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# *ORDER FROM CHAOS*

A History of the Museum Worker

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# Collections and Museums

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- The Museum Worker
    - Collector
    - Cataloger
    - Keeper/Curator
    - Conservator
    - Preparator
    - Exhibition Designer
    - Registrar
    - Imaging Specialist
    - Database Administrator
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# Origins of accountability

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- Collector to Museum
  - Public participation in Museum
  - Technical ability to account for objects
    - Conservation
      - Paintings
      - Cleaning
      - Taxidermy
    - Documentation
      - Catalogs
      - Card system
-

# Early discoveries

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- Collections had no chance at longevity until the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Most were primarily natural history collections and there was no way to preserve specimens. Developments in two areas changed things drastically:
    - Alcohol
    - Paper
-

# Alcohol and paper

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## Alcohol

### ■ Before 1483

Medicine

Drink

### ■ After 1483

Preservative

## Paper

■ Known but not used

■ Late 1400s, linen paper was everywhere

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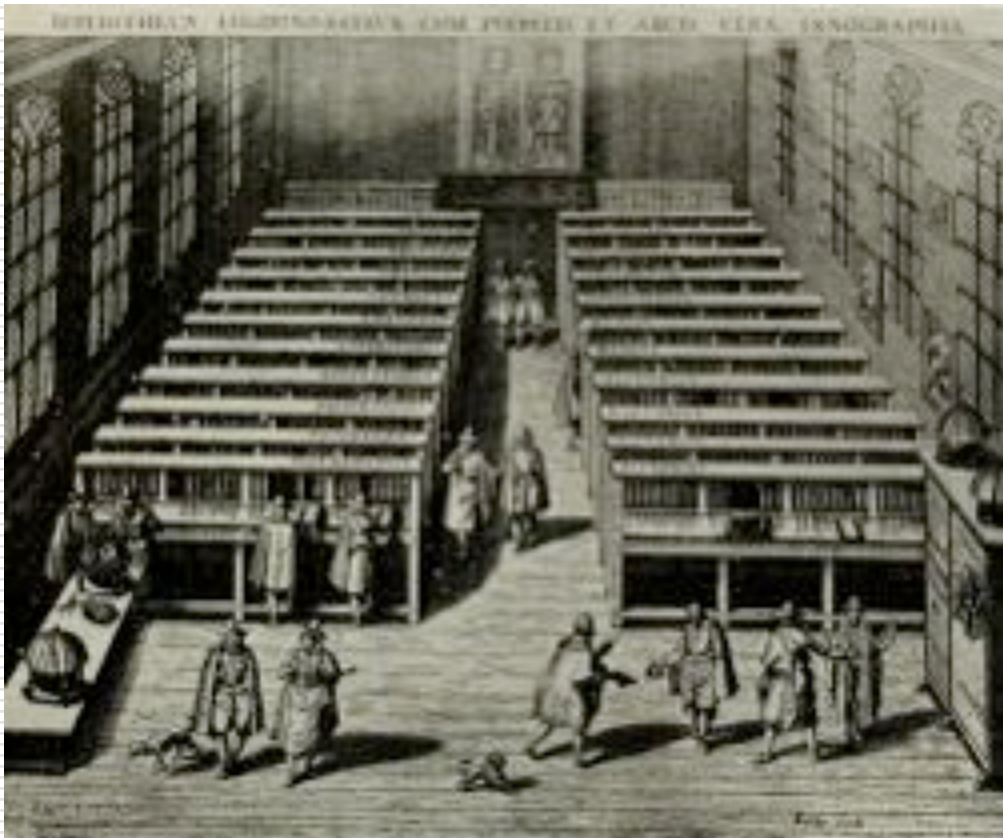
# Printing press

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- Limited one-off documentation
  - Gutenberg - 1450
  - 1565 – Samuel Quicquelburg of Amsterdam, first published catalog of objects
  - Followed by:
    - Kenntmann of Saxony
    - Mercati of Rome
    - Imperati of Naples
    - Palissy of Paris
-

# Leyden University subject catalog – early 17<sup>th</sup> century

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- Mathematics
  - Philosophy
  - Literature
  - Theology
  - History
  - Medicine
  - Law
-

# Carl Linnaeus (1707-1798)

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- Taxonomy clarified
- “The ‘printed instructions’ for the arrangement of a museum published by Linnaeus in 1753 is the first really scientific essay, and has been followed by most naturalists. Indeed, even to-day we find the principles and rules of Linnaeus more or less unconsciously followed in many museums.”

■ Hermann A. Hagen, 1876

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# Card Systems

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- Playing cards with catalog information written on them.

# Precursors to the modern museum: collectors and cabinets

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- John Tradescant Elder
  - Gardener to aristocrats
  - Collector of the Closet of Rarities
- John Tradescant Younger
  - Musaeum Tradescantianum
- Elias Ashmole
  - Catalogued 1656
  - Obtained 1659
  - Donated to Oxford 1677
    - Instituta Ashmoleana opened in 1683
    - Joined with University Art Gallery
    - First museum in Britain open to the public



- <http://www.ashmolean.org/ash/amulets/tradescant/tradescant00.html>
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# First museums, United States

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- 1638 Ancient and Honorable Artillery Company, Boston
  - 1731 Library Company of Philadelphia
  - 1763-1772 Dartmouth College Museum NH
  - 1773 Charleston Museum, Charleston, SC
  - 1791 Albany Institute of History & Art
  - 1785 Peale's Philadelphia Museum
  - 1791 American Museum, New York
  - 1791 Massachusetts Historical Society
  - 1799 The Peabody Essex Museum, Salem
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# American chaos in three early ways

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- Dartmouth College Museum – 1772-present
    - TOO COMPLEX
      - Philosophical Apparatus, Mammoth Bones
      - Hood Museum of Art – still going!
  - Peale's Philadelphia Museum – 1782-1850
    - TOO COMMERCIAL
      - Private business, art and natural history
  - American Museum, New York - 1791-1795
    - LACK OF FOCUS
      - Everything, from whatever clime...
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# Dartmouth College Museum

## 1772-1803

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- 1772's commencement brought a gift of **£175** for the purchase of philosophical apparatus.
- On October 26, 1772, Reverend David McClure wrote "I have collected a few curious Elephants Bones found about six hundred miles down the Ohio, for the young Museum of Dartmouth." 772.1.30172
- 1796: Mr. Derby's Zebra arrives
- 1798: The Fire



# Dartmouth College Museum 1804-1828

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- Dartmouth Hall and the Attack - 1811
  - Students to the left of us
  - Students to the right of us
  - Canons available...
- Destruction of the Dartmouth College Museum



*A first View of DARTMOUTH COLLEGE, with the FRANKLIN'S HALL.*

# Dartmouth's collection grows 1828 – present

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- Library and Gallery of Portraits
  - Anthropology/philosophy museum
  - Individual department collections
  - Wilson to Butterfield to the Hop
  - Hood Museum of Art
    - Charles Moore building
    - Unified collections
    - Opened September 1985
-

# Peale's Philadelphia Museum - 1782

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- ❑ In 1782 Charles Willson Peale decided to build a gallery next to his house – somewhere to show, and showcase, his paintings. It quickly grew into a museum.
- ❑ 1784-1854 Philadelphia Museum
- ❑ Great strides in preparation and changing exhibitions.





# Peale's split personality museum

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- ❑ Education vs. Economics
  - Education disguised as entertainment
- ❑ Antagonized his own wealthy patrons
- ❑ Art vs. Science
  - Peale's portraits
  - Morgan's mastodon bones
  - Alexander Wilson's ornithology



# Peale's vision

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## □ The Generalist

- 'a repository for Natural Curiosities... The several Articles will be classed and arranged according to their several species; and .. On each piece will be inscribed the place from whence it came, and the name of the donor.'
-

# Peale's museum - spiraling to the end

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- ❑ Never considered moving from profit-making to non-profit
  - ❑ Endorsed by Philosophical Society
  - ❑ Peale died in 1827 – by then the museum could not compete with contemporary entertainment – the great P. T. Barnum enterprises
  - ❑ Sons increased the entertainment value, but eventually (1854) sold the collections to Barnum.
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# The American Museum - 1791

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On June 1, 1791 the Tammany Society of New York City issued a Broadside publicizing its American Museum, which had opened to the public on May 21<sup>st</sup>



# The American Museum collecting plan

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- The founders had a collecting plan:
    - “Everything, from whatever clime, will be acceptable.”
  - The broadside noted that everyone most likely had one or two things to donate, and the museum made the following promise:
    - “The articles and names of the generous donors are carefully registered in a book kept for the purpose, the contents of which shall be published at some future season.”
-

# The American museum keeper

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- “The Trustees shall elect a Keeper of the Museum, whose duty shall be to summon all meetings called by the Chairman, to attend the same, and perform such necessary offices as may be required. He shall receive all presents made to the society, and deposit them to the Museum, giving an account thereof to the Secretary. He shall admit all members into the museum, at such times as shall be appointed for that purpose, and shall take care that no visitor remove or injure any of the articles belonging to the Museum.”
  - Gardiner Baker was named Keeper. By 1795 interest in the museum had waned, and it was given over to Baker. Baker died soon after, and the contents of the museum eventually ended up with Phineas T. Barnum’s museum of wonders.
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# Barnum's American museum

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- ❑ Zoo, museum, lecture hall, wax museum, theater and freak show
- ❑ A museum of un-natural history
- ❑ July 1865 – destruction of the Barnum Museum by fire – rebuilt and burned again in 1868
- ❑ Edwin Lawrence Godkin praised the end of the museum in the New York Times...

<http://www.lostmuseum.cuny.edu/home.html>

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# Registration begins

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- 1876 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
    - Committee of the Collections asks for an appropriation of \$250 to hire a part-time clerk to number and catalog the objects
    - Philadelphia Museum emerges
  - 1880 Smithsonian's first registrar
    - Stephen C. Brown
  - 1906 Am. Association of Museums
  - 1920s Museum Studies
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# Formation of registrar's office

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- G. Brown Goode, Assistant Director of the National Museum, reported in 1881 that he had overseen “the establishment of the office of registrar, this officer being responsible for all matters relating to the reception and sending out of packages, the management of the storage-rooms, and the record and acknowledgement of accessions, the packing and unpacking of boxes.
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# Registrar at the Smithsonian

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- George Brown Goode, Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian, in charge of the National Museum, was instrumental in developing a methodology for museums.
  - In 1880 Stephen C. Brown was appointed Registrar of the United States National Museum (Smithsonian Institute). He served until his death in 1919, when the position was abolished. His responsibilities included:
    - Shipping
    - Storage
    - Accessions
    - Record clerk
    - Distribution of Objects and Specimens
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# Stephen C. Brown, Registrar - 1880

## The National Museum

Former Assistant, Division of Reptiles



# Brown's 1st annual report

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- Brown reported that the year's account of 1882 accessions was good (1,849 separate entries) but not perfectly accurate, and he made several points that would help him achieve perfection:
    - 1<sup>st</sup> – that a fully competent assistant be furnished to the Registrar
    - 2<sup>nd</sup> – that all data concerning accessions, as soon as properly entered in the letter files, be sent to the office of the Registrar
    - 3<sup>rd</sup> – that Curators be instructed to report on all accessions as soon as possible, at the same time returning all papers relating ... to the "Museum File"
    - 4<sup>th</sup> – that strict enforcement of Rules on distribution of specimens be followed
    - 5<sup>th</sup> – that all packages of specimens for the Museum be first delivered to the Door of Transportation and entered upon the "Transportation Record"
    - 6<sup>th</sup> – that letters having only been entered in the Announcement Record be returned to the Office of the Registrar to await the arrival of the specimens.
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# G. Brown Goode, Principles of Museum Administration, 1895

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- ❑ The value of a collection depends in the highest degree upon the accuracy and fullness of the records of the history of the objects it contains.
  - ❑ A museum specimen without a history is practically without value and had much better be destroyed than preserved.
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# Early notes on registrars

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As early as 1906, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, trustees had voted yes on Malcolm Stewart Prichard's plans to establish an Office of the Registrar.

Registration was discussed at the first two meetings of the American Association of Museums in 1906 and 1907. Talks by various luminaries, including Henry Watson Kent, Paul R. Rea, director of the Charleston Museum, and one Mr. F. A. Lucas led to the first general development of registration departments nationwide.

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# Henry Watson Kent

## Metropolitan Museum of Art

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- ❑ Henry Watson Kent was appointed assistant secretary of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1905.
  - ❑ He was an advocate of new business records and developed a detailed process of colored cards to track accessions and object-related information. Out with the red tape!
  - ❑ In 1906 he established an Office of the Registrar and appointed Mr. Patrick H. Reynolds (he of Latin bible test phrases) to deal with the “systematized and coordinated” duties of tracking objects and their documentation.
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# Patrick H. Reynolds, Registrar

## The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Patrick Henry Reynolds served as an Assistant Curator of Art Objects and Textile Fabrics before his appointment as Registrar in 1906.

The board resolution asked “that he be given complete charge, under the Director, of the registering of all accessions to the Museum, whether by gift, bequest or purchase, and also of all loans to the Museum ... that he attend as hitherto, to the Custom House business of the Museum, to the unpacking of all objects received, to their arrangement for exhibition when necessary, and to the preparation of the necessary lists for the Annual Reports and the Bulletin.

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# Reynolds and the pitfalls of registration

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- ❑ Reynolds appointed January 20, 1906.
  - ❑ February 6, 1906 – Trouble!
    - I beg leave to acknowledge the receipt of two (2) ancient temple wine vessels of old Chinese bronze with archaic designs
  - ❑ Did he take on a Board of Trustees duty?
  - ❑ The first TR system at the Met – and perhaps in museums
-

# Margaret Talbot Jackson

## The Museum, 1917

APPENDIX

249

Temporary Receipt No.....

NAME OF INSTITUTION

.....19..

Received from { Name.....  
Address.....

Offered { for gift.....  
as loan.....  
for purchase.....

the objects described below, subject to the conditions printed on the back of this receipt.

For the Director.....

No.	Description of Objects.	Value.

250

APPENDIX

### CONDITIONS TO BE PRINTED ON BACK OF RECEIPT

1. This receipt must in all cases be returned to the Institute upon notification of the action of the Trustees in regard to the objects hereon enumerated.

In the case of accepted loans another receipt will be given, and in the case of purchases or gifts accepted this receipt becomes void.

2. Objects will not be returned to their owners except on presentation and surrender of this receipt, or, if it be lost, upon certification of such fact by the owner, or his legal representative, and presentation of a written order for delivery signed by the owner or by such representative.

3. The Institute will take the same precautions with objects temporarily in its possession as with its own permanent collection, but will not assume any further responsibility for such objects.

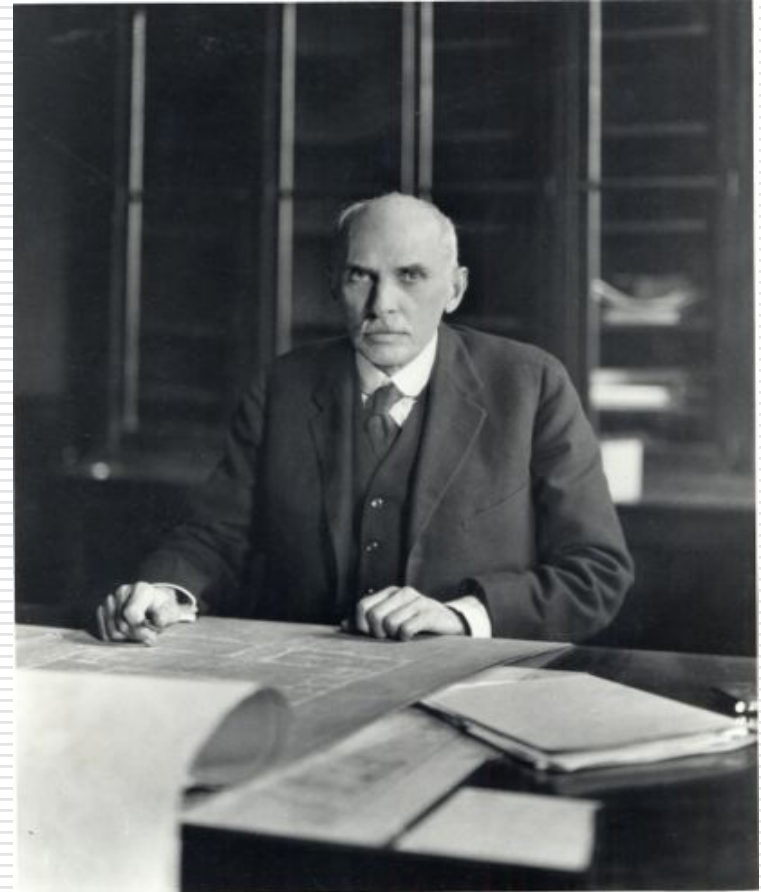
If the receipt is not presented when objects are returned a receipt should be given the museum by the person taking the object away.

# John Cotton Dana and the museum worker

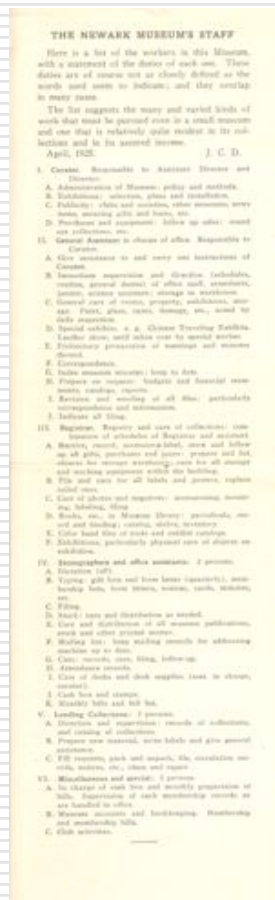
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- Dana, like his friend Henry Watson Kent a librarian and printer, founded the Newark Museum in 1909
- In 1925 he began an Apprentice Program and developed a job description for Museum Workers.

Photograph courtesy of The Newark Museum



# Dana's 1925 Registrar



Registry and care of collections - combination of schedules of Registrar and Assistant:

- A. Receive, record, accession, label, store and follow-up all gifts, purchases and loans: prepare and list objects for storage warehouse; care for all storage and working equipment within the building.
- B. File and care for all labels and posters, replace soiled ones.
- C. Care of photos and negatives: accessioning, mounting, labeling, filing.
- D. Books, etc. in Museum library: periodicals, record and binding; catalog, shelve, inventory.
- E. Color band files of trade and exhibit catalogs.
- F. Exhibitions, particularly physical care of objects on exhibition.

# Dorothy H. Dudley

- Newark Museum,  
Apprentice, 1925-26  
Museum staff 1926-36
- Museum of Modern Art  
Registrar 1936-1968
- Dudley and Irma  
Bezold (Wilkinson)  
published *Museum  
Registration Methods*  
in 1958.

Photo courtesy of The Newark Museum



# Dorothy Dudley graduates, 1925

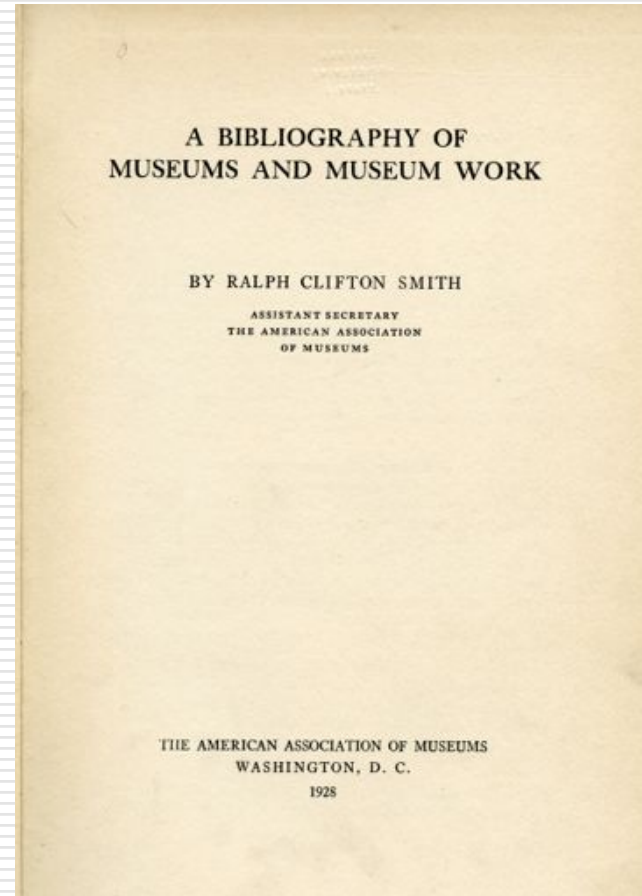
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# Bibliography – 1928 – 302 Pages

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<input type="checkbox"/>	Accessioning	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	Acquisition	5
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cataloguing	30
<input type="checkbox"/>	Classification	14
<input type="checkbox"/>	Collecting	126 (NH)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Conservation	6
<input type="checkbox"/>	Numbering	1
<input type="checkbox"/>	Records	7
<input type="checkbox"/>	Registration	3
<input type="checkbox"/>	Staff	9
<input type="checkbox"/>	Storage	6
<input type="checkbox"/>	Terminology	1



# The museum at work

## 1935 – Philadelphia Museum of Art

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Not much bibliographic evidence, but there is already a strong process in effect in museums in the United States.

- Find the object
  - Research the object
  - Receive the object
  - Submit to the monthly Committee on Museum
-



# In the pre-view room

The Assistant Registrar checking exhibition receipts

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# In the shipping room

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# Accessioning the object

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- Enter in Accession book
  - Give it a serial accession number
  - Number the object
  - Make catalog cards
    - Artist
    - Style
    - Material and type
    - Location
  - Photograph the object
-

# The Registrar at her desk

## The museum catalogue in the background

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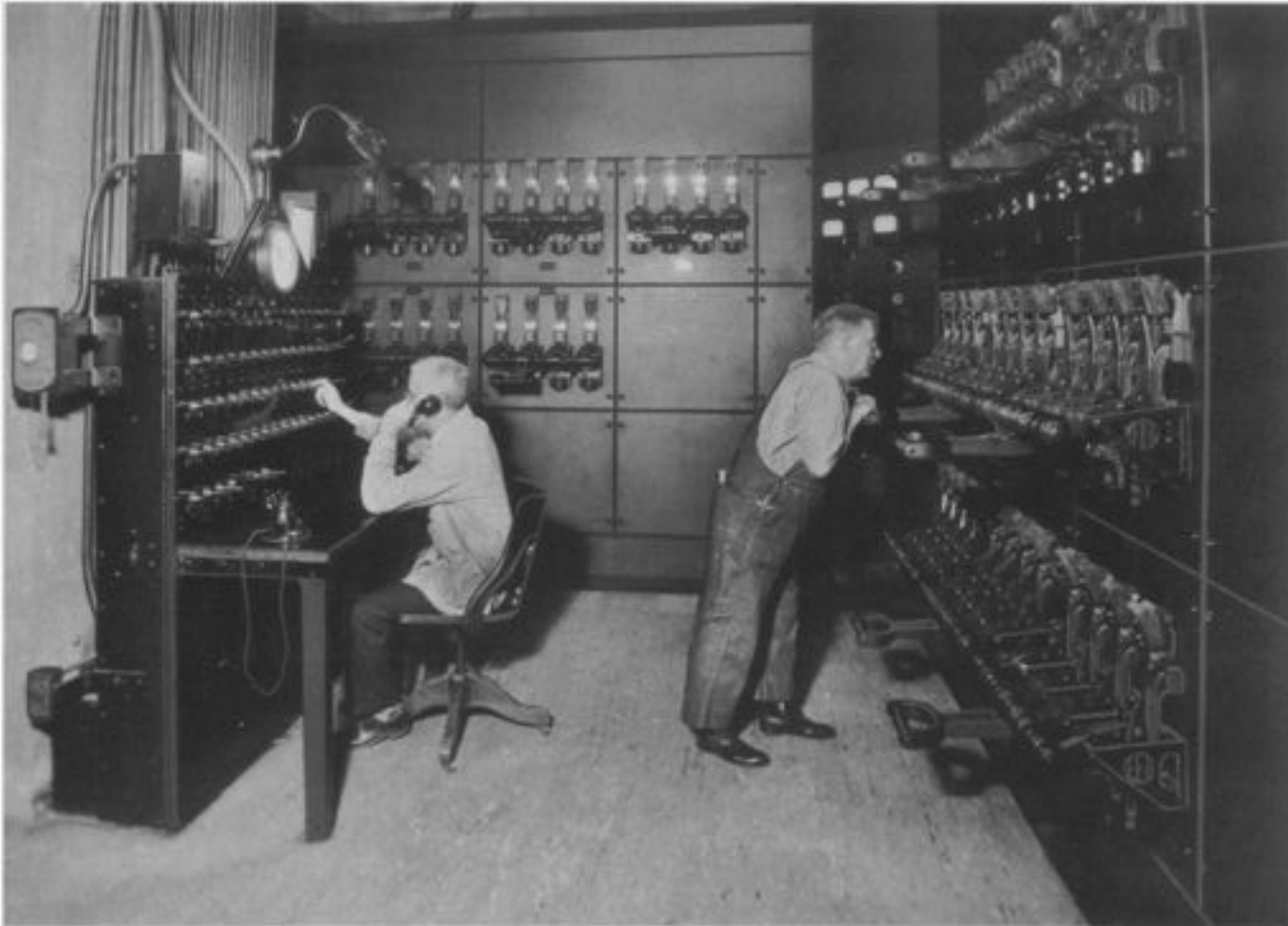
# In the photographic studio

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# In the control room

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# 1900s continued

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- 1950s AAM groups start developing standard loan procedures
  - 1958 MRM, 1<sup>st</sup> edition
    - 1953 General Call for information
  - 1970 Accreditation begins
  - 1977 RC-AAM formed
  - 1998 MRM, 4<sup>rd</sup> edition
    - Totally reorganized and rewritten
  - 2012 ARCS begins
-

# Professional organizations

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- |   |               |
|---|---------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Registrars                 | RCAAM         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collection Managers        | RCAAM, PACCIN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curators                   | CURCOM, AAMC  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservators               | AIC           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preparators                | PACIN, PACCIN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer Specialists       | MCN           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Imaging/R and R            | RARIN         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Packing and Crating        | PACIN, PACCIN |
| <input type="checkbox"/> International Art Services | ICEFAT        |
- 
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Registrars & Collection Specialists |  |
| ARCS   |  |
-



# ARCS

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1998 - 2012	Dreams and discussions
2004 - 2011	IRS - biannual International Registrars Symposiums sponsored by RCAAM and discussions and dreams continue
2011 - 2012	AAM changes to American Affiliation of Museums and goes from Professional Committees to Networking Groups
2012	Discussions intensify, decision is made to form new group - ARCS
2013	ARCS officially formed, incorporated, and the first conference is held in Chicago, Oct. 31 - Nov. 1, 2013

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Tell me you stories....

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