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#paperwork

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Abstract

This is history, not bureaucracy, right? I am fairly certain that my methods professor did not mention anything about a thirty-page report, so why the paperwork? In order for Special Collections to request objects for loan from specific institutions, I have to complete what is called a “[General Facility Report](#)” which is a comprehensive document that inquires about facility conditions. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Musselman Library, Gettysburg College, Exhibits Intern, Fortenbaugh Internship, Civil War, Civil War Medicine

Disciplines

Library and Information Science | Museum Studies

Comments

The Interns at Gettysburg College’s Musselman Library captured their internship experiences since the spring of 2011. Over time the blog has featured Fortenbaugh, Smith, and Holley interns. They shared updates on semester long projects, responded to blogging prompts, and documented their individual intern experience.

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#paperwork

October 24, 2013

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This is history, not bureaucracy, right? I am fairly certain that my methods professor did not mention anything about a thirty-page report, so why the paperwork? In order for Special Collections to request objects for loan from specific institutions, I have to complete what is called a "[General Facility Report](#)" which is a comprehensive document that inquires about facility conditions. Why is this necessary for a history major to understand?

Well, let's say you have an object: a Civil War era surgical kit. Think of this kit as your child. If you want to send he/she/ze on a four month field trip, you will probably want to know the nature of the trip and the housing conditions in which your child will be staying. You will want to know if there is central air and heating, if there is adequate lighting for when it gets dark, if the beds are comfortable and clean, if the bathroom facilities are up to par, if the staff taking care of your offspring is gentle, encouraging, and compassionate. You will also want to know what food your child will consume during his/her/zed stay.

The receiving institution will also want to know information about your child. Does he/she/ze have health and/or dental insurance? Does he/she/ze have dietary restrictions or health concerns? The staff might like to know your child's gender and if he/she/ze plays well with the other children. Staff might also like to know your child's favorite color, food, sport, and nervous ticks.

This same type of information is useful to both the lending and receiving institutions involved in loan agreements. Old objects, like children, have certain needs and yes, often come with insurance plans. Lending museums or collectors need to know if our facility has temperature and light control, security, and proper equipment to take care of an object should something happen to it. They might also like to know how big the display case is and which other objects will be in the case with it. Certain items such as those made of cotton or linen are extremely sensitive to light, so the lending museum will need to know how long the object will be on display. Some artifacts are so well worn that they can only handle being in direct or indirect light for a few days before they are irreparably damaged.

My newest task is to complete the General Facility Report so that Special Collections can ask to loan certain objects that we do not have in our collection in Musselman.

While paperwork can be tedious, the most important priority is the safety of each and every object. Exhibits like this and the ones we see in museums are only possible because of the care paid to each artifact. The more we abuse objects from the past, the faster they will deteriorate and be useless to future generations.

Sometimes we have to trudge through unglamorous tasks to make something spectacular. And that is just what I'll do.

Titillating Medical Fact of the Week: Did you know that hospitals during the Civil War would reuse bed-sheets from soldiers no longer in the facility? Of course, they boiled them first, but if you were wounded, you could be sleeping on the sheets of a recent amputee. What's even more curious, these were often cleaner than new sheets! Since people during the 1860s did not yet know about germ theory, what they thought was simply cleaning linens to rid them of a stench actually sterilized them. You would want a boiled, used sheet if you were alive in the nineteenth century! The same idea goes for sutures. Typically, stitches would be made with thin silk thread that was dirty and caused infection. When supplies ran thin, surgeons would boil horsehair (to make it more pliable and less likely to break). They began to realize that patients who were sewn up with the horsehair had lower rates of infection than those treated with thread. Though they did not know the reason for this, they recognized the difference. Snaps for wartime innovation!

<http://blogging.musselmanlibrary.org/2013/10/>