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Under Construction: Registration Practice during Museum Building

by

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Dr. Janet Marstine, Faculty Advisor

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Abstract

In the past twenty years, museums have expanded like never before in order to accommodate larger collections and increased visitorship. With this building frenzy, museums must handle expanding physically while protecting their precious collections. Museums, in other words, must maintain registration practice in the face of major change and upheaval of the physical facilities.

With this thesis, I attempt to answer the question: How do registrars manage collection care issues during museum building projects? By discussing three relevant case studies, I analyze the involvement of registrars and collection managers throughout the construction process, from the initial planning phases to the inhabitation of the new(er) space. First, I examine the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston expansion in 2000 in order to answer some key questions. How do registrars make sure the care of the collection is guaranteed during the planning phase? What ideas are proposed at the initial moments? Then I look at The Morgan Library & Museum's Renzo Piano-designed renovation from 2006. How do they prepare the collection for construction? How do registrars handle the logistical problems during renovation? Finally, I discuss the 2007 expansion at the Morris Museum in Morristown, New Jersey. How do registrars return to normalcy once a project is completed? What kind of issues do they face after moving into the newer space? How has the physical change affected the institution? For all three case studies, the building project allowed the museum to rethink both itself as an institution and as a collection.

This thesis thus synthesizes both museum building and collection management by offering theoretical discussion and practical guidelines for registrars and collection

managers. Having practical advice and guidance for the building process would be invaluable to any museum, and its registrar or collection manager, looking to expanding their collection care and storage areas.

Acknowledgements

This project would not be as rich as it is without the assistance of those who gave their precious time for interviews. Their frank discussions have been simply invaluable to this thesis, and I am incredibly indebted to the individuals acknowledged here.

To *Kathleen Crain*, Exhibitions Registrar at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, thank you for sharing your experience during the initial design phases of the gorgeous Audrey Jones Beck Building. This thesis actually stems from a conversation I had with you last October. In our brief time together, you mentioned your involvement during the expansion of the museum several years before. Your enthusiasm and knowledge about such an undertaking left an impression on me and helped me shape this thesis topic.

To *Patricia Courtney*, Associate Registrar at The Morgan Library & Museum, I greatly appreciate your time to describe the preparations that occurred at the museum. I value our friendship which began when I interned at The Morgan during the Spring of 2007. My internship there was a wonderful learning experience as I was exposed to multiple facets of a modern museum. As I developed my thesis, The Morgan Library & Museum was a natural choice to include.

To *Jenny Rebecca Martin*, Collection Manager at the Morris Museum, thank you for providing such a frank discussion about the collection care issues surrounding the construction for the recent expansion. Your dedication to the museum, and to its collection, is remarkable in light of the difficulties you faced throughout the project at the Morris Museum. I wish you only the best for your future endeavors.

To *Steve Miller*, Executive Director at the Morris Museum, thank you for answering my outstanding questions about your institution so thoroughly. Your insights

into and comments about the Morris Museum's transformation certainly contributed to my discussion about the institution. I appreciate the opportunity to learn from you not only as a museum professional but also as an adjunct professor in Seton Hall's graduate program.

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Finally, I would like to thank my personal support group throughout this process. Without them cheering me on, I may not have been as motivated as I was. To my parents, *Ralph and Pam Meyer*, thank you for being my parents, for loving and supporting me no matter what, even when I moved across the country to pursue my graduate education. To *Matt McCaslin*, my love and my best friend, thank you for being there to listen despite the physical distance. And to my advisor, *Janet Marstine*, thank you for guiding me through this difficult process. Your thoughtful suggestions and encouraging words kept me working until the end.

List of Abbreviations

AAM	American Association of Museum
MFAH.....	Museum of Fine Arts, Houston
RC-AAM.....	Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museums
The Morgan.....	The Morgan Library & Museum

Introduction: Facing the Collection

A Global Phenomenon

In 1998, the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle in Paris, one of the three leading natural history museums in the world, was in dire straits. The museum needed a major building renovation for the safeguarding and care of its collection of over 60 million specimens. "Their collections [were] deteriorating, and there [was] an urgent need for expensive and well organized storage and research conditions to keep specimens free from insects, dust and extremes of temperature and humidity."¹ Lack of appropriate storage space was not the only danger: a fire threatened the collection in 1995. Without any long-term plan to guide the maintenance and upkeep of both the antiquated facilities and the large collection, the French museum found itself in a crisis state. Armed with an interministerial report urging the French government to launch a refurbishment program, the museum's director, Henry de Lumley, proposed a 15 year renovation of the collection, for a total cost of FF2 billion.

Ten years later, the project to renovate the collections is still ongoing. The Parisian museum "exercises a major patrimonial function" by preserving and documenting a large collection of natural history. According to the museum's website:

Preserving such a large part of the planet's patrimony is a large responsibility that has to be handled in a rational and efficient manner.

This is why the policy of renovating and securing the establishment, financed since January 2000 by the Ministry of Youth, National Education and Research, extends to document collections as much as to natural

¹ "Funding for renovation is the top priority." *Nature* 394 (1998): 116.

history collections. ... To do this, the collections project is examining the existing situation, drawing up a list of requirements and proposing an action plan.²

In other words, ten years after the *Nature* report, the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle continues to prepare for improvement by studying the current state of its collections before it actively pursues any sort of renovation. Ten years, however, is a long time; technology that was on the cutting edge a few years ago, for example, could be outdated or obsolete today. Without a guiding strategic plan, the French museum found itself in a difficult position in 1998. The large natural history collection grew out of control without clear collection management policies and procedures while the physical building was not maintained well enough to protect and safeguard the growing collection. Now the institution finds itself playing catch up, trying to define what it needs for the collection and the physical building before pursuing any solution.

The need to renovate old museum spaces for the sake of the collection is, of course, not a purely European phenomenon. American museums have also recently undergone major renovations of physical space. For instance, in 2004, an *Art in America* article announced the completion of the renovations at the Brooklyn Museum. The \$63 million project created a new entrance pavilion as well as “a new 16,000-square-foot basement to house the museum’s climate control equipment and other mechanical

² Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle. “The collections, archives of the planet.” (Paris: Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, 2008). Accessed 14 January 2008 from: http://www.mnhn.fr/museum/foffice/national/national/presentation/rub-missions/ss-missions/fiche-missions.xsp?i=1&nav=liste&idx=1&ARTICLE_ARTICLE_ID=347.

systems.”³ The Brooklyn Museum is but one of many museums, both in the United States and worldwide, to undergo such a physical transformation.

The 2006 Museum Financial Information, produced by the American Association of Museums (AAM), provides some insight into the current state of museum building. The AAM survey received responses from 822 museums, of which only 809 were used for analysis.⁴ According to the published results, “these museums are for the most part actively engaged in ambitious plans for growth. In the past three years [since the previous survey] they have forged ahead with capital campaigns, building improvements and expansions.”⁵ Specifically, almost fifty percent (396 museums) had begun or completed a building construction, renovation or expansion project in the past three years. Comparatively, in 2003, only forty-four percent (356 museums) had done so.⁶

In order to learn more about current museum building trends, I sent an eleven item questionnaire to the Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museums (RC-AAM) listserv. Out of thirty-four responses, twenty-nine percent indicated that their museum had undergone renovation or construction within the past year.⁷ Slightly over twenty-six percent had done so within the past five years while an additional twenty-three percent had done so within the past ten years. More than twenty percent were planning a museum renovation or construction project in the near future. Additionally, out of thirty-nine respondents, the overwhelming majority conducted either a renovation or an

³ “Brooklyn Museum Renovations Complete.” *Art in America* 92 (2004): 152.

⁴ Thirteen responses were from museums not yet open and were excluded because their financial information would be different from already operating museums.

⁵ Elizabeth E. Merritt. *2006 Museum Financial Information*. (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2006), 92.

⁶ Elizabeth E. Merritt. *2003 Museum Financial Information*. (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 2003), 98.

⁷ The number of responses for each question varied. Fifty people began the survey; however, not everyone answered each question. A brief summary of the RC-AAM listserv survey can be found in the attached appendix.

expansion of their museums. Specifically, forty-one percent of the responding museums had planned an expansion or addition (i.e. add to what already existed) while over thirty-eight percent conducted a renovation (i.e. remodel what already existed).⁸ Museums thus are and have been pursuing building projects, whether a renovation or an expansion, within the past several years or even in the near future.

In the preface for the recently updated edition of *Towards a New Museum*, Victoria Newhouse acknowledges the growth of museums in recent years. Referring to her 1998 original text, she writes in 2006, “The phenomenon I referred to eight years ago as the museum’s unequalled proliferation has, if anything, accelerated. . . . Museums worldwide continue to multiply and expand at a rate unequalled at any other time in history.”⁹ The museum building boom is truly a global phenomenon. Focusing specifically on art museums, art journalist Blake Eskin traces this boom to several twentieth-century developments: “an increase in museum attendance, overburdened galleries, elevators, and gift shops.”¹⁰ Other contributing factors include the economic prosperity of the 1990s and a desire to be architecturally innovative. The purpose of the museum has shifted from an elitist institution to a public gathering space, and thus the museums’ buildings must reflect this ideological change. Eskin warns, “Yet as they become more popular and populist, museums must also keep in sight their traditional mission of collecting and displaying art.”¹¹ Museums look to change their physical space to reflect this ideological shift. The Brooklyn Museum, for example, created a new

⁸ Leslie Meyer. *Registration Practice during Museum Building*. Survey of the Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museums listserv. Conducted from 01 March 2008 through 15 March 2008.

⁹ Victoria Newhouse. *Towards a New Museum (expanded edition)*. (New York, NY: Monacelli Press, 2006), 6.

¹⁰ Blake Eskin. “The Incredible Growing Art Museum.” *ARTnews* 100 (2001): 141.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 140.

entrance pavilion in order to become a more welcoming institution. Yet, as they pursue those unsettling building projects, museums must constantly remind themselves of their primary objective: to safeguard a collection of objects for prosperity.

Besides Newhouse and Eskin, other museum professionals have offered commentary on the museum building phenomenon. In his 2002 *Museum News* article, Franklin W. Robinson, Director of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art at Cornell University, presents an inherent conflict surrounding the increase of museum building projects based on his career experience with three museum expansions. Primarily, buildings should be able to store and display the museum's collection. On the other hand, however, the building epidemic, caused in part by a growth in cultural tourism, might cause museums to forget their public obligation. Similar to Eskin's warning, Robinson writes, "We may become so relevant to the self-image of our community ... that we may forget our primary duty—to collect, preserve, and interpret the art of the past and present for everyone who comes through our doors."¹² Thus, Robinson is wary that the new buildings might outshine what is inside, what the museum offers: the collection of objects.

Associate Professor of Museum Studies at George Washington University Martha Morris presents a different perspective regarding the museum building phenomenon.¹³ While Robinson is skeptical, Morris seems optimistic about new construction projects. She writes, "New construction creates dramatic new spaces for programs, collections, and

¹² Franklin W. Robinson. "Forum: No More Buildings!" *Museum News* November/December 2002.

Accessed 09 November 2007 from http://www.aam-us.org/pubs/mn/MN_ND02_NoMoreBuildings.cfm.

¹³ Having worked in museums for over 35 years, including as Deputy Director of the National Museum of American History, Martha Morris' expertise is in museum management, emphasizing on strategic planning and project management. She has extensive experience in collections management policy and practices. Along with Dana Allen-Greil, Ms. Morris also organizes the annual Building Museums symposium hosted by the Mid-Atlantic Association of Museums.

exhibitions. ... These projects are highly visible to the public and probably represent the largest investment of funds, time, and energy a museum can make.”¹⁴ Morris also offers certain factors which contribute to a successful building program: “The best programs have a clear link to organizational strategic planning, support the museum’s vision, are keenly aware of the needs of their communities, and navigate the many challenges in funding and implementation.”¹⁵ Indeed, many building projects are successful because the museums develop clear goals related to the institution’s strategic plan and mission while they maintain high standards of care for the collections. Bringing both collection care issues and long-term goals to the forefront allow the institutions to see themselves and their collections in new and interesting ways.

Cultural Stewards

As both Eskin and Robinson mention above, museums are meant to be the protectors of culture. As one source states, “Museums do function as stewards, responsible for collecting, preserving, interpreting, and displaying collections for the public.”¹⁶ Most museum professionals in the field today uphold this primary goal: to safeguard a collection of objects for prosperity. After the 1984 recommendation by AAM’s Commission on Museums for a New Century that museums renew their commitment to conserving and documenting their collections, registrars and collection managers have been charged with that particular duty. They must maintain a standard of care for the entire collection of the museum, whether on display, in storage, or in transit.

¹⁴ Martha Morris. “Expansionism ... Successes and Failures.” *Museum News* July/August 2004. Accessed 09 November 2007 from http://www.aam-us.org/pubs/mn/MN_JA04_Expansionism.cfm?cs_LoginTime=141329.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Charles Hummel. “The Role of the Registrar in the Museum’s Web.” Rebecca Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore, eds. *The New Museum Registration Methods*. (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1998), xvi.

Museum building, whether it is a renovation of existing space or a new construction, is disruptive not only to the staff and the visitors but also to the collection of the museum. Dust, vibrations, and other construction elements are dangerous to people and to the museum objects. However, registrars are duty-bound to maintain a certain standard of care for the museum's collection. Supported by the AAM's Code of Ethics for Museums, a museum ensures that "collections in its custody are lawfully held, protected, secure, unencumbered, cared for, and preserved."¹⁷ Any kind of physical construction poses a serious threat to that responsibility. When those care standards are challenged by building renovation or construction, what should registrars do? How do they handle the potential threats to the museum's collection during a construction project?

After breaking the construction project into three phases (the planning phase, the design or implementation phase, and the occupancy phase), additional questions are raised. How do the strategic plan, the museum's mission, and the needs assessment all influence the planning phase? What administrative or psychological demands does the preparation phase have on the museum as an institution and on the registrars personally? What compromises or changes to the architectural program occur during the design phase? During construction, what collection care issues arise? How and why are particular decisions in regards to collection management made? What collection care issues arise during initial occupancy? This thesis attempts to answer these specific questions.

¹⁷ American Association of Museums. "Code of Ethics for Museums, 2000." (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1999). Accessed 14 March 2008 from <http://www.aam-us.org/museumresources/ethics/coe.cfm>.

More far-reaching questions stem from these. First, what can others learn from those who experience museum renovation or construction? Hopefully, registrars can use others' first-hand experience to develop their own plan of action to deal with collection management issues during such a project. How has the process affected the museum and its policies and procedures? While answers to this question will vary depending on specific museums, it is expected that the building process, from initial planning to execution, will reaffirm the museum's mission and dedication to safeguard its collection. The building process could possibly affect other areas as well, including registration and collection management. Also, what choices did the registrars have to make during the process? Innovative or simple, the choices made allowed registrars to maintain registration practice.

One thing is certain: Registrars must continue their diligent registration practice and collection management in the face of major change and upheaval of the physical facilities. Museum building projects, in other words, force collection management under a microscope. During such a project, registrars and collection managers are compelled to evaluate and re-evaluate on a daily basis the systems in place which protect and manage the museum's collection. By interacting with the collection on a finite level during such a project, museums see the collection in a new light and thus envision the whole museum in a brand new way as well.

Research regarding museum building ranges from practical guides to theoretical discussions. For example, Victoria Newhouse, in her book *Towards a New Museum*, provides commentary and discussion on recent museum construction projects around the world. In *Museum Design: Planning and Building for Art*, Joan Darragh and James S.

Snyder, on the other hand, provide insights into the entire process of museum building for both new and existing art museums. Darragh and Snyder's book provides an invaluable resource for this thesis as I use the information provided as a starting point to discuss the different phases of museum building projects. Developed in the late 1980s because new museum buildings, while architecturally important, were not meeting the basic functional requirements for art museums, the book *Museum Design* intends "to help [art] museums become informed and knowledgeable clients, able to assume responsibility for the management of the museum-building process and able to create ... a building both aesthetically and functionally appropriate for their needs."¹⁸ Most of these resources are either theoretical in nature, discussing the resulting implications of a museum's choices, or practical, providing general advice on the topic.

Research regarding registration practice takes a practical approach. Considered the textbook for the collection management field, *The New Museum Registration Methods*, for instance, discusses all aspects of the daily responsibilities of a registrar. Similar publications regarding registration and collection management provide practical guidelines for museums and the care of their collections in general. These texts do not discuss registration practice during actual museum building projects.

This thesis thus synthesizes both museum building and collection management by offering theoretical discussion and practical guidelines for registrars and collection managers currently (or in the near future) undergoing a museum building project. Primary research from personal interviews, institutional archives, and surveys of the profession provides information regarding how registrars have dealt with collection care

¹⁸ Nancy L. Pressly. "Introduction." Joan Darragh and James S. Snyder, eds. *Museum Design: Planning and Building for Art*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-4.

issues during their museums' construction. Additional published research provides historical and theoretical frameworks for the subject.

Learning from Examples

Three case studies, chosen for their relevancy to the topic, provide insight into a museum building project at three different phases. First, I discuss the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH) with regards to planning for a museum expansion. Over fifteen years in the making, the addition of the Audrey Jones Beck Building, which opened in March 2000 and was lauded by architectural critics and museum professionals alike, added 192,447 square feet, making the MFAH the sixth largest museum in terms of space in the United States.¹⁹ What ideas were proposed at the initial moments? What decisions were made to result in such a dramatic change? How did the strategic plan influence the new collection storage and display areas? At the MFAH, the building project allowed the growing permanent collection to be utilized in an enriching way as more artwork can be showcased in the new building. After dealing with collection care inadequacies found within the old Caroline Weiss Law Building, the museum registrars devoted much time and effort to the planning of the Beck Building. In so doing, they ensured the new building would be appropriately equipped to handle all of the museum's art collection needs, from storage to display to transportation. Because of the careful planning and informed insight of the MFAH registrars, the museum is now able to employ its permanent art collection more effectively for public programs. While storage areas which meet collection care standards hold the remainder of the collection, museum objects now can be easily transported to and displayed in the larger galleries of the new Audrey Jones Beck Building.

¹⁹ "Houston MFA Expansion Moves Ahead." *Art in America* 87 (1999): 35.

Secondly, I discuss The Morgan Library and Museum (The Morgan), re-opened in 2006 after the Renzo Piano-designed renovation, in view of the preparation phase immediately prior to construction. Located in the heart of New York City, the institution had to protect its large and varied collection during major construction which required excavation to a depth of fifty feet in the bedrock.²⁰ What logistical issues surfaced in preparation for this excavation? How did the physical transformation effect or influence the institution? Ultimately utilizing a complex system of on and off-site storage as well as traveling exhibitions, The Morgan protected its historical collection throughout the process. Continuing an active outgoing loan program and supporting the Reading Room during the construction, the registrar's office supervised and managed constant movement of collection objects. In so doing, the documentation practices used by the registrar have been improved to allow for tracking any and all object movements. By undergoing the building process, The Morgan Library & Museum could see itself not only as a library which preserved the story of its past but also a museum of the twenty-first century which would attract diverse audiences.

Finally, I discuss the Morris Museum in Morristown, New Jersey, in terms of the final phase of a construction project: occupancy. Acquiring the 700 piece collection of mechanical musical instruments and automata from the late Murrough D. Guinness in 2003, the museum opened its doors in November 2007 after a multi-million dollar expansion and renovation. What kind of issues has the collection manager faced since moving into the new space? How did augmenting the museum's collection to such a large extent highlight the strengths and weaknesses of the museum? Deciding to keep the

²⁰ Brett Hansen. "Modern Design Is at Heart of Morgan Library Expansion." *Civil Engineering* 76 (2006): 14.

permanent collection on-site, the museum faced many collection care issues throughout the expansion project. The collection manager at the Morris Museum is still addressing those issues on a daily basis, months after the opening of the new wing. The building project encompassed only the display and storage needs of the Guinness Collection, tabling the storage needs of the museum's remaining permanent collection. However, the Guinness Collection acquisition has allowed for many changes, both physically and psychologically, within the institution itself. For one, the addition has enabled the Morris Museum to transform itself into a physically larger, publicly prominent institution. Yet, at the same time, the addition of the Murtoth D. Guinness Collection reinforces the institution's commitment to the four tenets of art, science, theater and history.

For all three of these case studies, the building project allowed the museum to rethink both itself as an institution and as a collection. As discussed in the following chapters, these case studies highlight the complexities regarding collection management throughout a museum building project, from the initial planning stages to the opening of the new building. Additionally, there are three main concepts registrars and collection managers should take away from this thesis. First, they should understand what a building project entails for the museum at large and for the collection in particular. Second, registrars and collection managers should know what collection care options are available to handle issues during a museum building project. Finally, they should anticipate both physical and psychological transformations as a result of such an undertaking. Overall, my thesis synthesizes two important and relevant topics and, in so doing, provides registrars and collection managers with critical information regarding collection care issues during a museum building project.

Chapter One: Planning for the Future

The Planning Phase at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston

The planning phase is crucial for any museum building project. The process allows a museum to begin the transformation of the idealistic strategic plan into a concrete reality. In so doing, the museum translates the institutional ideals into explicit designs as specified in the architectural program. All this takes considerable time and effort on behalf of the museum's dedicated staff. The case of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, demonstrates that devoting the necessary time and effort to the planning phase will enable a museum to succeed in its building project in multiple ways.

The case of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, is typical of numerous museums across the United States. According to my RC-AAM listserv survey, sixteen out of thirty-eight responses, over forty-two percent, indicated that a museum's current or future building project stems from the institution's strategic or forward plan. As the survey comments indicate, some museums need building maintenance or upgrades for the safety of the collection while others require more object storage space to accommodate a growing collection.¹ Underlying those comments is the concept that a museum must protect and provide adequate facilities for its collection.

Beginning to Build

When a museum decides to undergo a building project, whether it is a new construction, renovation or expansion, it must spend an extensive amount of time planning in addition to daily duties and responsibilities. The planning process is crucial

¹ Leslie Meyer. *Registration Practice during Museum Building*. Survey of the Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museums listserv. Conducted from 01 March 2008 through 15 March 2008. A brief summary of this survey can be found in the attached appendix.

for any building project. In the introduction to *Museum Design: Planning and Building for Art*, Nancy L. Pressly, a consultant for museum strategic planning, puts it succinctly:

Everything that follows depends on the success of the planning stage and the comprehensiveness of the architectural program. Planning not only is time-consuming, but also demands intensive involvement on the part of staff. . . . It necessitates arriving at a consensus of how a museum envisions its future and the image it wishes to convey to the community and the art world at large. Managed well, the planning process can generate the kind of community, board, and staff endorsement necessary to help ensure the project's success.²

Indeed, this phase is vitally important for the success of the entire project. Museum leadership must create a mechanism at the earliest stages to ensure that the staff has a voice throughout the building project. Throughout the process, staff members contribute substantial time and effort, often without any additional compensation. Using this mechanism, museum leadership must consolidate and articulate those ideas from the staff into an architectural program, which is “the primary reference document for client and architect throughout the design and construction project.”³ Without a clear and comprehensive plan for the building project, as outlined in the architectural program, the museum may not attain its goals.

The impetus to undertake a museum building project depends on a specific museum's circumstances. Motivations for such may differ between new museums and existing museums. New museums may need an actual building in which to thrive.

² Nancy L. Pressly. “Introduction.” Joan Darragh and James S. Snyder, eds. *Museum Design: Planning and Building for Art*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 15.

³ *Ibid*, 15.

Existing museums may find that they have outgrown their galleries or their storage areas. In their book *Museum Design: Planning and Building for Art*, Joan Darragh and James Snyder write, “The museums may need to grow or change simply as a result of the physical condition—or physical constraints—of its existing facilities.”⁴ Other motivators include increased programming which requires larger public spaces or the acquisition of a private collection.

Whatever the incentives are for undertaking a building project, ultimately, three main choices are available to museums: renovation, expansion or new construction. For new museums, the idea of new construction seems somewhat self-explanatory; however, for existing museums, this concept involves relocation to a new site. Expansion, on the other hand, requires the annexation of a new facility to an existing one, while renovation “consists of adapting existing structures for rehabilitated use.”⁵ Of course, selection of a particular solution may occur later in the planning process or even in the design process, as dictated by institutional needs, project scope, or budgetary restrictions.

Throughout a building project, a museum, however, should keep the collection paramount. Museums are stewards of their collections, protecting and safeguarding the items for the visitors for perpetuity. Any museum building therefore needs to guarantee that the appropriate care for those collections will be maintained. In both object storage and display areas, as May Cassar, an expert on museum environments, writes, “plans for new buildings or extensions should take into account the needs of the collection for stable relative humidity and temperature provision, the control of light and the elimination of

⁴ Joan Darragh and James S. Snyder. *Museum Design: Planning and Building for Art*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 24.

⁵ *Ibid*, 25.

ultraviolet radiation and all pollution emissions.”⁶ All these elements are potential threats to the safety of collection objects. Without protecting the museum’s collection against these harmful elements, a new museum building may not be successful in achieving the institution’s inherent mission.

The Growing Museum

According to my personal interview with Kathleen Crain, current Exhibitions Registrar and former Preparations Manager at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), all involved with the building project at the MFAH in the late 1990s realized the rising need for the building project, partially driven by the need to showcase the museum’s growing collection of modern and contemporary artwork.⁷ Even as far back as 1989, MFAH leadership was concerned about the museum’s growing collection and the need to exhibit and store it appropriately. In a memorandum directed to a select group of museum staff, dated August 1989, Director Peter C. Marzio stressed, “The permanent collection has become the driving force of the institution. As the collection grows, so does the museum’s responsibility for the care, exhibition, and publication of important artworks.”⁸ According to Director Marzio’s memo, while the 1980s saw the MFAH improve its educational programs to better serve increasing visitorship, the 1990s witnessed the institution grow physically to accommodate not only the increased programming and visitorship but also the growing permanent collection. Collection care

⁶ May Cassar. “Environmental Planning and Control.” Timothy Ambrose and Sue Runyard, eds. *Forward Planning: A Handbook of Business, Corporate and Development Planning for Museums and Galleries*. (London: Museums & Galleries Commission in conjunction with Routledge, 1991), 98.

⁷ The former curatorial department of Twentieth Century Art has recently become the department for Modern and Contemporary Art, incorporating art created in the twenty-first century.

⁸ Peter C. Marzio. “Memorandum Re: Long-Range Plan Draft.” Dated 18 August 1989. From the Archives of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 3.

in terms of storage and exhibition was thus a motivating factor for the building project at the MFAH.

Established in 1900 as the Houston Public School Art League, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, became the first art museum in Texas (and the third in the South) when it opened the doors of the William Ward Watkin-designed building in 1924.⁹ Since then, the museum has undergone four major building campaigns, most notably the 1958 and 1974 additions designed by architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.¹⁰ Considered part of the MFAH's master plan, these two phases expanded the museum's exhibition space and moved the main building entrance from the south to the north façade.¹¹

These building projects not only changed the physical layout of the original building but also allowed for a changing institution: the 1974 Brown Pavilion, specifically the mezzanine level, was initially intended for the museum's growing twentieth-century art collection. With these multiple additions, this building, now known as the Caroline Weiss Law Building, however, became somewhat clumsy for the movement of art, especially the larger pieces of modern and contemporary artwork. With these issues in mind, the MFAH began a long and intensive planning process to add to the developing museum complex.

What is the Planning Process?

There are many, somewhat overlapping stages in the planning phase of a building project. Usually, museum governance first conducts a review of the institution's mission.

⁹ "Milestones in MFAH History, 1900-1959." (Houston, TX: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2008). Accessed 17 March 2008 from <http://www.mfah.org/info.asp?par1=1&par2=1&par3=1&par4=1&par5=1&par6=1&par7=&lgc=1&eid=¤tPage=>.

¹⁰ Mies's role at the MFAH started in 1953 when he designed a 25 year master plan for the museum. He is considered a pioneering master of modern architecture from the second half of the twentieth century.

¹¹ Frances Colpitt. "Space City Takes Off." *Art in America* 88 (2000): 67.

Sound and succinct, the mission statement, according to the book *The New Museum Registration Methods*, “provides focus and direction for collection development and determines resource needs at both institutional and departmental levels.”¹² It identifies the institution, its location and audience, its purpose and how the institution intends to accomplish that purpose. According to Joan Darragh and James S. Snyder, “Any museum building project must spring firmly from a recognition and understanding of that museum’s mission and purpose. . . . This effort [of mission review] initiates and then anchors any building planning process, whether for a new or an existing organization, whether in new or existing facilities.”¹³ For a new museum this stage involves formulating the institution’s mission from scratch, while an existing museum should assess its current mission. Both types will have to then define the needs the new or renovated building will meet.

Once the mission has been reaffirmed, the museum must develop a plan for the institution’s future. Darragh and Snyder write, “Since every judgment that is made in assessing a museum’s mission and its needs affects its future operations, no building planning process should proceed without the concurrent development of a related long-range plan.”¹⁴ This long-range plan, often called the strategic or forward plan, assists the museum to identify areas in need of improvement, to assess strengths and weaknesses within the museum, and to induce management to make the necessary changes to address those issues. Timothy Ambrose, editor of the book *Forward Planning: A Handbook of*

¹² Paisley S. Cato and Stephen Williams. “Administrative Functions: Collection Management Policies.” Rebecca Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore, eds. *The New Museum Registration Methods*. (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1998), 221.

¹³ Joan Darragh and James Snyder. *Museum Design*, 29.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 49.

Business, Corporate and Development Planning for Museums and Galleries, offers this insight:

While the completed [forward] plan will help the museum to improve its effectiveness in a number of different ways, the planning process itself will help provide solutions to the problems which the museum faces. The plan will give the museum a framework within which to work and measure success.¹⁵

The strategic plan, in other words, provides the museum with purpose and direction to achieve its institutional goals.

The long-range plan should also allow for the continued growth of the museum's collection. Relating a museum's long-range plan to its collection, May Cassar writes, "a forward plan must take into account [the collection's] rate of growth and the cost of implication of housing the new acquisitions in environmentally sound conditions."¹⁶ If a museum continues to acquire objects for its collection, without consideration for the objects' storage or display requirements or for the museum's current storage or display conditions, the museum will quickly outgrow its physical space. A forward or strategic plan would allow an institution to grow systematically, taking into account new collection accessions as well as the physical limitations of the museum's facilities.

In most cases, the museum building project stems from a strategic plan developed many years previously. In his August 1989 memorandum, MFAH Director Peter C.

Marzio writes:

¹⁵ Timothy Ambrose. "The Purpose of a Forward Plan." Timothy Ambrose and Sue Runyard, eds. *Forward Planning: A Handbook of Business, Corporate and Development Planning for Museums and Galleries*. (London: Museums & Galleries Commission in conjunction with Routledge, 1991), 2.

¹⁶ May Cassar. "Environmental Planning and Control." Timothy Ambrose and Sue Runyard, eds. *Forward Planning*, 98.

Now, during fiscal year 1989-90, it is imperative to establish a long-range plan which will prepare [t]he Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, for the final decade of the 20th century. ... As I see it, the major challenge of the 1990's will be to expand the physical plant in an orderly and imaginative manner so that a clearly defined and beautifully articulated museum precinct or campus is established.¹⁷

At the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, a "master plan [which had been] defined by Denise Scott Brown of Philadelphia's Venturi Scott Brown and Associates in 1980" had become restrictive, stipulating that a new building's main façade should face north, similar to the existing Caroline Weiss Law Building.¹⁸ In 1989, Marzio called for a new, updated long-range plan to ensure the museum's physical growth in the 1990s would achieve the museum's overall goals to become a cohesive museum complex for the twenty-first century.

The strategic or forward plan for the museum is vitally influential for the success of a building project. According to Associate Professor of Museum Studies at George Washington University Martha Morris, who has become an expert in museum building during her long career, "The most successful [building projects] are ones that were based on a lot of upfront strategic planning. ... The strategic plan really sets the stage. The mission is what you test all your decisions against."¹⁹ Aided by the museum's mission, the strategic plan thus becomes the guiding force behind any museum building project.

¹⁷ Peter C. Marzio. "Memorandum." From the Archives of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 4.

¹⁸ Martha Thorne. *Rafael Moneo, Audrey Jones Beck Building: The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston*. (Stuttgart, Germany: Edition Axel Menges, 2000), 10.

¹⁹ Martha Morris. Associate Professor, Museum Studies Department, George Washington University. Telephone interview on 06 March 2008.

The second stage of the planning phase involves assessing the needs for the museum building project. A needs assessment may seem simple but the process is very complex. It is “literally an analysis of what an organization needs. It can begin as nothing more than a statement of physical requirements. This statement may be motivated by programmatic constraints, needs or desires.”²⁰ Multiple tools, such as collection condition surveys, can assist museum staff to produce such as assessment. This stage is also a time of brainstorming, of gathering any and all ideas for the new building, and of identifying aspects in need of improvement, based on daily experience. Indeed, museum staff members, who know all of the inadequacies of an existing space, should become involved at this stage by contributing ideas for the building project. From the initial stages, museum leadership should welcome the staff members’ insights and suggestions during the planning phase, incorporating them into the resulting architectural program.

A Team Effort

The next interrelated stage of the planning process involves assembling a project team for the museum. At all levels and throughout the process, staff members “need to be utilized in planning and implementing any project.”²¹ Museum staff can assist with leading the planning, defining the vision for the future, and developing the goals and the programs for the museum. Collection managers and registrars should assert their role as stewards and caretakers of the museum’s collection at this stage. As Martha Morris puts it, they need “to be advocates for the objects and hopefully they can take the lead or be

²⁰ Joan Darragh and James Snyder. *Museum Design*, 37.

²¹ Martha Morris. Telephone interview on 06 March 2008.

involved in all phases of planning.”²² Additionally, a project management system needs to be established so that the project runs smoothly. Such a system establishes a hierarchy of command and decision making, creates a timeline for the multiple phases of the project, and develops a system of checks and balances for accountability. A project management system, in other words, will allow for the input of the numerous voices within the museum while maintaining order for and focus on the overall building project.

At the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, Kathleen Crain became involved at this particular stage. As the Preparations Manager, she supervised all art handlers who packed and moved collection objects within the museum complex. The art handlers “had a lot of trouble moving art in the [Caroline Weiss] Law Building because it was built in five different stages.”²³ Narrow hallways, short doorways and a small freight elevator all contributed to the difficulties of moving artwork in the building. She and her staff encountered first hand, and on a daily basis, the pitfalls of the older building.

Because of this, museum management asked for Ms. Crain’s input during the planning process. Indeed, she was involved in numerous planning committees, including the Basement Committee, the Prints and Drawings Committee, and the Loading Dock Committee. During regular meetings with the architect and museum leadership, she would contribute to discussions about general spatial relationships. For instance, the registrar’s office needed to be near the preparation area. Both areas should be accessible to the art storage and the freight elevator, “which becomes the central part of moving artwork all around the building.”²⁴ The freight elevator, in turn, should relate well with

²² Martha Morris. Telephone interview on 06 March 2008.

²³ Kathleen Crain. Exhibitions Registrar, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Personal interview on 18 February 2008.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

the galleries. With Kathleen Crain as an example, staff members in various departments were involved with planning the areas in which they would be working.

At the MFAH, according to Ms. Crain, staff members “were really asked for [their] input and [they] were really listened to which doesn’t really happen very often.”²⁵ This aspect of the process contributed greatly to the success of the building project. Because the management did listen sincerely to its needs and wants, the project addressed almost all of the staff’s desires. Kathleen Crain describes one of her contributions to the plan: “I actually did a drawing [for a new loading dock] and the loading dock [as it exists now] is almost exactly my drawing.”²⁶ The new loading dock can accommodate two 18-wheeler transportation trucks as well as two other smaller delivery trucks; the entire area is enclosed and climate controlled. The loading dock at the Law Building, on the other hand, cannot accommodate large transportation trucks easily. When the museum expects a shipment, the Houston Police Department must block the busy Montrose Street adjacent to the building. Because Ms. Crain and her art handling staff expressed to the project leadership what they needed to work effectively and efficiently for the museum, the final results as found in the Audrey Jones Beck Building met those desires with much success.

During her interview, Ms. Crain reflects that the design mistakes that were made were not due to staff influence. However, she points to one exception: the painting storage in the Beck Building. Because they were enthused about the technology, the registrar and the conservator agreed to purchase compact, electronic screens on which to hang the painting collection in the storage area in the new building. However, they did not realize the new system would cause a few collection care issues. First, all of the

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

screens would have to move in order to access certain screens on either side of the storage unit, causing potentially dangerous vibrations for sensitive paintings. Second, the MFAH's building design required twelve foot tall screen units when Spacesaver Corporation, the company which makes the storage systems, had previously built only eight foot tall units. Even though the manufacturer could adjust its product, additional bracing, which took up storage space for the larger paintings, was required to stabilize the taller screens.²⁷ Despite these particular issues in the painting storage area, overall the collection areas in the new Audrey Jones Beck Building were well-designed, rectifying the art movement issues in the older Caroline Weiss Law Building.

Planning for Success

The next stages of the planning process involve the development of the program statement and the architectural program. The program statement must include an outline of the physical needs which will meet the programming, financial, and operating requirements motivating the building project. In other words, it includes the basic requirements which must be met. With this statement in hand, project leadership ensures that the vision "prevails during the rigors of the building process."²⁸

The development of the architectural program, the culmination of all the planning, marks the first formal stage of the museum's building project. The architectural program is "a formal document that will play a key role in architect selection, design development, and even construction management."²⁹ It must include a qualitative statement of what the museum wishes to achieve in each part of the proposed project, a quantitative inventory of the proposed project, and a catalogue of quantitative technical criteria (in order to meet

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Joan Darragh and James Snyder. *Museum Design*, 51.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 57.

standards for museum operations). The selected architect uses this information to meet the museum's requirements while completing his or her aesthetic design.

Indeed, Rafael Moneo, architect for the MFAH project, used the museum-produced architectural program to create the Beck Building, a building that both meets the practical needs of the institution and the artistic vision of the architect. Martha Thorne, associate curator of architecture at the Art Institute of Chicago, writes:

Moneo has taken the measured approach in his design of the Audrey Jones Beck Building. The new museum is conscious of its urban context and seeks to be even 'more urban' than some of its neighbors. Moneo is respectful of the work of previous architects in his positioning of the building, his use of exterior and interior materials, and his articulation of the façades.³⁰

On the one hand, the building becomes a part of Rafael Moneo's architectural *oeuvre*, incorporating ideas and elements the architect had previously developed and utilized. However, at the same time, the building incorporates crucial elements the institution requested and needed, such as additional exhibition galleries, curatorial offices, and collection care and storage areas. Thus, guided by the architectural program, architect Rafael Moneo designed both a functional and an aesthetic building, a building ultimately influenced by the museum staff's input and suggestions as well as the MFAH's long-range plan. In the words of architecture commentator Victoria Newhouse, "Rafael Moneo's Audrey Jones Beck Building in Houston ... is the kind of freestanding building

³⁰ Martha Thorne. *Rafael Moneo*, 13.

that provides a more successful means of expansion than do extensions of existing museums.”³¹

In conclusion, the planning phase of a museum building project is critical to the success of the project overall. During the process, guided by the strategic plan as well as the input of the staff, the museum as client articulates what the new building should accomplish and develops the architectural program, a pivotal document that communicates specific ideas to the design architect. With the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the institution had outgrown its existing facilities by the early 1990s. Built in multiple phases, the Caroline Weiss Law Building was inadequate for the growing collection as well as for the movement of that collection. Among other concerns, there was no space to display the museum’s collection of modern and contemporary artwork. The Brown Pavilion, built in 1974 for the collection of modern art, was consistently used for temporary exhibitions. Movement of artwork within the building itself was incredibly difficult due to narrow hallways, small freight elevators, and short ceiling clearances, all resulting from the various building phases. The Audrey Jones Beck Building addressed those specific collection care issues; the new building’s design not only provides adequate space for storage and display but also considers the movement and flow of collection objects throughout the building.

Overall, the addition of the Audrey Jones Beck Building to the growing Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, complex was a success due to two primary reasons. First, museum leadership dedicated a considerable amount of time to the planning of the

³¹ Victoria Newhouse. *Towards a New Museum (expanded edition)*. (New York, NY: The Monacelli Press, 2006), 5.

project. Without rushing into the building project, the museum was able to systematically plan for and address every aspect of the process. Secondly, throughout the planning process, museum leadership really listened to the staff's input and was able to implement almost all of those ideas within the new building. While the museum's Board of Trustees and Director were most concerned about the resulting galleries, the Associate Director and Project Manager Gwendolyn H. Goffe was sympathetic to everyone's needs and wants for the overall project.³² This sincere concern for the staff members enabled them to be fully invested in the project.

³² Kathleen Crain. Personal interview on 18 February 2008.

Chapter Two: Preparing to Transform The Preparation Phase at The Morgan Library & Museum

As discussed in the previous chapter, the planning phase of a building project allows a museum to initialize the transformation of the strategic plan into reality, translating the institutional ideals into concrete designs, which takes considerable time and effort on behalf of the museum's dedicated staff. Likewise, the preparation phase allows a museum to rethink itself as an institution and as a collection. Faced with the realities involved with preparing for actual construction, such as moving the collection, the museum and its staff may find certain aspects of daily operations in need of improvement in order to deal with the consequences of that construction. The example of The Morgan Library & Museum (The Morgan) illustrates how physical renovation can influence an institution's image as well as its registration practice. For instance, because they had to find innovative solutions during the construction phase, the registrar's office at The Morgan found inadequacies in its traditional record-keeping practices.

Indeed, diligent record-keeping was of primary importance during this phase at The Morgan. The RC-AAM listserv survey demonstrates that this is a common concern. Fourteen out of thirty-six responses, almost thirty-nine percent, indicated that maintaining accurate and current records of object locations was most important during the preparation phase of a museum building project.¹ On-site object storage and transportation of objects to off-site facilities were other major concerns for registrars and

¹ Leslie Meyer. *Registration Practice during Museum Building*. Survey of the Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museums listserv. Conducted from 01 March 2008 through 15 March 2008. A brief summary of this survey can be found in the attached appendix.

collection managers.² Both these survey responses and the situation at The Morgan Library & Museum reflect a serious dedication to collection care, from storage to display to transportation, throughout a building project.

What is the Preparation Phase?

Once the museum articulates its needs and wants for the building project in a complete architectural program, the construction project moves into the preparation phase. The preparation phase is the time period after the completion of the architectural program and before the actual construction. Contractors call this phase ‘mobilization’ because the museum and the specialized crews mobilize and prepare for actual construction. In their book *Museum Design: Planning and Building for Art*, Joan Darragh and James S. Snyder write, “The moving, temporary storage, and relocation of collections probably make up the largest expense under mobilization for ... museums. Any collection either in storerooms or on exhibition that will be in the vicinity of construction most likely will have to be moved.”³ This is because physical construction poses a serious threat to the safety and care of the museum’s collection; construction often causes vibration, dust and other environmental risks that could potentially harm museum objects.

Therefore, registrars and collection managers are active participants during the preparation phase. What do collection managers do with the museum’s collection during construction? Faced with several options, such as storing the collection on-site, transporting the collection off-site, or handling loans and traveling exhibitions for the

² On-site storage received thirty percent of the responses while transportation of objects to off-site storage received over sixteen percent. Interestingly, transportation of objects to another venue for exhibition received no responses.

³ Joan Darragh and James S. Snyder. *Museum Design: Planning and Building for Art*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 152.

duration of the construction, registrars and collection managers must manage the logistical aspects of whatever option is ultimately chosen. Using their knowledge of the standards of care under normal circumstances, they also must attempt to maintain those same standards during unstable circumstances. Maintaining accurate records of object locations and conditions is also crucial during this phase.

The preparation phase begins with the review of the architectural program by the selected design architect. The museum and the architect must review, evaluate and mutually agree on the program. Because of the constant dialogue between museum and architect, compromise is inevitable. Darragh and Snyder expand, “Buildings are not perfect environments, and yet professional staff can have standards of perfection ... that simply are not achievable in designing and constructing buildings.”⁴ In other words, elements that the museum staff would want in an ideal world may not be feasible within the scope of the project. The architectural program is a working tool; changes will occur over the course of the project.

Despite unavoidable changes to the program, the museum must maintain focus on its goals for the construction project:

Museum buildings are specialized building types.... Throughout the design process, the function of the building, the operation of its mechanical systems, and the operating budget ... must always be kept in mind by the board, the museum director, and the project director.

*Requirements for the exhibition and safekeeping of the collections are paramount.*⁵

⁴ *Ibid*, 137.

⁵ *Ibid*, 147. Emphasis added.

In other words, museums are special places because they collect, store and display their collections for the public, and these ideas need to be kept in the forefront during the design process.

The second half of the preparation phase involves selection of the contractor and, then, preparation of the site for construction. Darragh and Snyder suggest that certain regulations, such as a 72-hour notice for relocation of museum objects, should be included in the contract with either the general contractor or the construction manager. Because they generally do commercial or residential construction, contractors and their crews may not understand the special circumstances surrounding a museum building project. Including specific clauses and regulations within the contract allows the museum to protect its interests during the project. The inclusion of a 72-hour notice for object relocation, for instance, would allow the museum and its staff time to plan and to execute a move of its collection in order to accommodate construction crews.

Once a general contractor or a construction manager is selected, the site must be prepared for construction. For new construction that task is relatively easy; existing structures are demolished and cleared in order to build a new museum on the empty land. However, “for an existing museum faced with an alteration or addition, site preparation can be formidable.”⁶ Existing structures might need to be cleared or protected from construction; museum staff might have to move to temporary office space; and the museum’s collection might have to move to an altogether different location. All of these elements require time as well as detailed planning and coordination by the registrars and other staff members. Indeed, at The Morgan Library & Museum, preparation for construction seemed a formidable yet feasible task, according to Associate Registrar

⁶ *Ibid*, 190.

Patricia Courtney. She graciously allowed an interview about the renovation project at The Morgan.

Preparing for Dramatic Change

Located on a historic multi-building campus in mid-town Manhattan with a collection of over 350,000 objects, The Morgan Library & Museum began discussing an expansion project in the first half of 2001. After September 11th, despite an atmosphere of political, cultural and economic anxiety, the institution's Board of Trustees decided to move forward with the project. The reasons for this desire were two-fold: the Board wanted more unification for the institution, in both its physical appearance as well as its storage of the growing collection, and the Board needed to open the institution to twenty-first century ideas.⁷ In a press release dated October 8, 2002, The Morgan's Director Charles E. Pierce, Jr. is quoted as saying, "With the steady growth of both our holdings and our public offerings has come greater demands on our facilities. Over the last several years, we have been engaged in a thorough planning process to identify critical institutional needs."⁸ While the collection had continued to grow and change, the physical space and the image of the institution had not. The Board saw the building project as an opportunity to transform The Morgan physically. By incorporating more modern architecture and amenities, such as a concert hall, with the renovation, the institution could then attract newer audiences in order to become a more relevant and modern museum. For the Board, the building project was about changing the attitudes of the staff, the returning visitors, and the community at large towards The Morgan.

⁷ Patricia Courtney. Associate Registrar, The Morgan Library & Museum. Personal interview on 04 February 2008.

⁸ "Morgan Begins Major Expansion Project – Library Remains Open through May 4, 2003." (New York, NY: The Morgan Library & Museum, 2008). Released 08 October 2002. Accessed 31 January 2008 from <http://www.themorgan.org/about/pressReleases2.asp?id=5>.

After an initial round of design submissions, the Board of Trustees asked architect Renzo Piano to submit a design proposal. His submission called for a glass and steel piazza which unified the existing historic buildings while maintaining the institution's aesthetic profile. According to one contemporary article, "[The] new construction will add 75,000 square feet to the institution, 47,000 of which will be below grade and provide a four-tiered subterranean storage vault and a 280-seat hall for music, films, lectures and readings."⁹ In this way, the design plan for The Morgan's six building campus was complicated. Some elements such as the Brick Building were demolished and other buildings were expanded while three new buildings and the subterranean vault were created. Thus, certain physical aspects needed to be removed while others were protected.¹⁰ Needless to say, Piano's proposed plan, which involved underground construction, caused some concern from the institution's staff including the registrar.

Registrar Lucy Eldridge's original idea was to move The Morgan's entire collection off-site for the duration of the construction. She wanted to protect the large and delicate collection from any repercussions of the proposed construction 'blasting.' Yet, moving the entire 350,000 item collection off-site posed greater potential for lost or broken items. When it was explained that 'blasting' did not actually involve explosions but rather the insertion of rods into the bedrock and then the snapping off the stone, a complex plan of on-site and off-site storage soon developed.

The Complex Solution

The Morgan had a balanced and well-planned approach to accomplish its goals in the year and a half before construction began in May 2003. According to Darragh and

⁹ Marcia Vetrocq. "Grand Piano Design for Morgan Library." *Art in America* 91 (2003): 25.

¹⁰ Patricia Courtney. Personal interview on 04 February 2008.

Snyder, however, “it is nearly impossible to preserve and care for fragile and priceless works of art at a construction site. Many precautions must be taken, and the project may need to be carried out in phases as collections are moved about, often at extra cost.”¹¹ Despite these risks, The Morgan managed to address its collection care issues during construction using many precautions and without any major mishaps.

Storage of museum collections, either on or off-site, is one option available to registrars and collection managers during the preparation phase. In general, collection storage needs to meet a certain standard of care. According to museum environment expert May Cassar, “[t]he minimum storage requirement can be stated quite simply: a clean, watertight, accessible and pest-free space.”¹² Museum object storage should be thoughtfully planned and assessed. Ideally, objects in storage should be organized by composite materials and by curatorial responsibility. Climate control for temperature and relative humidity as well as light control, pollution filtration and pest control all need to be addressed. Other concerns involve fire detection and suppression systems and security alarm systems.

At The Morgan, one of the curators suggested using the existing McKim Building to house the historical collection during construction. “The original 1906 library designed by Charles McKim of McKim, Mead & White,” the building housed the library collection as well as founding father Pierpont Morgan’s study.¹³ With the curator’s suggestion, the historic building became on-site storage for The Morgan’s large

¹¹ Joan Darragh and James Snyder. *Museum Design*, 144.

¹² May Cassar. *Environmental Management: Guidelines for museums and galleries*. (London: Routledge, 1995), 121.

¹³ “Facets of the Morgan Tour Begins this Fall.” (New York, NY: The Morgan Library & Museum, 2008). Released 28 August 2003. Accessed 31 January 2008 from <http://www.themorgan.org/about/pressReleases2.asp?id=1>.

collection. Several reasons supported the decision to store items in the McKim Building. First, on-site storage would not only save money but inhibit unnecessary movement of the collection. Also, the objects were already acclimatized to the building and its environs.

Items already in the building had to be either moved or protected. For instance, marble columns located in the rotunda were moved further to the perimeter of the space, wrapped and crated in place. Other non-collection items were packed and moved to an off-site storage facility by contracted art handlers. Specialized library movers worked with the curatorial staff to prepare the library collection located in the McKim Building, by wrapping in tissue, packing in plastic bags, and labeling each book. Once prepared, the books were placed on moveable shelves in their original order; the shelves were then wrapped and moved to an off-site vault rented from another institution.

Collection objects, previously housed in the numerous curatorial vaults below ground, were then bagged and shelved in the McKim Building. The library movers were also contracted to move the collection items from the vaults to the McKim Building's temporary storage area utilizing moveable library shelves and stackable plastic tubs. Ideally, collection items that would not be moved at all were left in the McKim Building for the duration of construction.¹⁴

The off-site storage facility for The Morgan included several necessary registration elements. The facility offered trucking services as well as packing and preparation areas near the collection's storage area. The registrar's office maintained access control as museum staff had to get permission from the registrar to see the stored collection. Additional off-site storage was also utilized by The Morgan as a last minute

¹⁴ Patricia Courtney. Personal interview on 04 February 2008.

option, especially when construction efforts and other developments forced non-collection items such as furniture to be moved elsewhere. However, the registrar's office did not have much control of this site since it was rented storage space at another museum.

Transportation for the collection objects to an off-site facility or venue is another option available to registrars and collection managers during construction. It requires meticulous planning to carefully pack crates in order to ensure environmental continuity, a guiding principle for preventative conservation. In other words, packing and shipping crates should duplicate the pre-existing environmental conditions of the museum objects. As May Cassar writes, "Objects are at constant risk of environmental damage from the moment they are moved from their permanent location until they are returned."¹⁵ Each museum must weigh those risks carefully before deciding to pursue this particular option for the collection.

The Morgan tried to inhibit unnecessary movement of collection objects by storing most in the McKim Building. However, due to continued outgoing loan and research activity at The Morgan during the construction time period, objects were moved from storage to the institution's temporary workspace a few blocks away from the mid-town campus. According to Associate Registrar Patricia Courtney, during the time of construction, there was a lot of movement with "weekly shipments, almost on a shuttle basis, to move material to the [off-site] Reading Room and back. And then there would be shipments from there to the off-site storage and back."¹⁶

¹⁵ May Cassar. *Environmental Management*, 129.

¹⁶ Patricia Courtney. Personal interview on 04 February 2008.

Such shuttle movements were recorded as transits using the in-house collection management database. For outgoing loans and exhibitions, on the other hand, shipments were logged using receipts. Patricia Courtney confesses, “Moving the collection shook it up a lot ... not in [a] physically unhappy way but also it brought up the issue of what was missing in terms of logging and recording.” She elaborates that moving the collection objects during construction allowed the registrars to comprehend The Morgan’s record-keeping needs. Now, almost two years after re-opening, the registrar’s office is able to track all movements, both exhibition shipments and temporary transits, under temporary shipments in its electronic database.

A third option for collections is long-term loans or traveling exhibitions. According to the book *The New Museum Registration Methods*, “Long-term loans ... from one museum to another are common.”¹⁷ The museum undergoing a building project could loan all or part of its collection to another institution for the duration of the construction project. Such a plan involves packing and transporting objects to the borrowing museum, maintaining constant communication between the loaning and borrowing institutions, and obtaining insurance coverage. The registrar would be responsible for all those aspects.

Curators at The Morgan also organized several traveling exhibitions for the duration of construction. Consisting of three distinct exhibitions “that represent the richness and diversity of the Library’s collections,” the exhibition series *Facets of the*

¹⁷ Sally Freitag and Cherie Summers. “Processes: Loans.” Rebecca Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore, eds. *The New Museum Registration Methods*. (Washington, D.C.: American Association of Museums, 1998), 177.

Morgan allowed a portion of the institution's collection to travel around the country.¹⁸

The Book of Kings: Art, War, and the Morgan Library's Medieval Picture Bible was the small-scale exhibition of the series, consisting of a Medieval Bible that packed into and traveled in one single crate. A press release issued by The Morgan announced, "The Picture Bible—one of the greatest illuminated manuscripts produced in thirteenth-century France—is disbound for conservation and study, offering visitors a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to view twenty-six of the book's pages in a single exhibition."¹⁹

The two other more large-scale shows of the exhibition series were *Painted Prayers: Medieval and Renaissance Books of Hours from the Morgan Library* and *To Observe and Imagine: British Drawings and Watercolors, 1600-1900*. Each of these two exhibitions traveled to more than one venue. *Painted Prayers*, for instance, consisting of over sixty Books of Hours and their individual cradles, traveled to three different venues between 2003 and 2006. On the other hand, the exhibition *To Observe and Imagine* had over 100 objects which traveled to two different venues. The registrar was responsible for the logistical details including packing, shipping and insurance for these objects to travel to the several venues for the respective exhibitions.

Each large-scale exhibition of the series had additional movement outside of normal registration practice. Usually, for traveling exhibitions, the items are packed after the show closes at one venue and then shipped to the next, subsequent venue. With *Painted Prayers* and *To Observe and Imagine*, however, the packed crates returned to The Morgan between venues and unpacked. The objects were then sent to the temporary Reading Room for scholarly consultation by curators and other researchers. By allowing

¹⁸ "Facets of the Morgan Tour Begins this Fall." Released 28 August 2003. Accessed 31 January 2008 from <http://www.themorgan.org/about/pressReleases2.asp?id=1>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

the Reading Room to operate throughout the closure, The Morgan continued one facet of its four-pronged mission: “to function as a center and source for research and publication in the permanent collections and to promote their scholarly study.”²⁰

The Morgan Library & Museum offers an interesting case study. Faced with the construction phase of its building project, the museum staff utilized a mixture of solutions to deal with its collection. Most of the large collection was stored on-site while another portion was stored at off-site facilities. A small percentage of objects even traveled to several venues for a series of exhibitions. All these solutions were developed in order to protect the collection, safely and securely, throughout the construction. The institution’s staff purposely continued daily operations, such as access to its Reading Room (available to scholars and researchers) and a vigorous outgoing loan program, while simultaneously dealing with the preparation phase of its building project. Juxtaposing both aspects thus allowed the registration staff to recognize its internal needs in terms of record keeping. For the Board of Trustees, the building project allowed the institution to concurrently transform its public space and its public image.

The Renzo Piano-designed renovation allowed The Morgan Library & Museum to update to the twenty-first century both in terms of its physical space and its public image. For instance, The Morgan’s large historical collection is now stored together in a new subterranean vault, centrally located within the museum complex. The registrar also has new facilities: a preparation room is located near the collection storage area and the registrar’s offices are incorporated among the other administrative and curatorial offices.

²⁰ “About the Morgan: Mission Statement.” (New York, NY: The Morgan Library & Museum, 2008). Accessed 11 February 2008 from <http://www.themorgan.org/about/mission.asp>.

These physical changes demonstrate the modernization of The Morgan as an institution and also point to the growing importance of registration itself within the museum. The renovation also allowed the museum as an institution to update its registration practice, especially in terms of its record-keeping. Any and all object movements, either within or outside of the museum complex, are now recorded in the registrar's electronic database. The development of accurate documentation as well as the allocation of space for collection management at The Morgan reflects the transformation of registration at that institution due to the building project.

Chapter Three: Occupying Change

The Implementation Phase at the Morris Museum

As previously discussed, the planning phase of a building project initializes the translation of a museum's future plans into reality while the preparation phase highlights policies and procedures in need of improvement. Similarly, the implementation phase forces the museum staff to adjust to and adopt a new institutional identity once the building project is completed. At the Morris Museum, for instance, both staff and visitors witnessed the museum's transformation into a larger and different institution due to an expansion project. The building project allowed not only for the incorporation of the Guinness Collection but also the maintenance of the historical spaces and the upgrade of the facilities and amenities at the Morris Museum. According to Executive Director Steven Miller, with the museum's expansion and renovation, the Morris Museum has become "a regional cultural institution with an international outreach."¹

The case study of the Morris Museum is not unique. As the results of my RC-AAM listserv survey attest, most museums currently or in the near future undergoing a museum building project are small museums. Specifically, thirty-two out of the forty-seven responses, over sixty-eight percent, had only zero to fifty full-time employees at their museums. Furthermore, sixteen out of thirty-nine responses planned an expansion or addition to their existing museum complex.² In these ways, many registrars and collection managers can learn from the 2007 expansion project at the Morris Museum, a small but encyclopedic museum in northern New Jersey.

¹ Steven Miller. Executive Director, Morris Museum. Email correspondence on 21 April 2008.

² Leslie Meyer. *Registration Practice during Museum Building*. Survey of the Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museums listserv. Conducted from 01 March 2008 through 15 March 2008. A brief summary of this survey can be found in the attached appendix.

What is the Implementation Phase?

As physical construction winds down, the implementation phase draws closer. With the construction completed, the end of the museum building project is near, with anticipation and anxiety common among the museum staff and the visitorship alike. In the words of Joan Darragh and James S. Snyder, authors of *Museum Design: Planning and Building for Art*, “Completion and occupancy are the culmination of the planning, design, and construction process.”³ Also called the move-in period, this timeframe should be a gradual and carefully thought out process, although external and internal pressures may not allow the ideal duration of one full year. Internally, for instance, the museum’s board and governance might want to open the doors at the earliest opportunity, while the external community and the museum’s constituency might want to see firsthand the physical transformation after access to the museum has been limited during the building project. The museum perhaps cannot ignore the pressure to open to the public soon after the construction is completed. Thus, decisions made during the planning phase regarding construction completion and occupancy must be weighed with these kinds of pressures in mind.

The implementation phase, the time after the physical construction and before the public opening, is actually one of adjustment. Time is needed for the new building to prepare itself for daily operation. Ideally, that time period should be one calendar year for the environment to stabilize running on normal operating cycles and standards. Realistically, however, that period should be as lengthy as possible within the timeline for the project, with a minimum of three months. Additionally, “concrete and objective criteria must be established to determine whether or not a new museum facility is ready

³ Joan Darragh and James S. Snyder. *Museum Design: Planning and Building for Art*. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 209.

to receive its [collection].”⁴ For example, running on normal operating cycles, the HVAC (meaning heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) or climate control system should meet specific temperature and relative humidity ranges, which contribute to the preservation of the museum’s collection, well before the objects move into the new storage areas. Any problems with the HVAC system, along with the fire protection and security systems, should be addressed during this timeframe. Also this period allows for the removal of construction dust and the off-gassing of any building materials. In other words, time is needed for the environment, both physical and atmospheric, to stabilize before museum objects and museum staff move in.

Similarly, time is needed for the objects and for the staff to move and adjust to their new facilities. Referring specifically to art museums, Darragh and Snyder write, “Staff, art, and public: the consideration and timing of occupancy differ for each, and the sequence in which steps take place is therefore important.”⁵ Coordinating movement of objects and of people requires much planning and patience. Once in the new storage spaces, most museum objects need time to acclimatize to the new environment. People require less time to acclimatize but may need more time to unpack and settle into new work spaces. Any change such as moving requires time to adjust.

Hopefully, when the museum staff moves into the new building permanently, it is not the first time it has seen the new space. As previously discussed in Chapter One, successful building projects include staff members in all phases of the building project, from planning to occupancy. During actual construction, one such way is to allow museum staff to visit the site not only to experience the new space but to bring another

⁴ *Ibid*, 217.

⁵ *Ibid*, 220.

viewpoint to the construction project. Concerned with their specific area of expertise, such as conservation or registration, staff members can often point out potential errors or concerns with the end results, so that changes can be implemented. But, “in a well-integrated planning, design, and construction process, operating staff will have been involved at every stage, either by participating in making critical decisions during each phase or by being kept abreast at all times of operating implications of the facilities’ design and construction” and errors will be minor.⁶ Without the staff’s input throughout the process, the building project might not fully achieve the goals of the institution.

When the majority of construction is completed, the architect submits a punch list of incomplete or incorrect work to the owner for approval. Development of the punch list should be thought of as a system of checks and balances “to ensure that the owner [the museum] has received all work as stipulated in the contract documents and at the level of quality specified.”⁷ The punch list is a working document, with items removed as they are completed and other items added as they are identified. Addressing outstanding items may take weeks or even months.

The museum staff and the collection, however, may take up occupancy of the new facilities when the punch list items have not been fully addressed or corrected. According to Darragh and Snyder, “In taking possession, the museum thereafter accepts responsibility for the condition, operation, and occupancy of that space in whatever condition it has received.”⁸ Depending on the specific clauses of the negotiated contracts, either the museum or the contractor may be responsible for addressing the outstanding punch list items after occupancy. Either option, though, requires additional

⁶ *Ibid*, 214.

⁷ *Ibid*, 204.

⁸ *Ibid*, 219.

time, money and effort on behalf of the museum staff. Months after the new wing opened to the public, the Morris Museum in Morristown, New Jersey, continues to identify and address those outstanding items. Jenny Martin, Collection Manager at the Morris Museum during the 2007 expansion, kindly shared her experience for this thesis.

A Large Acquisition

“Originally founded as a ‘children’s cabinet’ of exotic toys,” according to a local newspaper article, the Morris Museum was established in 1913 as the Morristown Neighborhood House with an original focus on children’s education.⁹ According to the current museum’s website, “Mrs. Aldus Pierson, the House’s first headworker, gave talks to children about various cultural expressions represented by this early collection of art and artifacts from a broad range of cultures throughout the world.”¹⁰ The museum has grown, moving and expanding, over the subsequent years. In 1963, for example, the museum acquired Twin Oaks, the historic home of Peter H. B. Frelinghuysen which now is at the center of the museum’s exhibition space. However, prior to the development of the Guinness Collection wing, the last renovation was in 1990 which expanded the museum complex to 75,524 square feet.¹¹ These changes attest to the Morris Museum’s growing importance to the community it serves.

The Morris Museum acquired the Murtoth D. Guinness Collection of mechanical musical instruments and automata after the collector’s death in 2002. With over 700 objects, the collection is “one of the largest single gifts to the museum since its founding

⁹ Dan Bischoff. “Mechanical Genius.” *The Star-Ledger*, dated 11 November 2004, 25.

¹⁰ “About: History.” (Morristown, NJ: Morris Museum, 2006). Accessed 01 February 2008 from <http://www.morrismuseum.org/about/history.html>.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

nearly a century ago.”¹² The large collection also comes with its own financial endowment (and its own staff) for its maintenance, care and storage. According to one journalist, “The Morris, a museum and a teaching center that specializes in science, history, theater and art, seems an ideal site for the Guinness collection as those are the areas in which it provides excitement.”¹³ In fact, the Guinness Collection incorporates all four tenets simultaneously: science and technology enables the theatrical entertainment provided by these artistic living dolls and historical musical boxes. Thus, this collection provides a link to the past in multiple ways: it provides not only a connection to the nostalgic and historical past but also a connection to the museum’s original collection of exotic toys. As the collection manager put it, the acquisition of the Guinness Collection was “a boon for us [the museum].”¹⁴

The Estate of Murtoth D. Guinness soon accepted the Morris Museum’s proposal for the construction of a new wing in order to accommodate the large collection. The museum then initiated a \$15 million capital campaign to make it happen. Three short years after the acquisition, in March 2006, construction for the new addition broke ground. The building project not only added display and storage space for the special collection but addressed some other institutional needs as well. According to a museum-issued press release:

Built atop what had been a terrace at the center of the building, the new wing includes the 4,300-square-foot exhibition *Musical Machines & Living Dolls* ... as well as viewable storage and a resource center. The

¹² Dan Bischoff. “Mechanical Genius.” *The Star-Ledger*, dated 11 November 2004, 25.

¹³ Michael Beckerman. “Fanciful Collection Finds Home in New Jersey.” *The New York Times*, dated 27 November 2004, 7.

¹⁴ Jenny Rebecca Martin. Collections Manager, Morris Museum. Personal interview on 06 February 2008.

project also includes the addition of 5,700 square feet of adjacent public and gallery space, a two-story Grand Entrance Pavilion with new Museum Shop and the restoration of the museum's core structure, a historic 1913 mansion designed by the famed American firm McKim, Mead & White.¹⁵

Thus, this building project touched many facets of the Morris Museum. With the new Grand Entrance Pavilion, for instance, the museum announces itself as an inclusive and professional public institution comparable to those found nearby in New York City. The restoration of the 1913 mansion, the core exhibition space, reaffirms the Morris Museum's dedication to its past, its present and its future as a cultural steward. In these ways, the addition of the Guinness Collection and the other facets of the building project enhanced the public image of the Morris Museum.

Caring for the Collection

One such area affected by the building project was storage for the museum's collection. While the new wing incorporated visible storage for the mechanical instruments and automata, there was also a need to address issues in the storage areas for the remaining museum collection. At the outset of the building project, Jenny Rebecca Martin, Collections Manager at the Morris Museum, says, "I really wanted to look at not only more space for our permanent collection but more efficient use of that space." Most of the permanent collection is stored in a subterranean vault while some collections, including toy and costume, are stored in the attic areas of the Twin Oaks mansion. Looking beyond the Guinness Collection, Ms. Martin wanted to install a movable storage

¹⁵ "Landmark Exhibition Musical Machines & Living Dolls Premieres at Morris Museum." (Morristown, NJ: Morris Museum, 2007). Released 22 October 2007. Accessed 01 February 2008 from <http://www.morrismuseum.org/about/press/MorrisMuseumMorristownNewJerseyGrandOpeningMusicalMachinesLivingDollsGuinnessCollectio.html>.

system in the vault and to address the HVAC needs in the remaining storage areas. Effective and efficient space management is an integral part of collection management. With the construction project at the Morris, however, the focus has been solely on the collection care needs of the Guinness Collection, but “the hope is that [the museum] will be able to address those [other] issues at a later time.”¹⁶

Protection of the collection from potential harm is a major concern for registrars and collection managers during the implementation phase. As the RC-AAM listserv survey results demonstrate, eighteen out of thirty-four responses, over fifty-two percent, agreed that protection of the collection objects until after construction was fully completed was most important during this final phase.¹⁷

Many collection care issues arose during construction at the Morris Museum. Shortly after groundbreaking, for instance, construction crews had to do foundation work near where the collection was stored in the vault. Nearly two-thirds of the vault had to be cleared. Without any off-site storage available, there was limited space in which to keep the museum’s permanent collection safely and securely. In the end, most of the objects were moved to the furthest section of the vault or to another storage area within the Morris Museum. A temporary wall, sealed with plastic, was erected within the vault to divide the storage area from the construction work area. Following the wall erection, a few leaks were found in the work area, but not in the sealed storage area. No collection objects were damaged throughout the process. Because of issues like these, the

¹⁶ Jenny Rebecca Martin. Personal interview on 06 February 2008.

¹⁷ Leslie Meyer. *Registration Practice during Museum Building*. Conducted from 01 March 2008 through 15 March 2008.

collection manager admits now she would have lobbied harder initially for the off-site storage of the permanent collection.¹⁸

Construction dust became a recurring issue for collection care during the building project. Reflecting on her experience, Ms. Martin advises, “No matter how much you try to deal with construction dust – you can mitigate it, you can’t seal anything off from it – it gets everywhere. All we could do was just seal areas off with plastic and tape. There are still areas we need to [go] back to clean up.” The Morris Museum continues to address this particular issue several months after construction finished in 2007. In fact, after opening the new wing, a fire detector went off because dust got into the system and clogged the electric connectors.¹⁹

Another recurring issue was communication between construction crews and museum staff. According to Associate Professor of Museum Studies at George Washington University Martha Morris, “daily communication between [museum] staff and contractors really needs to be carefully monitored.”²⁰ During construction at the Morris Museum, however, communication lines became murky as time went on, according to Jenny Martin. For example, construction crews notified museum staff of requiring access to the vault in order to install a new sprinkler system; however, the collection manager needed more than twenty-four hours notice to protect the permanent collection from such an intrusion. Regulating vault access was a huge challenge during the construction process, Ms. Martin admits. Throughout her interactions with the

¹⁸ Jenny Rebecca Martin. Personal interview on 06 February 2008.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Martha Morris. Associate Professor, Museum Studies Department, George Washington University. Telephone interview on 06 March 2008.

construction crews, she tried to emphasize that these security precautions were just as important for the crews' protection as it was for that of the museum.²¹

The crews, it seems, may not have understood the special circumstances of a museum building project. As stewards of cultural objects, museums must safeguard them to the fullest by mitigating intrusions of people and harmful elements like pests and dirt which could potentially harm the objects. With an increase of people, dust and vibrations, construction projects pose serious threats to those collections. Perhaps construction crews do not realize the necessity to be careful around and protective of the museum's collection when working at such a site.

Once construction has been completed, the collection manager must deal with moving the collection to the new spaces, either display or storage. Because "museums are literally among the most sensitive kinds of facilities, ... mobilizing to occupy new facilities must be orchestrated with great sensitivity."²² As already mentioned, museum objects should have time to acclimatize to the new storage or display environment. The movement of the collection should only occur under the direction and supervision of professional staff and only after the debugging of the environmental systems.

Object storage is an important aspect of collection management and registration. Storage facilities, as one source explains, "are the core of good museum collections management. A museum's first responsibility is to protect and preserve the objects in its charge. The role of collections storage facilities is fundamental. In the end, nothing else is as important."²³ The storage areas provide the first line of defense against any

²¹ Jenny Rebecca Martin. Personal interview on 06 February 2008.

²² Joan Darragh and James Snyder. *Museum Design*, 216.

²³ John D. Hilberry and Susan K. Weingberg. "Museum Collections Storage." Simon J. Knell, ed. *Care of Collections*. (London: Routledge, 1994), 175.

potential threats to the collection. Therefore, once construction has been completed, movement of museum objects to the storage facilities should be considered a significant stage of occupancy which requires careful planning and time.

At the Morris Museum, the storage vault remains in flux simply because the collection manager has not been able to devote time to settling the museum's permanent collection into the space. Ms. Martin explains, "I told them that I wasn't going to start [to] reconfigure the vault space and start using it as viable storage space until I was absolutely certain it could be used as a viable storage space." In other words, because of the regular disruptions during construction, the collection manager is cautious to return items to their usual placement in the storage vault. Furthermore, since the completion of construction, her time has been devoted to other tasks: installing temporary exhibitions, trying to get outstanding punch list work completed, and mitigating persistent leaks in the storage areas. Issues remain in the gallery spaces as well. While pre-existing problems with the roof of Twin Oaks were fixed, other areas of leakage were found in the process.

²⁴ Even though construction has been completed, the collection manager continues to deal with the physical repercussions of that construction.

In retrospect, after the project's conclusion, Collection Manager Jenny Martin admits that had she understood better how the construction would really impact the collection, she would have campaigned for certain concessions. Specifically, she would have hired more assistants for the duration of the project and moved all of the Morris Museum's collection to off-site storage.²⁵ Without a real grasp of what the museum's expansion meant for the collection, Ms. Martin found herself dealing with collection care

²⁴ Jenny Rebecca Martin. Personal interview on 06 February 2008.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

issues on almost a daily basis. Without that knowledge and understanding, she was left understaffed and unprepared for the project, narrowly missing potential collection care catastrophes.

Institutional Change

Physical space is not the only thing affected by a museum building project. Throughout such a project, the museum staff faces many physical and psychological challenges. Staff responses to a construction project may fluctuate among positive, negative or indifferent emotions at various moments. The museum director and board of trustees need to remember that people often resist change: “Staff members long accustomed to certain facilities, cramped or deficient as they may have been, may not easily accept a changed environment, even if it is successfully designed and executed to yield improvement.”²⁶ Thus, museum governance needs to reconcile the staff’s feelings with the reality of the building project. At the Morris Museum, luckily, morale among the staff was overall more positive than negative throughout the project. Because of a real sense of camaraderie at the museum, everyone supported each other to remain focused on the end result: the addition of the Murtoth D. Guinness Collection.²⁷

Furthermore, Morris Museum staff members must adjust to new policies and procedures which were put in place because of the transformation. Fliers and other advertisements no longer are kept on the reception desk but rather at a designated kiosk. Food and drink are to remain only in the entrance pavilion. All appropriate doors should remain locked during hours of operations. Security has become an increasingly larger issue than previously. With the larger building, the museum’s number of visitors has

²⁶ Joan Darragh and James Snyder. *Museum Design*, 215.

²⁷ Jenny Rebecca Martin. Personal interview on 06 February 2008.

increased. With the increase in visitorship, more people are venturing into restricted areas. As Jenny Martin puts it, the staff is still adjusting to the “idea that we’ve grown so much in the last year, this [Guinness] collection and this construction has done so much to really bring our name up and bring our reputation up and now we need to step up to the plate and act accordingly. We don’t do things the way we used to any more.”²⁸ Staff members cannot conduct themselves the way they used to, before the construction, because the Morris Museum is no longer the same institution. With the physical changes from the expansion project at the Morris Museum comes the pressure of a higher institutional profile and, in turn, the pressure to be a more professional institution at all levels.

In fact, this institutional change was predicted at the outset of the building project. According to a March 2006 article in *The Star-Ledger*, “The museum is already among the state’s most important cultural institutions, but the new wing ‘has the potential to truly raise the prominence of this organization, both nationally and internationally,’ [Morris Museum Director Steven] Miller said.”²⁹ In my correspondence with him, Mr. Miller admits that he measures this concept anecdotally, relying on reports from foreign visitors and on national and international press coverage. In the same newspaper article, Mr. Miller also estimated an increase in visitors by twenty percent. Although this conservative prediction has not been confirmed six months after the museum’s doors reopened, the museum director seems hesitatingly optimistic about increased visitorship. Mr. Miller explains, “The first month we opened, attendance did increase quite a bit and

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Maura McDermott. “At Morris Museum, iPods of a century ago.” *The Star-Ledger*, dated 19 March 2006, 33.

we are beginning to see a gradual increase but I think it is premature to analyze figures yet.”³⁰

In recent email correspondence, Mr. Miller elaborates on the institutional changes the Morris Museum has experienced. He writes, “The museum is a much transformed institution. ... The board recognized the problems the museum faced and decided to not only build a new wing for the new collection but correct long-deferred (read no maintenance) issues and upgrade the overall scale, scope, vision, impression and capabilities of the museum.”³¹ With modern amenities, such as the Grand Entrance Pavilion, the Morris Museum can also function as a social center, allowing for special events while protecting the museum’s collections or galleries. With the maintenance attention, the historic Twin Oaks mansion and other exhibition spaces can continue to be utilized as exhibition spaces without endangering collection objects from environmental threats. According to Director Steven Miller, “We have a nicer institution to boast about and we have a higher level of exhibitions and programs to achieve. Visitor [access] and flow is much better, the museum has vastly improved amenities and the galleries all look great.”³² The Morris Museum has become a contemporary and professionalized cultural institution, on a par with many nearby institutions in New York City.

In conclusion, the implementation phase signals the completion of construction and the occupancy of the new space. However, this phase requires time for the building to adjust operating at required levels, so as not to endanger the museum’s collection. Time is also needed for the objects to acclimatize and the staff to adjust to the new

³⁰ Steven Miller. Email correspondence on 21 April 2008.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

environment. Once objects and staff members are settled, outstanding punch list items—incomplete and incorrect construction elements—should be addressed. As discussed here, at the Morris Museum, Collection Manager Jenny Rebecca Martin handled those outstanding issues as well as other collection care issues during construction remarkably well, safeguarding the permanent collection throughout the building process.

Because of the addition of the 700 item Murtoth D. Guinness Collection, the Morris Museum needed to expand physically in order to accommodate such an acquisition. The building expansion enabled the institution to transform itself into an altogether different institution. The physical space was increased with the addition of the new wing to display and store the collection of mechanical musical instruments and automata. The building project also addressed outstanding maintenance in the historic spaces and modernizing the museum's amenities. The permanent collection gained a large acquisition which embodies and supports the four tenets of the Morris Museum: art, history, science and theater. Members of the museum's staff have also had to adjust to the physical change as well as to the idea that they now work at a transformed institution. With the larger, more modern facilities, pressure is placed on the museum, and its staff, to conduct itself as an institution befitting its public image. Thus, with the construction of a new wing to house the unique Guinness Collection, the Morris Museum upheld its mission while simultaneously transforming itself into a physically larger and more prominent cultural institution.

Conclusion: Lessons Learned

There are three main ideas registrars and collection managers can learn from the experience of others engaged in construction projects, as I've conveyed through my case studies of three typical scenarios. First, they should know what options are available to deal with unexpected collection care issues. Protecting the collection throughout the building process should be paramount for registrars and collection managers. Careful consideration should be given to storage and transportation solutions for the entirety of the project, but the solutions selected depend on an institution's specific circumstances. At the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (MFAH), for instance, the collection simply remained in storage in the Caroline Weiss Law Building while the new facilities were built, as construction would not seriously threaten the collection there. At The Morgan Library & Museum (The Morgan), objects were stored both on-site in the McKim Building and off-site at rented facilities while still more objects traveled on exhibition. This complex system saved money and allowed the collection to remain in its original environment. The Morris Museum decided to keep its collection on-site throughout the project in order to save money and to keep the collection together. However, as she later admitted, the Collection Manager Jenny Martin would have lobbied for off-site storage had she known about the collection care issues she would face during construction. Thus, each institution selected a collection care solution suited to its budget, project scope, and other circumstances.

Secondly, registrars and collection managers should understand what a building project entails for a museum overall and for the museum's collection specifically. For instance, the annual Mid-Atlantic Association of Museum's symposium Building

Museums and the RC-AAM email listserv are just two venues which allow for an interchange of experience and insight about building projects. Building allows for the museum to grow in more than just a physical way. As seen with the Morris Museum and The Morgan, a museum building project enables the institution to expand its exhibition and storage space while simultaneously transforming the public institution into a different one, more modern and professional. However, the building process poses a serious threat to the collection. Construction causes dust, vibration, and environmental fluctuations which are harmful to museum objects. Construction also brings more people into contact with the collection. Movement of museum collections can cause serious harm or breakage. The registrars at The Morgan and the collection manager at the Morris Museum both ensured the safety and protection of the collection by minimizing the threats to the collection and by being advocates for the collection during construction. Neither institution had serious collection care issues during construction because they took necessary precautions to protect the collection.

Finally, registrars and collection managers should be aware of what physical and psychological changes might occur during or because of the building project. The physical transformation is expected from a museum building project; a new or expanded space for the museum is the intended goal. However, expanded physical space might also mean a change with the institution's identity or the staff's attitude. At the MFAH, for instance, the staff was initially excited and enthusiastic about the building project. However, once the Audrey Jones Beck Building was open, staff members lost morale and became depressed and tired. Exhibitions Registrar Kathleen Crain explains this phenomenon, "With double the space, you're going to have double the projects, double

your programming, [and] double your exhibitions. [However,] we did not double our staff.”¹ Out of the original twelve staff members in the preparations area, six employees resigned within a period of six months after the project was completed. Now, eight years later, Ms. Crain has only eight people on her staff, not fully recovered despite the increased programming and continued acquisitions. At The Morgan, the building project intended to bring the institution to the twenty-first century both in terms of physical space and its public image. The Renzo Piano renovation at The Morgan created a light-filled piazza which physically and symbolically connected the historical buildings and the modern ones of the museum complex. The renovation also enabled the institution to change its museum brand. No longer is the institution the Pierpont Morgan Library but rather The Morgan Library & Museum. Therefore, museum building projects not only transform an institution physically but also psychologically.

As this thesis demonstrates, a museum building project impacts the institution in multiple ways. For one, the museum’s public image is modernized as seen with all three case studies discussed here. With the addition or renovation of physical space, a museum becomes a more prominent cultural institution within its community. Constructing noteworthy architecture is just one way a museum can establish itself as such. As with Rafael Moneo and his Audrey Jones Beck Building for the MFAH, architects are often selected for museum building projects to create an aesthetic masterpiece. Luckily, Moneo’s building is also truly functional for the museum, which is not always the case. Increasing public programming is another way for a museum to establish itself as a prominent institution. With larger or better use of space, a museum can offer more

¹ Kathleen Crain. Exhibitions Registrar, Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Personal interview on 18 February 2008.

exhibitions and more educational programs. With increased programming, more people will come to the museum to see what it has to offer. The museum's collection thus becomes accessible to more visitors.

Secondly, registration and collection management become more professionalized because of a museum building project. During the building process, registrars and collection managers interact with the museum's permanent collection in a more in-depth way. Because of this, they are able to improve policies and practices which contribute to greater accountability of and within the museum. Even during a building project, museums must remain transparent regarding their role as cultural stewards; the registrars and collection managers must comprehend fully the status of the institution's collection at all times. Effective policies and procedures regarding collection management, including movement, storage and display of museum objects, contribute to that goal. Collection management becomes a major concern during construction which, in turn, increases the overall importance of registration and collection management within the museum.

Appendix

Registration Practice during Museum Building Survey of the RC-AAM listserv

Below is a brief summary of the survey of the Registrars Committee of the American Association of Museums email listserv which I conducted from March 1 through March 15, 2008. Detailed responses have not been disclosed as to maintain anonymity.

1. Who are you? Please provide the following information:

	Response Percent	Response Count
Name:	100.0%	43
Title:	100.0%	43
Museum Employer:	100.0%	43
Location: (city, state)	100.0%	43
<i>answered question</i>		43
<i>skipped question</i>		7

2. At what kind of museum do you work?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Art	51.2%	22
History	23.3%	10
Science or Technology	0.0%	0
Zoo or Aquarium	0.0%	0
Other	25.6%	11
If Other, please specify:		16
<i>answered question</i>		43
<i>skipped question</i>		7

3. How large is your museum?

	Response Percent	Response Count
0-50 Full-time employees	68.1%	32
50-100 Full-time employees	21.3%	10
100-250 Full-time employees	8.5%	4
250-500 Full-time employees	0.0%	0
Over 500 Full-time employees	2.1%	1
<i>answered question</i>		47
<i>skipped question</i>		3

4. When did your museum undergo (or will undergo) museum renovation/construction?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Within the past year	28.4%	10
Within the past 5 years	26.5%	9
Within the past 10 years	23.5%	8
Within the past 15 years	0.0%	0
In the near future (5-10 years)	20.6%	7
If time frame is not listed above, please specify:		6
<i>answered question</i>		34
<i>skipped question</i>		16






5. What kind of building was (or is) planned?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Renovation (i.e. remodel what already existed)	38.5%	15
Expansion or Addition (i.e. add to what already existed)	41.0%	16
Construction (i.e. build from nothing)	20.5%	8
	<i>answered question</i>	39
	<i>skipped question</i>	11

6. Which issue prompted the museum building project the most?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Establishment of a new museum	5.3%	2
Outgrew existing personnel space	0.0%	0
Outgrew existing object space (either for display or storage)	23.7%	9
Required to accommodate large donation (either financial or collection)	0.0%	0
Part of museum's strategic or forward plan	42.1%	16
Other	28.9%	11
	If Other, please specify:	13
	<i>answered question</i>	38
	<i>skipped question</i>	12

7. Throughout the entire process, which issue was most important to you as registrar and/or collection manager?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Storage of objects 	16.2%	6
Display of objects	0.0%	0
Protection of objects 	62.2%	23
Transportation of objects through facilities (elevators, hallways)	0.0%	0
Transportation of objects off site (packing, shipping) 	10.8%	4
Additional personnel work space 	2.7%	1
Other 	8.1%	3
	If Other, please specify:	6
		<i>answered question</i>
		37
		<i>skipped question</i>
		13

8. What collection care issues were important during the initial planning phase? (Initial planning phase means the time leading up to the finalized architectural program.)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Meeting object storage space needs	27.0%	10
Meeting object display space needs	18.9%	7
Meeting personnel space needs	5.4%	2
Upgrading facilities to meet collection care standards (e.g. installing HVAC system)	24.3%	9
Upgrading facilities to accommodate collection (e.g. larger elevators, wider hallways)	8.1%	3
Other	16.2%	6
If Other, please specify:		8
<i>answered question</i>		37
<i>skipped question</i>		13

9. What collection care issues were important during the preparation phase? (Preparation phase means the time after the completion of the architectural program and before construction.)

	Response Percent	Response Count
Storage of objects on site	30.8%	11
Transportation of objects off site	16.7%	6
Transportation of objects to another venue (for exhibition)	0.0%	0
Maintaining accurate and current records of object locations	38.9%	14
Other	13.9%	5
If Other, please specify:		7
<i>answered question</i>		36
<i>skipped question</i>		14

10. What collection care issues were important during the implementation phase? (Implementation phase means the time during which museum staff and objects occupies the new space.)

	Response Percent	Response Count	
Acclimating objects to new/upgraded storage	5.9%	2	
Acclimating objects to new/upgraded display areas	0.0%	0	
Transportation of objects back to museum (from off site or venue)	29.4%	10	
Protecting objects until after construction full complete	52.9%	18	
Other	11.8%	4	
	If Other, please specify:	9	
		<i>answered question</i>	34
		<i>skipped question</i>	16

11. What is one thing you know now that you wish you knew before the process started? Please explain why.

	Response Count	
	30	
	<i>answered question</i>	30
	<i>skipped question</i>	20

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