Working toward best practices of collection stewardship:
Viewing a museum’s diverse collections as materials types

Julianne Snider
Assistant Director

EARTH AND MINERAL SCIENCES
MUSEUM & ART GALLERY
The Pennsylvania State University, University Park
Museum history

1896: PA geological cabinet
1910: Mineral Museum
1917: Mining Museum
1928–1953: Mineral Industries Museum
1928–1953
- 3 exhibit galleries
- 0.25 miles of hallway
displays & exhibits cases

1953–2004
- consolidation into one gallery
1953-2004
Collections continue to grow

- More than 18,000 rocks and minerals
- More than 1000 historic mining & mine safety artifacts
- More than 300 pieces of artwork in the Steidle Collection of American Industrial Art
- Fossils, laboratory equipment, maps, publications, miscellaneous objects
2004 EMS College Commitment

- Revitalize the museum
- Hire a new director
- Build 2 new exhibit galleries

2005

- Close old gallery
- Remove hall display cases
- Open new galleries
- Pack geology collections for move to off campus storage
- Hire museum director
2006

Hire Assistant Director Collections & Exhibits

- Facilitate move of collections off campus
  - Identify collections & collections locations
  - Specify collection storage conditions to accommodate all collections
- Interpret collections
- Use in exhibits and education about college disciplines, research, and scholarship
Steidle Collection of American Industrial Art
Mid-20th Century Extractive Industries of Pennsylvania
Collections “storage”

- Art Collection
  - old exhibit gallery—on walls, in drawers, inside false walls
  - departmental offices & supplies closets
  - college mailroom
  - Offices of the Bureau of Mine Safety, Washington, DC

- Geological Collections & Historic Mining Artifacts
  - basement storerooms, rooftop storerooms
  - other campus buildings: Coal Barn, Blue Band Building, etc.
Collections documentation

- Edward Steidle publications on mineral resources conservation
- PhD dissertation on Edward Steidle as Dean
- Handwritten inventory of rock & mineral collection
- Invoices, articles, correspondence, exhibit photos
- Card catalog of rock & minerals, paintings, and miners lamps
- Handwritten ledgers of minerals procured 1949-1963
- Black and white photographs of paintings and minerals taken in 1965
- 4” x 5” color transparencies of paintings and sculptures taken in 1986
2006–2008

- Special Services Building
  —5 miles from EMS Museum exhibit galleries
- EMS Museum Center for Research, Education, and Collections (CERC)
- Climate controlled, limited access, secure facility
2010 CAP & MAP

Reports

- Detailed
- Recommendations for improvements
- Recommended priorities
- Short term goals
- Long term goals
2012 IMLS Grant

Environmental improvement for art collection
- Art racks on compactors
- Collections management software (PastPerfect)
- Conservation assessment of art collection
Masonite
Edward Steidle, Dean 1928–1953
Museum Collections = Resource for Teaching and Learning
Art Gallery Devoted to Mineral Industry

In a Pennsylvania State College Museum There Are Thirty-Seven Paintings Portraying Coal-Mining, Quarrying, Natural-Gas Production, Pottery, Fuel-Technology, Metallurgy

Perhaps the only art gallery and museum devoted exclusively to the development of the mineral industry has been created by Dean Edward Steidle of the Pennsylvania State College’s School of Mineral Industries.

The work of eleven artists, the oil-paintings in the present group (six of which are here reproduced) are displayed in the conference-room of the School’s five-year-old building.

As one of the greatest mineral industrial commonwealths in the world, Pennsylvania’s mineral wealth also is the source of its evolution as an industrial center.

The thirty-seven paintings, presented by alumni, private citizens, and State industries, as part of the gallery’s collection of fifty which the Dean hopes to obtain, portray scenes from coal-mining, quarrying, the production of natural gas and petroleum, pottery, fuel-technology, and metallurgy.
1939—Mineral Industries Building foyer mural
coal mining, steel production, petroleum (oil & gas)

*Changing Shift; The Cast; Changing the Bit*
Edmund Marion Ashe (1867-1941)
1950—Mineral Sciences Building foyer mural
Geosciences, Mining Engineering, Material Sciences

untitled
1950
Hiram Draper Williams (1917-2003)
Art Maintenance Fund

- Conservation of paintings ongoing

Promote collection

- Exhibitions
- Symposia
- Publications
2013 IMLS Grant

Stewardship improvement for geological collection

- 3 years
- Unpack collections (boxed since 2004)
- Data base all specimens
- Photograph all specimens
- Transcribe specimen records
Micro-climate storage containers

Gretchen Anderson
Conservator
Carnegie Museum
of Natural History
2017 IMLS Grant

Stewardship improvement for geological collection

- 3 years
- New storage furniture
- Geological collections assessment
- Professional development workshops collections care and risk assessment
Sustainability

More than environmental conditions and use of space
More than rethinking collections types & storage
—thematic, interrelated objects, material composition
More than reinterpreting collections exhibits & programs
More than public recognition of collections

Recognition collections as university asset

- Support & promote the university’s mission
- Central to programs of teaching, research & service
- Embody scholarly heritage of research
- Unique resource of knowledge
- Relevant to current and future research
- As important to maintain as electronic data
Partnerships

PSU Physical Plant Sustainability Office
—LED lighting energy savings program

PSU Physical Plant Security Office
—public spaces monitoring and safety program
Partnerships
Earth and Mineral Sciences Library
- Academic disciplines focused exhibits
- Collaborative programming
PSU Museum Consortium
- Museum professional development workshops
- Collaborative promotions and programming
Partnerships with faculty and researchers

- Center for Science and the Schools (CSATS)
  - i-STEAM Workshops (K-12 teacher professional development programs)
- Civil Engineering—analysis of degrading pyrite for research of construction aggregate
Partnerships with faculty and researchers: NSF Broader Impacts

- Meteorology—Tornado machine exhibit
- Seismology—Real-time seismic monitors exhibit
- Hydrology—Augmented Reality sandbox exhibit
Undergraduate education

- Senior Thesis exhibitions
- Center for Advancement of Undergraduate Studies and Experience (CAUSE) — communicating science research
- Engaged Scholarship opportunities
- Pennsylvania History class — museum collections as original source material
- Freshmen Honors Writing — museum exhibits and descriptive writing
Graduate student education

- Mining Engineering independent research projects
- Communicating Science in a Museum Context graduate course
- Informal Science Learning and Teaching education research site
- Object-based research opportunities
- Internships
Higher Achievement art & science workshop
Beyond the Edge: art & science exhibition
Lure of the Mine & Anthracite Fields: coal mining, art history & musical composition
Collaborative exhibition: material science & art
Collections repository

E-FIRE (Ex Terra Field Institute and Research Endeavor)

- different approach to collections
Sustainability & Interpretation

- Collection care fundamental to maintaining scholarly heritage of university
- Collections relevant to university mission
- Collections act as agents of education, research, and cultural history
- Collections viewed as unique, irreplaceable knowledge resource
- Collections are priceless intellectual assets
- Collections are documentation of human exploitation of mineral resources
- Collection objects aligned thematically
- Collection objects’ environmental needs based storage