Spacesaver®

Case Study:

SAVING A STATE'S CULTURAL TREASURES

Designing a shared off-site preservation facility

Storage Solved®

Historic Challenges

Shared preservation facilities are becoming more popular as museums and other institutions look for more efficient ways to improve collections care, conserve resources, and share costs. That was the case in this capital city, where museum staff at several state-funded entities had been making the best possible use of less-than-ideal collections storage spaces for decades. They were using overcrowded storage areas, offsite overflow facilities, and the basement of a former downtown department store. Few of those spaces had been designed specifically for collections care, and staff were concerned that they weren't able to provide the best possible preservation conditions.

"We had run out of space. Things couldn't be organized the way we wanted them to be anymore; we just had to fit them in where we could find a place."

- Collections Manager

The need for better collections storage became apparent back in the 1970s, when a shared purpose-built facility was first proposed. Due to ongoing budget constraints, facility planning didn't begin in earnest until 30 years later. After another ten years of planning, design work, and construction, the new shared preservation facility was ready for occupancy.

Challenges:

- *Inadequate temperature and humidity controls*
- *Overcrowded storage areas*
- *No room to expand*
- *Aging plumbing and other infrastructure*
- *Insufficient security*

Solution:

Modern, climate-controlled shared facility with custom storage systems.

A State-of-the-Art Solution

The new shared preservation facility is by far the largest and most technologically advanced facility of its type in the state. It houses 500,000 artifacts and 200,000 books in nearly 200,000 square feet of collections storage space. It also features state-of-the-art climate control systems, modern security, and storage equipment that was designed specifically for the facility and the collections.

Designing even a small collections storage area presents challenges, so a facility of this size and scope required years of research and planning, as well as careful coordination among the various entities.

TIP: Consider Object Transport within the Building

The building's corridors are ten feet wide to accommodate the large objects that need to be moved into and out of storage areas for research, conservation, or exhibitions.

Historic Blueprints

Because historic blueprints are fragile and can contain chemical residues, these original plans for the state capitol and the governor's mansion are stored in non-off-gassing steel flat-file cabinets. The cabinets are stacked to save space.

TIP: Plan Workspaces

In addition to planning for collections storage and conservation labs, be sure to plan work areas for the day-to-day work of rehousing projects, accessioning new objects, and temporarily displaying objects for curators or visiting researchers.

Work Table

Archives staff with limited space need multi-purpose work areas. A movable work table provides a flat surface to lay out architectural plans and other documents, and it can be rolled out of the way to create a large open area to receive and process materials. This table features flat file cabinets on one side and 4-Post shelving on the other. Staff turn the mechanical-assist handle to move it along rails installed in the floor.

"It seems like nobody ever has enough workspace, so this is a luxury for us. I can leave projects out overnight and not have to worry that someone will come in and need the space."

- Collections Manager

Framed Art

Art screens are the preferred way to store framed paintings and other hanging art. The facility has two types of art screens: wall-mounted art screens for smaller collections, and nested art screens on carriage-and-rail systems for a larger collection that needed to be compactly stored in a limited space.

TIP: Streamline Processes

Moving to a new facility or collections area can be the perfect opportunity to photograph artifacts, inspect housing, and conduct other essential tasks. That was the case in this move, where staff developed streamlined processes to inventory, image, house, and pack objects.

Photographing objects was helpful in two ways. First, the photographs could be used to document the objects' condition if damage were to occur during transport. After the move, the photos were still useful: they made the collections accessible online, and staff could send photos to researchers in response to requests.

Cold Storage

Microfilm masters, 16mm film, videotapes, and other items that require cold storage are stored in a room that's kept at 40 degrees and 35% relative humidity. To prevent damage from condensation, a transition room is used to acclimate items that need to be moved to or from cold storage.

Large Objects

Large and heavy objects present special storage challenges. To keep them protected, organized, and accessible, furniture and other large objects are stored on RaptorRAC™ Widespan Shelving mounted on high-density Spacesaver systems.

Textiles

Depending on the specific storage needs of particular flags, quilts, clothing, and other textiles, objects are stored either in oversized drawers, on rolled textile racks, or on hanging rods. These solutions prevent the creases that can form along folds.

"That turned out to be one of the best parts of the move: not panicking about having enough space. I knew that even if my estimates were off, we would have enough room."

- Collections Manager

TIP: Plan to Grow

Anticipating future growth is crucial when planning a facility that's intended to last decades. The floors in this facility were designed to bear the weight of compact storage systems, and rails were laid throughout the building. In the future, shelving and cabinets can be placed on movable carriages for even more space savings as collections grow.

Saddles

Although saddles seem sturdy and rugged, they're made of leather and other natural materials and are prone to degradation over time. Saddle mounts keep them properly supported.

Swords

To protect elaborate ornamentation, swords are supported by custom brackets on cantilever wall-mounted columns.

TIP: Be Realistic with Time Estimates

When planning a new facility, making the best use of space is usually the main focus. That's fine, but be sure to plan your time, as well. The planning process and the move will likely consume more time than you think. "Anyone who's in this line of work is probably going to have the type of personality where it's hard to not be in control," said one of the collections managers on this project. "You're in charge of where absolutely everything is and it's difficult to delegate on a big, important project like this. Looking back, I realize that I probably took too much on. I probably should have asked for more help or budgeted twice as much time."

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Military Artifacts

The facility's extensive military collection is housed on Spacesaver shelving, which allows for the entire collection to be organized and visible.

TIP: Count on your Spacesaver Consultant's Expertise

The local Spacesaver consultant collaborated with the staff over a period of several years. "I would tell him exactly what I needed," said a collections manager. "I'd spend a lot of time counting drawers and try to guess: 'OK, this is how much we have so this is how much we need, and this is how much I think we'll need plus ten years.' Then he would come back with drawings and I would make edits as needed."

Archival Boxes

Boxed objects are stored on 4-Post shelving, which can be easily reconfigured on the fly to ensure that space is used efficiently.

Bound Materials

Approximately 200,000 books and other bound materials are stored by size instead of subject. This creates significant space savings over thousands of feet of shelving.

Insights and inspiration for your collections storage project.

At Spacesaver, we understand that planning for new construction or renovation can be a daunting experience. Although every project has its challenges, we bring the expertise you need to create a collections storage system that will protect your collections now and into the future. Our in-house teams of engineers, project managers, and manufacturing craftspeople are ready to work with your local Spacesaver consultant to design, build, and install effective storage solutions that will stand the test of time.

As you think about designing a new or renovated collections area, contact us to arrange a free consultation. You'll learn about your options and gain insight and inspiration from others who have undertaken similar projects.

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