

Archival Products

NEWS

Preservation of Historical Libraries of Arequipa

by Gary Frost and Helen Ryan

THE HISTORICAL LIBRARIES of Arequipa, Peru, have survived but their future is at risk. Earthquakes and volcanic dust are a part of life and the rare books and timeless library rooms are in need of physical care and protective measures. Fortunately, preservation actions are underway.

Libraries for the education of clerics were founded in Arequipa beginning in the mid-17th century. Subsequent acquisition programs have continued to build the collections bringing together printed books imported to Peru as well as those printed in Peru over a period of five centuries. The genres collected include civil and canon law, theology, ecclesiastic history, philosophy, sociology, and linguistics. Church libraries have also served as repositories for local newspapers and regional imprints of various kinds.

The library at The Recoleta, though largely unused today, evinces signs of past activity. San Francisco showed almost none: one whole wall of some 3,000 vellum bindings looked like they have never been touched.



Books in workshop awaiting attention.

The books had, through a combination of tight shelving and perhaps a geologic peculiarity, stayed on the shelves during the 2001 earthquake. Our preliminary supposition is that the vellums are largely Spanish bindings, protecting the books much more effectively than European leather covers in their trip across the world. The climate in Arequipa has been stable enough that the common experience of vellum springing out from

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Emily Rainwater brushing books.

the book block is not a factor and the vellum coverings, tough and impervious to the glassy volcanic dust, have not broken away as have the leather-covered boards. San Francisco houses the entire array of European bindings from the 15th to the 20th centuries and the “archaeologically original” conditions were marvelous.

Of the 4,000 to 5,000 books in The Infiernillo storage room, about 500 are from the pre- or early 1700s. The main collection contains another 2,000. (Another 2,000 18th century imprints will no doubt be a cataloging priority.) As might be expected, there is a preponderance of religious/philosophic works (perhaps 80%) and the remaining cover the entire spectrum: literature, science and crafts, history and travel, linguistics, and sociology. About half the works are Spanish imprints and the remainder from the usual early publishing centers of Europe: Venice, Antwerp, Leuven, Paris, Rome, etc. The content of the religious/philosophic works reflect the intellectual fervor of Renaissance



Jessica Peterson safely handling books with two hands.

and post-Renaissance Europe including three or four editions of The Venerable Sister Mary of Jesus of Agreda’s *Mystical City of God* (a 17th century Spanish nun whose works were censured for a while), a Portuguese edition, not reported elsewhere, and the Council of Trent. Almost 20% of the early European imprints are original editions and 36% are reported by three or fewer libraries in the world. We have discovered very few original titles and those which we have are



Stacks at San Francisco.

of little importance. Plantin was given special export privileges by the court of Spain and The Recoleta.

Of the 130 books analyzed, 24 or 18% of the collections are unique editions. (This means that the same title is available, but only in other editions.) There are 47 or 36% of the books which are held by three or fewer libraries in the world.

Over generations, the function of these libraries has changed from specialized training of missionaries to more general education in Peruvian history and culture. Future roles are also emerging including tourist interest and renewed educational and craft interest in historical book production. The historical libraries themselves offer



Painting at San Francisco.

perspectives and contrasts in a changing environment of globalism and digital connectivity. These new roles only add to the significance of the historical libraries of Arequipa.

The Preservation of Historical Libraries of Arequipa Project is providing both guidance and production needed to protect the collections. With enthusiastic cooperation of local library officials, a six-member team from Alabama, Iowa and Texas spent two weeks in July 2008 working with local authorities Helen Ryan, Librarian and Director of Catalog



Anna Embree cleaning mold from books.

Processing, and Alvaro Meneses, Director of INLIBRI (Institute of the Book) and Bibliographer. The team members were Anna Embree and Jessica Peterson, University of Alabama; Chela Metzger and Emily Rainwater, University of Texas; and Joyce Miller and Gary Frost, University of Iowa. Resources of INLIBRI, a nongovernmental organization for the study and preservation of the book in Arequipa, and the cooperating U.S. universities are exceptionally complementary. INLIBRI provides local project authorization and funding, expert historical and linguistic perspective, and collection knowledge. The U.S. universities provide preservation and conservation expertise, opportunities for advanced book studies and book arts education, and materials and technology support.

Together the team has demonstrated methods for effective cleaning and exhibition, and methods for non-damaging relocation of collections. The team has set up a workshop and has trained local students from the

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Universidad Catolica de Santa Maria to continue the project in their absence. In addition, study has begun to search for those characteristics common to 17th and 18th century Peruvian bookbinding. The legacy of bookmaking in Peru can enhance local hand book crafts and book conservation in the future. The two-week session concluded on July 18th with a presentation at the Universidad Catolica San Pablo. A large audience of students and scholars attended to hear presentations on rare book cataloging, book conservation and preservation of libraries in Arequipa.

Renovation and reinstallation of exhibits at The Recoleta will be completed and a library conservation studio established at The Recoleta as a base for both visiting and local practitioners. Further work is needed to reinforce the shelving fixtures against earthquake damage. Other project objectives include planning for continuity of exchange of student teams, for adjustment or shift of activities according to local needs, and authorization and funding for an on-site conservation work-place. The relocation of the San Francisco collection, which includes remnants of Jesuit libraries, is required immediately. The current library building has been condemned by municipal authorities due to earthquake damage. Plans are completed for the extraction,



Stacks at Recoleta

cleaning and relocation of boxed books to a secure intermediate storage during the renovation and shelving reinstallation in the new library space. The cleaning method has been tested and specified and resources needed have been assembled. A relocation proposal has been drafted. This collection relocation work should be accomplished soon.

The momentum of interest in the historical libraries of Arequipa may be due to a rare convergence of factors including key personnel, key organizations and key motivations. Many opportunities for advance of tourism, historical preservation and devotional dedication are mixed with the future of these old libraries.

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Project team, from left: Anna Embree, Helen Ryan, Chela Metzger, Emily Rainwater, Joyce Miller and Jessica Peterson.

Investing in the Future: Creating a Historic Archive in an Art Museum

By Lindsay E. Shannon and Ian Ringgenberg

SMALLER INSTITUTIONS that specialize in artifacts-based collections often face the challenge of creating or maintaining supplementary documentations archives with limited staff and budget resources. These archives are often being created on an ongoing basis, making it even more challenging to maintain a consistent system. While the immediate problems are difficult to surmount, the benefits of a professional archive system greatly add to the institution's cultural and scholarly value. The initial investment in staff time creates a much more accurate and time saving system for research, storage, and retrieval of records.



The Blanden Art Museum's former art research library; plywood shelving and the need for multiple access aisles posed storage problems and left no space for archives.

In its five-year plan, the Blanden Art Museum has had the goal of preserving its art research library and archives using professional archival standards. These collections document over 75 years of history directly related to the museum and its collections, as well as containing items relating to the local history of the Fort Dodge, Iowa, area and the broader American art world. The archive items have been continuously collected by volunteers and staff for the duration of this period, which is no small accomplishment given the museum's long and varied history. While the documents have been collected, they have previously received little ongoing care as professional attention has been primarily focused on the 1,300 fine arts objects in the museum's permanent collection, including modern masters. Archive items have been stored in a variety of formats, from filing cabinets and bookcases to scrapbooks and binders. The variety of formats sometimes created duplicate documents and made it difficult to know where to find specific materials.

This project entailed updating the various storage formats into one consistent system and enacting professional archive standards to ensure that the materials were preserved for their value to the museum as well as being accessible to staff and researchers who frequently contact the museum. Tanya Zanish-Belcher, Head of Special Collections and University Archives at Iowa State University, provided a consultation through the State Historical Society of Iowa's Technical Advisory Network (TAN). Recommendations ranged from archive basics to long-term storage solutions. Ian Ringgenberg, a student assistant from the same department, was engaged to

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Archive materials stored in a variety of scrapbooks. Although these items followed a consistent format, accessing documents was still awkward and preservation concerns constituted the main reason for the decision to reformat.

help re-house the archives during the period of December 2007 to January 2008 under the supervision of Curator Lindsay E. Shannon.

Initially, archive collections were delineated from the regular accession records, which are used on a daily basis for museum operations. The archive collections were then broken down into categories by type of record: administrative records, historical documents, exhibitions documentation, publications and photographs. Documents had already been stored chronologically, mostly within filing cabinets and assembled scrapbooks. Both formats presented problems aside from preservation; storage was difficult to access for research and filing cabinets were often overcrowded. Re-housing these collections in archival folders and document cases created a uniform system that improved access and identification of documents. Furthermore, archive materials were previously stored in the Conservation and Print Rooms, which were needed to accommodate work related to the permanent collections. Consolidating

the collections into a shared space with the research library improved access and organization without compromising the security of the archives. Consolidation was achieved by installation of a custom-fit Spacesaver® mobile shelving unit. This system used the area which was previously occupied by plywood bookcases to house the research library alone and consolidated the library and archives with additional growth space. In the past, the museum had frequently needed to shift materials to new storage locations. Eliminating this process was another project benefit which adds to the security of the collection and the efficient use of staff time.

The most significant portion of the project dealt with the decision to reformat the historical scrapbooks, undertaken by Ian Riggenberg. The bulk of the historical documents consisted of newspaper clippings mounted into several dozen scrapbooks that were created starting in 1923 and continuing through the present. Due to the long chronology of this collection, the scrapbooks were diverse in their construction and method of adhesion. Each style of scrapbook posed its own challenges to preservation and organization. The oldest scrapbooks used screw bindings and affixed clippings using paste. We sought to preserve these articles in their original form due to the historic nature of many of these articles including announcements



Ian Ringgenberg preparing a scrapbook for archiving.



Curator Lindsay E. Shannon using the new library and archives.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, the construction of the scrapbooks changed drastically.

of the museum's creation, files of the local American Federation of Arts chapter and the acquisition of many of the museum's most famous collections. Many of the articles were loose and required repasting. The bindings were removed and each page was neutralized using Bookkeeper® Deacidification Spray. Pages were individually sealed in polypropylene Crystal Clear Bags® and placed in folders by scrapbook year. Bagging not only provides a sound preservation environment for the page indefinitely, but will allow easy, glove-free handling by researchers. Resealable adhesive strips allow the document to be removed by a staff member for the purposes of scanning or photocopying, should reproduction be requested. Scrapbooks created between the 1950s and mid-1980s were often too large for standard folders and excess background paper had to be cut away to allow for bagging. These too were treated with deacidifying spray, though polypropylene bags were only used on those scrapbooks with significant deterioration that made handling a concern.

Beginning in the mid-1980s, the construction of the scrapbooks changed drastically. The volunteers and staff who created the scrapbooks began using a photocopier to reproduce the articles onto a more stable

paper. Secondly, they switched from pasting articles onto a scrapbook page to using static-cling, low-intensity adhesive pages to bind the articles. This adhesive had deteriorated over the years, making removal of the articles difficult and time consuming. Due to the low-priority of preserving non-original articles and the difficulty of separating the photocopies from the adhesive pages, the scrapbooks dating more recent than 1986 were simply photocopied onto acid-free paper, then placed in folders. Since these records are from more recent years, the museum's own exhibition records and publications consistently overlap with the information provided in the articles, making quality of reproduction less of a concern. Any original, full-page articles or significant clippings were gently removed with a spatula and filed with the photocopies.

This multiple-approach solution was necessary to tackle a relatively small collection with such a wide range of preservation hazards. By deacidifying and bagging only the most critical years and rare pieces, we retain originals of some of the most valuable parts of the collection, while photocopying newer, lower priority records preserves the information in a stable format with a quick, easy, and most of all, inexpensive procedure.

While the institution's main mission revolves around the artifact collections, carefully preserving the museum's records ensures that valuable information relating to its collections and history is available.

The chief benefit to the museum has been the consolidation of these research collections. There is now a retrieval system in place that reflects the accession system used to document the permanent collections. This ensures the continued security of the collections while providing easier access for staff and researchers. Retaining the chronological ordering system also makes it easier for staff to regularly add new records, as the archive is still actively being created, and at the same time will make it easier for records scheduling in collections such as Administrative Records and Exhibitions Documentation. This streamlined review process will significantly reduce unnecessary growth; records scheduling has been a considerable problem for the museum in the past due to the incongruity of the archive formats, wasting valuable staff time and storage space. Consolidation of the various collections has also made it easier to develop a handling policy. Previously it was difficult to monitor the handling of documents and to train staff on proper handling and

retrieval techniques due to the various housing formats and storage locations.

While the institution's main mission revolves around the artifact collections, carefully preserving the museum's records ensures that valuable information relating to its collections and history is available. By treating documentations collections as significant supporting collections within the museum, the institution's function and significance is enhanced for scholars, staff, and, ultimately, the public. Through improved access to funding and increased opportunities to collaborate with libraries, archives and conservation resources, a greater number of museum institutions are now able to better preserve their histories—to the benefit of the entire research community.

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