

# It's 10 p.m.! Do You Know Where Your Collections Are? Library and Archival Security



**NEW HAMPSHIRE ARCHIVES GROUP  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CHESHIRE COUNTY  
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# Introduction

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“[Libraries and archives] in every stage of their development have an obligation to protect their collections from loss and from damage of any sort, and they have an obligation to protect their staff and their visitors as far as possible from hazards that may exist in work, study, and exhibition areas.”

# Responsibilities

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- Responsible for building collections and for cataloging, access, preservation, security, and safe storage
- Accept responsibility for providing proper housing, storage, and protection for materials (*Responsible Custody*)
  - Ensure that the materials do not deteriorate and are not lost through theft or mutilation
- Responsible for making security a basic library and archival function

# Security

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- “Freedom from damage.” (Webster)
- “An archival,...records management, [and library] function concerned with the protection of documents [and books] from unauthorized access and/or damage or loss from fire, water, theft, mutilation or unauthorized alteration or destruction” (Bellardo, *A Glossary for Archivists, Manuscript Curators, and Records Managers*)

# Security and the Collections

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- Security is a primary staff responsibility, yet it is one of the most difficult to enforce
  - Must enforce the security rules and regulations uniformly with all researchers
  - Must provide access to the materials with security
  - Must ensure the preservation and security of the collections

# Security Operations

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- Deterring the theft of library and archival materials
- Identification of missing items
- Controlling the environment
- Preparing for and preventing disasters
- Fire protection
- Protecting exhibited and loaned materials
- Insuring valuable holdings

# Evaluating Library and Archival Security

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- No two repositories have the same needs
- Take into account their own library's or archives' unique nature, collections, mission, buildings, and locations
- Survey each area of library or archives
  - Determine what materials should be protected against what threats
  - Think broadly when considering threats
  - Be hard on yourselves at this point
  - Consider security issues from a collection's point of arrival to time of consultation
- Consider the *modus operandi* of thieves

# Management Strategies for Developing a Security Plan

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- *Participation* of as many staff as possible
- *Integration* of security policies into day-to-day operations
- *Phased implementation* of identified security steps
- *Cooperation* with other institutions



# Implementing Change

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- Change starts from the top
- Start small
- Implement rules that make sense for your institution
- Post the rules and regulations
- Implement changes that you can afford
- Consider analog and digital security
- Always balance security with access

# Security Plan Components

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- Security policies and procedures that cover staff, researchers, and collections
- Staff education and training
- Physical security
- Storage and reading room design
- Techniques of processing and cataloging
- Collection management
- Written document
- Approved by the highest authority in the institution
- Distributed to, and signed off on, by the staff at all levels

# Deterrents and Prevention of Theft

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- Special kind of protection
  - Highly selective as to how it is implemented
- Need to address issues of theft, vandalism, and recovery
- Items with marketable value should be identified, appraised, and scheduled
- Determine what kind of protection is necessary and feasible for your institution

# Security Steps To Be Taken

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- Public access to public areas only!
- Identification badges worn by repair, construction, and custodial staff especially, but all staff preferably
- Develop clear and specific closing procedures
- Create and maintain complete, accurate, and up-to-date records of holdings, their contents, and their locations

# Security Steps To Be Taken

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- Accession and cataloging records, finding aids, *signed* call slips, conservation reports, collection condition surveys, loan and exhibition forms, ownership records, literary property rights (when applicable)
  - ✦ **Trace the material's existence in the institution**
- Marketable items may need to be removed from collection
- Special insurance policies are a possibility

# Access to the Institution and Collections

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- **When is access granted?**
  - Walk-ins?
  - Appointments?
  - Scheduled hours?
- **Who has access?**
  - Anyone who asks?
  - “Just looking around?”
  - Researchers with a stated project?
  - Genealogy or family research?
  - Student working on an academic paper?
  - Homeless person looking for a place to sleep?

# Security Steps To Be Taken

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- Monitor all exits at all times
- Monitor unprotected and unmonitored staff areas
- Supervise the use of all materials of any value
- Patrol all areas of the library or archives on an irregular basis
- Work with book and manuscript dealers and other libraries and archives

# Think Like Thieves

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- Archivists and librarians must learn to think like thieves.
  - Determine which items upon which to focus
  - Possible strategies
    - ✦ Use photocopies instead of originals
    - ✦ Microfilming
    - ✦ Marking materials
    - ✦ Special insurance policies



# Security in the Reading Room

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- Encompasses sign-in, personal belongings, staff surveillance, environmental controls, water and fire threats, and staff training
- Reference Service
  - Good service leads to more secure library or archives program
  - Reference interview
    - ✦ Educate patron, define and refine subject, focus researcher on specific collections, minimizes wasted time, reduces wear and tear on the materials

# Security in the Reading Room

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- **Rules and regulations**
  - Contract between researcher and institution!
  - Develop and improve upon with input from staff
  - Alert researchers to security concerns of library or archives
  - Permit librarian or archivist to set ground rules for consulting materials
  - Must be uniformly enforced
  - Require positive (photo) identification
  - To be read and signed by researcher
  - All personal belongings to be stored in locker or secure area
  - Consult materials **ONLY** in reading room

# Security in the Reading Room

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- **Provision of materials**
  - No one (researchers) permitted to access collections alone (i.e. storage areas)
  - Staff need to be able to see face of researchers at all times
  - Staff provides the materials
    - ✦ One folder, one volume, etc. at a time (number of materials in a folder)
  - Staff does ALL photocopying (cost)
  - Handling instructions
  - Staff follows policies consistently

# Security in the Reading Room

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- All materials handled carefully and left in order found
- Note taking in pencil only on blank paper
- Information on copyright and publication
- Other institution-specific regulations
- All photocopying done **only** at discretion of and by the staff
- **Staff**
  - Well-trained staff is crucial to security

# Security in the Reading Room

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- **Reading Room physical arrangement**
  - Chairs should be only on one side of the tables facing the Reference Desk
  - Reference Desk should provide clear view of all researchers facing the Desk
  - Provide carts on which materials can be kept instead of on the tables
    - ✦ Provide only minimal amount of materials at a time

# Security in Closed Stacks

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- **Greatest threat is from staff or privileged persons**
  - MUST restrict access to materials in stacks
    - ✦ Public access to public areas **ONLY**
  - Disgruntled, unreliable, and untrustworthy staff pose a threat to collections (approximately 25% of thefts are inside jobs)

# Security in Closed Stacks

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- Pleasant, efficient, vigilant, etc. staff are one of greatest assets for protection of materials
  - ✦ Most repositories have little to fear from staff
- **Closed stacks often become “open” following a disaster**
  - Use of ID badges, close supervision, and increased security overall is crucial

# Staff Education

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- **Seriousness of security needs to be understood by all staff**
  - Integral part of everyone's position description
  - Implementation is responsibility of ALL staff
  - Key and access policies must be clear
  - Many researcher rules also apply to staff
  - Be aware of possible breaches in security



# Theft and Vandalism

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- **Types**
  - Monetary gain
  - Augment their personal collections
  - Improve their collections
  - Caretakers
  - Feeling of ownership
  - Protect a family legacy
  - Protect research
  - Acquire a conversation piece
  - Employment

# Consequences of a Theft

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- Loss of donors
- Insurance issues
- Demands from the organization for improvements or restrictions
- Loss of an item of value/importance from the collection

# Behaviors to Observe

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- Researchers are more interested in others than in their own research
- Constant monitoring of staff
- Building a fort around them with boxes, carts, etc.
- Shuffling with clothing/ inappropriate for season or environment
- Bending below the table or fussing with clothing
- Asking for unrelated collections
- Looking for a quiet spot in the reading room
- Moving record around in a haphazard or disorganized fashion/mishandling issues

# Steps to Limit Risk

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- Security audits
- Train staff to interact with researchers
  - No one gets special treatment
- Clear sightlines
- Bag search and train staff to do so
- Limited number of collections and personal items permitted
- Frequent, random walk-throughs by staff
- Best monitoring equipment for the facility
- Theft and vandalism policies
  - Review at least yearly

# Crisis Management

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- **Suspected theft**
  - Often suspicion comes from an outside source such as a manuscript or rare book dealer who is calling to inquire about a volume or manuscript
  - Sometimes comes to light because of an altered bibliographic record
  - Sometimes there is a pattern of systematic loss without explanation
  - Recovery usually depends on quick action, bolstered by a written security plan, and previous contacts with dealers

# Crisis Management

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- Suspicious activities by patron or other staff member
  - ✦ No action to be taken unless activity is actually witnessed by staff person
- Internal theft is always a problem and must be thoroughly investigated and documented before any confrontation
  - ✦ Background checks
  - ✦ Bag search policies
  - ✦ Staffing levels during open hours
  - ✦ Access policies
    - Who has access?
      - Staff, non-staff members, students?

# Security Conclusions

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- “Special Collections” and archives are special and therefore have “special rules and regulations”
- Rules and regulations are there to protect the materials so they can be consulted in the future
  - Once the materials are gone they may well be gone forever
  - Prevent accidental damage
  - Apply to ALL persons
    - ✦ No one singled out or excused

# Security Conclusions

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- Contract between researcher and institution
  - ✦ Institution provides for patron's research needs
  - ✦ Researcher follows rules and regulations
- Seriousness of security is crucial to be understood in library or archives
- Implementation is responsibility of ALL staff
- Activities aimed at protection of library or archival collections lie at core of any good security system
- **Few librarians or archivists know the value of their collections/holdings**



# Security Conclusions

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- Security is not just fancy locks, motion detectors, fire alarms, sprinklers, etc.
- Security is a state of mind integral to a librarian's or archivist's *modus operandi*
- Fancy equipment does little if policies, procedures, and activities or librarians and archivists are lax and present a “devil-may-care” attitude
- Policies and procedures are at the core of any security program

# Security Conclusions

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- Finally, the librarian or archivist must be friendly, cordial, and helpful but also firm and resolute in enforcing security

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