

APPENDIX J: MARKING AND NUMBERING MUSEUM PROPERTY

A. INTRODUCTION

Museum property in the unit's permanent custody has catalog numbers applied directly to the objects and/or specimens. The catalog number provides the critical link between the object or specimen and the catalog record. Without the catalog number the relationship between the object or specimen and its associated data on the catalog record is almost impossible to track. Loss of the catalog number leads to loss of accountability. Objects or specimens without data lose much of their significance and may be rendered unusable for research. Objects and/or specimens that are in the unit's temporary custody, such as incoming loans to the unit, are never permanently marked. The loan number should be written on a tag attached to the object and/or specimen, and not written directly on the object or specimen.

The catalog number should be legible and easily found, but should not be obtrusive; it should be highly durable, but should not be damaging. Placement of the catalog number and method of application should in no way detract from the scientific, historic, aesthetic, or intrinsic value of the object or specimen. In order to facilitate finding the catalog number, the number should be applied in the same location for objects and/or specimens of the same type.

In addition to the permanent catalog number, a supplementary string-tie acid-free tag carrying the catalog number helps to minimize handling of the object or specimen.

Whole ceramic vessels and baskets should be labeled on the exterior base, near but not precisely at the center or on the start. Labels or numbers should not be applied over diagnostic or potentially informative features. Sherds should be numbered on the undecorated surface and chipped stone on unflaked areas whenever possible. Numbers should be in proportion to the size of the object or specimen. The permanent number should not be placed on parts that are easily removable.

When an object is composed of two separate pieces such as a teapot and lid each part should be labeled with the same catalog number and a component part designator. In the event

the object is too small to be numbered with the permanent catalog number, it should be placed in a small vial, partially opened polyethylene bag (so as not to create a micro-environment), or an acid-free envelope, and the catalog number placed on the container. An additional tag carrying the number may be placed inside the container. Containers of lot cataloged objects are numbered and tagged in the same way. A single representative object from a lot may be permanently numbered.

B. SPECIAL TECHNIQUES FOR CULTURAL COLLECTIONS

1. Human Remains

When applying permanent numbers to skeletal remains, numbers should be applied unobtrusively in order not to detract from, or disfigure, the material. It may, however, be inappropriate to apply permanent catalog numbers directly onto culturally sensitive materials, such as human skeletal remains. Where it has been determined that human skeletal materials should not directly bear permanent catalog numbers, the materials may be placed in acid-free boxes, polyethylene bags, vials or other containers. The containers, and not the remains, bear the permanent catalog numbers. Additional tags bearing the catalog number should be attached to the skeletal materials where possible.

Cabinets housing human remains should be kept locked at all times. Exteriors of boxes containing human remains should only identify catalog numbers of contents and not object names. Human remains are not to be exhibited or shown to casual visitors. Access may be subject to the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990. Access for study should be requested of the unit manager in writing.

a. Cremations

Where possible, cremations should be stored in the vessel in which they were found. To save wear on a covered vessel, the covering vessel or lid may be stored nearby rather than on the base vessel. The burial vessel containing the cremation should be

covered with a length of unbleached muslin to completely enclose the entire container. This is not only an act of respect, but also protects the remains from dust and unnecessary access. The catalog number for the cremation itself and any other labels should be located on the vessel. The labels should be on acid-free, cerex tape, or Tyvec polyolefin.

b. Inhumations

Where possible, osteological remains should be stored in acid-free containers of an appropriate size. The bones of each burial should be stored together in the same container, and small bones should be grouped by type within a polyethylene bag. Place the catalog number on the base of the cranium, inside of the mandible bone, on the innominates, and on acid-free labels in each bag. Place larger bones at the bottom of the box, small and more fragile on top. For identification purposes, place only the catalog numbers on the box exterior.

c. Skeletal Remains with Soft Tissue

Attach the catalog number to an acid-free label and attach the tag to the mummy. Mummies should be stored in cabinets.

2. Paper

For paper items, apply the number directly and inconspicuously on the reverse side in the lower right corner using a medium grade pencil. Never use ink or indelible pencils. Use HB, H, or 2H pencils only. More importantly, write lightly as bearing down hard with the pencil may leave an impression. For books, place the catalog number inside the front cover, at the lower edge near the spine if possible without damaging the spine. The number should also be written on the lower edge, right hand corner on the back of the title page.

3. Photographic Negatives

For photographic negatives, do not mark the negatives

directly. Rather, place the number on the acid-free enclosures that hold the negatives.

4. Textiles

For rugs, costumes, linens, draperies, flags, and other textiles, use permanent black ink to write the catalog number on white linen tape. After the ink has thoroughly

dried, sew the tape to the textile. Use a small needle and try not to pierce the threads of the textile.

If the item is fragile or of open weave, such as lace, attach the tape with a small loop of thread. The linen tape is sewn directly onto the textile with cotton thread. The stitches should be moderately loose and attached to the warp threads of the textile.

5. Methods of Applying Number

When selecting a numbering method, consider the nature of the material. Make sure that lacquers and inks used to apply a number, and solvents used to remove it, do not damage the object. Make sure the area to be numbered is clean, and free of dust.

The proper left and proper right side of an object is determined by the object's right and left side. Use Arabic numerals wherever possible. To avoid possible confusion, numbers one (1), six (6), and nine (9) may be underlined when numbering objects or specimens.

a. Inked Number

Apply a small rectangle of clear lacquer or white acrylic on the object using a small artist's brush or brush cap. Use clear lacquer on light objects and white lacquer on dark objects. The lacquer is made of acryloid resin (Acryloid B-721TM and acetone, with titanium dioxide as the pigment for the white lacquer). Make the lacquer primer smooth and neat. Usually a spot 1/8" wide by 3/8" long is sufficient.

Allow the lacquer to dry thoroughly. Write the catalog number on the spot, using India ink and a

crowquill pen. Take care not to etch the catalog number onto the object with the pen tip. (Rapidograph-type drafting pens are acceptable, but are more apt to smear.) Keep a small jar of ammonia and water handy for cleaning pen tips.

When the ink is dry, in about 10 minutes, cover the number with a coat of clear lacquer to protect the number. The clear lacquer top coat should extend just beyond the lacquer primer.

b. Adhered Numbers

Adhered numbers are written on archival quality porous paper and then adhered to an object with acryloid B-721TM (e.g., to a basket). The paper is porous to enable the adhesive to penetrate it. The adhesive should be tested before applying to ensure it does not adversely affect the object surface or conceal diagnostic information (e.g., do not adhere label to the basket "start;" rather, attach it to the side of the "start").

6. Removal of Numbers

The catalog number should always be reversible (i.e., removable). However, remove the catalog number only when absolutely necessary (e.g., if it is incorrect, if the paint smears, or if the object is changed from a lot to an individually cataloged item). In the past, shellac was used where clear lacquer is now being used.

To remove shellac, use denatured alcohol. Use acetone to remove lacquer. Use cotton-swabs with very little solvent, so that the dissolved material is carried into the swab rather than diluted and absorbed into the object. Exercise care.

Previous catalog numbers, from former owners, should be left on the object if they are not likely to be confused with the unit number, if they do not occupy space needed for the unit number, and particularly if their removal would damage the object. Retaining the number helps to maintain the documentation of the object. Field specimen

numbers should not be removed. If previous owner's numbers are removed, care should be taken to test for the correct solvent before removal. All previous numbers should be recorded in the catalog information. The advice of a conservator may be necessary if the marking material does not yield to readily available and appropriate solvents.

7. Inappropriate and Destructive Methods of Marking that Should Not be Used

Etching, scribing, imprinting, stamping, engraving, scratching, and other methods of marking objects are irreversible and therefore unacceptable because they

permanently alter the object. Reproductions, however, may be indelibly marked if the unit chooses.

Pressure-sensitive tapes should be avoided. All sticky tapes deteriorate (some faster than others), and the adhesive has a tendency to leave a permanent stain. Such tapes as cellophane, masking, plastic, and adhesive have caused permanent damage to museum materials. Tape may be removed on the advice of a conservator.

Epoxy and cement should not be used to attach catalog numbers to objects.

Wire tags should be removed. Any method of attaching numbers or labels to artifacts that uses a wire can cause stains or rusting at the point of contact, corrosion because of electrochemical reactions, or abrasion.

Nail-on tags may be removed after consultation with a conservator.

Staples and/or paper clips should be removed.

Paint or ink should not be used on paper documents that are museum property.

8. Special Techniques for Large Objects

Large objects such as wagons, anchors, boats, trains, and cars kept out-of-doors need especially durable numbers.

The numbers may be painted directly on the object using a sable brush of an appropriate size for the object and artist's oil paint (Cadmium Red is recommended). Trimming the hairs of the brush and thinning the paint with turpentine may be helpful. If an error is made, VMP Naphtha or turpentine may be used to remove the paint while it is still fresh. After the paint has dried thoroughly, removal may be done only with a very strong solvent such as methylene chloride, which should only be handled by a conservator or otherwise qualified staff. Instead of solvents, painting over the number with another artist's oil paint color and reapplying the number is recommended. Wherever possible, place large objects under cover of roof or canopy.

9. Location of Number

However applied, a catalog number should be easy to find, legible, and durable. It should not permanently mar the object or specimen or interfere with study. It should not be directly visible when on display.

Place the catalog number on the primary or non-removable part of the object where possible. Do not place the catalog number on the underside of a heavy object or specimen. The number should be easily found and legible, yet not obtrusive; it should be highly durable, yet not damaging; in order to facilitate finding the catalog number, the number should be applied in the same location for objects and/or specimens of the same type. There are several recommended ways of applying the catalog number depending on the type of object.

As a rule, the catalog number should be placed in the same location on all objects of the same type. Standard locations for marking certain classes of museum objects follow.

Class of Object Location of Catalog Number

Armor Inside each element.

Baskets On base. Do not place in base center or

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	on basket start.
Beads	On edge or on attached tag or place object in clear vial container with label.
Books	On endpaper (blank leaf inside front cover), lower edge near spine, and on lower edge, right hand corner on back of title page. Loose pages should receive the same catalog number, but be numbered individually on reverse, lower right.
Buttons	On reverse side or handled as for beads.
Ceramic, glass, and pewter	On the underside, but avoid parts that might be abraded when the object is moved.
Coins	On the edge/rim. Mint condition coins should not be numbered; number is placed on container holding the coin.
Clothing	Attached to neckband or waistband. Number on textile tape sewn on costume.
Documents, Photos, Prints, Letters, Postcards, and Envelopes	Reverse, lower right corner.
Dolls	Back of neck or bottom of foot.
Firearms	Inside trigger-guard or on the breech of the barrel opposite the lock.
Framed image	Reverse, lower right corner of frame. If behind glass, the image is removed and numbered similarly.
Furniture	Near the inside top of the right rear leg; or for pieces without legs, on right side near rear corner. Heavy

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items are numbered on the right side/leg at the base.

Guns, rifles,
and shotguns

Lower right corner of butt.

Jewelry

Right lower corner on reverse side, or affix number to cloth tape looped around necklace.

Paintings

Reverse, lower right corner. Number both stretcher and frame, because they may get separated. Do not place number on the front or back of the canvas. For heavy frames difficult to remove from wall, use lower right corner on side of frame. Number scroll paintings on scroll knob.

Rugs,
Tapestries,
and Drapes

Reverse side, lower right corner.
Number on textile tape sewn on object.

Scabbard

On reverse of the throat, at top, or (absent a throat) on the body near opening.

Scrapbooks
and Albums

Lower corner near spine inside front cover.

Sculpture

At the rear of the base near the bottom.

Swords,
daggers, and
knives

On reverse of the blade, on ricasso just below the counter guard.

For Natural History specimens, refer to Section C of this Appendix.

Objects too small to receive a number should be placed in a small vial, chipboard tray, plastic bag, or acid-free envelope that bears the catalog number. For further information on placement of numbers see Dudley, Dorothy H. and Wilkinson, Irma B., et al, Museum Registration Methods, Washington, DC: American Association of

Museums, 1979, pp. 57-63.

10. Special Numbering Considerations for Component Parts, Pairs, and Sets

All catalogers have faced the problem of deciding whether to group a set or pair into one cataloging unit or to catalog the items individually. A simple rule that covers all situations is impossible to write. For example, consider a silver service tea set or a 64-piece set of china dinnerware. Are the pieces of the silver tea service assigned different numbers? Is the entire dinnerware set considered a single unit? The cataloger decides whether to group or split the objects for numbering purposes. The objectives to keep in mind are accountability, consistency, and integrity of the object or group of objects and information about the objects.

The following guidance may be helpful to the cataloger in deciding how to number component parts of single units, pairs, and sets. Units may select the numbering method from options listed below. Once an option has been selected, units are encouraged to consistently use that particular numbering when cataloging. Lot cataloged items follow a standard rule, as outlined in Appendix E.

a. Component Parts of Single Units

Objects with component parts are given one catalog number. An object may be considered to have component parts under the conditions described below.

- 1) The parts can be physically separated from the object.
- 2) The object is incomplete without its parts. Component parts of objects considered single units, such as a teapot and a lid, are given one number. Each component is individually marked with the catalog number and an additional suffix, such as lower case letters (i.e., a, b, c, etc.), to distinguish among the parts. A matched pair, such as a pair of shoes or a pair of gloves, is given a single catalog number with each item receiving a suffix of a or b.

- 3) Sets are groups of objects intended to be used together. If the objects in a set are essentially the same, the entire set is cataloged using one catalog number with a lower case letter assigned to each item in the set.

If the parts of a set are essentially different, each part should be given a different catalog number and each catalog record should reference the catalog numbers for the other items in the set. If individual objects within a set are of particular intrinsic or monetary value they may be given individual catalog numbers.

If cataloging the objects individually would destroy the integrity of the whole, for example, by removing the seal on a package of assorted items, then catalog as one unit.

In some cases a set of essentially dissimilar items may have sub-sets of identical items. In such complex cases each different item receives a different number, but the subsets of identical items are cataloged with the same catalog number using lower case letter suffixes. Identical objects may also be lot cataloged.

When designating catalog numbers, catalogers should always bear in mind that greater use of individual catalog numbers makes for greater accountability. To ensure integrity of sets, all associated catalog numbers should be cross-referenced on each catalog card.

C. SPECIAL TECHNIQUES FOR NATURAL HISTORY SPECIMENS

1. Labels

All natural history specimens should have bureau-approved natural history specimen labels completed by the collector or specialist prior to cataloging. When accessioning and cataloging is completed, the catalog

numbers are added to the specimen labels using a permanent, waterproof black ink and a crowquill or rapidograph pen.

If a label has not been completed by the collector, the cataloger may complete it using data provided by the collector and following instructions in this section.

Old labels should not be removed from specimens unless they are damaging the specimen. The bureau label merely should be added to the specimen. If the old label is to be removed, it should be placed in the accession folder or catalog folder. Old labels should never be discarded.

If an old label is clearly legible, remains attached to the specimen, and contains much of the information required on the bureau specimen label, the information does not have to be transferred to the bureau label. The cataloger merely adds any additional or new information, such as accession or catalog numbers, to the bureau label.

Each kind of natural history specimen requires one or more standard labels. Refer to Figure J.1.

2. Numbering and Attaching Labels on Natural History Specimens

Not all natural history specimens are marked with the catalog number directly on the specimen. Standard procedures are listed below.

a. Plant Specimens

For herbarium specimens, the number is not marked directly on the specimen. A herbarium collection label placed in the lower right corner of the herbarium sheet is marked with the catalog number.

For nuts, large seeds, and wood specimens, the number is placed directly on the specimen with permanent black or white ink, with a primer and protective overcoat of clear lacquer.

For wet plant specimens, the number is not marked

directly on the specimen. The catalog number is marked on a wet plant specimen label which is placed in the jar.

b. Vertebrate Specimens

Vertebrate bones may be numbered with permanent black ink with a primer and protective overcoat of clear lacquer. Numbers should be placed in the center of the largest part of the bone, near the proximal end of long bones, at the lower back center of the skull, or on the right and the left ramus (the halves of the dentary bone have a tendency to separate over time). Small bones may be numbered directly or placed in a vial or box and the catalog numbers written on a vial or box label which is placed in, or on, the container.

Flat skins may be numbered with permanent black ink, with a primer and protective overcoat of clear lacquer. The number is written on the reverse, on the inside of the neck or leg.

Flat skins may also be numbered by writing the catalog number on a vertebrate specimen label, which is attached to a hind leg, or for large skins, attached through a natural opening like an eye or the nose.

Eggs may be numbered with permanent black ink, with a primer and protective overcoat of clear lacquer. The catalog number is also entered on an egg box label that is attached with PVA on the exterior of the egg box.

For wet vertebrate specimens, the number is not placed directly on the specimen. The catalog number is written on a vertebrate wet specimen label which is placed in the jar, and, a vertebrate specimen label which is tied to a hind foot or caudal peduncle for fishes, through a nose or gill, or for some amphibians and reptiles, around the body near the head.

c. Invertebrate Specimens

For insects, numbers are not placed directly on the specimen. Catalog numbers are written on an insect label. The insect is pinned using a rustproof insect pin, and the label is placed at a standard height, below the specimen parallel to the insect's longitudinal axis and readable from the left side. The collector may have placed an additional label indicating locality, collector's name, and date on a separate label, which goes below an insect label.

Some other invertebrates (e.g., shells) may be directly numbered. Permanent black ink, with a primer and protective overcoat of clear lacquer, is used to write the number on the interior, bottom or reverse of the specimen. An invertebrate label or invertebrate specimen label is placed in the box with the specimen and the catalog number is added.

For wet invertebrate specimens, the accession and catalog numbers may be added to the invertebrate label or invertebrate specimen label and the label placed in the jar.

d. Paleontology

Paleontology specimens are marked using permanent black ink, with a primer and protective overcoat of clear lacquer on a flat, inconspicuous surface, where it will not wear off or obscure an important feature. A paleontology label is placed with the specimen and the catalog number is added.

e. Geology

Rocks are marked using permanent black ink, with a primer and protective overcoat of clear lacquer on a flat, inconspicuous surface. A geology label is placed with the specimen and the catalog number is added.

Minerals are numbered like rocks. The catalog number is added to a mineral collection label which is placed with the object and/or specimen.

f. Microscopic Specimens

Microscope slides are numbered on small paper labels glued on the slide.

g. Annotation Label

An annotation label is used when the specimen is annotated (i.e., a specialist reviews the specimen and indicates a judgment concerning the correct scientific name). This name may be the same as that originally on the label, or it may be different.

The label is attached to or stored with the specimen in the same manner as other labels.

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Name _____ Cat No. _____ Acc. No. _____ Locality _____ Mine: _____ Coll. _____ date: _____ Donor: _____ date: _____ Acc.: _____ date: _____ MINERAL COLLECTION Unit Code _____ </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Mineral Collection Label</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Name _____ Cat. No. _____ Acc. No. _____ Locality _____ Formation _____ Collector _____ date _____ Ident. By _____ date _____ GEOLOGY COLLECTION Unit Code _____ </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Geology Collection Label</p>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> Unit Code _____ Cat. No. _____ Acc. No. _____ M Prepared By _____ M Collected By _____ Date _____ </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> M _____ (Genus) _____ (Species) _____ (Subspecies) Locality _____ M Measurements _____ Age _____ </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Vertebrate Specimen Label</p>
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">EGG BOX LABEL</p> Unit Code _____ Cat.No. _____ Acc.No. _____ Genus _____ Species _____ Locality _____ Date Coll. _____ Ident. _____ Incu. _____ Set Mark _____ </div>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">DESCRIPTION OF NEST</p> Coll.By _____ Notes _____ A.O.U. No. _____ _____ _____ _____ <p style="text-align: right;">EGG BOX LABEL</p> </div>

Egg Box Label

Figure J.1. Sample Natural History Labels

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