



Vincent Lombardi <councilorvincelombardi@gmail.com>

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## Fwd: Large storage facilities

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Emma Stratton <emma@portsmouthhistory.org>  
To: Vincent Lombardi <councilorvincelombardi@gmail.com>

Thu, Jul 6, 2023 at 2:36 PM

Hi Vince:

I'm forwarding along an email from our curator who has worked at many institutions with off-site storage facilities. The details he provides are a bit ahead of where we are in the process, but his insight and notes are valid (for example, considering a loading dock!). I wanted to share it with you while it's fresh in my mind.

Thanks!  
Emma

----- Forwarded message -----

From: **Gerry Ward** <[gward@portsmouthhistory.org](mailto:gward@portsmouthhistory.org)>  
Date: Wed, Jul 5, 2023 at 11:30 AM  
Subject: Large storage facilities  
To: Emma Stratton <[emma@portsmouthhistory.org](mailto:emma@portsmouthhistory.org)>  
Cc: Molly Liolios <[molly@portsmouthhistory.org](mailto:molly@portsmouthhistory.org)>

I am sure that you and the committee have considered the points mentioned below, but I can't resist passing them along, all based on my experiences at the Garvan Furniture Study at Yale (1976-83) and our giant secret off-site storage (in Randolph) at the MFA (2006 or so to the present). Both share some of the characteristics of the HNE facility in Haverhill.

The Furniture Study was mainly a large open space (once a bakery) of about 10,000 sq. feet, where ca. 800 pieces of American furniture and a few other things could be arranged by form (clocks, chairs, chests, etc.) in long rows from front to back. The ceiling height was such that smaller objects could be stored on two-level shelving (as here and there at HNE). The taller chests-on-chests, desk and bookcases, clocks, etc., just stood on the floor or platforms. In essence it was open storage long before the Luce Center at the Met came along.

The MFA facility is a repurposed pharmaceutical manufacturing building and I have no idea how big it is except that it is large. Suffice it to say it holds all the American and European (and a few Asian) decorative arts objects (except precious metals) that are not on view, totaling many thousands of objects. (Textiles and fashion arts are not included.) So basically it has furniture and woodwork, glass, ceramics, and some base metals. The very high ceiling

allows for storage on shelving that has maybe 6-7 levels, requiring lifts of various sorts to get things down. Small objects usually remain boxed in their shipping crates.

In addition to the actual storage space for objects, good security, environmental controls, good lighting, etc., the good parts of each of these facilities included:

- easy access via a large loading dock and/or freight elevator
- office space/equipment for a curator, facilities people, or whomever staffs the place
- office space for object files (obsolete these days)
- photography studio big enough to shoot large objects professionally when needed
- dedicated space, either a separate space or an area within the storage area, for object examination by staff and visitors, with doors large enough for large objects to be brought in if need be
- a clean conservation space for at least minor treatments (Yale had a full furniture lab, but that was a site-specific need)
- the Furniture Study had a small reception area where a few objects could be displayed and where classes/groups of ca. 25-30 people could meet on occasion for lectures, workshops, etc.
- good parking for staff and visitors

Some of the "bad" parts include:

- lack of accessibility for the MFA site: it is ca. 19 miles from the Museum down the Southeast Expressway, so casual visits are not possible; the Yale site (in my time--they have subsequently moved) was only about 75 yards from the main Museum
- Inability to easily retrieve or look at objects for examination because they are boxed up or 50 feet in the air or no staff is available to retrieve them for weeks on end (MFA)
- Long delays in retrieving objects to put on view when need be (MFA)
- Below ground (Yale); never put anything you want to keep in the basement
- Public access only by appointment (both facilities); so-called "open storage" as at the Met or the Flynt Center at Historic Deerfield is a vast improvement, as it at least allows visual access for the public without an appointment. Online databases with images are only a partial solution to the access issue, although a good step.

One additional component to consider might be the inclusion of a small silver vault, which is sort of a standard part of storage for gold, silver, jewelry, and other rare and valuable objects that usually need good clean air in particular. No institution in town, to my knowledge, has much of a silver collection (we have ca. 50-55 pieces and SBM probably has ca. 125-50) but most of what everyone has tends to be in storage for security/environmental issues. One could easily

create a small secure vault within a larger storage area and perhaps provide it with good environmental controls so that things could be stored in cabinets without the need for bagging. Compact shelving works well in these spaces, of course.

Most places also have a small receiving space where newly arriving objects can be stored for a bit to make sure they are bug and mold free etc., to avoid introducing critters to the whole building. (Thinking of Molly and her spiders here.)

As I say, none of this is news, but I enjoyed thinking about these spaces and what they might add to your committee's discussion, which I suspect is not much.

One other point: it would be good to have each institution 'edit' their collections before (as opposed to after) moving them to a new storage facility. Here I am thinking mainly about us. No sense paying to move things you don't want to keep.

And, of course, allow room for growth over time. Collections that don't grow are basically dead.

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Emma Stratton (*she/her*)



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MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON TASK FORCE ON HISTORICAL ARCHIVES:

**Report Sections *proposed***

1. Executive Summary **Jeff & Vince**
2. General Information, including the history of prior efforts **Tom W & Tom H**
3. Current Condition **Elizabeth & Emma**
  - a. Example: Lack of appropriate storage, quality of conditions, accommodation of diverse storage needs, etc. (see Tom's Collections Assessment)
4. Description of Need/Issue
  - a. Assessment **Elizabeth & Emma**
    - i. Member Organizations (include collections, scope and special needs):
      1. City of Portsmouth
      2. The Portsmouth Athenaeum
      3. Strawberry Banke Museum
      4. The Portsmouth Historical Society, and
      5. Such other entities as appropriate
      6. Private Collections
  - b. Rationale **Kristen & Alan**

The history of Portsmouth is:

    1. Nationally recognized as important to the history of the Country and State
    2. Integral to the cultural identity of the city
    3. A major tourism draw
    4. Important to the economic viability of the city
    5. Studied and documented by Scholars from all over the world

6. A repository of information about the people and cultures who have lived in Portsmouth (Piscataqua region)
7. Important for how we shape Portsmouth in the future

5. The Issue **Susan & Tom H**

- a. The city and many organizations (and individuals) currently have and store relevant materials to the history of Portsmouth.
- b. The city and these organizations do not have adequate facilities to properly store and preserve these materials.

6. Recommendations/Goals **Christine**

- a. How the City and Portsmouth private historical organizations can join together to create a facility that meets the needs of archiving important records, with a recommended assessment.
- b. Ongoing, long-range committee to assist with this initiative moving forward.
- c. How the pertinent materials are identified and judged as vital; what should not or cannot be included? What qualifies as Portsmouth history? Flow of ongoing acquired objects.
- d. What archiving methods should be used for each type of material to assure each type is protected effectively?
- e. What space will be required for such an effort? How will the space be identified, procured and maintained?
- f. Scale of acceptable objects for archiving.
- g. How will the ongoing efforts be funded? What are the opportunities for establishing trust funds, local and state monies and private contributions?
- h. How will the archives ongoing leadership and management be structured and implemented?
- i. Structure/architectural needs
- j. Legal

7. Conclusion **unclaimed as of 4/28/23 – assigned later toward the end**