

Collections Terms

This glossary was created for the Hoosier Heritage Alliance survey and can be found on the Indiana Historical Society's Web site in the Local History Services department (www.indianahistory.org). The definitions used are taken from the sources cited. They have been edited to maintain a consistent style.

Accession/Accessioning:

The formal and legal documentation of an incoming repository transaction, including a gift, purchase, exchange, transfer or field collection. Also includes establishment of legal title and/or custody. (1)

Accession file:

File that contains the documentation for each incoming repository transaction, including all legal records. Often includes the documentation of a deaccession. (1)

Accession number:

A unique number assigned to a collection or, in some cases, an object for purposes of identification, not description. (2),(3)

Acid free:

According to Griset and Kodack, "a material that has a pH of 7.0 or higher (an alkaline), since acids can weaken cellulose in paper, cloth, and board and lead to embrittlement." (3)

Acquisition/Acquisitioning:

A process to obtain custody of an object, document or collection that involves physical transfer. (1)

Active stabilization:

Interventive treatment action taken to increase the stability or durability of an object. (1)

Ambrotype:

A picture taken on a plate of prepared glass. Light colors are represented in silver, while shades are produced by a dark background that is visible through the unsilvered portions of the glass. (4)

Archives:

A repository containing historical records, often unique or unpublished, that are intended for long-term preservation. (5)

Archival materials:

This term should be used to describe materials that are intended to be long lasting due to their high chemical stability, neutral or slightly alkaline pH, good

aging properties and inertness. The term currently has no standard definition or quantifiable method for verification and is therefore often used improperly on product packaging. (6)

Archival quality (archival boxes):

According to Griset and Kodack, “materials that have been manufactured of inert materials specifically designed to extend the life of artifacts and records by protecting them from agents of deterioration.” (3)

Archivist:

Person professionally educated, trained and engaged in the administration and management of archival and manuscript collections. (1)

Assessment, collections:

The process of evaluating a collection for the purpose of documenting its condition, relating it to the mission and goals of the repository and determining courses of action regarding its care and management. (1)

Born digital:

Materials that originated in the digital realm and have no print or analog counterpart. (1)

Botanical:

Of or relating to plant material. (1)

Broadsides:

Single-sheet notices or announcements printed on one or both sides, intended to be read unfolded. (7)

Buffer:

According to Buck and Gilmore, “a substance containing both a weak acid and its conjugal base, used to restrain the acid migration of a material. Acid-free paper products are often buffered.” (2)

Catalog:

A listing of objects or groups of associated records with descriptive details, including provenience information, that is arranged systematically. (1)

Catalog record:

A finding aid that contains a descriptive summary of an item or a set of records. The summary commonly contains information such as record storage location, author, title, history and contents. See also Finding Aid. (8)

Cellulose nitrate film:

According to the National Park Service, “a flexible film base used for motion picture film and photographic negatives between about 1890 and 1955. This film

base self-destructs over time going through five stages of deterioration. The film should be handled with gloves, foldered in buffered sleeves, boxed, placed in ziplock bags and removed to off-site (non museum storage) cold storage in a freezer.” (8)

Collections:

The collected objects of a museum, acquired and preserved because of their potential value as examples, as reference material or as objects of aesthetic or educational importance. (9)

Collecting plan:

Term used by repositories. It is a document, usually part of a repository’s acquisition policy, that specifically details what the repository is going to collect in order to fulfill its mission, goals and scope of collections. (1)

Collection policy:

A written statement that defines a repository’s collection scope and specifies the subject and format of materials to be collected. Collection policies guide the process of appraisal. May include policies and procedures for managing acquisitions, deaccessions, incoming and outgoing loans, etc. (4)

Collections management:

The management and care of collections with concern for their long-term physical well being and safety. Includes issues of conservation, access and use and inventory, as well as management of the overall composition of the collection(s) in relation to the repository’s mission and goals. (1)

Collections manager:

A trained professional who is responsible for any and all aspects of collections care. Specific responsibilities vary by institution, but can include day-to-day care of and access to collections, cataloging and information management. (1)

Condition report:

An accurate, descriptive report of an object’s or document’s state of preservation at a moment in time. Assists in planning for conservation treatment. (1)

Conservation:

Measures taken to prolong the life of an object or document and its physical, historic and scientific integrity as long as possible in its original form. May involve chemical stabilization or physical strengthening. Treatments should be fully tested, reviewed and recorded by professional conservators. (1)

Conservator:

A person trained in the theoretical and practical aspects of preventive conservation and in performing treatments to prolong the lives of objects and documents. Often specializes in a particular class of objects or materials. (1)

Copyright:

Legal recognition of special intellectual property rights, distinct from the right of possession, that a creator may have for their work. Copyright exists for original works in tangible media and covers the rights to reproduce, adapt, distribute, perform or display the work. (1)

Cultural property:

Objects, collections, specimens, structures or sites identified as having artistic, historic, scientific, religious or social significance. (6)

Cultural resources:

Materials or remains, including historic and archaeological objects, that compose a culture's non renewable heritage. Also includes ethnographic objects, historic and prehistoric buildings, structures, sites and landscapes. (1)

Curation:

According to the National Park Service, the process of "managing and preserving a collection according to professional museum and archival practices." (10)

Curation agreement:

Document/contract between two parties (one usually a repository) detailing the curation of a collection(s). It includes details on the state of the collection when given to the repository, work to be done at the repository, responsibilities to the collection for both parties, costs, ownership and issues/details on access and use of the collection. (1)

Curator:

A trained professional who is usually responsible for the care, exhibition, research and enhancement of repository collections. Specific duties vary between repositories. (1)

Daguerrotypes:

An image made on a light-sensitive, silver-coated metallic plate. (4)

DAT:

Digital audio tape

Data Logger (HOBO™):

An electronic device that records data of humidity/temperature over a period of time at specified intervals. (11)

Deaccession:

The legal, permanent removal of an object, document, specimen or collection from a repository. Requires full documentation of the process. (1)

Dead storage:

Method for storing objects that are not actively used. It usually involves less expensive, off-site facilities where collections are relatively inaccessible. (1)

Deed of gift:

A contract that transfers ownership from one person or institution to another. Should include any conditions placed on the gift, although these are generally discouraged by the receiving repository. (1)

Digital Image:

The file produced through the process of imaging, whereby a document or photo is scanned by computer and converted from a human-readable format to a computer-readable, digital format. (4)

Disaster Preparedness:

The state in which an agency is prepared for disaster. Preparedness involves a plan for avoiding and recovering from a disaster. See also Disaster Recovery. (4)

Disaster Recovery:

The retrieval and preservation of records damaged or distressed by an unexpected catastrophic occurrence such as fire or flooding. The recovery process includes repairing buildings and restoring an agency's critical business functions. (4)

Documentation:

The records that document the creation, history, acquisition by the museum and subsequent history of all objects in a museum collection. Such records include provenance and provenience documents, acquisition documents, conservation reports, cataloging records, images and research papers both created by the holding institution and by previous owners or independent researchers, etc. Also used for the process of gathering this information. (1)

Energy saver bulbs (compact fluorescent):

A CFL is an energy-saving, long-life fluorescent lightbulb that fits into a standard lightbulb socket. The tube is filled with a gas that emits light when an electrical charge is applied. (12)

Ephemera:

Transient everyday items, usually printed and on paper, which are manufactured for a specific limited use, then often discarded. Includes everyday items that are meant to be saved, at least for a while, such as keepsakes and stock certificates. (7)

Electronic records:

Records created, generated, sent, communicated, received or stored by electronic means. See also Government Records. (4)

Ethafoam®:

Product name for a polyethylene foam that is produced in sheets. Used for shelf liners in storage and support of objects. Can be carved into specific shapes, which makes it useful for supporting odd-shaped objects. (1)

Facility report:

Report prepared by a repository that outlines its facilities, environmental controls and monitoring and collections management procedures. Lending institutions often use these reports to decide whether a borrowing institution is able to properly care for and manage loaned objects. The standard form can be obtained from the American Association of Museums. (1)

Finding aid:

According to the National Park Service, (1) “A broader term for any format of textual or electronic tool that assists researchers in locating or using archival and manuscript collections. Basic finding aids include guides (for example, repository, collection and subject guides), descriptive inventories, accession registers, card catalogs, special lists (for example, shelf and box lists), indexes and (for machine-readable records) software documentation. (2) The file guides, indexes, registers and filing system aids produced by the records creator, usually referred to as ‘control records’ or ‘contemporaneous finding aids.’ (3) The specific type of descriptive tool described [in the text above].” (8)

Fluorescent:

Tubular light, generally with two prongs on each end. *See also Energy saver bulbs* (13)

Footcandle:

An English system measure of the intensity of light, based on the light of one candle at distance of one foot. Used to express recommended light levels for light-sensitive media and paper, often in the range of 5 to 10 footcandles. A metric measure of light uses a unit called the lux, which is approximately 10 times greater than a footcandle, resulting in recommended ranges of 50 to 100 lux. (6)

Genealogy group:

A group of people dedicated to advancing genealogy or the study of one’s family tree. (13)

Genre:

“Refers to the document’s style, content and form, including the document’s purpose (advertisements, presentation album), the document’s viewpoint (panoramic view), broad topical category (landscape, still life, portrait, or street scene), method of representation (abstract, figurative), circumstances of creation (amateur works, student works) or function (dance cards, cigarette cards, death certificates).” (8)

Glass plate negative:

See *Plate (glass) negatives*.

Historic preservation:

Management and preservation of buildings, sites, structures, objects and landscapes that have historical or cultural significance. (1)

Historic value:

Records that have historical value provide information about the past. They often document the development of government and its policies, provide unique evidence of the lives and activities of people, describe social and economic conditions and record the development of community and business. (4)

Historical society:

A nonprofit organization devoted to preserving the historical record of a place, institution, people, activity or thing. (5)

Humidification:

Application of small amounts of moisture in an enclosed humidification chamber to relax paper fibers so that a document can be gently unrolled or unfolded and then flattened. (1)

Hygrothermograph:

Device used to measure and record relative humidity (RH) and temperature levels in one area over a continuous period. Depending on the machine, it can record levels for one day, one week or one month. (1)

Incandescent:

A source of artificial light that works by incandescence. An electrical current passes through a thin filament, heating it and causing it to glow. The enclosing glass bulb prevents oxygen in the air from reaching the hot filament, which otherwise would be destroyed rapidly by oxidation. (12)

Information management:

The development and maintenance of integrated information systems and the optimization of information flow and access. In repositories, this most often applies to the systems (manual or computerized) that hold collections information. This may include accession, catalog and/or inventory records. (1)

Integrated pest management:

The selection, integration and implementation of a variety of approaches to prevent and solve pest problems in the most efficient and ecologically sound manner. A decision-making process that helps one decide if a treatment is necessary and appropriate, where the treatment should be applied and what strategies should be integrated for immediate and long-term results. (1)

Intellectual rights/Intellectual property rights:

Non physical (intangible) rights to an object or record that exist independently from ownership of the physical item. They include copyrights, images and rights to use. (1)

Intervention/Interventive materials:

Materials, such as consolidants, fumigants, acids and other chemicals used for the treatment of objects and records, including the addition of preservatives or the removal of agents of deterioration. (1)

Inventory:

An itemized listing of objects in a repository. It may also be the process of physically locating objects through several different types of inventory: complete, sectional and spot. (1)

Insect damage:

Physical damage to support and/or media as a result of destructive contact with insects. Damage may appear as surface thinning, losses or as accretions, such as flyspecks. (6)

Library:

An academic, public or school library housing a collection or group of collections of materials organized and maintained for use (consultation, viewing, research, etc.), that is organized to facilitate access by students or the general public and is staffed by librarians and other personnel trained to provide services to meet user needs. (5)

Light damage:

Reduction of stability of paper support and media caused by (long-term or high-intensity) exposure to light and ultraviolet radiation. Wavelengths in the ultraviolet region of the electromagnetic spectrum are considered most harmful to objects, however, all wavelengths of light are damaging. Light damage is cumulative and its effects may continue in the dark, after intermittent exposure. (6)

Loan:

Delivery of personal or institutional property by one person or institution to another in trust for a specific purpose. This is done with the understanding that when that purpose is accomplished the property is returned to the owner. (1)

Lux:

Lumens per square meter. Lux is a measure for visible light. See *Footcandle*. (1)

Machine-readable records:

Archives and records with informational content that is usually in code and is most efficiently read with the aid of a machine. Coded information is retrievable only by a machine. If not coded, the information may be read without the

assistance of a machine. For example, microformat is a machine-readable record, yet may be read without a machine. (1)

Material remains:

According to the National Park Service, “artifacts, objects, specimens and other physical evidence that are excavated or removed in connection with efforts to locate, evaluate, document, study, preserve or recover a prehistoric or historic resource.” (9)

Metadata:

According to Vogt O’Connor, metadata “refers to documentation about data, such as descriptions of electronic files that effectively tell you the format, structure, contents and authority of the materials.” (14)

Microfiche:

A sheet of film on which a printed book, journal, newspaper or other publication that has been reduced in size. (15)

Microfilm:

A roll of film on which a printed book, journal, newspaper or other publication that has been reduced in size. (15)

Microform:

A printed book, journal, newspaper or other publication that has been reduced in size so that it must be read with special equipment. (12)

Migrating data:

Data migration is the process of transferring data between storage types, formats or computer systems. (1)

Mission statement:

Also called a “statement of purpose,” a document drawn up by a repository to succinctly outline its purpose, current scope and uses of its collections and immediate goals. (1)

Mold:

A surface growth of fungus that may have varying color, shape and configuration. It generally proliferates in damp conditions (60 percent relative humidity or greater) where there is little air circulation. Damage caused by mold includes staining and loss of strength. (6)

MP3:

Compact audio and video file format. The small size of the files makes them easy to download and e-mail. Format used in portable playback devices. (16)

Museum:

Museums, in the broadest sense, are institutions that hold their possessions in trust for mankind and for the future welfare of the human race. Their value is in direct proportion to the service they render the emotional and intellectual life of the people. (17)

Mylar®:

Trade name (DuPont) for a plastic polyethylene terephthalate (polyester) sheet. Mylar is characterized by its transparency, colorlessness, high-tensile strength and chemical stability. (1)

Negative:

A photographic image with reversed polarity or, if colored, tonal values that are complementary to those of the original. (4)

Non cultural artifacts or materials:

General term applied to items collected at archeological sites that are natural (not man-made), but still have cultural or archeological significance. Includes soil samples, shell and floral remains. (1)

Numismatic artifact:

Relating to coins, currency or payment methods. (18)

Object:

An item that forms part of an institution's collections either permanently (in which case it would be recorded in the accessions register) or temporarily (e.g., a deposit or loan). For natural science collections the term "specimen" is used. (1)

Off site storage:

A storage facility located separately from the main storage facility. Off site storage is ideal for infrequently used collections, master copies, copies of inventories and collection locators and disaster plans. (4)

Paleobotany:

Study of ancient plants from fossil remains and other evidence. Also called Paleoethnobotany. (19)

Paleontological:

Of or relating to forms of pre existing life as represented by the fossils of plants, animals and other organisms. (19)

PastPerfect™:

Collection and membership management software. For cataloging archive, library, historic objects, art object, natural history, archaeology and photograph collections and tracking contacts along with membership information. (20)

Pest management:

See *Integrated pest management*.

pH level /pH scale:

A logarithmic measure of the acidity or alkalinity of material. The pH scale goes from 0 to 14 with each number indicating a tenfold increase or decrease from the next number. Neutral is pH 7. Numbers below neutral indicate acidity. Numbers above neutral indicate alkalinity. (1)

Philatelic artifact:

Of or relating to adhesive postage stamps. (21)

Phonodisc:

Phonodisc is the term for sound recordings in the old vinyl format. (22)

Phonograph cylinder:

Commonly known simply as “records” in their era of greatest popularity (ca. 1888–1915), these cylinder shaped objects had an audio recording engraved on the outside surface that could be reproduced when the cylinder was played on a mechanical phonograph. (23)

Photocopying policy:

Written policy describing photocopying hours, cost, response time and what can and cannot be photocopied. (4)

Plate (glass) negative:

Gelatin dry glass plate negatives, as they are officially known, were the first mass-produced, ready-to-use film made available to photographers. The film, or plates, were made by coating a piece of glass with an emulsion that would remain light sensitive when dry, a great leap forward over previous processes that required the film to be used before the emulsion dried. (24)

Polyethylene (PE):

A chemically stable, flexible, transparent or translucent plastic. May be found in the form of film, sheets, foam and rods. It is widely used for making archival quality plastic bags and sleeves. (1)

Polypropylene:

Similar to polyethylene only stiffer and more heat resistant. Commonly used to make sleeves for slides or film or small containers. (1)

Polyurethane:

An unstable polymer that should not be used for storage or in repositories. Tends to off-gas, which can create chemical reactions on or in objects. (1)

Preservation group/society:

A group of people dedicated to the preservation of one or more historic buildings or sites. (13)

Preventive care/Preventive conservation:

Non interventive actions taken to prevent damage and minimize deterioration of an object. These include monitoring, recording and controlling environmental conditions; inspecting and recording the condition of objects; establishing an integrated pest management program; practicing proper handling, storage, exhibit, housekeeping and packing and shipping techniques; integrated pest management; emergency preparedness and response; and reformatting/duplication. (6)

Preservation:

The protection of cultural property through activities that minimize chemical and physical deterioration and damage, as well as prevent loss of informational content. The primary goal of preservation is to prolong the existence of cultural property. (6)

Proposal (conservation):

A treatment proposal or treatment plan submitted to a client for approval. (13)

Provenance:

The background and history of ownership for an object or records. Generally used for works of art, historical objects and archival records. (1)

Provenience:

In archeology, it is the specific geographic or spatial location (either in two-dimensional or three-dimensional space) where an object was found. (1)

Records:

Recorded information including data in computer systems created or received and maintained by an organization or person in the transaction of business or the conduct of affairs and kept as evidence of such activity. (4)

According to the National Park Service, "federal records are defined as all books, papers, maps, photographs, machine readable materials, or other documentary materials, regardless of physical form or characteristics, made or received by an agency of the United States Government under Federal law or in connection with the transaction of public business and preserved or appropriate for preservation by that agency or its legitimate successor as evidence of the organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, operations, or other activities of the Government or because of the informational value of data in them." (10)

Records management:

The process involved in determining the status, value and disposition of

administrative records throughout their lifetime (for example, active or inactive). Also involves scheduling records for their ultimate disposition. (1)

Registrar:

An individual responsible for the development and implementation of procedures and policies affecting the acquisition, management and disposition of collections. A registrar also usually maintains all collection documentation, including inventory and loans. Specific duties vary between institutions. (1)

Rehousing:

Removal from damaged/destroyed/deteriorated storage and placed in a safer environment. (1)

Relative humidity (RH):

The measure of moisture in the air in relation to the saturation point of the air at its current temperature. RH is measured as a percentage of the absolute humidity divided by the saturation humidity. (1)

Repair:

Various treatment techniques that restore structural stability and/or visual continuity to a damaged support or media. (6)

Repository:

According to the National Park Service, "a facility such as a museum, archeological center, laboratory or storage facility that is managed by a university, college, museum, or other educational or scientific institution, a federal, state, or local government agency, or Indian tribe that can provide professional, systematic, and accountable curatorial services on a long-term basis." (10)

Research policy:

A written policy regarding the capacity in which staff or volunteers will serve researchers. The research policy often includes information on staff hours, availability for assistance, cost and acceptable request formats. (4)

Risk management:

The planning and use of available resources to minimize overall risk to collections. Involves identifying risks identifying strategies to eliminate or manage risks, and setting priorities for risk elimination and management. In repositories, this involves measures for security, fire control, pests and disaster planning. (1)

Sacred objects:

Specific ceremonial objects that are needed by traditional religious leaders for the practice of traditional religions by their present-day adherents. An important component of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act for American Indians, Native Hawaiians and Native Alaskans. (1)

Scope of collections:

A repository planning document that details the extent of an institution's collections, including what it may acquire in the future to fulfill its mission. (1)

Security copy:

According to Griset and Kodack, a "duplicate copy of original documentation that is on archival paper and is stored in a separate location from the original." (3)

Series:

According to the National Park Service, "a group of documents arranged or maintained as a unit within a file system because of their shared circumstances of creation, receipt, or use. An example of a list of series would be: 1) incoming correspondence, 2) outgoing correspondence, 3) bills and check receipts, 4) photographs, and 5) legal documents." (8).

Stabilization:

Minimal treatment procedures intended to maintain the integrity of an object and to minimize deterioration. (6)

Tintypes:

A positive photograph made directly on an iron plate varnished with a thin sensitized film. Also called a ferrotype. (4)

Tyvek®:

A DuPont product manufactured from spunbonded polyethylene used for tagging and labeling objects. The product comes in sheets or as precut tags. (1)

Ultraviolet (UV) rays:

Light rays, not visible to the human eye, that can cause permanent damage through fast color degradation, structural weakening and embrittlement of objects. UV rays are found in natural sunlight and in some artificial light sources (such as fluorescent lamps). (1)

Watermark:

A watermark is a recognizable image or pattern in paper that appears lighter when viewed by transmitted light (or darker when viewed by reflected light, atop a dark background). There are two main types of watermark, the Dandy Roll process and the more complex Cylinder Mould process. A watermark is very useful in the examination of paper because it can be used for dating, identifying sizes, mill trademarks and locations and the quality of a paper. (25)

Web page:

A document, such as the home page of a Web site, on the World Wide Web. (4)

Web site:

A site (location) on the World Wide Web. Every Web site contains a home page

that the viewer sees when they enter a site. A Web site also contains other pages or documents, and is owned and managed by an individual, company or organization. (4)

Zoological:

Of or relating to animals.

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