

Archives Report- DRAFT

Submitted July 27, 2023 by Emma Stratton and Elizabeth Farish

3. Current Condition

a. Example: Lack of appropriate storage, quality of conditions, accommodation of diverse storage needs, etc. (see Tom's Collections Assessment)

Strawbery Banke: Strawbery Banke has appropriate storage space for archival materials, including documents, photographs, oral history transcripts, maps and building assessments in the Carter Collection Center. However, there is little to no room for growth. The closure of the Thayer Cumings Library and Archive in 2009 precipitated the need for alternative storage, hence the move to the object collection facility. However, public access to the museum's resources was severely affected by the library closure. The archival material is still available if requested, but the public facing nature of the resources no longer exists.

The museum has a small vault in what is now a museum owned rental building, the Shapley Townhouse at 454 Court Street. This small space has environmental challenges, and must be monitored constantly. The vault holds glass plate negatives, various types of tapes with recorded oral histories, 20th century advertising material collected during the Abbott Store project, institutional archives among other archives.

The museum's archaeological collection is precariously stored in the basements of the museums' 18th and 19th century basements. The collection represents artifacts from the 30 excavations executed by archaeologists on Puddle Dock, and the significant Deer Street excavation of the 1980s. This is problematic for numerous reasons including accessibility, possible harm from failing building systems like furnaces and sump pumps, the constant breakdown of the boxes from damp basement conditions and more recently, the threat of sea level rise.

Strawbery Banke's archival material should be more easily accessible to the public and the archaeological collection should be protected and available for scholars for research projects.

Portsmouth Historical Society: The Portsmouth Historical Society's collection of objects and artworks are located on the 3rd floor of the John Paul Jones House. While attempts have been made to properly store the items with archival boxes, metal shelving and hanging walls, the third floor space is not properly climate controlled. There is evidence of substantial past leaks from the roof and the window air conditioning units are not sufficient to moderate the fluctuating heat and humidity levels in a 1758 home. The 3rd floor is only accessible to museum staff and the organization lacks adequate

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study/research space. The lack of public access and climate control are two major concerns for the Portsmouth Historical Society that we hope this project will address.

Athenaeum: The overriding, dominant concern at the Athenaeum is with the environment-temperature and humidity control, and visible and ultraviolet light levels – which is damaging the collections. Equally important is fire risk, especially in the 1805 Building. There is an urgent need to address these issues.

The Athenaeum is quickly outgrowing its existing space, to the point where the weight of the collections compromise the structural integrity of its buildings. A short-term solution has been secured with additional off-site storage on State Street, but this storage is not environmentally stable.

City: In 2017, the City devoted a portion of the basement in City Hall (the former hospital building) to city records, including those records it is required to keep due to RSA laws and regulations. Prior to 2017, the records were stored in an underground tunnel connecting the hospital to Connors Cottage, where they were subject to frequent water infiltration and mold. Many of the covers of bound historical records were compromised in the process.

While there are attempts to control the climate through dehumidifiers and HVAC, there are instances of leaks and outside water infiltration during heavy rains. Basements and attics are two of the least ideal places for archival storage due to the likelihood of water infiltration. During our site visit, the ceiling of the quarantine room was exposed due to a recent burst water pipe that impacted the collections area. Records are growing at a rate of 4-5 shelving units per year to include all the documents required under RSA. It was noted that there are archives not stored centrally for additional departments, including objects and maps, at DPW and the Police Department. The facility is already at capacity for space (within 6 years of opening) and the need will only be more pressing. At present, the City has an employee in the finance department who has taken on the archives as a passion project, but is only to devote a minimal amount of time to its oversight and maintenance. She relies heavily on the facilities and maintenance teams for routine checks.

4. Description of Need/Issue

a. Assessment (include collections, scope and special needs):

1. City of Portsmouth: [need scope of what is held in archives]

2. The Portsmouth Athenaeum:

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The Athenaeum has, since its inception in 1817, been the steward of important collections related to the history of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and the Piscataqua River region. Scholars and students from all over the United States and internationally come to use the Athenaeum's rich resources for original research. Virtually the entire collection is also accessible online, with catalogue information and images; the site receives between 2,000 and 3,000 unique visitors every month.

The Athenaeum's holdings include:

- 1) The Art and Artifacts Collections including paintings, furniture, original art prints, models of Piscataqua River ships, ethnographic and archaeological objects given before 1875, and other artifacts of local historical significance
- 2) Rare Books, including many old and rare books purchased starting in 1817, and the entire libraries of Charles L. Woodbury and Benjamin T. Tredick, both dating from about 1870
- 3) The Manuscript Collection (1300 lineal feet), comprising archives of local businesses, families and the Athenaeum itself
- 4) The Photographic Collection, including 24,000 photographs, copper plates, daguerreotypes, glass slides, etc., almost all of which are on the Internet
- 5) The circulating library (40,000 volumes), which is available to proprietors and, through the New Hampshire Public Library System's Inter-library Loan Program, to members of the general public

Day-to-day responsibility for the Athenaeum rests with the Keeper, who oversees a staff of five: a Research Librarian, who is also responsible for the Ephemera Collections; a Rare Books Librarian, also responsible for pamphlets; an Archivist, who is responsible for the Manuscript/Archive collection, the Photographic Collection, and the Map Collection; a Curator of Art and Artifacts; and an Assistant Curator.

A number of members of the board and proprietors generously volunteer their time assisting with Athenaeum work, such as mounting exhibits, maintaining the building, acting as docents for the public, and carrying out special projects.

3. Strawberry Banke Museum:

Strawberry Banke Museum collects objects needed to illustrate and understand the Puddle Dock neighborhood through time as defined by the interpretive plan. Strawberry Banke collects archives and artifacts that were made or owned in Puddle Dock, Portsmouth, the greater Piscataqua area, and the Seacoast region between the period of Native American presence in the region until the founding of the museum (c. 1960) when Puddle Dock was last a residential neighborhood. Except for Native

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American artifacts, the core years represented by the collection are 1623-1960. Core collections items include:

Objects that can be documented or attributed to Portsmouth makers or makers in the greater Piscataqua River region or the Seacoast region.

Objects that have a history of ownership in Puddle Dock, Portsmouth, or in the Piscataqua region, or the Seacoast region

Period objects that are similar to those that might have been owned in Puddle Dock, Portsmouth, the greater Piscataqua region or the Seacoast region as documented by local archaeological evidence, early household inventories, newspaper advertisements, account books, related documented examples, photographs, and oral histories.

Period manuscripts, photographs, and published materials that relate to the families of the Puddle Dock neighborhood and the furnished house exhibits of SBM.

The Permanent Collection consists of original, rare, and often irreplaceable historical and art objects preserved for future generations with the inherent understanding that curatorial staff are only temporary stewards. Objects in the Permanent Collection may be used for research and exhibition and curator-supervised teaching and include ceramic, glass, metal, textiles, paintings, prints (graphics), wooden objects (primarily furniture), and tools from the late seventeenth century through the mid-twentieth century.

The museum will avoid using objects in the Permanent Collection in any way that is detrimental to their preservation. Objects in this collection number around 25,000 and are fully accessioned and may only be transferred through the deaccession process.

The Archaeological Collection consists of material culture remains found during the course of excavations at Strawberry Banke, in the city of Portsmouth, and the greater Piscataqua region. There are over one million artifacts in this collection. These remains constitute a collection of prehistoric artifacts and historic artifacts from the late seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. The collection includes human-made objects as well as biological, and geological remains which are maintained in storage, exhibition, study, and educational collections. In addition to artifacts, environmental and dating samples, field documentation, laboratory documentation, photographic records, related historical documents, maps, and reports are considered part of the Archaeological collection.

The Thayer Cumings Library and Archives Collection includes historical monographs, photographs, research papers, manuscript collections or single items (account books and other business records, personal letters and diaries, ephemera) and books relating to the history and inhabitants of Puddle Dock and the surrounding neighborhoods in Portsmouth, and architectural plans and drawings of

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Strawbery Banke structures and landscapes. There are approximately 500 linear feet of archival collections housed in Carter Collections Center and the Townhouse Vault.

Strawbery Banke's Collections staff consist of a full time curator, a full time project based archaeologist and a 15 hour per week Collections Manager.

4. The Portsmouth Historical Society:

The Portsmouth Historical Society has one of the most diverse collections of objects which includes furniture, paintings, textiles, silver, glassware, china and more. The nearly 3,000 objects are all stored on-site at the historic John Paul Jones House. PHS has collected objects needed to illustrate and understand the history and material life, broadly conceived, of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and the immediate Seacoast area, from the seventeenth century (with the exception of certain earlier Native American materials) to the present. Such objects include artifacts that were made or owned in Portsmouth and the immediate Seacoast region. Some types of core collections items include but are not restricted to:

- i. Objects that can be documented or attributed to a Portsmouth artist, artisan, company, or maker(s);
- ii. Objects that have a significant history of ownership in Portsmouth or the Seacoast region; for example, Asian or European ceramics of the types imported into Portsmouth;
- iii. Period objects that are similar to those that might have been owned in Portsmouth or the Seacoast region as documented by local archaeological evidence, early household inventories, newspaper advertisements, account books, related documented examples, photographs, and oral histories;
- iv. Period manuscripts, photographs, and published materials that relate to the history of Portsmouth. This aspect of the collection is coordinated with the Portsmouth Athenaeum, where PHS materials of this sort are on long-term deposit.

The main requirement for storage is substantial space and appropriate storage (acid-free boxes, hanging walls, shelving, etc.) in a climate-controlled facility. The archives of the Portsmouth Historical Society are on deposit at the Portsmouth Athenaeum. The collection is overseen by a part-time Collections Manager and part-time Curator who are guided by a Collecting Policy that has been vetted by the organization's Collections Committee and Board.

For all institutions, regardless of collections scope, the following issues are at hand:

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- Lack of control over the environment – temperature and relative humidity, light levels, pest management are jeopardizing the condition of collections. Prior fire safety and water mitigation efforts are also two threats to all collections.
- Space constraints– many of our organizations must sacrifice public space to create room for collection storage and have a finite amount of space, though our collections continue to grow.
- Lack of available funding for proper staffing

List of Potential Grant Funders:*

National Endowment for the Humanities

[Humanities Collections & Reference Resources:](#)

\$350,000 for implementation; prefer institutional collaboration

[Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections:](#)

Planning: \$50,000

Implementation Level I: \$100,000

Implementation Level II: \$350,000

IMLS

[Museums for America:](#)

\$250,000 for collections stewardship and access

National Archives

[Major Collaborative Archival Initiatives:](#)

A grant is for one to three years. Awards will be between \$150,000 and \$350,000. Non-profits and local government agencies are eligible.

**The grants listed here are for the highest awards. Additional opportunities exist at each federal agency.*

Private Foundations

Penates Foundation

Fidelity Foundation: [Capital Investments or Planning Initiatives](#)

Luce Foundation: [American Art Responsive Grants](#)

[Foundation Grants for Libraries & Archives](#) (Library of Congress)

Mellon Foundation: [Expanding Public Knowledge](#)

Gladys Krieble Delmas Foundation: [Research Libraries Program](#)

**There are additional opportunities for digitization efforts as well as preserving underrepresented collections*