines which recommendations it would like to work towards and in what time frame.

Please note that this report owes a debt of gratitude to Randall Clemons of the Granville Museum for his regular, diligent assistance to our staff and his tremendous enthusiasm for the museum. I would also like to acknowledge several staff members at the TCWNHA and Center for Historic Preservation that assisted with the development of these guidelines: Caneta Hankins, Ashley Tate, and Dr. Antoinette van Zelm.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL MUSEUMS

Phase One Goals

- Compose Mission Statement to indicate concisely the museum's activities and areas of interest
- Develop formal Statement of Purpose for the museum
- Develop Collections Policies regarding accessions, de-accessions, loans (incoming and outgoing), and collections care
- Develop a Collections Management Manual with procedures and sample forms; consider the purchase of a collections management software package
- Develop a Master Plan; this plan should be revisited and revised if/as needed about every two years
- Remove lights from display cases if/when not meeting museum standards
- Review state-wide and national professional museum organizations and consider joining two or three of them as a means for accessing further expertise; include professional development funds in the annual budget in order to purchase current literature, attend selected workshops, and/or attend selected conferences
- Apply to the Center for Historic Preservation at Middle Tennessee State University for an intern to assist with one or more projects/goals

Phase Two Goals

- Hire a part-time Museum Director
- Explore improvements to the security of entrances to the building, the possibility of a security system, ADA compliance for entrances and restrooms, and Integrated Pest Management
- Begin reconfiguring museum spaces (offices, exhibit space, storage, etc.)
- Begin to formally accession and register current artifacts in the museum's collections
- Begin acquiring appropriate archival-quality storage supplies to properly house items going into collections storage (e.g. acid-free boxes, folders, and tissue)
- Make padded hangers for garments that do not extend into the shoulders and remove metal pins, tacks, etc. from garments, textiles, and other artifacts
- Use Velcro on fabric-covered exhibit walls to hang items that are not originals to reduce use of thumb tacks and improve aesthetics of exhibitions
- Create policies for researchers (no pens, only pencils; wearing gloves when handling original photographs; charges for publication of museum images; etc.)

Phase Three Goals

- Create a full-time position for the Museum Director

- Begin a formal endowment campaign to develop a fund from which the interest can be drawn on regularly for basic museum operations and/or begin pursuing grants from government foundations
- Continue the accession and registration of artifacts in the museum's collections
- Continue archival-quality storage of artifacts
- Research the possibility of off-site storage for added collections storage capacity
- Invest in a few museum-quality vitrines or exhibition cases (or build them with museum-quality materials); ensure that these can be matched for future purchases in order to maintain visual consistency in an exhibition
- Continue reconfiguring museum spaces
- Determine consistent fonts, graphics, etc., for individual exhibitions
- Create or rent first temporary exhibit(s)
- Adjust placement of items as/if needed to protect them from non-museum quality lighting

Phase Four Goals

- Hire a part-time Curator who will also oversee Registrar duties and possibly educational programming
- Apply for the Museum Assessment Program (MAP) through the American Association of Museums
- Complete the accession and registration of the backlog of artifacts in the museum's collections (so that in the future the Curator/Registrar can work on registering new acquisitions as they are approved/come into the museum)
- Continue and complete archival-quality storage of artifacts
- Research and clarify usage rights for all materials that are not original documents or photographs (usage for exhibition, publishing and publicity, etc., for copies the museum has acquired)
- Begin regular, annual inventory of collections
- Develop a Teacher Advisory Committee and develop one or more school programs
- Look into adding a fall or winter annual event

Phase Five Goals

- Create a full-time position for the Curator
- Hire a full-time Visitor Services Coordinator to staff the front desk and manage gift shop, volunteers, group sales, and membership
- Create a regular schedule of temporary exhibitions, planned one to two years in advance
- Install museum-quality overhead lighting in all museum galleries

Reviewing the Definition of “Museum”

Reviewing the purpose and definition of a “museum”, and the associated obligations which must be assumed by the community if its museum is to succeed, is always a good beginning point when undertaking the creation of short- and long-term strategies for growth.

The American Association of Museums defines a museum as “an organized and permanent nonprofit institution, essentially educational or aesthetic in purpose, with professional staff, which owns and utilizes tangible objects, cares for them, and exhibits them to the public on some regular schedule.”

For a discussion of the nature of museums – and an excellent introduction to museology in general – consult G. Ellis Burcaw, *Introduction to Museum Work*, third edition (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1997).

Organization and Support

Legal Entity: In order to acquire and utilize its collections, a museum must exist as a legal entity. Usually a museum is established as a separate non-profit corporation, complete with a charter, Board of Trustees, staff, and other aspects typical of the corporate form of organization. The establishment of any museum requires professional legal services to minimize future challenges to the museum’s right to own and manage its collections. For instance, the Granville Museum has addressed this basic concern by establishing itself as a 501C-3 non-profit organization.

Statement of Purpose: Every museum must clearly define its basic purpose in a formal document. The most important aspect of the statement of purpose is an explanation of the museum’s area of interest in collecting, since the nature of the collections largely determines the museum’s future research, exhibitions, and educational programs. For example, is the museum actively collecting, exhibiting, interpreting, researching both past and present? Does it seek to collect and interpret a specific time period? Families connected to the town’s present and past? Does it include broader county-wide information? Note that the broader statement of purpose document can certainly include more of the philosophy behind the mission, so that ideas incorporated in the current mission statement can continue to guide the institution.

Policies: All museum activities should be guided by formally established policies. As with any organization, general administrative policies should cover purchasing, hiring, and the like. Museums additionally require policies covering acquisitions (also referred to as accessions; new collections items officially received either by donation or purchase), de-accessioning (appropriately removing items from collections), and loans (both incoming and outgoing loans of items and/or entire exhibitions). For additional definitions related to collections, see pages 11 through 13.

Acquisition and de-accession policy guidelines might include the following:

(1) The museum shall acquire only those objects which fall within the museum's area of interest as defined in the statement of purpose.
(2) The museum shall not acquire an object without proper muniment (proof of ownership, i.e., a transfer of title for a gift or a bill of sale for a purchase).
(3) The museum shall attempt to uncover the provenance (documented ownership history / origins) of items under consideration for accession in order to more fully ensure their legal transfer and to provide for more effective interpretation.
(4) The museum shall not acquire an object with any restrictions on its use.
(5) No acquisition shall be appraised by a trustee, staff member, or any person associated with the museum.
(6) The Board of Trustees shall appoint a collections committee charged with oversight of the collections policy; the committee shall recommend all potential museum acquisitions and de-accessions to the Board for final approval.
(7) Acquisitions shall be promptly and completely registered following the procedures in the museum's collections management manual (see pages 12-14 for details).
(8) The Board of Trustees shall develop a de-accession procedure so that superfluous objects can be removed from the collections legally (especially with regard to tax regulations).

Loan policy guidelines might include the following:

(1) Objects from the museum's collections shall only be loaned to qualified borrowers, i.e., another museum or other non-profit organization committed to furthering the purposes of the museum. Loans shall not be made to private individuals.
(2) The borrower shall submit a formal proposal describing the purpose of the requested loan and demonstrating the borrower's ability to provide proper, safe transportation as well as their ability to provide protection for the object(s) while on display.
(3) The museum may elect to conduct a site visit before and/or after the loaned object(s) are transported to the borrower in order to ensure proper care and display.
(4) If the loan is approved by the Director, the Curator/Registrar shall execute a written agreement with the borrower specifying the conditions and period of the loan.
(5) The Registrar/Curator shall maintain a loan register, including the loan number, the accession number(s) of the loaned object(s), the condition of the loaned objects, the name and address of the borrower/lender, the loan beginning date, the period of the loan, and the loan termination date.
(6) The borrower shall not alter the loaned object in any way, and any damage which may occur while in transit or on the borrower's premises shall be reported immediately to the museum.
(7) Loaned objects shall be properly identified and credited to the museum while on exhibition or reproduced for publication.

(8) The museum may elect to require the borrower to provide insurance for the object(s) while on loan.

The museum should also consider developing policies covering conservation, research, exhibitions, and educational programs.

Staffing: The minimum staff for a community museum is a Museum Director. If possible, the directorship should be a full-time paid position, and the Director should be familiar with professional museum standards (or willing to study the professional literature earnestly). As the museum grows, a Curator may be needed to manage collections, and subsequent hiring might add a Receptionist / Front Desk Personnel, Housekeeper / Maintenance, and Director of Education. Depending on the needs and growth of the museum, other future positions might include a Registrar, Membership / Development Director, Office Manager, or Marketing Director.

Financing: Communities frequently underestimate the investment required to establish a museum and the ongoing financial support needed to keep it operating year after year. There are a number of possible funding sources: private and government grants, admission receipts, museum store sales, memberships in a “friends” organization, etc. If at all possible, the Board of Trustees should avoid saddling the Director (especially as a one-person staff) with the task of raising funds; consider contracting a professional fundraiser for large fundraising campaigns.

Area businesses may be interested sponsoring a local museum, and in funding professionally designed exhibitions as well. Current sponsors would also be fertile ground for a future endowment campaign, raising money for the continued operation of the museum. An endowment’s principal is kept invested, while a percentage of the interest earned is used as regular income for annual operating expenses. In addition, the museum may wish to pursue grant opportunities in the area.

Granting agencies in Tennessee that may be considered include:

- **Humanities Tennessee**
  http://humanitiestennessee.org/
  807 Main Street, Suite B
  Nashville, TN 37206
  (615) 770-0006
- **Tennessee Arts Commission**
  http://www.tn.gov/artscommission
  401 Charlotte Avenue
  Nashville, TN 37243
  (615) 741-1701
- **Tennessee Department of Transportation**
  http://www.tn.gov/tdot/article/tdot-grant-information
  James K. Polk Building, Suite 700
  Nashville, TN 37243

(615) 741-2848

- **Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area**
  http://www.tncivilwar.org/
  1417 East Main Street
  Murfreesboro, TN 37132
  (615) 898-2947

Once the museum has incorporated several of the recommendations indicated in this report, a next step to assess its progress and receive further advice would be applying for the Museum Assessment Program, offered through the American Alliance of Museums (http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/map/about.cfm). This program typically takes two years in order to complete each of the three steps: self-study, peer review, and implementation. Completing the MAP assessment is an achievement that documents the level of seriousness the museum has for professional growth, a potential asset for future grant applications.

Planning: Probably the single most important prerequisite for developing an excellent community museum is a thorough planning process. While the planning process occurs on many levels and deals with many subjects, a similar format can be followed in each case: articulation of needs and objectives, followed by the creation of several scenarios designed to meet those needs and objectives, and, finally, selection of the scenario which best meets the criteria of cost effectiveness, available time frame, available museum expertise, etc. The results of all planning activities should be formally documented; a single master plan document may be adequate.

A detailed treatment of museum planning can be found in Barry and Gail Dexter Lord, ed., *The Manual of Museum Planning*, second edition (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1999).

Physical Plant

The physical plant must provide a variety of spaces dedicated to the museum's various activities; moreover, the museum's special obligation to protect its collections dictates that special environmental conditions be constantly maintained. The requirements must be met whether the physical plant is a new building, designed specifically for museum use, or a historic building which is adaptively restored for museum use.

Public spaces suitable for a community museum may include the following: lobby, gift shop area, restrooms, large permanent exhibition space, smaller temporary exhibition space, and perhaps a multi-purpose meeting room. Of these, the permanent and temporary exhibition spaces require good security and special environmental conditions – constant temperature (in the human comfort zone), constant relative humidity (usually 50%), and a low light level (as little as 10 foot-candles for paper or textile artifacts).

Staff spaces might include a security/information station (with visual control of all public spaces), offices, curatorial workshop (for registration and simple conservation activities), exhibition workshop(s) (for basic woodworking with a dust collection system and/or a separate space for working with graphics and framing/mounting), collections storage (for collection objects only, with constant temperature and humidity levels and very low light levels), general storage, mechanical room, and janitorial room.

Both public and staff spaces should be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990; this compliance is a requirement for federal and state grant proposals. In general, this includes access into and through the museum for people with disabilities including, but not limited to, blindness, deafness, learning disabilities, and physical disabilities sometimes requiring the use of a wheelchair, walker, or crutches. Accessibility requirements are directed towards both staff and visitors and also include requirements for video presentations (accessibility for the deaf such as closed captions) and for telecommunications devices for the deaf for public telephones, among others. Historic properties often have different requirements than new construction. If it has not done so yet, the museum should contact an attorney or an ADA representative to ensure that the current layout of ramps, restrooms, etc., is in compliance.

The physical plant should provide reasonable security against theft and vandalism, as should the exhibitions themselves, using techniques such as security screws or locks on exhibition cases and security hangers for hanging artifacts and paintings. Additionally, the fire suppression system should produce minimal damage to the collections if activated.

As concerns pest control, there are many different theories as to the best method to manage this on-going responsibility. Integrated pest management (IPM) is presently considered one of the best methods. Successful IPM includes regular scheduled inspections of all items on display, a bi-annual inspection of collections storage, and the use of sticky traps throughout the facility which are checked regularly, with trapped pests identified and recorded. When pests and their seasonal patterns are identified, the museum must proceed carefully, as many treatments may cause as much damage as the pests; ideally, the museum should avoid chemical treatments. For further details on IPM, the National Park Service provides an on-line manual at no charge at www.nature.nps.gov/biology/ipm/manual/ipmmanual.pdf. For infested collection items, the museum should immediately isolate them from other collection items and consult a conservator. Some basic advice is available from National Park Service conservation articles found at http://www.cr.nps.gov/museum/publications/.

Collections Management: Overview, Accessions, Loans

A museum's collections management procedures should be compiled into a collections management manual, which presents in detail the guidelines outlined below. Responsibility for managing the collections is usually delegated by the Director to the Curator, who may be assisted by a Registrar.

The museum's collections consist of museum objects. A "museum object" is a physical entity, plus the data associated with it. Items without adequate documentation lack interpretive value. "Museum object" denotes any object collected by a museum, whether natural or manmade. The term "specimen" is generally synonymous with museum object, but also means example or sample, and an "artifact" is defined as a manmade object.

The definitive book on registration is Rebecca A. Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore, eds., *The New Museum Registration Methods*, fourth edition (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1998); see also Daniel B. Reibel, *Registration Methods for the Small Museum*, third edition (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1997). Legal concerns related to museums and collections management are addressed in Marie C. Malaro, *Legal Primer on Managing Museum Collections*, second edition (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998).

Acquisition is the process by which the museum obtains the museum objects in its collections. Generally, when an object or group of related objects is brought to the museum, a temporary receipt is provided to the potential donor by the Curator, pending a determination (by staff or by a Board acquisition committee) of the relevance of the object(s) to the museum's collections. Objects should never be accepted by the front desk without prior permission by the Curator and some form of documentation concerning the temporary transaction. If the object(s) is accepted, the Curator then executes a certificate of gift with the donor or seller to legally transfer the right of ownership of this acquisition, or accession, to the museum. Thus, an "acquisition" or "accession" is an object or group of objects acquired by the museum through gift, purchase, or transfer from a single source at a particular time.

Registration is the process of creating, acquiring, and keeping records on the museum's collections. This process varies from one museum to another. The following suggested approach would work well for a small museum with a simple registration system using a computer with software for word processing and spreadsheets; an off-the-shelf computer database software package could also be used and would offer additional features.

Registration Number

Each object within an incoming accession is permanently assigned a three-part registration number, with each part having two digits: the first part indicates the year of the accession (some museums make this a three digit number to distinguish the year 2000 from the year 1900), the second part indicates the number of the accession within the given year, and the third part indicates an individual object within the given accession. For example, “06.15.7” would signify the seventh object in the fifteenth accession in 2006 (or, if desired, “006.15.7” to distinguish the year 2006 from 1906).

The registration number should be marked on the associated object in a reasonably permanent manner that avoids damaging the object. Most museums opt to use Acryloid B-72 white lacquer as a base for inking in the registration number on the item with a clear Acryloid lacquer to seal it. This process is reversible using acetone, and the materials are generally available from archival supply companies. This process should not be used on books (soft lead pencil is preferred), textiles (sewing cloth tape with the number on it in a stable place inside the garment is preferred), photographs, leather, plastic, or painted surfaces. Some items may require writing the registration number on acid-free tags attached to the item with a cotton string, on archival-quality plastic envelopes/bags (Melinex© polyester, polypropylene, or polyethylene), or just on the archival quality box it is stored in. However, tags, bags, and boxes have the danger of being separated from the item, presenting challenges in relocating an object’s records and in positively identifying the item in the event of theft. Applying the number directly to the item is preferable whenever possible.

Accession Documents

All documents associated with each accession should be stored in a fire-resistant file cabinet; they should be filed in acid-free envelopes (with the registration number penciled on the outside) in registration number order.

Accession Register

An accession register is a ledger, with accessions entered in registration number order, containing minimal information (registration number, name of object, source and date of accession), to help the registrar keep track of accessions, registration numbers, and sources. This can also be easily done as a spreadsheet document with software such as Excel, keeping a hard copy in a notebook as a backup (in addition, computer information should be routinely backed up with one backup tape or disk kept off site and one on site in a fireproof safe in regular rotation).

Accession File

Traditionally a card file that was preferably secured in a drawer with a rod through holes in the cards, an accession file can be easily developed using word processing software. Each accession should be saved as an individual file in the computer (named by its registration number) and should also be printed out and stored in individual acid-free file folders, in order by registration number.   Each document, or card, contains detailed permanent information about an individual accession including: registration number, donor/source name and address, object name (using a standardized nomenclature – see the cataloging section), description (material(s), style, measurements, etc.), condition, provenance (history of the ownership of the object), and other relevant information. Volatile information may also be included, such as value and location in storage or exhibition, if recorded in pencil or created as a computer document to allow for ease of changes. A photograph of the item should be included as well; this is particularly easy to do with digital cameras. In addition, the accession file serves as the proper place to file newspaper articles, oral history transcripts, and other such materials that serve to help interpret the item. If a scanner is available, a scanned image of these items should be included in the computer file created for the accession.

Donor / Source File

Traditionally a card file, the purpose of this file was to sort accessions alphabetically by donor or source name in order to easily access all items donated or purchased from a given individual or business. The card contained the donor/source name and address, along with a simple listing of all accessions from that source (including each one's registration number, object name, and date received). With computers, this information can be saved as an individual word processing document for each donor or source, with printouts kept in a series of acid-free folders.

Catalog File

This file was also traditionally a card file, arranged systematically by object name in order to provide a means for retrieving objects by object type or function. Each card contained at least the registration number and object name; many museums also include additional descriptive data from the accession file as well as a photograph. A computer spreadsheet or word processing document can be created for each object type or function and named as such to create a similar file that can also be routinely printed out and kept in a bound book or acid-free files.

Concerning nomenclature for object types or functions:

The systematic use of a standard nomenclature (naming) system is strongly recommended. The best system for historical artifacts is James R. Blackaby, Patricia Greeno, and The Nomenclature Committee, *The Revised Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging: A Revised and Expanded Version of Robert G. Chenhall's System for Classifying Man-Made Objects* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1995). Natural objects can be cataloged using the standard nomenclature of the applicable science (e.g. the Linnean system for biological or paleontological specimens).

Specialized Computer Software for Museums

Today, there are many registration software packages available to all sizes of museums. These come with standardized forms for not only accessions but also for loans, with tools that allow for easy querying of collections data for a variety of information. A sample listing of websites and telephone numbers for reputable collections management software vendors follows, although this is by no means intended as a complete list.

- **Argus**

http://www.questorsys.com/index.htm; 310-783-1450

- **KE Software**
  http://www.kesoftware.com/; 604-877-1960
- **Past Perfect**
  http://www.museumsoftware.com/; 800-562-6080
- **RE:discovery**
  http://www.rediscoverysoftware.com/; 434-975-3256, ext. 21
- **The Museum System** *(see TMS Light version for small museums)*
  http://www.gallerysystems.com/; 646-733-2239

Typically, vendors offer a downloadable sample version of their software (or can mail one), as well as a sample list of current clients which can be helpful in considering which program might be right for each museum. Prices range from $800 up to several thousand, so it is important to look at more than one option and to ask about annual maintenance / upgrade fees as well as technical support and training opportunities. Some companies also offer discounts for museums that are members of such organizations as the American Association for State and Local History.

Loan Documents

Loans of museum objects should be controlled through a loan policy and require careful monitoring by the Curator and/or Registrar. Outgoing loans should be allowed only to borrowers qualified to provide adequate protection for the objects (usually other museums; loans to individuals should be discouraged), and there should be a definite loan period with a specific termination date. For incoming loans, which may be needed for temporary exhibitions, the terms will generally be dictated by the lender but should be consistent with the museum's policies and procedures. A loan register should be maintained for both outgoing and incoming loans, including the loan number, the registration number(s) of the loaned objects, the name and address of the borrower/lender, the loan beginning date, the period of the loan, the loan termination date, whether or not the public may photograph the loaned object(s) on display, and whether or not images of the loan are permitted for use by the borrower with details on such use (e.g. permission to use images for press releases, brochures, and gallery guides). Signed loan papers from the lender should also include a statement to the effect that the lender has ownership and the express legal right to loan object(s) being borrowed and/or reproduced by the museum. This is particularly important for loans from individual collectors.

Collections Management: Collections Care

Conservation or preservation of a museum's collections is a primary responsibility of the Curator. The single most important action the Curator can take is to establish the proper environment for both exhibition and storage of the objects, which will ensure the longest possible survival of the various museum objects in the collections. In general, the best environment will include the following conditions:

- Constant temperature in the human comfort zone (perhaps 70° Fahrenheit)
- Constant relative humidity at 50%
- Low light level, not to exceed 10 foot-candles for paper and textiles (preferably no light for items in storage)
- Absence of ultraviolet radiation (use only incandescent lamps or use UV filters on fluorescent lamps and/or windows; another option, particularly useful for lighting individual items, is the use of fiber optic lights which do not contain heat, or UV or IR radiation)
- Absence of harmful biological agents, i.e., fungi, insects, rodents, mold, etc.
- Absence of air pollution, both particulates and gases which might condense as acids
- Storage materials and furniture which are chemically neutral, support the item well, and provide dust-free environments when possible (e.g., acid-free boxes; metal shelves with doors for closed storage; acid-free tissue)
- Isolation of museum objects which may harbor biological or chemical agents harmful to the rest of the collection (especially nitrate film which is subject to spontaneous combustion)
- Padded hangers or mounts for stable costumes (historic clothing), with care not to over-extend into the shoulders (wire hangers bent into shape, covered with batting and a final cover of muslin sewn into the appropriate shape work well to support most garments); textiles and fragile garments should be placed in acid-free boxes with as few folds as possible, using acid-free tissue to pad out all necessary folds
- Removal of staples, metal paperclips, and metal pins from objects, especially papers, costumes and textiles, and photographs (use instead acid-free folders or boxes, plastic coated paperclips, archival-quality plastic sleeves such as polypropylene, polyethylene, and Melinex©, etc.)
- Removal of any inappropriate framing techniques that do not employ acid-free materials (framed items should have acid-free backboards and mats with reversible V- or T-hinge mounts using an acid-free tape; glass should ideally be UV-filtered or acrylic, though acrylic should not be used with watercolor, chalk, or charcoal prints); framed items and paintings should be hung in storage to prevent damage, if possible

Even when the Curator provides a suitable environment, some museum objects will continue to noticeably deteriorate. When this occurs, positive conservation actions should be taken either by the Curator (in simple cases) or by a professional conservator (for complex cases and for any object of high value). The Curator should be familiar with the appropriate conservation treatments for the following types of materials:

- Paper
- Wood
- Skin and leather
- Metal (iron, copper, tin, lead, gold, silver)

- Textile (wool, silk, cotton, linen)
- Ceramics (vitreous and high-fired earthenware)
- Glass
- Bone, ivory, teeth
- Stone
- Photographs

The Curator is ethically and legally obligated to respect the integrity of the museum object. For example, any conservation procedure should be reversible if at all possible. Likewise, the Curator should strongly discourage any use of a museum object which might alter it – specifically, do not alter an object for exhibition purposes, and do not subject valuable, irreplaceable artifacts to the wear and tear of “hands-on” educational programs. Items to be used in “hands-on” educational programs should be part of a separate Education Collection under the purview of the Education Director, with the express understanding that these items will eventually be destroyed as the result of such use; such items are typically reproductions.

An excellent guide to conservation for the Curator of a small museum can be found in Per E. Guldbeck and A. Bruce MacLeish, *The Care of Antiques and Historical Collections*, second edition (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1995); see also, Simon Knell, *Care of Collections* (London: Routledge, 1994).

Some current museum-quality storage supply companies include:

- **Gaylord**
  www.gaylord.com; (800) 448-6160
- **Hollinger Corporation**
  www.hollingercorp.com; (800) 634-0491
- **Light Impressions**
  www.lightimpressionsdirect.com; (800) 828-6216
- **Bags Unlimited**
  www.bagsunlimited.com; (800) 767-2247

Collections Management: Collections Use and Exhibitions

Research is often assumed to be the exclusive province of the large museum, but even the smallest community museum needs to conduct research for both documentation and interpretive purposes. The Curator, as part of the registration and cataloging process, undertakes research to identify and describe objects in the museum’s collections. Frequently, this involves the traditional documentary work associated with the local historian, but it may also require the Curator to “read” the object itself as primary evidence.

Additional research is usually needed for developing exhibition storylines and educational programs. The museum's major permanent exhibition(s) and related interpretive programming usually require a major research effort.

Public Access

Some community museums hold collections of significance to outside researchers. As public entities, museums have an obligation to make their collections available for study by qualified researchers, although close monitoring by a staff member of the research activity is necessary for the protection of the studied object. A museum which receives many requests for research access to its collections should establish a research policy.

Exhibitions Overview

Exhibition is usually the primary use of the collections in a small museum. A community museum might provide two kinds of exhibition programs: permanent and temporary.

Permanent exhibitions might constitute the core of the museum's interpretation of the community's history. Such exhibitions should reflect design sophistication, if they expect to be fully appreciated by visitors from outside the community. This would require development of a comprehensive storyline document which integrates artifacts, labels and graphics, as well as reasonably professional exhibition design, construction, and installation. Due to the obvious time and expense involved, such exhibitions would be stable (i.e., change rarely) and only donated or purchased objects (not loans) can be practically included. Thought should be given ahead of time to any object(s) on display that is especially light-sensitive (such as clothing or textiles) so that it may be changed out with another item after being on display for no longer than a year, or be thoughtfully excluded from the permanent exhibition. Note that graphically sophisticated permanent exhibitions can be very effective in serving the outside visitor (tourist); hiring a professional designer for even just a portion of the exhibition, such as the graphic designs, can dramatically professionalize the final product. This expense, while certainly not a necessity for initial upgrades of an exhibition, can prove to be fundable. Paying a designer for a plan and rendering that can be presented to potential sponsors is an effective fundraising tool. If the museum decides to pursue a professional designer, checking websites for professional associations (see page 25) and sites like www.museumsusa.org (410-884-7081) for listings and references may be helpful.

Temporary exhibitions tend to serve local visitors, who tend to return to the museum after viewing the permanent exhibitions only if there is something new and different to enjoy. Temporary or rotating exhibitions provide novelty through the display of "canned" traveling exhibitions or staff-developed special-interest exhibitions. Staff-developed temporary exhibitions still require systematic interpretive methods, but generally avoid the development complexities which arise in large (permanent) exhibitions. Temporary exhibitions allow the staff to explore specific subjects in more detail than would be appropriate in the permanent exhibition(s) and to use loaned objects effectively.

In both types of exhibitions, it is important to keep ADA requirements in mind, particularly as regards pathways, artifact and label placement, and font sizes for labels.

Museums that are able to offer increased accessibility beyond basic requirements may discover new, appreciative audiences. For example, exhibitions and tours might include audio components, written scripts of audio components and tours, scripts and/or recordings in other languages, labels or brochures in Braille, or include reproduction artifacts that may be touched.

Researcher Reading Area and Collections Storage

Some small museums tend to overflow with fascinating documents, images, and artifacts, so much so that the visitor is easily overwhelmed by the breadth of materials on display. In this case, a museum needs to consider simply housing many of the materials in a new collections storage room. Documents and images could be stored either in Collections Storage or in an archives/researcher reading area created within the permanent exhibition (with document copies in notebooks on bookshelves and original clippings, documents, and images housed in acid-free folders in locked filing cabinets, to be opened upon researcher request by the receptionist, who can also provide security). Thus, these materials would still be accessible to the public with a space to sit down and look through them. Reducing the number of materials and artifacts on display within the permanent exhibition to roughly 30% of the museum's holdings will allow selected items to receive more focus from visitors and provide space for complementary graphics and labels with larger type to briefly explore the context surrounding the items in a professional manner.

Temporary Exhibition Gallery

Creating a temporary exhibition gallery will allow the museum to explore an individual topic, event, or person more fully and will keep the museum fresh with one, two, or even more new staff-generated exhibitions each year. Incorporating rotating temporary exhibitions would ensure that museum items not used in the permanent exhibition have a chance to be displayed and truly featured, with the added benefit of helping preserve them by not having them out for long periods of time.

Display Techniques

If a museum's collections are too numerous to fit inside cabinet or wall-mounted display cases, there are simple alternatives. In the short term, fabric-covered panels can be used with Velcro strips (the "hook" type) on the back of mounted items to hang them. Of course, sticky-backed Velcro should only be used on copies of the materials and/or on polyethylene, or other museum-quality, sleeves (never on an original item itself; ideally, it should also not be laminated, glued, or dry-mounted if it is an original document or the only copy).

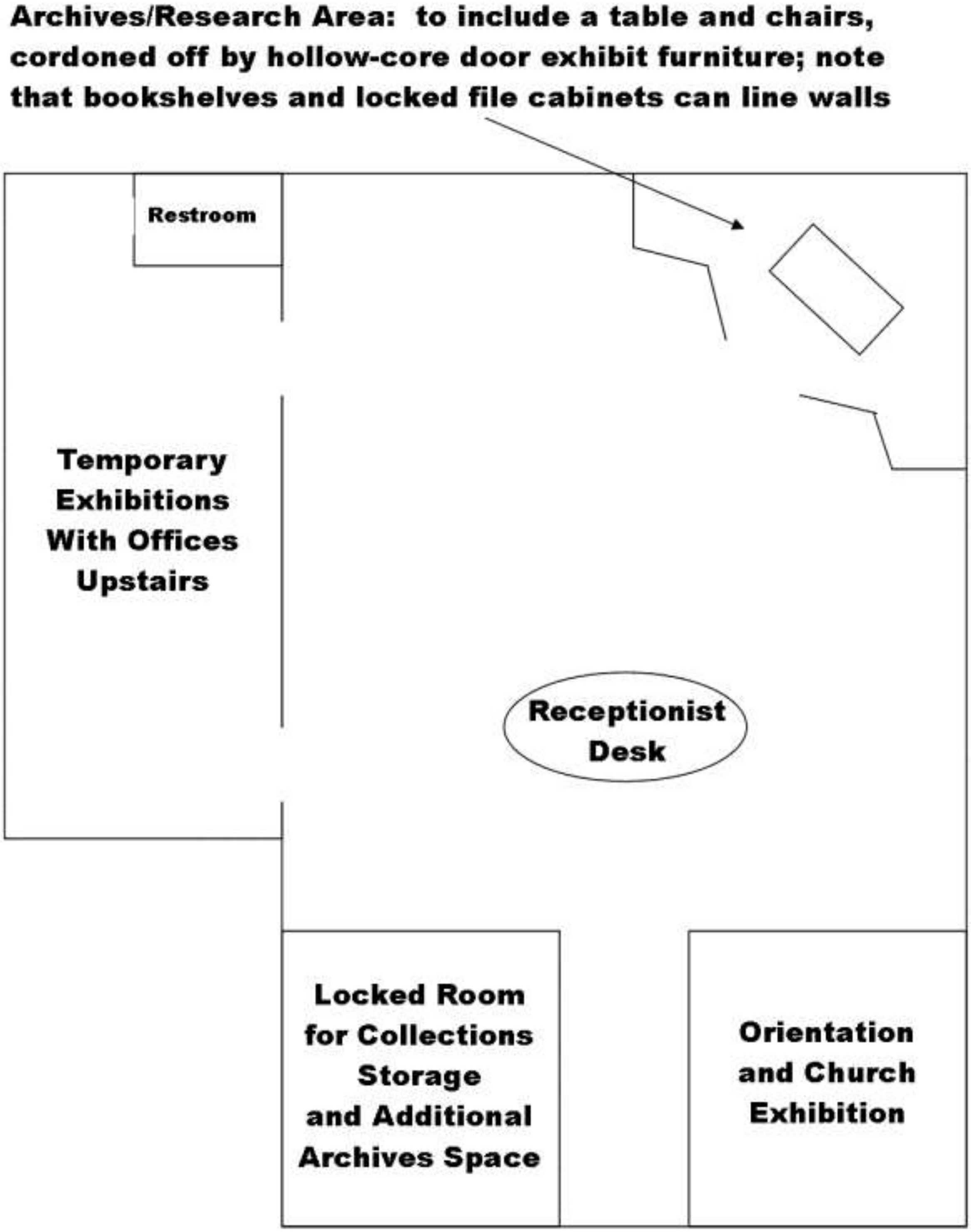
If the museum is housed in a historic building, the Director and Curator should strongly consider protecting the building itself by limiting the amount of nailing and tacking to original walls. One inexpensive method would be to mount hollow-core door panels to the walls for display use. These could also replace any fabric-covered panels for visual consistency and could be painted if desired. Exhibit panels with text and graphics, as well as labels, that have been dry-mounted or spray-mounted onto foam core can be hung using strong double-stick tape (use a putty knife to slice the tape when removing panels and use mineral spirits to remove the sticky residue, then repaint if/as needed). These could also be attached with Velcro if the hollow-core door panels are covered in fabric or have small, fabric-covered, wooden boards attached for this purpose. Framed images and even acrylic artifact exhibit boxes can be mounted with security hooks directly.

(1) *Tennessee's Century Farms* Hollow-Core Doors Traveling Exhibition, Center for Historic Preservation.

A second inexpensive idea is to hinge several hollow-core doors together (3-5 doors per section) to create a free-standing exhibition wall that can be easily arranged and re-arranged to create pathways and nooks. An example of the use of hollow-core doors is shown in Figure 1. In Figure 2, the same exhibition is shown in a different arrangement; the flexibility of the materials used (lining up two or three doors at a time instead of the entire display being in a row) allowed for the exhibition to be used in a variety of spaces. This same idea may be used with ½ doors and wooden posts, as seen in Figure 3. In this particular example, images were screened onto fabric shade-type extensions below each panel, or partial door, to increase visual appeal. Taking these ideas into consideration, a museum could easily create an archives/research area by cordoning off a corner with a hollow-core door exhibition (see Figure 4).

(2) *Tennessee's Century Farms* Traveling Exhibition,
Center for Historic Preservation.

(3) *Through the Years Together: A History of Tennessee Extension Home Economic Programs* Traveling Exhibition,
Center for Historic Preservation.



(4) Suggested general physical plant layout (not to scale) with Archives/Research area, Granville Museum.

Permanent Exhibitions

Many museums arrange their permanent exhibitions thematically. Assuming that the museum's mission is principally to interpret past and present, creating a chronological component might prove useful to the visitor and could incorporate some highlights on themes.

Whether a museum is dedicated to the history of a town, industry, house, etc., a narrative, chronological history, displayed on walls or hollow-core doors, will provide context for the visitor. This chronology can be broken down into thematic sections, such as beginnings, early days, transitions, the modern era, etc.

The following are examples of subtopics that might be covered in each section in a historic town museum:

- Town size, lay out, important additions such as paved roads, electricity or the post office
- Agriculture
- Merchants
- Schools & sports
- Family life including clothing styles, architecture, home décor, social organizations and leisure activities
- Events of note
- One or two spotlights on a specific individual or place, either of renown or because it is typical of the norm at the time

Limiting the images displayed on each panel to two to five images is recommended as is limiting artifacts displayed to one or two on each panel (preferably in an acrylic case that attaches to the wall). Across from the panels (with a path wide enough for a wheelchair), in between panels, or below a panel, the museum could place one or two vitrines (smaller museum display case), pieces of furniture, or mannequins. With museum exhibitions, less is often more. Limiting large display cases to only one or two along this wall is highly recommended; be sure to remove any harmful fluorescent lights and replace with halogen lights, fiber optic lights, or no lights. Stanchions placed around furnishings and mannequins with clear signage to not touch can help deter visitors from doing so. Labels should never be attached directly to the artifact.

Note: Take care to ensure that clothing displayed is on a smaller size mannequin that is padded with batting and covered with muslin or cotton stretch sleeves available from medical supply stores, in order to not put undo stress on the garment and to display how it would have looked on a person. Unlike raw wood or newspaper, these materials are inert and better for the garment's preservation. According to The Costume and Textile Specialists (www.costumeandtextile.net), quilts should be mounted by sewing the loop side of a 2" strip of Velcro to a strip of 3" wide twill tape and then sewing the strip to the back of the quilt. The hook side of the Velcro is then stapled to a strip of wood that is attached to the panel or wall. This system distributes the weight more evenly than a fabric sleeve sewn on to mount using a curtain rod and is similarly reversible. Cotton thread is generally the best choice as silk thread is too strong and may cut the fibers of the quilt fabric. Only stable (good condition) garments and textiles should be displayed; damaged items should be referred to someone knowledgeable about current conservation techniques. Any garments or textiles displayed should be rotated out annually.

Along the other sides of the main gallery, themes could be explored in more detail. For instance, an extensive section on agricultural tools; street scenes through time (could use interactive labels quizzing the visitor with multiple choices as to what year is depicted, lifting the label up to see the correct answer); and/or businesses. Remember that the temporary exhibition gallery offers space for exploring themes in more detail as well.

Large items needing to be removed to collections storage, like the pews and other furniture, may require looking into an off-site, secure, storage facility. As the museum's collections grow, such an additional storage facility may prove necessary regardless.

Interior Aesthetics Planning

In setting mid-range and long-range goals, a museum may wish to begin exploring better lighting for the galleries and improvements to the building's interior aesthetics. Many museums housed in historic buildings have opted to remove drop ceilings, paint the ceilings and exposed ductwork black, and hang track lights with museum quality lamps. A similar solution may be appropriate for Granville and would provide an opportunity to review wiring for the safety of the building and collections. When examining a museum's aesthetics, consistency is often a key element. Examples to consider include maintaining the same font styles and general color scheme throughout an individual exhibition (may change from one exhibition to the next, however); keeping a similar "look" with choices for display cases, vitrines, and mannequins within an individual exhibition; and even considering the look of flooring, the staircase, moldings, and panel additions throughout the building itself.

Collections Use and Exhibitions: Conclusion

Certainly many of these suggestions are food for thought for long-range planning. Still, some could be begun now. For instance, note that organizations like the Boy Scouts require members to help with construction projects and may be a good resource for patching and painting walls, putting up panels, creating free-standing hollow-door exhibition furniture, and creating vitrine bases. Breaking down the long-term vision into "bite-size" annual projects is often the best approach.

A good introduction to museum exhibition development (on a modest scale) is Lothar P. Witteborg, *Good Show! A Practical Guide for Temporary Exhibitions*, second edition (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991). Another, more in-depth, book exploring exhibition development from planning to production to evaluation is Barry and

Gail Dexter Lord, *The Manual of Museum Exhibitions* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2001).

Educational Programs

Educational programs for youth and adults might constitute another major interpretive approach. A Director of Education can develop programs for grades K through 12 which interpret the material culture held in a museum's collections. Obviously, these programs are most meaningful when carefully tied to the museum's exhibitions and other heritage-related assets in the community. Community museums which develop and publicize quality educational programs often find that demand for this service increases rapidly; school field trips may become so numerous that elaborate scheduling and additional staff are needed, and students may actually constitute the bulk of the museum's annual visitation (and help with museum store sales). Developing a teacher advisory committee is highly recommended to assist the museum with supporting curriculum guidelines, creating teacher and student handouts, developing evaluation techniques, and promoting the program to fellow teachers.

Other educational programs that might be developed include:

- Guided tours
- Lectures, by staff and/or guest speakers
- Workshops (e.g. genealogy methods, archival care for photographs)
- Summer camps
- After-school programs
- Boy Scouts or Girl Scouts programming
- Youth and family programs (e.g. storyteller, living history demonstrations)

Museums often develop their most successful programs when collaborating with other community groups, from the local garden clubs to the Boys and Girls Club. Creating one or two annual larger events is another way to maintain local awareness, such as the Granville Museum's Heritage Day and Jazz Festival. Ideas for an addition for the fall and winter months might include a holiday open house or tour of homes.

As mentioned in the section on exhibitions, programs should also take ADA requirements into consideration and should consider ways to improve accessibility whenever possible.

Among the many excellent books related to museum education is William T. Alderson and Shirley Payne Low, *Interpretation of Historic Sites*, second edition (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 1985) and Bonnie Sachatello-Sawyer, et. al., *Adult Museum Programs: Designing Meaningful Experiences* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002).

Selected State and National Professional Museum Associations

If you are interested in professionalizing your museum's exhibitions and learning best practices, joining a state or national professional museum association is highly recommended. These associations provide access to current literature on best practices as well as workshops, conferences, and connections to colleagues who can help a museum avoid pitfalls. Please find a list of selected associations below.

- **American Alliance of Museums**
  http://www.aam-us.org/
  2451 Crystal Drive, Suite 1005
  Arlington, VA 22202
  202-289-1818
- **American Association for State and Local History**
  http://www.aaslh.org/
  2021 21st Ave S., Suite 320
  Nashville, TN 37212
  (615) 320-3203
- **Southeastern Museum Conference**
  http://www.semcdirect.net/
  P.O. Box 550746
  Altanta, GA 30355-3246
  (404) 814-2048
- **Tennessee Association of Museums**
  http://www.tnmuseums.org/
  P.O. Box 330984
  Nashville, TN 37203
  (615) 495-3354

Complied by Melissa Zimmerman for the Tennessee Civil War National Heritage Area, 2011; contact information for professional associations and grant-makers updated, 2017.