

INVENTORYING & CATALOGING MASONIC ARTIFACTS

A Primer

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON MASONIC MEMORIAL ASSOCIATION

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TERMINOLOGY

- **ARTIFACT / OBJECT:** Any two-dimensional or three-dimensional thing. They can be historic in nature, like a 1850 Past Master's jewel or more recent utilitarian object, such as a 1970's minute book. They include photographs, art, regalia, furniture, furnishing – everything.
- **INVENTORY:** is the processing of accounting for every object / artifact within a room or a building. It is the first step in cataloging a collection. Inventorying is usually no more locating an object, assigning it a unique number, recording 5-10 fields of information in a database, and creating a paper and digital files on the object.
- **CATALOGING:** Is a more advanced inventorying. It is an on-going never ending process of adding more fields of information, collecting and doing in-depth research on artifacts within a collection.
- **ACCESSIONING:** the processing of adding a new artifact into a collection.

This primer is to provide you the basic step-by-step guide to completing an inventory of every object within your Masonic museum or building, so that you may later accession more items into the collection and catalog each item in the future.

SUPPLIES

- Ledger books with lined paper (school note books also work)
- Pencils and pencil sharpener
- White paper tags with cotton string
- File folders, preferable acid free
- White cotton gloves
- Re-sealable baggies of various sizes
- Black permanent marker
- Computer with Internet connection
- Digital camera
- Backup computer memory sticks or drives.

EXAMPLE TEMPLE TO CATALOG COLLECTION:

A typical Masonic temple, built in the 1920s was once was home to 3 lodges, a Royal Arch chapter and

Eastern Star chapter and a DeMolay chapter. Today just one lodge owns and occupies the temple. The lodge, chartered in the 1850s, is growing and its younger members wish to clean, improve and care for the temple and all its great old artifacts. The Temple has a large lodge hall with 200+ seats along with five storage closets used by the various organizations. On the first floor is a library /game room, a ladies lounge with bathroom. A secretary's office, a cloak room with men's bathroom, a parlor / reception area, a three-foot high safe and a long connecting hallway complete the first floor. On the second floor is a dinning room and kitchen. The basement has a boiler-room plus three rooms used for supplies, tools an old “stuff.”

With the approval of the temple association and lodge, four brother masons agree to inventory all the objects in the building. The four brothers' priority is to catalog all the historical objects first while the temple association wants an accounting of the building's assets-- to include furniture, tools, appliances and fixtures. Rather than insisting all things be inventorying at the same time, the association agrees, to let the four brother inventory the historical objects first and the assets later.

PRE-INVENTORY PROCESS

1. SECURE ALL AREAS before announcing inventory process to brethren. If people know the process is about to it will only encourage meddlers and malcontents
2. After acquiring all necessary supplies and establishing a proper work area in the secretary's office, the brother identifies all location of artifacts to be inventoried. This means either bringing items scattered throughout the building to one central location or designating several storage / display locations within a buildings. The four brothers agree that most of the objects in the public areas (lodge room / library / parlor/ dinning room and hallways) will remain on display, but all the private areas, such as closets, the basement and secretary's office will be consolidated. Object within the locked safe will also remain.
3. A floor plan of the temple is obtained and each room, area and closet is assigned a unique code. Example: 1.L = First Floor Library; 1.C2 = First Floor, Second Closet; 2.K = Second Floor Kitchen; 3.B = Basement, Boiler-room. Once designated marked floor plans should have many copies made and a pdf file and other scans stored in hard-drives.
4. Small discrete letter and numbers should be placed on doors or within each room, area or closet to mark them according to their location code.
5. After affixing numbers to each area begin sorting and consolidating objects from assets. For example, looking through the five storage closets the four brothers find a few remaining DeMolay capes, the Royal Arch Ark of the Covenant and an Eastern Star minute books. They consolidate all these items in to one closet. In the basement the find some framed membership certificates and photos among some broken chairs and a coffee pot. Leaving the chairs and the coffee pot, they move the other material into a unused closet. As they search the building they find more items. At the end of this process they have separated the “sheep from the goats” and cleaned out several closets. Lastly, they have consolidated a large pile of what could be thrown away into one area in the basement.

6. Just like sorting laundry into whites, colors and delicates, the four brothers sort objects among the various storage and display rooms. For example more DeMolay objects are found and consolidated into one closets. Another closet fills with old props and aprons from the two other lodges that once met in the temple. The secretary's offices fills up with minute books, tyler books and old membership certificates. Opening the safe three boxes of past masters jewels are discovered.

Displayed in the library and the main hallway are numerous Masonic prints, plaques, awards and photographs and artwork from the history of the lodge. With this sorting completed the four brothers have limited the actual object into specific storage and display areas. They designate locations within these areas. For example the closets' shelves are numbered, the walls in the library are named according to compass direction, while its various bookcase, shelves, cabinets and desk are all given a location number. The old frames certificates found in the basement are now stacked on a closet shelf: 1.C2.4 = first floor, second closet fourth shelf. A framed display of Past Master's photos in the library is now located as 1.L.S = first floor library south wall. Within the safe are three boxes, marked 1, 2, 3 so box #2 = 1.S.B2 It does not matter how the areas within a room are designated, so long as it is done rationally and thoroughly. Once completed each location out to be discreetly marked and numerous copies should be made and safely filed.

7. The first five steps may take two full day's work. The steps have both circumscribed the entire area of work, but it also has informed the four brothers where exactly all objects are in the building. This is important if other objects are discovered or more items are brought into the building. They have focused the work from a whole building filled with stuff, to a few storage rooms and display areas down to a few objects on a shelf, on a wall, in a cabinet or a box. Having now limited every object in the building in to a specific location they are now ready to catalog individual objects.
8. With everything in its place, prevent anyone from moving anything until the inventory is completed. Once a location is inventoried make it is secured from tampering.
9. Only after all steps are completed and the storage areas are secure, the lodge may consider accepting donations, or call an amnesty of "borrowed" objects, books, and archives.

The process has moved from considering all objects within a building, to objects within each room or closet, to all objects within a box or on a shelf or wall. It is now time to work on each object.

THE INVENTORY PROCESS IS READY TO BEGIN

The four brothers divide into two teams. In this way they can work independently in different rooms and at different times. One person will do the data entry the other will do the actual cataloging.

THE BASIC STEPS

1. Locate an object to inventory
2. Determine object's accession number and write number in accession book
3. Tag object with accession number
4. Take digital images of object (front, back and details)
5. Measures and describe object
6. Write information on catalog record sheet **OR** enters information directly into a database
7. Store the object and move to next object
8. At a later time, record sheet information and digital images entered into Database
9. Database records reviewed for edits and corrections

RECOMMENDED OPTION: Write information with pencil on catalog sheets, enter information from sheet into database. File sheet, printed database page, and thumbnail images of object

1. LOCATE AN OBJECT TO INVENTORY

Select a storage / display area and start with the top shelf, first box, nearest wall or whatever items is logically first. It does not matter where exactly inventorying starts, so long as each separate item, container and areas is systematically done. DETERMINE THE LOCATION NUMBER

The Four Brothers/ Two Pair:

The first pair opens up the safe and on the top shelf on the left had side is a box of Past Master's jewels. They mark the box #1, open it and take out the first jewel.

The mark on the sheet paper: 1.S.S1.B1 = first floor safe, shelf 1, box 1

The second pair, in the library, has a room full of past master photographs and framed membership, past masters, and other paper certificates. They start on the wall clockwise (south) from the exit and mark on paper: 1.L.S = first floor, library, south wall

HANDLING OBJECTS: It is best to use cotton gloves on all metals and textiles to prevent dirt and oils from hands soiling the object. Cotton gloves should not be used to handle glass, ceramic and most wood items. Cotton makes glass and ceramics more slippery and fabric gloves may catch on wood and cause splintering.

2. DETERMINE OBJECT'S ACCESSION NUMBER AND WRITE NUMBER IN BOOK

All Items MUST have unique numbers – no duplicates, ever!

Standard Museum Practice is three-part numbers: Year + Order of Accession + Items within accession. Example: a Royal Arch Past High Priest Apron is numbered 2018.006.025

2018 = The apron was donated (or inventoried) in 2018

006 = It was the sixth donation/collection inventoried in the year

025 = It is the twenty-fifth item within the donation or collection—there might be 24 other PHP aprons or in may be one Mason’s personal collection that includes a PM apron, lapel pins, a fez, cufflinks, certificates, plaques, etc.

Use letters for paired items or units in a set ---- but there is no need to number every item

Examples: Past Master Jewel and Case = a & b
OES Tea Service of 4 cups & 4 saucers, a, b, c, d, e, f, g, & h
Ballot Box with white balls and black cubs = One accession and a= balls, b= cubes
500 piece jigsaw puzzle = one accession

If you have two pairs of inventorying the building, one might start with 2018.001 and the other might start with .500

The third number is open ended—so if more items are found that should be added to the collection, it can be done without any trouble. So if five more PHP aprons are found or another box of the brother’s Masonic items are donated, they can add as .26+

In the end, it is not as important what sort of numbering system is used, so long as it is impossible for the system to generate duplicate numbers.

WRITE NUMBER IN BOOK! – Keep a separate book for each letter category. It is very important that a good ledger book or notebook is obtained and that a running list is kept. This prevents any duplication of numbers. Divided the sheet into four columns and use pencil!! not ink :

ACC #	OBJECT	CATALOGER	DATE	DONOR
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Acc# = the unique accession number

Object = What is it? PM Jewel, bracelet, Masonic ring, stick pin, fob, etc.

Cataloger = the initials of the person who accessioned the object

Date = the month, day year when the object was accessioned.

Donor = If known, or if it was purchased and if not then simple place “Found in Collection”

3. TAG OBJECT WITH ACCESSION NUMBER

DO NOT USE INK

DO NOT USE TAPE, GLUE, STICKERS OR ANY ADHESIVE – including Post-it Notes

Using a pencil write accession number on a white paper tag with a cotton sting. Tie tag onto object, or place tag within object.

Paper objects like certificates, lithographs, framed art and the like, on the REVERSE in a bottom corner gently write the accession number. Write legible but not so dark as to groove the paper. There might be a time when the number has to be removed / erased. Deep dark marks are harder to remove and on lighter paper, mar the front (obverse) side.

4. PHOTOGRAPH OBJECTS (FRONT, BACK AND DETAILS)

Digital images of artifacts are for documentation only. While it is highly encourage to take many images of each object within a collection, such images should only be used to help describe objects and not for publications.

- Secure a reasonable quality digital image with proper software.
- Set up a place to photograph - small object may be shot on a table top, framed objects on a wall or easel, large objects ought to be photographed where they exist.
- Create three image files in computer hard-drive.
 - First file for every image to be downloaded into.
Within this file establish subfiles according to location.
 - Second file for best images of each object to be copied into.
Within this file establish subfiles by letter category: A, B, C, etc.
 - Third file will contain images for database use.
- Begin in a storage/display location and take digital images of every object in the location
 - photos should include details, front and back and even damage or special marks
 - If possible use a black and white measuring stick next to object to help judge scale.
- Download all images into the first computer file
- Select best images, copy and past into second file.
- Name each image in the second file by its accession number with a dash and unique suffix number
Example: 2018.006.002 is a framed portrait. 201800600201.jpg = front; 02.jpg = reverse; 03.jpg = image of artist signature; 04.jpg = image of art gallery label on reverse.
- In First File moves all images downloaded into a sub-file titled "Location." In this way you keep past downloaded images in one place while using the First File as a "work area."

5. MEASURE AND DESCRIBE OBJECT

For inventorying purposes not more than 10-12 fields of information on each object should be recorded. Describing and object should also be kept brief. As mentioned in that the manual's beginning, there is literally scores of information fields that could be recorded and it is possible to write hundreds of words describing one artifact. Such detail is called cataloging and is to be done after an inventory is completed. So "KISS": keep it simple stupid. The work must stay focused on getting through all the artifacts, and avoid spending too much time and effort on any one object.

- ACCESSION NUMBER: See Step #2
- OBJECT: What is it, 1-3 words, "Past Master Jewel", "Folding Chair" "Tyler Apron"
- MEASUREMENTS
 - HEIGHT: from bottom to top;
 - WIDTH: How wide is it
 - DEPTH: How deep is
 - CIRCUMFERENCE: if it is round- what is its span?

- WHEN MADE: If there is a date on the item or a close estimate “circa”
- WHO MADE: a manufacturer, artist, publishers, etc.
- WHERE MADE: location use: “city, state, country”
- MATERIALS: the 3-4 more use materials in an object. Such as apron: silk with gold bullion thread. Certificate: paper with wax seal. Quilt: textiles, cotton. Painting: oil on canvas
- DESCRIPTION: Short 10-30 word explanation of the object.- SEE BELOW
- DONOR: who gave the item? Was it purchased or “Found in the Collection”
- ORIGINAL OWNER: Who owned the item, may be different than donor. A grandfather might have owned the item, but a grandson donated it.
- LOCATION: Where is the object located in the building.

* DESCRIPTION: This field explains what the object is. It is key to identifying an object if it loses its number or when searching for items within the database. Most of the words contained in this field are used to search the whole database. It is absolutely essential that the most obvious information is recorded here.

For example when inventorying a Past Master's jewel include the name of the lodge, the year and the past master's name. Simply entering “Lodge Past Master Jewel” is of little help. These four words belong in the “Object Field”. A better description would be “Hiram Lodge No. 12 Masonic Lodge Past Master Jewel for John H. Harvey, 1920 -1922, Columbus Ohio. Gold jewel with “Hiram Lodge No. 12” on top, square, compasses, sunburst & arc with carved moonstone for sun face. On reverse is engraved “John H. Harvey, 1920-1922.” Below in small letters: 'Johnston Jewelry Company, Cincinnati, OH.”

With two good digital images included this jewel will be easily identifiable.

Lastly: “A picture is worth a thousand words, but nothing beats the real thing.”

The information inputted on each object and the length of its description is never as good as an image. This is especially true for highly complicated objects such as aprons, lithographs, tracing boards, quilts and even some badges. Since images will be taken for every item there is no sense in describing every symbol that appears on a Masonic apron or lithograph. By mentioning the 5-10 major motifs, symbols images a future researcher or cataloger will be lead to the objects image for a better understanding.

On the other hand, never assume an image is better than the real thing. Inventorying and photographing an image can often ask more questions than they answer. Sometimes examining the real object is the only way to truly appreciate it. Seeing an image of 1790 lodge charter is not the same as actually viewing the charter.

6. WRITE INFORMATION ON CATALOG RECORD SHEET OR ENTER INFORMATION

DIRECTLY INTO DATABASE.

This step depends on the proficiency and availability of workers. The most efficient way to inventory is to have one person speaking the information and the second keying the information into the database. On the other hand, written hard copy records are the best safeguard against loss.

The GWMNMA and nearly every museum recommends the following:

- Keep hand-written Accession Book for each item inventoried – See Step # 2
- Create hand-written Catalog Sheets for each item
- Data enter the information on the sheets into database
- Print out the database object records for storage
- Make computer back ups of all digital images – photographs, scans, etc.

Depending on manpower and expertise there are different ways to achieve these recommendations. The hypothetical four Masonic brothers chose to split into two teams each working in different storage areas on different artifacts. One brother determined the information the other wrote it onto an accession sheet. While one brother organized the objects, the other took digital images of them. At the end of the day one brother data-entered the object information into the database, while the other downloaded and edited the digital images.

If working alone, a person could measure and photograph objects first and use the photographs to determine the information for the accession sheets or to data-enter into database.

The way and manner to achieve the recommendations is not important, as long as the objects are properly inventoried and the information is in the computer.

7. STORE THE OBJECT AND MOVE TO THE NEXT OBJECT

While this sounds obvious it is often not the case. Inventorying is a slow and systematic routine. Once an object is being inventoried there should be no distractions or digressions. An object must receive the full attention of the worker. This prevents loss, damage, confusion and other mishaps. An object should be carefully removed from its storage location, inventoried and then carefully and thoroughly returned to its location. Only when the object has received the previous six steps is the next object considered.

Example: a box of Past Masters Jewel. It is reasonable to look at all the jewels before inventorying any of them. Certainly they could be sorted by year or lodge photographed as a group and individually. If there are other boxes of jewel they could be combined into one box or if there are jewels from other lodges or other organizations that should be moved into their own boxes, this is also recommended. But once the jewels are organized for inventorying, then start with the first one, fully inventory it, place it back in its case, or wrap it in paper and place it back in the box.

Do not try to catalog elements of several jewels at the same time, do not run off looking for other object that may relate to that jewel, such as an image of the past master or his apron or certificate, awards plaques or the like. Overtime each of these supporting objects will be inventoried and the database will pull them together as it should.

Do not run out to lunch, eat food while inventorying, stop work for the day or do anything but inventory the object. At the end of the work period it is absolutely necessary that you finish what you

started and that you or anyone else will know exactly where to begin the next session.

8. At later time, record sheet information and digital images entered into a database

9. Review Database records for edits and corrections

10. Corrections / changes in database and for the items **MUST** be reconciled

OBJECT ASSESSION FORM – BASIC

ACCESSION NUMBER:

LOCATION

OBJECT:

DESCRIPTION:

HEIGHT:

WIDTH:

DEPTH:

CIRCUMFERENCE:

CONDITION: (good, fair, poor)

DATE / WHEN MADE:

WHO MADE:

WHERE MADE:

DONOR:

ORIGINAL OWNER:

Useful Websites List

Ordering/ Supplies

- <http://www.aam-us.org/mmo/> AAM Museum Marketplace On-line buyers guide
- <http://www.coleparmer.com> Cole-Parmer hygrothermograph info
- <http://www.belfort-inst.com> Belfort hygrothermograph info
- <http://www.universityproducts.com> University Products catalog—archival products
- <http://www.lightimpressionsdirect.com> Light Impressions catalog—archival products
- <http://www.archivart.com> Archivart catalog—archival products
- <http://www.conservationresources.com> Conservation Resources catalog—archival products

Professional Organizations Sites

- <http://www.aam-us.org> American Association of Museums (AAM)
- <http://www.nemanet.org> New England Museum Association (NEMA)
- <http://mignon2.si.edu/rcaam> AAM's Registrars Committee (RC-AAM)

General Information Sites

- <http://www.wils.wisc.edu/disaster/disaster5.html> Disaster Preparedness info/ list of suppliers for products
- <http://www.loc.gov/copyright> Library of Congress- Copyright law page
- <http://www.panix.com/~squigle/rarin/01rcsite.html> Rights and Reproductions Information

Centers/ Organizations/ Institutes

for preservation information

- <http://www.cr.nps.gov/csd/publications/index.htm> Conserve O Grams, National Park Service, Museum Management Publications; available on line
- <http://www.nedcc.org> Northeast Document Conservation Center
- <http://www.cci-icc.gc.ca> Canadian Conservation Institutes
- <http://www.gii.getty.edu> The Getty Information Institute
- <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/> CoOL = Conservation OnLine
- <http://www.npi.org/> NPI = National Preservation Institute
- <http://palimpsest.stanford.edu/aic/> AIC = American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works
- <http://www.preserveart.org/> UMCA = Upper Midwest Conservation Association