Accessioning Museum Records

1. Introduction

The primary mission of the Cleveland Museum of Art archives is to collect and preserve records that document the origins, development, achievements, and activities of the museum. The archives also operates the museum's records management program. The museum's records are important for several reasons. At minimum, they are the primary material for historical and other essential research. They document the care, security, ownership, and changing conditions of the collection. They also provide the knowledge of the institution's history that is essential for internal communication and decision making. They protect the museum's legal rights and its ownership of property, ensure compliance with government and business regulations, and provide the means for keeping its constituencies informed of its activities, operations, and accomplishments. If accessioning collections originating outside the museum see A6 Procedures for Accessioning Manuscript Collections.

2. Record Types and Locations

The archives accepts records in many formats and its holdings include analog as well as electronic records. Not all records are permanently retained. Many records, such as museum store register tapes, are destroyed on a regular basis that is detailed on the records retention schedules. These records are not processed but merely accessioned into the archives. They are then shipped to the contract records center, Iron Mountain, where they remain until destroyed at the end of their life cycle. Non-permanent electronic records are retained in the electronic records archive in the appropriate directory until their destructions are authorized.

Permanent records are kept onsite. Many accessions contain both permanent and non-permanent records. If there is a significant amount of non-permanent records in collections containing both type of records, then the non-permanent records may be sent to Iron Mountain. Consult with the Archivist and Records Manager if there is an inconsequential amount of non-permanent records.

Boxes staying onsite should be shelved with the accession number visible. Shelf locations must be added to the accession record. Whenever possible, all of the boxes for an accession should be shelved together.

Electronic Records are stored in the Electronic Records Archive in the directory of their office of origin, within a folder labeled with the accession number. For example, an accession from the Registrar's Office with the number A2016-001 would be stored here \\electronic records archive\Registrar\A2016-001.

3. Records Transfer

Museum staff transfer records to archives in accordance with departmental retention schedules, the general, and the vital records retention schedule. Several methods of transfer are used depending on the type of record (electronic vs. analog) and the circumstances of the transfer.

3.1 Records Transfer Form

The archives uses a web based records transfer form that is completed by the staff member transferring records to the archives. This form includes basic instructions for packing boxes of analog records. The transfer form includes the following fields:

Date: this is automatically generated by the system

Department: this is a drop down box

Contact: the name of the person transferring the records

Records creator: the name of the person who created the files

Type of records: either analog records (paper) or electronic records

Box content: Staff are encouraged to describe each box's contents as thoroughly as possible including date spans.

When the transfer form is submitted to archives the accession number and box numbers are automatically generated. Transfers via the transfer form receive an accession number in the

format AYYYY- numbers beginning with 100 (A2016-100). The form sits in a table of the accessions database until acted upon by the archives staff. Archives staff are alerted about new submissions via email.

Electronic records may also be transferred using the transfer form. Records up to 105MB in size can be attached to the form as a .zip file, which is then downloaded from the library server by the Digital Archivist and Systems Librarian. Records should always be uncompressed (unzipped) before being transferred to the electronic records archive.

3.2 Direct Transfers

The archives also accepts direct transfers that do not make use of the transfer form. For example, analog records may be transferred to the archives when departmental or archives staff clean out offices of terminated employees. Electronic records are transferred directly to archives in coordination with the Digital Archivist and Systems Librarian via museum servers when an accession exceeds the 105MB size limit.

If a transfer form is not used the archives staff create a new accession record directly in the database describing records to the folder level. In these cases, the accession number must start with a zero after the hyphen, example: A2002-002 (as opposed to accessions via the online transfer form, which start with 100).

If the direct transfer contains non-permanent records destined for Iron Mountain archives staff should fill out an electronic transfer form for the accession to ensure the boxes receive the appropriate four digit number to facilitate retrieval.

4. Appraisal

When records arrive at the archives it is necessary to review the contents of all the boxes to determine if permanent and non-permanent records are present, to discard duplicate or unnecessary material, to remove non paper records to AV, photo, oversized, electronic, or cold storage, to determine any preservation hazards such as insects, mold, or nitrate film, and, if necessary, to re-box paper records so they fit properly in the boxes. Material that can be weeded immediately include drafts, routine correspondence such as thank you letters, routine

memoranda such as meeting announcements, routine departmental administrative files, calendars, reference material, miscellany, and records not created by the department. These categories are more fully described in the Policy for Museum Records which can be found on the archives web page and in the policy manual.

Transfers of electronic records also receive an initial appraisal that includes weeding duplicate and unnecessary material (as described above), and noting any unusual file formats or storage requirements.

5. Description

The archives gains intellectual control over materials by accessioning records into the collection. Using an Access database, records are assigned an accession number and are described most often to the folder level. This level of intellectual control at this stage of the records' lifecycle is necessary as only a very small percentage of records are processed, and records scheduled for destruction are not processed, but may be referenced prior to destruction.

5.1 Accession Records

Once the boxes are determined to be properly packed, archives staff officially accept the new transfer and create an accessions record in the Archives_2002 Microsoft Access Database.

After transferring the accession, edit the record accordingly. If necessary, add files to the box list and note any material that has been removed to AV, photo, oversized, electronic, cold storage, or discarded. Boxes must be marked on the short end in pencil with the accession number, department, box number, and destruction date if applicable. If the accession arrived via direct transfer, create a new accession record.

Once an accession is completed a pdf of the accessions report is saved in the electronic records M:\Archives\Accessions Reports. Make sure the pdf contains any Iron Mountain location information.

5.2 Database Fields

Use the following fields to create the accession record:

Accession #: Include the calendar year and the next number based on the last number used.

Office of Origin: A drop down box but additional offices can be typed in case of reorganization.

Size: In cubic feet and/or gigabytes

Onsite: Check if Yes

Location: stack address if the collection or a portion of the collection is on site

Accession date: automatically generated

Contact: The name of the staff member transferring the records, usually a departmental assistant.

Creator: The staff member or members who created the records in the accession. Some departments combine records of different creators.

Description: A brief description of the accession, including date spans.

Disposition: Accessions may be permanent, non-permanent, or stored temporarily for Offices during construction.

Container number: If an accession is to remain on site the boxes can be numbered beginning with #1. Boxes going to Iron Mountain should begin with the next available number which can be determined by the last number generated by the transfer form. For electronic records, container numbers are generally not used.

Record Series: Use the record series under which the file falls according to the department's records retention schedule, or the general records retention schedule.

File name: Type the file name as provided by the office of origin. For electronic records use folder titles. If a transfer does not include any folders create a short description of the records.

Permanent?: Check if yes.

Disposal year: If a file is not permanent, include the year of disposal.

Destroyed?: Check if yes.

Processed?: Check if yes.

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Media: Use the drop down box to describe the media.

Notes: Include any information not noted in other fields, such as if there is more than one folder included in the file name.

IM barcode: If the box is shipped to Iron Mountain, the barcode from the box label provided by Iron Mountain is added here prior to shipment.