

Collections on the Move: Moving your Museum Collection

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LCHS



LCHS



Visualize a big challenge, and walk through every step of it.





Hard work and good preparation will make your move a success.



La Crosse County Historical Society

- In 1979, LCHS moved into its first permanent home, the “Swarthout Addition” at the La Crosse Public Library.
- In 2011 LCHS accepted the donation of a building to be its new headquarters
- Negotiations between the boards of the two organizations resulted in an agreement that LCHS would move out and give up any rights to their space in the library building by the end of 2014.
- Due to internal wrangling, the decision to actually move into the property at 145 West Ave was only finalized in July of 2014.





The new home for La Crosse County Historical Society

Two rules, in this order:

- No one gets hurt
- No artifacts are damaged.

No liability insurance?
Get professional movers!



Calculating Your Space Needs: Do it yourself or Get professional help

Professional help:

- LCHS used a company, Storage Systems Midwest, that provided a planner who came to La Crosse multiple times, and worked and reworked a design, as our plans changed and changed again. John Butler created a design that maximized our space, used our existing shelving, and supplemented it with good quality new Space Saver shelving that filled our needs.
- Some designers work independently, and not for companies that sell shelving. Probably a more expensive option.

Steel shelving in collections (height x width x depth)

7' x 8' x 4' units: 6

83" x 48" x 18" units: 11

97" x 36" x 15.5" units: 1

104" x 36" x 15.5 units: 1

85" x 36" x 24" units: 11

87" x 36" x 12" units: 4

97" x 36" x 18" units: 5

87" x 36" x 18" units: 1

85" x 36" x 18" units: 27



Calculate how much shelving you plan to re-use.

DIY: Calculating space needs and designing your new storage space

1. Conserve O Grams, *Determining Museum Storage Space Requirements*, Numbers 4/10 & 4/11

Good basic advise: covers all the points you need to take into consideration
http://www.nps.gov/museum/publications/conservedgram/cons_toc.html

2. CCI Preventive Conservation, *Museum Storage Space Estimations: In Theory and Practice*

This 9 page article is available on-line, and is a rich source of information
https://www.academia.edu/8051693/2014._Museum_storage_space_estimations_In_theory_and_practice

3. John Butler, of Storage Systems Midwest, shares his personal method of calculating space needs: “measure the collection in cubic feet (height x width x depth of the shelving or storage equipment, including what is stored on top shelves). Take that total and multiple by about 2.5, which will account for aisle space and collection decompression. That would be a starting point for how much space is required.”

Your museum's special challenges?

Shelving: the good, the bad, the ugly, and the good enough



Old shelving





New shelving



Old Shelving

What's wrong with this storage?



Flat storage for
large textiles,
Designed and
built locally.

Collections storage at the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, in Decorah, IA

Storage for small textile items, on aluminum trays designed for baker's racks.



Collections storage at the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, in Decorah, IA



Large 2-D art collections,
created from panels of
fencing hung from garage
door racks.

Collections storage at the
Vesterheim Norwegian-
American Museum, in Decorah,
IA



Storage for rolled textiles,
locally designed and built.
Hung from garage door
tracks.

Collections storage at the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum, in Decorah, IA



New Shelving: made to maximize storage of standard 10" x 15" x 12" boxes



Old Shelving

Lined with Ethafoam, for padding and as a barrier

- Packing Materials: Archival or not? Temporary or permanent?
- Budget and plan for: boxes, tissue, packing (Ethrafoam, bubble wrap), trays, knives.
- Consider crates for art and other fragile, hard to move items.
- Use “body bags” for quick transport of hanging textiles.



Planning, continued: are you using volunteer and/or professional movers?
This affects:

1. Budget
2. Schedule (time)
3. Equipment: carts, blankets, dollies, straps
4. Staffing and time needs



LCHS Volunteers



Professional movers (The only day we moved in snow.)



Professional movers
with an especially
fragile piece.

Planning conclusion: things to include in budget:

- Shelving
- Storage and packing materials: mention Gaylord discount
- Rental truck
- Professional movers, if you are using them
- Paid staff time

LCHS had all of these expenses.

Storage materials and packing: examples and demonstration

- Ethafoam: rolls and planks
- Acid-free tissue
- Acid-free boxes, whenever possible, and especially for permanent storage



Packing before the
move starts helps *a
lot!*





We packed tools

And shoes





And medical supplies



And doll furniture



And lots of other things!

Be prepared for: **Hazardous materials.** Unless you have a completely up-to-date data base and have recently done surveys so you know exactly what you have and where it is...you'll have surprises. Mercury, arsenic, lead, and asbestos are commonly found in historic museum collections.



Things to watch for:

- Taxidermy, commonly treated with arsenic
- Case clocks, which may use vials of mercury for weights
- Gas mask filters, helmet padding, and other forms of filters or insulation which may contain asbestos.
- Old pharmaceuticals, some of which are toxic or explosive
- Loaded weapons (yes, we found one.)



Do you really want to move it all?
Moving is a great time to deaccession!



- Peggy's "low hanging fruit" theory of deaccessioning: you aren't doing thorough surveys because time doesn't allow. Just deaccession the items you know don't belong in the collection.

- Make sure you have and abide by a collections policy that covers ethical deaccessioning. Always emphasize transparency, adherence to policy and to industry standards of ethics (AASLH, AAM). This protects staff, volunteers, and the organization.



Clothing, found stuffed in wood chests, damaged by poor storage and with little to no provenance. Much of it was deaccessioned and never brought to the new building.

Set goals and constantly re-assess:

When the move gets underway: set clear daily goals, write them down, and then track your progress.

I actually did this on a weekly, as well as daily, basis. Over the weekend I would assess what we had accomplished and plan what our goals for the next week would be. On Sundays I sent out an email to all the volunteers, updating them on what we had done, and what I wanted to accomplish the coming week.

This went to volunteers who were actively involved, board members, and the large group of volunteers who helped on an occasional, when-available basis.



My new office, for the first 6 months: we waited to get settled in the new building to survey women's hats. This summer we deaccessioned 100 hats and the remaining 200 are stored safely.



One year Later

Are our collections in better storage shape? Absolutely. Is it perfect? Absolutely not. Collections storage is always a process of “constant progress,” not perfection.

Benefits we are enjoying:

- Better knowledge of the collection
- Better organized and it is much easier to locate items.



Thank You!

All photos courtesy of the La Crosse County Historical Society

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