

**SOCIETY OF AMERICAN ARCHIVISTS  
MANAGEMENT ROUNDTABLE  
August 1997**

*This edition of the Management Roundtable newsletter presents two articles of interest to archivists considering or planning renovations. Both articles are condensed versions of papers presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Southwest Archivists in Galveston, Texas, May 30, 1997.*

**PLANNING, SUPERVISING AND SURVIVING THE RENOVATION  
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ARCHIVES**

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The University Archives at the University of Houston was created in 1994, when the library administration announced the plans for developing the archives. These included renovating one floor of the M. D. Anderson Library to house the program and hiring an archivist and one paraprofessional. Monies for the renovations were identified in October 1994; however, construction did not begin until May 1996. The Archives opened to the public in October 1996.

The plans for renovation included creating a reading room, an office for the archivist, a staff workroom/processing room, and a secure stacks area. In addition, the existing rest rooms on the floor had to be brought into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The overriding need for the facility was that it had to be able to function with a skeleton crew; therefore, public, work, and storage areas had to flow well.

Work began on the renovations long before the construction crew arrived. The floor had been used as a storage area for the Libraries, so unwanted furniture, artwork, and other materials had to be removed. All of these items had to be handled according to state law and university procedures. This took several months and involved coordination between the Archives staff, library administration, and the University Physical Plant.

In the months before the renovations began, several meetings were held to go over the rough outline of the floor, to discuss heating, air conditioning and ventilation needs for the floor, and to establish what would be included in the overall renovations bid. The bids were received, and the company with the lowest bid was awarded the contract. At this point, the architect, the contractor and his on-site managers, and the Archives staff met to establish ground rules and to review plans for the renovations.

Initially the renovations began well, but soon several problems occurred. There were communications problems, including unapproved change orders. The contractors did not follow the rules that had been established in that initial meeting. These rules, all for the protection of the Archives' holdings, had included wearing name tags at all times, working only during the hours that Special Collections and Archives were open, and not having food or drink on the floor.

There were problems with the workmanship of some of the contractors and sub-contractors. It took two tries with two different sub-contractors before the architect would approve the glass wall at the entry. The contractors used furniture on the floor as step-stools and wastebaskets as buckets. Because of problems which developed during the renovations, the contractors went over the scheduled finish date by several weeks.

A great deal more effort was required on our part than originally planned. The Archivist designed the service desk, which was included in the overall bid as a cost-cutting measure. The original plans included purchasing prefabricated components from a library furnishings company, but that would have added several thousand dollars to the project.

In addition, Archives staff had to mark all of the shelving on the floor for its move, and mark each shelf's final destination. The materials on each shelf had to be tagged for the move as well. After receiving instruction from the Assistant to the Director, the archival assistant managed this project. Even this wasn't foolproof, as the archival assistant had to shelf-read over 7,000 theses and dissertation and re-shelve almost 1,500 which had been misshelved.

Finally, closer control should have been kept over who had access to the floor. During the renovations, a great deal of archival and other historic material remained on the floor, making security an issue. At various times, there were electricians, contractors, sub-contractors, physical plant workers, fire alarm installers, carpenters, carpet layers, and library staff on the floor. This was not as closely regulated as it should have been.

There were several things done correctly, however. The archival assistant served as the daily contact for all of the parties involved. He kept track of all the details and worked on problems as they arose. The Archives staff also drew on the skills of those in the library with contracting or renovating experience. The punch list was ready long before the architect asked for it, which established what the Library would and would not accept. Finally, the Archives staff learned as much as possible about the bid process and renovations in order to be informed customers.

In closing, five pieces of advice are offered based on what we learned during the creation of the University of Houston Archives:

1. Learn everything you can about construction and bid processes, before renovations begin, if possible
2. Be a presence during construction, both strategically and physically.
3. Don't move into the facility early, if at all possible.
4. Document the entire process to the best of your ability.
5. Be prepared to hurry up and wait.

*Casey Greene, Head of Special Collections at the Rosenberg Library, was session chair and a speaker at the renovation session.*

**PLANNING AND BUILDING A BOOK ROOM:  
THE ROSENBERG LIBRARY'S EXPERIENCE**

In 1996, the Rosenberg Library's Galveston and Texas History Center solved in large part a longstanding space problem by building a book room and transferring its book collection from the vault to the new storage area. The process offered an excellent opportunity to test management approaches, such as building ownership among the department's staff of the final product.

These lessons were evident based on our experiences with renovation:

1. Be bold in proposing innovative solutions. The best solution to a space problem may be the one that appears at the outset to be the most impractical.
2. Recognize the importance of "vision." Foresee what renovations will be needed, where they will be done, and how they will solve the space problem.
3. At the beginning of the planning process, set forth criteria: What changes will the renovations bring? What will they not change?
4. Factor hidden expenses, such as altered room acoustics, resulting from renovations into the planning and budgeting process.
5. Practice public relations. This will be a golden opportunity to press the case for more storage space for the archives. Build support for renovations among your constituencies (e.g., administration, staff, other departments of your institution, patrons). Prepare an artist's conception of the planned changes and display it in your reading room.
6. Utilize a team approach throughout the planning and building process. Give the staff opportunities to take turns leading the effort. Let them hold meetings without the administrative head present so that they feel less constrained in proposing solutions.
7. Document the planning and renovation process. Hold periodic meetings with your staff to evaluate the effectiveness of planning and decision making. Take photographs of your facilities before, during, and after construction. *Learn* from your experiences!

**JOIN US**

Be sure to visit us at the Society of American Archivists annual meeting in Chicago later this month. The Archives Management Roundtable will meet Thursday, August 28, 1997, 4-6 PM, at the Fairmont Hotel. This year's topic is "Managing Your Job, Your Time and Yourself." Ms. Anna Hammond of the Center for Academic Excellence will lead our workshop. See you there!