

MUSEUM DIRECTOR'S FIVE-YEAR REPORT

By
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Objects in the Museum Collections

Although many items had been collected during its twenty-two years, the Arlington Historical Society (AHS) had very poor records. Many items at the Museum lacked any indication as to how or why they were there. Also, many items reported to have been given were not there, and there were no records to indicate where they were. The Director/Curator filing this report took the following steps to try to compile meaningful records.

All available written documentation (thank you letters, magazine gift lists, a card file kept by John F. Burns, and a list made by Don Orth) was assembled and organized by year. Items referred to were then listed in an Accession Book, by year. Each item was given a separate number. This number is preceded by two letters that designate an arbitrarily assigned category (see attached list of categories), i.e. "WC" is category "War, Civil." The year that the existing records indicate the object was given comes next, i.e. "WC77" is "War, Civil 1977 donation." The remaining digits indicate the order in the year that the object was received, i.e. "WC77-09" means "the object is the ninth item received in 1977, and relates to the Civil War." Objects that are loans are designated with an "L" after the number. Since the numbering took place during 1980, any objects found in the Museum without records were listed in the Accession Book under that year. Hence, 1980 has many more item numbers than any other year.

After assembling information and establishing a number/classification system came the hardest part — finding the objects. When an object was located, it was cleaned or treated to preserve it; then the number was attached, either written on with india ink or on a sewn-in label. During this locating and numbering stage, detailed notes were taken on the size, condition, color and complete description of the item. These notes were later typed on classification cards with the donor's name (if known). These cards are filed two ways: by year, and by subject. All objects coming into the Museum collection since 1981 have had a countersigned deed of gift; this is a letter signed by the donor relinquishing right and title to the item donated. These deeds of gift are numbered to correspond with the item(s) and filed in another box; this box also contains other written documentation pertaining to the collection. These papers are filed numerically by year.

The above detailed records (classification cards, deeds of gift, loan records, and accession books) are readily available and are as current as possible. Also prepared by the current Director/Curator (with assistance from Anne and Will Webb) was a general Inventory. This basic list gives the estimated values for the collection.

Proper storage of the objects has been difficult. All items (except those on display or loaned out) are now located in one area of the Museum. New locks are periodically installed on this storage area. Objects are placed in acid-free paper and then in acid-free closed storage cartons. All boxes and cartons are labeled outside with a list of the objects and their numbers. Groups of similar small items may have a general

label outside and a detailed list inside the box. "Like" objects, i.e. all petticoats, all toy soldiers, are stored together.

The actual display of the objects was preceded in 1980 by painting the interior of the building. Old timers may remember the dusty rose and dirty cadet blue (with black baseboards) and the sage green of the upstairs. The current plain white is only a little better; the "grained" woodwork helps the appearance some. This graining and the floor refinishing were done by the current Director/Curator. The refinishing of the floors in the main room has made a big difference in the overall appearance. The basement was cleaned, painted, a dehumidifier installed and lights added. The "Rural Life" and farm tools exhibit that had been started upstairs was brought to the basement, upgraded and enlarged. The basement has been developed as a special interest "spotlight" display area. Segments (panels) of the walls and dividers show maps, photographs, and objects with detailed captions relating to specific topics of Arlington's history. The current topics include: Transportation, Railroads, Roads, Flight and Airports; Places or Communities; Federal Lands; Cemeteries; Churches; Schools; Houses; Law and Order (Jail, Courthouse and Police); Alexandria City; Bridges; Rural Life; The Experimental Farm; Industries, Mills, Dairies, and the Brewery; and Relics. The hallways have been difficult to use. The photographs and plaques were rearranged, a large flag and other textiles displayed and a sign added, leading the way to the basement exhibits.

The Nannie Hume Jewett Memorial Room, the large room on the first floor, after cleaning and painting, was changed drastically. Two cases were moved to create a separate area to hide the chairs and tables. The kitchen area was made smaller and less obtrusive. Two large cases were added. The displays here are meant to be changed frequently to encourage the casual visitor to return. New and current items, or a specific topic that may not be suitable for the basement are often found here. There is also a case (semi-permanent) that relates to the building as a school, giving the building's history.

Upstairs, the second floor is meant to be an overview of Arlington's past. It is viewed as a walk backward in time from the 1920 schoolroom; to the 1900-1920 parlor; to the 1860-1900 bedroom; to the display on reconstruction, redevelopment and reconciliation; through the Civil War; the colonial and federal periods; the boundaries, when Alexandria was part of the District of Columbia; to the Indians and the explorers; to the geology and the geography; and then back to the present with maps and a brief summary.

Programs — Interpretation

To help the visitor, a self-guiding tour of the Museum has been printed; also many labels, captions, and narrative texts are used with the objects to tell the story of Arlington. Maps and photographs are utilized to interpret this history.

Guided tours and a recently updated slide history are offered, and a "Touch and Feel Box" is available to school (and other) groups.

To encourage visitors to visit the building, special displays are set up during the year at Aurora Hills Library and the Central Library.

Papers in the Historical Society Collection

The collections of papers, manuscripts, books, maps, and newspapers were not as carefully recorded and cataloged as the objects. All the items were inventoried (typed listings with as much detail as possible) during the year of 1983 by the Archivist, the Director/Curator and a corps of volunteers. No attempt was made to ascertain the donor, except when the gift was recorded in the object accession book. The classification cards for these objects were the same as for other objects, with an additional notation to "See Archives Inventory Book." The items were not sorted or separated; they were inventoried as the Archivist had collected them.

The paper collections of the AHS are divided into several broad groupings: the AHS Manuscript Collection — R. Ward; the AHS Manuscript and Archival Collection; the C.B. Rose, Jr. Collection; the Map Collection; the Newspaper Collection; and the Photograph Collection. These are listed and numbered separately. Each collection has been handled as a separate and complete entity: each file folder was removed from the drawer, the papers placed in an acid-free folder and numbered according to the position the papers occupied. The number of the drawer is first; the position the file held in the drawer is listed second. EXAMPLE: The top drawer in the C.B. Rose, Jr. Collection is # 1. The first file (Progressing front to back) was labeled "County Board" (by C.B. Rose); it is now listed as 1-1 County Board. If there were newspaper clippings or enough papers to warrant the separation, other files were added and designated in series, i.e. 1-1 A is County Board Newsclippings, 1-1 B is a List of Action Taken in 1936.

The C.B. Rose Collection is in drawers 1 to 4; the AHS Manuscript and Archival Records are in drawers 5 to 19; and the "R. Ward" drawers are 20 to 27 — these are the files at the Archivist's home. The paper items not in file drawers, such as the newspapers, maps, and photographs have a slightly different inventory method. Once again, unless the object was listed in the new accession book, no attempt was made to ascertain the donor. The newspapers and maps are stored in acid-free boxes with acid-free tissue between layers. The most delicate pages have been encapsulated in acetate. Maps are sorted and filed by year and type. Newspapers are sorted and filed according to title and then (within that group) by the year and month of publication. Inventory sheets are typed and placed in the Archives Inventory Book.

Books are treated as objects and are in the card files.

The photograph inventory has just (March 1984) been completed. Each photo is described briefly on sheets according to subject. Also, the photographs are indexed and cross indexed on cards. Each photo was arbitrarily assigned a number, beginning with 0000; each number is four digits listed on the index cards by the last digit. EXAMPLE: a photo of Rosslyn with wagons in it is desired. The Rosslyn card is removed from the alphabetically arranged card file; this card has 72 four digit numbers on it; so another card (Transportation, Wagons) is removed from the box — it has 15 four digit numbers (meaning there are 15 photos that show wagons in the collection); these two cards are checked and if the same number appears on each, we have a photo that shows wagons in Rosslyn. With that number, the photo is easily found in the acid-free storage cartons. All photos are filed numerically, not by subject. There is also a numerical listing. The photos are as stated above, listed,

indexed and filed in acid-free folders and boxes. Most of the photographs have also been copied and the negatives are in additional (separate) acid-free boxes, each strip numbered and filed numerically. The negative numbers match the photograph numbers.

Storage of the paper objects is not as good as the object storage. Two file cabinets are in the Archivist's home. The other paper objects are in a crowded office in the Museum. Each drawer, box and carton is labeled with number and briefly with the contents.

To encourage the use of these important papers, indexes to the manuscripts, maps, and newspapers have been prepared.

Where to Now??

The most important and imperative need now facing the Director/Curator and Archivist is the storage and protection of objects belonging to the Society. The archival and paper objects need more space. Additional acid-free storage materials and other conservation aids should be acquired; ultra-violet shades should be installed at the windows; the archival and other scattered objects must be brought together and placed in a more secure environment. To do this inexpensively is possible. It could be accomplished with the installation of additional locks, sprinkler systems, plexiglass or wire screenings on the windows, and the enforcement of a Museum loan policy (i.e. nothing goes out of the building without a signed receipt for it).

Most important, the Society must publicize the Museum and the fine collections available. The Museum should be open more to attract more members, and to solicit additional gifts of objects and papers. The displays should be changed often, and given publicity when they are. The tours and other learning tools should be offered more often to a wider segment of Arlington's population. The hallway and main room need additional show cases to set the stage for the rest of our fine Museum.

CATALOGING MASTER SHEET

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| <p>A. ARLINGTONIA
 AB. Community
 AC. Awards
 AD. Art</p> | <p>J. INDUSTRY
 JA. Breweries
 JB. Mills
 JC. Dairies</p> | <p>S. SCHOOLS
 SA. Furnishings
 SB. Awards
 SC. Supplies
 SD. Hume</p> |
| <p>B. BOOKS</p> | <p>K. KITCHENWARE
 KA. Tools and gadgets
 KB. China and pottery
 KC. Metal and silver</p> | <p>T. TOOLS
 TA. Farm tools
 TB. Carpenters' tools
 TC. Mill tools</p> |
| <p>C. CLOTHING (WOMEN'S)
 CA. Accessories
 CB. Sports
 CD. Men's
 CE. Children's</p> | <p>L. LAW AND ORDER
 LA. Jail
 LB. Guns</p> | <p>U. TRANSPORTATION
 UA. Roads
 UB. Air and space
 UC. Railroads and trolleys
 UD. Metro</p> |
| <p>D. BLACK HISTORY</p> | <p>M. MEDICAL</p> | <p>V. VIRGINIANA
 VA. Art</p> |
| <p>E. BUSINESS ARTICLES</p> | <p>N. NEEDLEWORK
 NA. Sewing
 NB. Lace
 NC. Crochet
 ND. Woven goods
 NE. Embroidery</p> | <p>W. WARS
 WA. Revolution
 WB. 1812
 WC. Civil War
 WD. Spanish American
 WE. World War I
 WF. World War II</p> |
| <p>F. FURNISHINGS
 FA. Furniture
 FB. Bedding
 FC. Curtains
 FD. Display Items
 FE. Christmas Items</p> | <p>O. MUSICAL ITEMS</p> | <p>X. FLAGS</p> |
| <p>G. FIRE DEPARTMENT</p> | <p>P. PAPERS
 PA. Photographs
 PB. Public Documents
 PC. Maps
 PD. Tapes and Audiovisual</p> | <p>Y. POLITICAL ITEMS</p> |
| <p>H. HOUSES
 HA. Arlington House
 HB. Ball-Sellers House
 HC. Abingdon
 HD. Glebe House
 HE. White House</p> | <p>Q. QUILTS</p> | <p>Z.</p> |
| <p>I. INDIANS
 IA. Artifacts</p> | <p>R. RECREATION
 RA. Games
 RB. Toys
 RC. Sports
 RD. Dolls</p> | |