

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT



Cuyahoga County Archives

Innovative Archives Storage System Helps Piece Together a 30,000-Piece Puzzle

CHALLENGE

Since January of 1978, the Cuyahoga County Archives had been squeezed into the rooms of the Robert Russell Rhodes House – a Victorian, Italianate mansion built in 1874. As its number of collected records and media grew and the space available for organized storage got smaller and smaller, the Archives started considering moving to a new location.

When the County decided to divest itself of the mansion (along with several other properties) as part of an expense reduction plan, finding that next home for the archives became a necessity. It was a welcome decision for the in-house archivists, who recognized that the organization's celebrated collection of volumes, documents, and maps – representing 26 separate agencies – had far outgrown its current home.

SOLUTION

The County eventually selected a site that was previously a warehouse for the Halle Brothers Department Store chain. With the chain now defunct, the six-story building provided the Archives with a blank canvas – and plenty of space to grow. Two of the floors were already occupied by the Cuyahoga County Board of Elections, while the Department of Children and Family Services was located on the fourth floor.

While an architecture firm and interior designers worked together to convert the space to a workable venue for its new tenants, the plan for shelving and collection storage was directed to Patterson Pope. For County Archivist Judith Cetina, their input was a crucial part of the process.

"The first time I walked into this building, I couldn't imagine what it would look like once it was redesigned for us," she said. "It was just a large, open space that looked like a factory."

Patterson Pope account representative John McLaughlin spent weeks surveying the Archives' contents. Items were counted, weighed and measured. At the archivists' request, the new shelving would order collections by type, size, and associated agency.

"This was a unique project in that we used Spacesaver products exclusively," said McLaughlin. "Throughout the space – on the 3rd and 5th floors of the building – we used 4-post stationary shelving and Spacesaver storage cabinetry with drawers. The shelving had several different elevations with clear heights to accommodate newly installed lighting elements and HVAC installations."

Today, the 35,000 square foot space comfortably houses items for 26 sub-agencies. The Archives welcomes researchers from near and far, each relishing the chance to look through records and media recollecting almost 210 years of Cuyahoga history.

“They’ve got books that weigh a pound, and they’ve got old maps that weigh 40 to 50 pounds each. We had to right-size the shelving to accommodate the weights, heights and sizes, and then fit it all in there.”

John McLaughlin
Account Representative
Patterson Pope

ACHIEVEMENT

“It was like putting together a giant puzzle,” said McLaughlin.

Since its Grand Opening in September, 2018, the newly housed Cuyahoga County Archives has welcomed its public with open arms.

“I look around here and I’m just amazed,” said Cetina. *“We are really pleased with everything. It’s clean. It’s attractive. Everything has its place. We had people come through for our opening and received really positive responses. People love the new space – especially those who are able to compare it to the space we had in the*

mansion. I saw something online recently where someone said that they were so jealous of our new space. I never thought we’d get response like that.”

From births and deaths records, to marriage licenses and land records to wills and estates and both civil and criminal court records... they’re all here, properly housed, clearly organized, and eager to share their historical significance with anyone and everyone.

“We’re so appreciative of everything Patterson Pope has done for us,” added Cetina. *“I guess you could call it a good, old-fashioned success story.”*

