SDASM Environmental Study

Environment is the most persistent force influencing the longevity of various collections, affecting them every minute of every day. The ideal collection environment includes controlled temperature and relative humidity, clean air with good circulation, controlled light sources, and freedom from biological infestation.

The San Diego Air & Space Museum recently conducted a preservation planning survey, to evaluate the building and environment, as they relate to the preservation needs of our collections. During this study, temperature and relative humidity (RH) were monitored over a 12-month period. Readings indicated there were high fluctuations in both temperature and humidity in all collection storage areas, as well as insufficient ventilation.

The effects of poor and unstable temperatures, combined with relative humidity, increase the rate of chemical deterioration among collection media housed in the Museum. Stabilization of the environment forestalls physical and chemical damage caused by the absorption or release of moisture. A stabilized environment provides a deterrent against mold growth, corrosion, and insect infestation. A good environment pays dividends year after year, while a poor environment causes cumulative and irreversible damage, which, in turn, shortens the life expectancies of collection materials.

To protect the Museum’s collection, it is necessary to stabilize the environment in all collection storage areas. Because of the high sensitivity of film and photograph negatives, the Film Archives area and adjoining Book Annex, have been identified as a priority for an HVAC system. At the current rate of deterioration, the entire film collection will be lost in less than 20 years. By installing an HVAC and lowering temperatures to 60 (±2) degrees, with 35 (±5) percent relative humidity, the life of the collection can be extended up to 200 years.

One of the most significant collections housed in the Film Archives is the Ryan Collection. This collection spans six decades and includes film, video, and over 600,000 photograph negatives documenting the history of the company and its aircraft. Ryan Aeronautical was one of the most important and innovative aerospace companies of the 20th century and is probably best known for designing and building Charles Lindbergh’s Spirit of St. Louis. Ryan was considered a leader in unmanned air vehicle (UAV) development. Many of Ryan’s historical UAV documents are also housed here.

The Museum has identified the best overall system for the Film Archives, Annex, and five other collection storage rooms. The overall cost of this project is estimated to be $90,000, with $43,000 needed for installation of controls in the Film Archives and Book Annex. To date, the Library & Archives has raised $46,000, but we need your help!

We hope you will continue your support by contributing to this new endeavor. All donations are tax deductible and greatly appreciated.

Message from the Head Archivist

The San Diego Air & Space Museum is joining with the Society of American Archivists in recognizing October as American Archives Month. The Museum’s Library & Archives is dedicated to preservation standards that ensure artifacts and records will be available for research for generations to come. As Head Archivist, I am responsible for the care of our large collection of aerospace history, and for making this material accessible to our Museum staff and the public.

American Archives Month highlights the importance of preserving our documentary heritage, educating individuals on the importance of taking steps to organize, preserve, and protect their personal papers and records. The Library & Archives has recently taken several steps to improve storage conditions and to plan for the future. In honor of American Archives Month, and because of the importance of these activities for our Museum’s collections, this newsletter features our current preservation efforts as well as tips on what you can do to prolong the life of your family’s collection.
Brig Gen James Alfonte Collection

The Library and Archives at the San Diego Air & Space Museum has acquired a very important collection of early air service records and documents relating to the career of Brigadier General James Raymond Alfonte. This collection was originally donated to the English Field Air & Space Museum in Amarillo, Texas, by his son, James Alfonte. Due to the closure of that museum, a painstaking search for the most appropriate facility to receive these documents was made, and these records were passed on to us.

Born in Fortville, Indiana, on December 7th, 1886, Alfonte attended Purdue University. Commissioned in the U.S. Army Infantry in 1911, he participated in the Punitive Expedition to Mexico in 1916 under General Pershing. Late in 1916, Alfonte was ordered to the Army's newly established Signal Corps Aviation School at what would become Rockwell Field on San Diego's North Island.

Upon award of his wings in 1917, he was transferred to Camp Kelly, Texas, to form and command the 28th Aero Squadron. This unit would go on to see service in World War I, the Pacific Theater in World War II. Still in service today as the 28th Bomb Squadron (28 BS), this squadron is part of the 7th Bomb Wing at Dyess Air Force Base, Texas. The 28 BS is the largest bomb squadron in the Air Force.

While assigned as commanding officer to Call Field in Wichita Falls, Alfonte was directed to give a local senator's son his first ride in an airplane, with instructions that if anything happened to the VIP, Alfonte was to keep on going and not come back! Continuing his career at various posts and attending many schools, he completed his military service as Commanding General of the Utah Army Service Forces Depot, retiring in August 1946.

The Alfonte collection is made up of material related to Alfonse's association with aviation starting with his assignment to Rockwell Field in 1916, through his re-assignment to the Quartermaster Corps in 1919. Included are official and personal correspondence, orders, awards, cap wings, flight logs, original photographs, and his pilot's certificate.

Your History is our Nation's History

Letters from relatives, your grandmother's diary, photos and videos of you and your friends, and other material collected over the years provides vital and unique information about your life or the history of your family. These items are obviously important to you, but they also may be important to your community, state, or country, as well. Whether or not members of your family attained a degree of fame, they have contributed to the heritage of a certain place and time. When you donate your personal or family papers to an archive, your family history becomes a part of your community's—and America's—collective memory.

Preserving your Family's Photos

Family photos are a very rich source of information about our individual heritage and collective history. Does your family use any kind of preservation technology to protect your collection? With proper care and storage techniques, your photo collection can be available for future generations to enjoy. The following tips can help you preserve your family treasures.

- Store your photographs and papers in a clean, cool, dry, stable environment. Temperature and relative humidity should be moderate with minimal fluctuation. Air should be clean with good circulation.
- Don't store your valuable paper collections in an area subject to excessive heat and/or moisture. Avoid storing materials beneath or close to water sources. Also consider the room above your collection.
- Heat causes damage, so don't hang valuable photos over radiators, heating ducts, heat producing appliances, or fireplaces. Items with long-term value should be housed away from heat sources.
- Light causes fading and other damage, so keep photos in the dark as much as possible. Don't put them in direct sun or bright light; hallways or other...
areas without windows are best. Install shades or heavy curtains when you can’t avoid windows. High-resolution scans of photos should be displayed.

- Indoor pollution damages paper and is a growing problem in energy-conscious spaces with good insulation. Photos on display should be protected by a preservation quality mat and frame. Glass or plastic coverings should contain UV filtering.

- Photos, letters, clippings, and other family documents should be stored unfolded; folding breaks the paper along the fold lines. Store photos and documents in folders rather than envelopes; envelopes can cause damage when removed and replaced.

- To preserve photos of any important family event as long as possible, make sure the photographer takes a roll of black-and-white film. Although improvements have extended the life of color prints and negatives, color materials do not last as long as traditional black-and-white media.

- Color photo prints from an inkjet printer are not considered preservation quality. To maximize quality and durability of this type of color print, use inks and paper recommended by the printer manufacturer rather than third-party inks or papers.

- Use paper or plastic enclosures that pass the Photographic Activity Test (PAT). This test ensures the enclosure will not react chemically to your photos. Supplier catalogs should indicate whether a photographic storage product has passed the PAT. To read more about the PAT, see the Image Permanence Institute’s “Archival Advisor” web page at www.archivaladvisor.org/.

- Make multiple backups of all digital photos and other valuable media. Videotape, magnetic disks (hard drives and floppy disks), CDs, and DVDs have a limited life expectancy and are subject to both gradual and catastrophic failure.

Other preservation sources:


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**Volunteer Spotlight**

In 1988 Bob Cherry, who was newly retired, was introduced to volunteering opportunities at the San Diego Air & Space Museum. He decided to be a docent, and even though he was nervous during his first guided tour and made a few minor mistakes, the group he was speaking to gave him a round of applause. He was hooked!

After several fulfilling years working “on the floor,” Deciding it was time for a change, Bob moved to the Library & Archives 10 years ago, where his efforts are very much appreciated. As the periodical Czar, he keeps track of and catalogues incoming magazines. Although it might not seem so, life in the library can get pretty exciting! A few years ago, while shelving books in the Annex, Bob pulled a book out and the shelves started to collapse. Luckily, another volunteer came to his rescue as he strained to keep the shelves from falling...and crushing him! Needless to say, the shelving was immediately secured with supportive bracing. This willingness to put his life on the line shows Bob’s dedication to the Library!

Bob was born in Jefferson City, Missouri, where his father helped build the nearby Bagnell Dam, a 1931 “stimulus package.” He was raised in Rising Sun, a very small town in Maryland. Bob’s interest in aviation began at an early age. During WWII, at age 13, Bob volunteered with the Aircraft Warning Service as a plane spotter. He began flying at 14, soloing on his 16th birthday in an Aeronca Champ. Bob served a tour with the U.S. Army during the Korean War and upon returning, he completed his B.S. in electrical engineering at the University of Delaware under PL550 (i.e., the G.I. Bill).

Bob came to California to work at Convair with the Atlas Missile program. After a year at Convair, Bob was hired for another year by the Scripps Institution of Oceanography to record the effects of nuclear “water shots” at Eniwetok Atoll. Bob says he probably saw a dozen atomic bombs go off—a very rare and unforgettable experience! He said he worked cheap but had a great time. When the year was up, he was picked up as a research engineer by Scripps’s Marine Physical Laboratory, located on a naval base in Point Loma, where he worked for 25 years.

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Besides volunteering, he does beautiful pen and ink drawings, mostly aircraft and cheetahs, which he enters in the Del Mar Fair. He has earned several honorable mentions and peoples choice awards. Bob also reads a lot and, between chapters, does Sudoku.
San Diego Air & Space Museum Receives Conservation Bookshelf

Treasured objects and artifacts held by the San Diego Air & Space Museum will be preserved for future generations with help from the IMLS Connecting to Collections Bookshelf, a core set of conservation books and online resources donated by the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).

IMLS Bookshelf is a crucial component of the Institute’s conservation initiative launched in 2006, Connecting to Collections: A Call to Action. IMLS began this initiative in response to a 2005 study released in partnership with Heritage Preservation, A Public Trust at Risk: The Heritage Health Index Report on the State of America’s Collections. The multi-faceted, multi-year initiative shines a nationwide spotlight on the needs of America’s collections. Special attention is paid to collections held by smaller institutions, which often lack resources necessary to adequately care for the valuable artifacts entrusted to them.

The San Diego Air & Space Museum was chosen to receive this essential set of resources based on our application describing needs and plans for the care of our collections. Topics addressed in the bookshelf include the philosophy and ethics of collecting, collections management and planning, emergency preparedness, and culturally specific conservation issues.

Open for Research

The SDASM Library & Archives collection is accessible for research. Staff and/or volunteers are available for assistance. Appointments should be made in advance by calling 619-234-8291, x125, or emailing arenga@sdasm.org, prior to your visit. Information can often be pulled prior to your visit if we are aware of your research request. Contact the Library & Archives staff for research rules and regulations.

SDASM Library & Archives
Hours of Operation

Tuesday to Friday, 10:00am – 4:00pm.
(Closed on Mondays, weekends, federal holidays, and for some special Museum functions)