Day in the Life of Dan Cagley
Video Podcast Transcript
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Dan Cagley: I’m Dan Cagley, Collections Manager at the Minnesota Historical Society. I manage over 250,000 objects in the three-dimensional collections. I do everything from accessioning and processing new acquisitions; to taking inventories; to pulling and returning objects for exhibits, loans, and research requests.

There’s a big long process that we do that…curators bring things in, and they’re acquired and they get a deed of gift from the people they are getting the items from. They are creating these catalog records so we can keep track of them [the objects]. After we acquire title, I usually assign an accession number, a unique accession number to each item, so that we can keep track of that unique item. What happens after I do that is I have volunteers or myself…we number; we physically number the thing so that that unique number is actually attached to the item, and then, after that, we let those numbers dry and we put them away in storage.

These are new acquisitions that just were physically numbered two days ago and they are getting put away today. These are items that are actually all from one of Ann Bancroft’s expeditions to the South Pole. I’m in the process of putting all these things away, assigning a location and then later on I’ll do data entry on our database to keep track on our computer where all these things are. See, it all follows a system, but sometimes I have to actually find the spot where an individual item is going to go. And then I end up putting it there.

There is a unique place that each one of these things ends up being put away to. Those are in our system, and every ten years we do an inventory just to make sure that it’s still there.

Dan Cagley: 8851 point 2 A and B.

Mary Patton (Volunteer): Okay. Is that all you have on 2?

Dan: No, I’ve got 62 point 16 point 2

Mary: 62 point 16 point 2.

Dan: 1986 point 46 point 1, A and B.

Mary: Yep.
Dan Cagley: We’re in one of our collection storage areas. As you can see; this unit made by Delta Cabinet Company has a bunch of shelves in there which is great for certain types of artifacts. The problem is you need space to be able to reach in and pull things out. To get more objects within a cabinet like this I’m going to reconfigure this cabinet. This storage situation for these items really isn’t that bad, but our curator of this collection would like to see these items spread out a little bit more and stored so that you’re not concerned about bumping into something else as you are trying to remove an object.

So this is an example of one of our finished products, where this used to be the six shelves and now we’ve been able to put nineteen drawers in. there is very little space between each drawer, so we’ve been able to get the maximum amount of drawers in the unit as we can. We are also working with Conservation so that we can better store these things from a preservation standpoint. If you open and close the drawer, these arrows really aren’t going to roll around or anything like that. All these things have been preserved and are stored in a manner which is much safer for the actual items themselves.

Our 1500 Mississippi street offsite storage warehouse is about ten minutes away from the history center. I still usually go out there three or four times a month at the very least, and if we are actively working on certain things out there I can go out there quite a bit more. State Capitol furniture is an example where they are artifacts but they still get used at the Capitol and so requests come in quite often for a certain type of chair or certain type of table or there done with types of artifacts, so we are constantly using the forklift to either retrieve things or to put things back.

In 2004 we loaned two fire pumpers to the Daniels Firefighters Museum over in Minneapolis and one came back from loan and we took another one over there. So what we are creating a mount for today is the fire pumper that came back. We are using these floor jacks to get it off the ground so it’s putting as much pressure on the wheels, just to help preserve the artifact so that if something does happen on the floor, it’s just a few inches off the floor.

We have long-term conservation planning that takes place with the Conservation Department where we identify things for them to work on. One of our objects conservators, Tom Braun, and I have been working on identifying pieces in storage that either have stickers or tape on them, and in the case of the furniture, requires a little bit of effort to move those things down to his lab so that they can…he has a volunteer that comes in to work with him. They remove the tape and the residue, do an overall survey, and then the item will go back into storage. In the case of moving some of these large things where the contents are partially glass or mirrors, there is a concern that something could happen. We usually try to be safe rather than sorry.