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Intro To MIAP

Howard Besser

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Final Project Paper

“Finding Little Italy: Cataloging at the Italian American Museum”

For my final project, I embarked on a journey to work (intern) at the Italian American Museum in Little Italy in New York. My goal was to help them catalog and photograph the thousands of artifacts that have been stored in the Museum basement without any documentation or proper methods of preservation. However, the project turned into something much larger than I could have imagined, and as of yet, my work at the Museum is still unfinished. As of now I have created a new catalog, as the previous one was obsolete, and created a visual means of seeing what is in the Museum collection. In the following paper, I will illustrate the initial plans for the project, problems I encountered and changes I made along the way, the current state of the project, and my recommendations and proposals for the Museum’s future.

Note: For all intensive purposes, my use of the term “basement” “storage” or “downstairs” in this paper all refer to the same storage area under the Museum. For the sake of clarity, I have included a picture (on the last page) of the space to which I am referring. The storage area was central to my work and to understanding this paper.

### How It All Began

Before going into detail about my actual work at the Museum, I think it is first necessary to explain how I got involved with the Museum. As a Cinema Studies student at New York University, I saw an advertisement in my department for a class titled “Directed Projects: Documenting Little Italy” in the Photo and Imaging Department. The course was described as group project in which students would collaborate to document the last Italians still living in Little Italy. Students would reach out to neighborhood residents with the intent of getting them to share as many of their stories as possible. Their lives and the culture of Little Italy would be captured through interviews, portraits, old photos, objects, recipes, songs, dances, and street life. The students were welcome to use various media including photography, video, audio, maps, and data to assemble portraits of residents, local businesses, churches, and other institutions in the area. The end goal for all this work was to create a digital presentation of these portraits, in a form that that could be turned into a website, book, or museum exhibition.

It was through this class that I was introduced to the Italian American Museum and its President and Founder, Dr. Joseph Scelsa. As it happened, there was an arrangement between NYU and the Italian American Museum (IAM) to create an interactive exhibit based on the work my classmates and myself produced. The hopes were to develop a platform that would allow the Museum to continue to collect stories and images and explore other ways in which this valuable new collection could be expanded and used.

Through this connection, I soon contacted Dr. Scelsa about working with the Museum on a project for a separate class that dealt with issues of archiving and

preservation. Informing me that there were thousands of unknown and uncataloged items, Dr Scelsa warmly gave me his approval and was thrilled to have me get to work. Some of the items I were to work with came from the Museum's previous location and some were from new donations that had never been sorted.

The Museum at the moment has a small area of space for visitors to see selected parts of the permanent collection and some parts of old exhibitions. But, as mentioned, this space is quite small and there is no space for new exhibitions. The IAM is severely lacking funding and therefore has not had the ability to truly take care of its collection. Also, the IAM is only provisionally chartered by the State, however, Dr. Scelsa hopes to get it fully chartered so it can get more funding. One of the things preventing the IAM from becoming fully chartered until now is the lack of a catalog for its Collection. The Museum has also recently applied for a number of grants (some as recent as this past November), however, it could be at least a six months or more before Dr. Scelsa hears back from grant committees, let alone get the money (assuming it get the grants).

With all of this in mind, I made it my goal to get the ball rolling on cataloging and saving a collection that is very valuable to preserving the history and culture of the Italian American community that has existed in Little Italy since the 1800s.

### History of the Italian American Museum

In order to understand how the Museum's infrastructure has so seriously deteriorated, it is important to note the success and promise with which the Museum began. The beginning of the Italian American museum can be traced back to an exhibit at the New York Historical Society in 1999 titled, "*The Italians of New York: Five Centuries of Struggle and Achievement.*" The exhibit was co-arranged by Dr. Joseph V. Scelsa, who at the time was the Dean of the Italian American Institute at the City University of New York (CUNY). Highly acclaimed and successful, the exhibit vastly exceeded expectations and attracted thousands of visitors.<sup>1</sup>

Resulting from the exhibit's success, there was a postmortem of the exhibit at the Italian Consulate where it was again proved to be extremely popular. Inspired by the positive reviews and messages left by visitors in the Exhibit's guest book, the idea for a permanent exhibit or museum began to form. As it was, there was already enough material to put together another exhibit.

When the exhibit started, a call for artifacts had been sent out. However, once the exhibit gained notoriety, boxes of donations from Italian-American families came pouring in. Dr. Scelsa discovered that there were hundreds of Italian-American families who had artifacts going back to the 1800s, passing them down to each successive generation. Many of these families, however, either did not want them anymore, did not know what to do with them, or felt it was a shame for them not to be kept private if they contained historical worth. While these donations clearly had historical and cultural significance, the NY Historical Society did not want, nor have the ability, to store all of these artifacts.<sup>2</sup>

With all of this in mind, Dr. Scelsa investigated the possibility of making a permanent Italian American museum a reality. This dream came true on June 12, 2001, when Dr. Scelsa, as Founder and President, received the Charter for the Italian American

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<sup>1</sup> Conversation with Dr. Joseph V. Scelsa

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

Museum from the Board of Regents of the University of the State of New York. The goal and mission of the Museum was to raise public awareness and appreciation of the many accomplishments made by Italian-Americans to America's society. They wished to collect, preserve, and showcase notable contributions of Italians and Italian-Americans to the American culture. This would be accomplished by presenting the individual and collective struggles and achievements of Italians and their offspring's to the American way of life.<sup>3</sup>

Once chartered, the IAM began organizing and having traveling exhibitions, with some permanent exhibitions at a location on 44<sup>th</sup> street in New York City. During this time, a steady flow of donations kept coming to the Museum and were being redirected to 44<sup>th</sup> Street or various storage facilities. With a decent amount of press and positive responses, the Museum was off to a good beginning. These traveling exhibitions were created with the help by professional museum designers, and during this time the IAM had an employed curator on staff.<sup>4</sup>

#### Background for the Italian American Museum's Current Situation

When traveling exhibitions ended, the IAM stored everything at their 44<sup>th</sup> street location. At that time, there was a curator who had the artifacts easily accessible. The Collection was organized on shelves in rows, and there was a form of cataloging the materials (that I will return to later). Problems came along, however, when the 44<sup>th</sup> Street lease expired, and the IAM was forced to leave. Fortunately, the Museum had been researching possible permanent locations, and in 2007 they found the perfect home for the IAM at the corner of Mulberry Street and Grand Street, in the heart of Little Italy.

The new location was actually the historic site of a very important part of the Italian American immigrant experience. Founded by Francesco Rosario Stabile in 1885, the Stabile Family Bank (called Banca Stabile) is now the home of the IAM. Not just a bank, the Banca Stabile had a Western Union counter, which offered newly arrived immigrants from Italy a means of communicating with their relatives back home. In addition, it also provided telegraph services, purchase of tickets for travel via steam ships, import-export services, a notary public, and a post office. In other words, it offered immigrants a means of navigating this new world and city, where they do not speak the language nor understand the customs.

When moving to this new home, the IAM left their 44th Street location in a rather forceful and unfortunate manner, and there was no time to ensure that artifacts were properly moved. There was no supervision, but instead the packing of the objects was done by movers who had no knowledge of the proper way of preserving different media or of organizing materials. The Museum's Collection was packed and moved, with no records of what they had or where it went. With no plans or decisions made for where and how things should be placed at the new location everything got dumped downstairs in storage haphazardly. Once placed there, these boxes have barely been touched since and one of the biggest problems for IAM at this point is that so much has accumulated in the storage area that it is extremely overwhelming and even slightly dangerous to go down there.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Dr. Scelsa

<sup>4</sup> ibid.

<sup>5</sup> ibid

As it happened, the haste with which the Museum had to leave was the result of the convergence of a number of factors and situations. A round this time, the curator, Maria Cocchiarelli, left the Museum and moved to Colorado. In addition, 44<sup>th</sup> Street space was owned by CUNY, and when IAM began using the location, it was conditional on Dr. Scelsa being associated with the University. However, when Dr. Scelsa retired, the end of his official University affiliation meant CUNY was no longer obligated to any contracts in place between CUNY and IAM. While Dr. Scelsa had worked for CUNY for many years and believed that his long-standing relationships with certain respect and exceptions, but the IAM was unofficially evicted from the space.

Having lost the last curator, Dr. Scelsa hired a new curator when the Museum first opened on Mulberry Street. With a stroke of bad luck, however, she had a sudden death from an aneurism, following which the Museum has not since replaced her. Since then, Dr. Scelsa has not had the funds to hire a new curator and he has been single-handedly running the Museum and handling the archive. Currently, the Museum does have a small amount of space where visitors can see parts of the permanent collection, but the majority of material is housed in storage underground in a basement room that opens from two doors on the street.

#### The State of Things When I Got There

After deciding to do this for my final project and speaking to my professor, Howard Besser, I went into the Museum with a number of questions.

Do they have a current inventory list?

Is there a numbering scheme for items?

What kind of technical infrastructure exists?

Is there a computer and/or server space to use?

Is there enough space to store photographs?

Do they have software for cataloging and/or image handling?

What metadata do they want?

The answer to many of these questions gave me a pretty bleak outlook. According to the Museum's accountant, IAM *does* pay for wireless Internet, but the signal does not extend to the basement where I would be working. I did discover that there *was* a cataloging and numbering system in place for a few hundred of the items (334 to be exact), but no one there knew how to use it! One of the previous curators for the Museum (Dr. Scelsa did not even know which one) had started cataloging items somewhere between 2005-2006 on a program the Museum had paid for called Artsystems. Having been handed a paper copy of this catalog list, I asked if they had a version of this list still on the computer (to which I was met with blank faces). After some phone calls and digging around on the computer, I thought I had hit the jackpot. I discovered that there *did* still exist the copy of this catalog on the computer.

My excitement, however, was brief as this still left the problem of not knowing how the system was set up or how the numbering scheme worked. Artsystem did not seem easy to use for cataloging or finding items, and with numbers such as "DI-011MFS" and "HP-028TIT," the inventory numbers were not intuitive to an outside person. In addition, this numbering scheme was created when the Museum was at a different location. Dr. Scelsa did not know if they still had the items on this inventory list

or where they located. Also, on the Artsystem website, its describe itself as an art *gallery* software. This means that the program is geared in many ways towards pricing and valuing items, which is irrelevant information to the IAM. In addition, the software was from 2006 and the Museum's license to use the program had expired. In order to continue using Artsystem, the IAM would have to pay around \$700 to renew the license (a fee they were willing to pay if I told them the program was necessary).

My next questions regarding technical infrastructure were equally unpromising. The Museum has only one computer, a stationary PC, mainly used by Dr. Schelsa, which is at least ten years old and runs extremely slowly. This meant there was no transportable computer to bring to the basement for cataloging the items down there. There is Internet on this stationary computer, but it too is extremely slow. There was also no way that this computer could have handled the addition of a few hundred photographs. Dr. Scelsa was willing to pay for what I thought I needed for the project, however, this budget was limited. At the top of this priority list, I recommended, and he agreed to, buy a laptop, the Microsoft sweep software (if he buys a Mac) and an external hard drive (if possible).

### My Initial Plans and Proposal

After some discussion with Professor Besser, the decision was made that the continued use of Artsystems for this project made no sense due to the combination of factors described above. The decision was made, therefore, that the museum's money was better spent elsewhere than in renewing the license for Artsystem. Instead, it was decided that an Excel spreadsheet could do the work needed for IAM, without costing the Museum anything to buy it. So too, if the Museum reaches a point in the future where they are ready to buy a more advanced and museum appropriate program, an Excel spreadsheet could easily be uploaded and incorporated into that new program, with little work to be done. So too, Excel is very user friendly, a factor that was very important to Dr. Scelsa as he was worried about no longer having a curator. He wanted to make sure that he would not be using a system that would require a specialist or someone in the Museum, art, or archiving world to understand and use since he simply did not have the resources to hire such a person. Knowing the Museum and Dr. Scelsa, I knew that it was of the utmost importance that everything be as simple, user friendly, and as plainly worded as possible.

### My Initial Proposal Proposal/Plan to Dr. Scelsa:

1. Buy a Laptop (and possibly an external hard drive)
2. Plan and then discuss/revise fields of metadata for catalog
3. Make a Controlled Vocabulary for the Catalog
4. Make a RuleBook for the Catalog for not only myself, but for whoever comes after me
5. Buy Supplies- Buy binders, clear sleeves, labels, tags, etc. for labeling items with an inventory number.
6. Use Excel Spreadsheet to start cataloging items
  - a. Use accession numbering scheme
  - b. Take Photos of items and collect in separate folder (naming them with corresponding item numbers)

- c. Revise Controlled Vocabulary and Rulebook over time
7. Do Rough Collections Assessment- Take particular note of the condition of items and take out those that are most at risk of deterioration or where loss of information is most likely.

### What I Did

#### Research:

The first thing I needed to do before jumping into the project was to research how to do all the things I had just proposed to Dr. Scelsa. I used a number of books, some to give me a general idea of the whole museum collecting and cataloging process, others to give me more specifics about how to go about making a catalog, and others to give me ideas for the type of catalogs I did *not* want to do or use.

#### Books and Sources:

Taylor, Arlene G. *The Organization of Information*. Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, Inc. 1999

This book gave me a good overview of various options for how to compute my metadata, information about access and control to metadata, and how to incorporate (or if to incorporate) existing information with new information. (Which I decided NOT to do with the cataloged items from 2005 on Artsystem.) While initially I thought this book might also be helpful in guiding me in making a controlled vocabulary, I later realized that it was too specific and lengthy and it was unrealistic for IAM to have most of the guidelines and rules that this book laid out.

Hillman, Diane I and Elaine L. Westbrooks. *Metadata In Practice*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2004.

This book definitely gave me some great logistical advice about what fields to have in my catalog, how to use them, and how to set the parameters for them in my rulebook. I got a good idea of how to

Rowley, Jennifer and John Farrow. *Organizing Knowledge: An Introduction to Managing Access to Information*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. London and Vermont: Ashgate, 2000.

While I did not use anything specifically useful from this book when making my catalog, rulebook, or controlled vocabulary, it did give me ideas about the easiest means of formatting and structuring information so that the general reader can understand it. However, the rest of the book itself was not really geared towards my needs.

Gardner, James B. and Elizabeth E. Merritt. *The AAM Guide to Collections Planning*. Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2004.

Even though I was not getting myself into collections planning with this project, I thought it would be good to better familiarize myself with the framework and collections planning process just to better understand how a museum works. Sadly, most if not all of these practices do not apply to IAM. (They do not even have any formal or written)acquisitions or deaccessioning policies.)

Simmons, John E. *Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies* Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2006.

This book was significantly more helpful than some of the others, (if nothing else, perhaps because it is more recent). In a very clear and concise manner, the book gave me an overview (with visuals, which was very important for me in getting a real idea of how my catalog would pan out) of the scope of collections, categories of collections, documentation and collection care. I definitely took some of the advice for at least the categories of collections and documentation in my initial spreadsheet/cataloging.

Svenonius, Elaine. *The Intellectual Foundation of Information Organization*. Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2000.

This book was a little helpful in giving me ideas for catalog fields (however, I already had many of the ones I took from there), but like some of the other books, it was far too detailed in some ways to be applicable to my project.

#### Making the Controlled Vocabulary and the Rulebook:

In making a rulebook to explain how to use the catalog, I pulled ideas from the various books I had already researched.

In addition, I used:

J. Paul Getty Trust. *The Categories for the Description of Works of Art*, Edited by Murtha Baca and Patricia Harpring. College Art Association from the Getty Museum Website. Revised June 9, 2009.

[http://www.getty.edu/research/publications/electronic\\_publications/cdwa/index.html](http://www.getty.edu/research/publications/electronic_publications/cdwa/index.html)  
and

Blakaby, James R. and Patricia Greeno. *The Revised Nomenclature for Museum Cataloging: A Revised and Expanded Version of Robert G. Chenhall's System for Classifying Man-Made Objects* Nashville: AASLHPRESS, 1988

The rules I made for cataloging are:

**Be Clear:** Simple, plain prose. Avoid slang. Record terms in the natural word order, not inverted.

**Be Permanent:** Put up data often and adequately. Transfer information periodically from one generation of electronic memory to another.

**Be Comprehensive:** Documentation must be as complete and comprehensive as possible.<sup>6</sup>

I made procedures for updates and reviews and recommended that the Rulebook get reviewed every year, and that any changes that might help clarify or make the cataloging process easier be made. Whenever the rulebook is reviewed or changed, the date should be noted on the top of the book for future reference, with the names of those who worked on the changes. In addition, I created policies for the preservation of information and the need for regular “back-ups” of the catalog, rulebook, controlled

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<sup>6</sup> John E. Simmons . “Chapter 11: Documentation” *Things Great and Small: Collections Management Policies* by John E. Simmons (Washington, DC: American Association of Museums, 2006) 91-96

vocabulary, and photographs.

Deciding How to Mark the “Location” Field:

As there are no real shelves or means (at the moment) of organizing artifacts in the basement, I was only able to create a cursory system of how to locate items and identify/name locations.

The following cursory blueprint was derived:

Downstairs/Basement/Storage

Back of Room	
Southeast 1 (From back of room until the wall comes out (aka the beginning of the old fireplace))	Southwest 1 (From back of room until the wall comes out (aka the beginning of the old fireplace))
SE2 (Everything that falls within the space of where the old fireplace is now boarded up. You can tell where it starts and stops because the wall comes out)	SW2 (Everything that falls within the space of where the old fireplace is now boarded up. You can tell where it starts and stops because the wall comes out)
SE3 (from the end of the old fireplace to rafter 2)	SW3 (from the end of the old fireplace to rafter 2)
NE2 (from rafter closest to entrance to the next rafter (rafter 2))	NW2 (from rafter closest to entrance to the next rafter (rafter 2))
NE1 (from Brick Wall/entrance to Rafter)	NW1 (from Brick Wall/entrance to Rafter)
Left Side	Right Side

Entrance on Grand Street

See Appendix A for the Rulebook

See Appendix B for the Controlled Vocabulary

Cataloging the Items:

Having done my own research and reviewed things with Dr. Scelsa, I created an initial controlled vocabulary and rulebook. I was ready to begin the project. Dr. Scelsa had still not purchased a computer, despite my recommendation, so I used my own laptop for the project.

Initial Fields in the Catalog:

1. Inventory #
2. Artist/Creator
3. Title
4. Media
5. Description
6. Dimensions
7. Location
8. On Loan/or on Display



9. History of Item
10. Donor
11. Collection Title (if exists)
12. Condition of Item
13. Part/Set
14. Quantity

When I began cataloging at the Museum, I was simply brought down to the basement with no direction as to where I should start. As a result, I simply began with the first box I picked up. In many ways, this random selection of boxes became my process of selecting which items to catalog. I decided that in numbering the items, it was best to use an accession numbering scheme, rather than a classification numbering scheme. In an accession numbering scheme, items are assigned a unique number and the numbering follows successive numeric order.<sup>7</sup> In a classification number scheme, similar works are grouped together within the actual way the item is numbered.<sup>8</sup> However, I decided that a classification system would not work for the IAM since it is not at a place yet where it can be known what types of classifications and categories to use. Realistically, the Museum's first priority is to find out what it has in its collection and know where that item is located. Due to the great disorder of the basement, I thought it best to use the simplest numbering scheme possible.

In all I cataloged a variety of items including: photographs, documents, instruments, books, paintings, linens, dresses, tools, utensils, drawings, marionettes, furniture, and magazines.

I also needed to create a system for the marking and labeling of inventory numbers on the items. The most basic and general rules were that the marking and labeling needed to be secure, reversible, safe for the object or specimen, discreet but visible, easily located, not on physically unstable surfaces or across a fracture, not on surfaces prone to abrasion or war. Also, all detachable parts of the object or specimen must also be marked or labeled with a number.<sup>9</sup>

Since there are a variety of media in the Collection, different rules were needed for different types of items. Here is a brief summary of those policies:

For objects: Use the tags (at the time this is being written, yellow tags are being used, but the color may change in the future), and attach the tags somehow to the artifact.

For Photographs not in frames: Place the photograph inside a new glossy sleeve. Then post a sticky label on the outside of the glossy sleeve with the photograph's inventory number.

For Documents/Papers: Use same procedure as with photographs not in frames. Place the document within a clear glossy sleeve, write the inventory number on a sticky label that you place on the outside of the sleeve, and place the sleeve within a binder.

Textiles: For small items (i.e. napkins) carefully place cloth/textile within a clear bag, and use a sticky label on the outside of the bag with the inventory number.

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<sup>7</sup> Simmons. 38

<sup>8</sup> Elaine Svenonius. *The Intellectual Foundation of Information Organization*. (Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2000) 10

<sup>9</sup> Simmons 93

For Things On Display: We still must label items on display with the appropriate inventory number, however, we do not want it to be visible to the public, and it still must be secure, reversible, and safe for the object or specimen. Also, it cannot be on surfaces prone to abrasion. With all of these concerns in mind, at the moment the procedure in place is to use a *post-it* (Dr. Scelsa's adamant wishes) with the inventory # written on it, on the display item.

Unfortunately, most of my findings, once cataloged, had to be placed back where I found them for lack of materials to cover/move them. However, in addition to moving the photographs into protective sleeves, the museum also had a large collection of marionettes that came wrapped. (Marionettes and puppet shows were very important to Italian culture.) I was able to rewrap all the marionettes so they were protected and place tag on them with their inventory numbers. For everything else, it is regrettable that there is no space to organize and put aside what I have cataloged.

In addition to being included in the catalog, every item was photographed. When these photographs were uploaded onto the computer, they all entered the "IAM archival photos" folder and were given names corresponding to the inventory number of the item in the photograph. These photographs are mainly intended as a visual aid for the Museum staff and to enhance the catalog. However, these photographs will also hopefully soon be available online to allow the public online to see what is not on display. (There are no written out steps or plans at the moment to complete this.)

#### Problems I Encountered:

1) Nothing is safe! Not everything is covered or in boxes. Those that are in boxes are mostly in boxes that are torn or exposed. Boxes are sitting on the floor and not shelves. In other places, boxes are sitting on top of each other, with the boxes beneath visibly sinking and weakening, and the content inside most likely getting damaged. If there were to be a flood or leak of any sort from above or below, almost everything in this collection would be destroyed. Paintings are barely covered, furniture is lying on its side and on top of other things, shelves are not sturdy and boxes are often ripped and not closed.

2) Space: Problems that I knew would exist from the start were simply having space to work in. There is barely enough space to walk in the basement, so I only had two folding chairs to work with. One chair was for myself, and the other as a desk for my computer.

3) Climate: Cold, Dark and Dusty: Another large problem was the climate of the basement. There is no temperature control (which I will return to later), and there is very little light, just a few exposed bulbs on the ceiling. As a result, the doors to the street must be kept open to have any good light source for both seeing artifacts and documents, and especially for photographing them. This made working cold and uncomfortable. In addition, the vast amount of dust downstairs required me to wear a dust mask while working, which also made the working process slightly uncomfortable.

Already damage has been done to some photographs due to the moisture downstairs. I found an entire box full of groups of photographs stuck together so much that I could not even pull them apart, all due to water damage.

4) Ability to Move Around: Things are haphazardly placed. Boxes are piled on top of each other and heavy pieces of furniture are laid about, making it difficult to move. There is no organization there at all. My biggest problem was getting to boxes and finding items to catalog. While there are many valuable items to be found, finding them itself is a challenge. I discovered, as I went along, that the front area of the storage mainly contained press materials or visitor booklets from previous IAM exhibits. I am not sure entirely why this is the case, but as a result it required a lot of work to get over the various obstacles (literally large and heavy objects) in the way, to try and get to artifacts in boxes stored on high shelves or behind large objects.

5) Safety: There were some holes in the floor, and many of the marionettes had poles jutting out of them. Some pieces of wood had nails sticking out. In general, I had to be very careful when moving around down there.

6) Mislabeling/Getting Information: The lack of organization made my work that much more difficult. Many boxes simply had nothing written on them and had no information inside about who the items belonged to, who donated them, who the people in the photographs were, when the item was made, etc. Most of the time Dr. Scelsa was equally clueless about this information. Other times, the information on the outside of boxes was totally wrong. For example, a box that said it had ceramic pieces had posters inside. Other times, I was unsure whether to trust the information on the outside of boxes since it had been wrong so often. Or the information on the outside of a box would contradict information found inside a box.

#### Revisions and Changes Along The Way:

As time went on, I realized changes needed to be made to the Catalog fields, the rulebook and the controlled vocabulary.

##### 1) Eliminated the categories Donor, Part/Set, and Quantity

Over time it became clear that Dr. Scelsa was telling me the name of a collection for an object based on who had donated them. When I realized this, it seemed redundant to have a Donor field and a Collection field.

Part/Set was eliminated as so few items truly fit in the “part/set” parameters. I originally thought that perhaps I would be seeing sets of kitchen artifacts, such as tea cups, etc. But, those type of items were not coming up in my findings. Instead it seemed that “Related Works” was a more appropriate term for linking together items that should have a noted association.<sup>10</sup>

So too, Quantity was eliminated as there were so few artifacts that had anything in this field. Most items were one of a kind, and if there was something to note for “Quantity” it

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<sup>10</sup> J. Paul Getty Trust. *The Categories for the Description of Works of Art*, Edited by Murtha Baca and Patricia Harpring. College Art Association from the Getty Museum Website. Revised June 9, 2009. [http://www.getty.edu/research/publications/electronic\\_publications/cdwa/index.html](http://www.getty.edu/research/publications/electronic_publications/cdwa/index.html)

could instead just be written in the Description field. This also made cataloging faster and easier. For example, there were six dining room chairs that were exactly alike, and in the description field I simply wrote, “there are six items”.

1b) “Dimensions”: While Dr. Scelsa felt that this was vitally important to have this in the catalog, it simply was not realistic or a good use of time to take the dimensions of every single objects. Also, I felt that the priority should be on finding as many items as possible, and that the time it would take to measure the items was not the best use of time at this venture. This category was therefore not eliminated, but has mainly been left blank for now (unless a letter comes with the object from the donor with the dimensions noted) In the Rulebook it has been left as an optional field (time permitting).

## 2) Added Subject, Classification, Period, Citations, and Color fields

After a few items I decided to add a “Subject” field that would give one word descriptions of what the item was “of” or “about.” I thought this would make searching for items belonging to particular themes or topics for discussion easier. For example: Weddings, Birth, Church, etc.

I decided two-thirds of the way through the process that I wanted to add a classification field since I felt the “Subject” field was not clear and simple enough. Since I did not want to limit the “Subject” field to just one word, sometimes two or three words would be used to describe the subject of an item. However, this meant the “Subject” field was a little more full than I initially expected. With the “Classification”, I felt it would be simpler and easier for the Museum to find related items and to control the language used to describe the kinds of items. Unlike a classification *numbering* system, this would group works together based on similar characteristics in a catalog field, but it would not be a part of the inventory number.<sup>11</sup> This new field required an entire new section added to the rulebook to explain the different classifications.

See Appendix C for Classifications

Added a “Period” field. It is used to indicate when an item was made or used. Because this field was added later in my work, there are some inconsistencies in how the date appears. (This was also because of some of my own trouble using Excel in finding ways to make the date appear the way I wanted.)

On the model of some of my readings, I included a “Citations” field. This field is meant to tell the reader where the information, particularly that relating to the history of the item, came from. For example, if the information came from a letter attached to an item that was sent to the Museum versus information Dr. Scelsa gave (which might be a little less reliable). This way there is accountability for where the information is obtained.

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<sup>11</sup> Arlene G. Taylor. *The Organization of Information*. (Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, Inc. 1999) 182-183

Added a “Color” field. I thought it helped better identify and differentiate items, especially the marionettes.

3) Began work on some of the collection on display inside the Museum: At the request of Dr. Scelsa, I began also cataloging some of the items inside the Museum. Since he hopes to have the entire collection, and not just the unknown pieces in the basement, in this catalog, he wanted me start doing some of the objects upstairs.

#### What System I Have Left In Place/Notes to Future Person

1) I have left the Museum with a Catalog of almost 250 items in the Excel Spreadsheet document “IAM Catalog.” Created a system of numbering and locating those items. Given descriptions for the items and any history that belonged to it. The artifacts cataloged range from those in the basement through random selection (mainly in NW1, NW2, NE1, NE2, SE3, SW3) and some items on display in the Museum (also somewhat random selection based on availability).

2) All the rules of how to fill in these fields can be found in the rulebook for the Catalog, found in the document titled “Rulebook To The Catalog At IAM”

3) A controlled vocabulary for the catalog to make searching easier. This can be found in the folder “Controlled Vocab. IAM”

4) Photographs of all these items in the computer folder “IAM Archival Photos”

#### Note:

Much more still needs to be done to complete this catalog. There are some inconsistencies in the notations on the condition of items. Sometimes I noted it in the “Description” field, other times I noted I noted it in the “Condition” field. Some revision here could definitely be done. The condition of the items should definitely be reevaluated and described more in-depth.

The “Period” field to mark the date of when something existed, was made, or used, also definitely has some inconsistencies. This was due to my own difficulty with Excel, but a standardized way of writing the date should be implemented.

#### My Proposals/Plans For the Museum’s Future:

##### Short-Term:

1) Storage Issues and Recommendations:

- a) Re-house items or Clean Everything Out!
- b) Buy shelves, boxes, labels etc. to create organized storage. Need to do better job at labeling and organizing.
- c) Containers for books that are fragile
- d) Proper protection for paintings

Everything that is on the floor, or on a shelf but exposed, is at risk for more water damage. Everything must be placed in new boxes, off the ground, and covered.

2) Documentation Policies: Ensure that the Museum properly manages all the collection documentation, both written and electronic. Regular back-up of all documentation, no matter the medium. If the link between the object and the documentation is lost, both will lose their value.<sup>12</sup>

a) Try calling as many families or donors as possible to get more information about document and artifact history.

3) Create better acquisitions policies. The IAM needs to become more specific about the type of artifacts it will take. With so many pieces and without the resources to manage them, everything is in peril and so tough decisions need to be made about what the Museum can handle and what will truly add to the Museum’s collection at this point.

Long-Term

1) Assessment

Needs Assessment- Survey building, policy and collection needs, and plan a phased program to respond to those needs.<sup>13</sup>

Risk Assessment- Conduct rough assessment of collection to find the items or information most important, most at peril, and at risk of loss or destruction.

- a) Survey and evaluate the existing protective systems and practices and the effectiveness of such practices<sup>14</sup>
- b) Survey the conditions of the Collection to identify elements at risk. Determine what resources are available to reduce these risks. Take steps to avoid or ameliorate each risk.
- c) Prepare an Environmental survey of the collections and evaluate risks to the Collection<sup>15</sup>
- d) Prepare a comprehensive, prioritized list of preservation and conservation goals, how these goals can be achieved, and the resources needed to achieve them

2) Environment Changes:

a) Create some form of temperature control: The downstairs collection is constantly exposed to outside air. It never freezes downstairs, however, it fluctuates roughly between 40- 70 degrees. Considering what is housed in this basement the proper storage environment would be different for each type of item.

My recommendations/Ideal temperatures and relative humidity for the types of items in the storage area:

Material	Temperatures <sup>16</sup>	Relative Humidity <sup>17</sup>	How far off the Museum
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<sup>12</sup> Simmons, 91-96

<sup>13</sup> Simmons, 103

<sup>14</sup> Simmons, 103

<sup>15</sup> Simmons, 103

<sup>16</sup> Simmons, 104

			is at it's lows and highs
Furniture	65° F <sup>18</sup>	47% - 55%	Low: 25° High: 5°
Paintings	65-75° F	40% - 55%	Low: 25-35° High: 5°
Photographs	55-77° F	20% - 50%	Low: 15° - 37° High: 7° - 15°
Textiles	55-68° F	40% - 50%	Low: 15° - 28° High: 2° - 15°
Works on Paper	60-65° F	45%- 55%	Low: 20° -25° High: 5° - 10°

According to Dr. Scelsa it is always somewhat cool down there, even in the summer. Dr. Scelsa has said that he would like to encase the entire room with cement, and then put temperature control, de-humidifiers, and humidifiers, in there, but no actual plans for this have been made. (He says that if they get a certain grant applied for, the money will be put towards this endeavor.)

b) Light: Add more light downstairs so that the doors can be closed while down there and so less moisture gets in.

3) Additions to the Catalog: Here are some fields I hope will be added to the catalog sometime in the near future (when the Museum is able and ready)

- a. Acquisition Details: Date of Receipt
  - i. The date the item was acquired by the Museum
  - ii. Packing details of item
- b. Name of cataloger when item is entered and each time the catalog is updated
- c. Date article was cataloged, and date of each update of information
- d. Track conditions reports: Prepare condition report when item enters the collection. Periodic reports should be made in order to determine whether the condition has changed and if there should be conservation methods put in place.
  - i. Track and identify the *type* of examination done to an item (infrared light examination, visual examination, etc.)
  - ii. *Person* who did the examination and wrote the report, and the *date* it took place.<sup>19</sup>
  - iii. Include “Earliest Examination” and “Latest Date” field- Date when earliest and last examination took place.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Simmons, 104

<sup>18</sup> Simmons, 104

<sup>19</sup> J. Paul Getty Trust, Chapter 14 “Conditions/Examinations History” *The Categories for the Description of Works of Art*, Edited by Murtha Baca and Patricia Harpring. College Art Association from the Getty Museum Website. Revised June 9, 2009.

<[http://www.getty.edu/research/publications/electronic\\_publications/cdwa/index.html](http://www.getty.edu/research/publications/electronic_publications/cdwa/index.html) > 29 Oct 2010

<sup>20</sup> Getty Trust, Chapter 14 “Conditions/Examinations History”

- e. Rights Management- Statement, link or identifier that gives information about rights management (whether its restricted use until a certain time, time at which the resource will be removed from display, etc.)<sup>21</sup>
- f. Other contributor- Name of person or organization that has made significant intellectual contributions, but ones that are secondary to the name in the Creator elements (editor, illustraor, etc)<sup>22</sup>
- g. Standardize the use of the following words in the Catalog (I include definitions for clarity, but no rule is in place for having to use them): Item, Group, Volume, Collection, Series, Set, Component
- h. Title Date- Note when the title was assigned to the work, or range of dates during which a title was known to be valid. Note the earliest and latest dates on which title was assigned to work.

#### Obstacles/Problems To The Museum Moving Forward:

Part of the problem is that Dr. Scelsa does not have much background in museum, archive, or library management. He is a licensed mental health worker in New York State, but spent the majority of his career in academia. In addition to teaching courses on Education and Counseling, he was also the vice president of CUNY's Queens College for a period of time. His main experience in this was working with museum directors and overseeing museum programs at institutions, including at the Louis Armstrong Center Archive and Museum and Queens College's Godwin-Ternbach Museum.

Money is also a huge problem for the Museum. The fact that the IAM is free does not help either. They are a donations based museum, meaning that some visitors do not have to pay at all. Due to these the financial issues, Dr. Scelsa relies on volunteers to help run the Museum and so it is only open on the weekends and sometimes during the week for groups who call ahead. There are grants that they have already gotten, but there are certain specifications and difficulties to using to this money.

In the long- run, Dr. Schelsa already owns more space in the adjacent building and has architectural plans for an expanded museum. He imagines the Museum building up to having a full range of education programs. In order for the Museum to go forward, however, the barber next door, Sal, has to move out. Sal is a staple in the community and had had that barbershop for forty years, since he came to America from Sicily. When Dr. Scelsa first bought the Stabile bank for IAM, Sal had told him that he would move out and retire when Sal turned 65. However, Sal turned 65 this past summer, and is still working. Sal has since said that he would leave at the end of December 2010, but at the moment that does not seem likely happen either. Legally, Dr. Scelsa can evict Sal, however, in addition to being cruel, this would not leave a good taste in the mouths of the local Italians who have known Sal for a long time. (Meaning the community Dr. Scelsa is trying to get to support the museum.) However, without Sal moving out, Dr. Scelsa says that the Museum cannot continue with their expansion plans.

My work at the Museum is not done, but I have started teaching other volunteers how to

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<sup>21</sup> Taylor. 88

<sup>22</sup> Taylor, 88



use the catalog with their being no longer dependent on me in mind.

Conclusions:

While I knew I was taking on a challenging role when I signed on with this project, nothing could have prepared me what was to come. The actual number of man hours, the research, writing a rulebook, writing a vocabulary, and being truly solely responsible the direction of a vital process of museum management, cataloging. And in many ways I feel as though I almost did more than that. While I never officially did any museum management, I do feel that all my reading made me much more upset, but also forceful, in trying to help the Museum decide what steps and direction it should take next. I certainly will not say that I am qualified for such at thing, but I hope that at least my small percentage of knowledge will help the Museum move forward. In many ways that made this one of the best learning experiences possible- one that was in the real world, on-the-go, hands-on,- and with real responsibilities, not just to a boss or even an institution, but to the preservation of a nationalities history and culture.



Photograph of Storage Space:



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