

AMST2500A Spring24 S01 History Curatorship

 canvas.brown.edu/courses/1093836

Tuesdays 1 - 4pm, Nicholson House, first floor seminar room ([about the course](#))

Important Links:

- Little Compton Historical Society (LCHS) transportation exhibit [Google Folder](#) → [Links to an external site.](#)
- Readings and course documents [Google Folder](#) → [Links to an external site.](#)
- Professor Lubar office hours: Thursday 10:30 - 12 Nicholson 303; other times <https://brown.zoom.us/my/lubar> → [Links to an external site.](#)
- kristen office hours: Tuesday 10 - 11 <https://brown.zoom.us/my/iemma> → [Links to an external site.](#)

Schedule:

Introduction

Week 1: January 30. Introducing the class and history museums

Introductions. About the course and the Little Compton Historical Society (LCHS) exhibit project.

Presentations: Your recent visit to history museums.

Week 2: February 6. What do curators do?

Read for class:

- *American Alliance of Museums Curators Committee Standing Committee on Ethics, [Curator Core Competences](#) → [Links to an external site.](#)
- AAM, [A Code of Ethics for Curators](#) → [Links to an external site.](#)
- Association of Art Museum Curators, [Professional Practices for Art Curators](#) → [Links to an external site.](#), 2007
- *Christina Kreps, [“Curatorship as Social Practice,”](#) → [Links to an external site.](#) Curator 46/3, July 2003.

Discussion Questions: What do curators do? What skills and qualifications do they need? Where do they fit in museums?

Writing Assignment (due Feb 6): Explore curator job descriptions on the [AAM website](#) [Links to an external site.](#), [HERC](#) [Links to an external site.](#), [Glassdoor](#) [Links to an external site.](#), or elsewhere, and read the Federal position description for [curator](#) [Links to an external site.](#) and [museum specialist](#) [Links to an external site.](#). Write 2-3 pages on the work of a particular curator or curators, as outlined in the job description, with reference to the discussion in the readings for class.

LCHS project: begin reading Little Compton history: Changing Landscape, Janet Lisle books. Explore online LCHS resources and the material in the LCHS transportation exhibit Google Folder. **In class:** Overview of LC history.

[Slides from class](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

Part 1: Collecting

Week 3: February 13 Collecting plans

Read for class:

- *Part 1 of *Inside the Lost Museum*
- *[Gardner and Merritt, AAM Guide to Collecting Plans](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- [New Bedford Whaling Museum collections documents](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- [2009](#) [Download 2009](#)
- [\[older version\] \(significance\) a guide to assessing the significance of cultural heritage objects and collections \(2001\)](#) [Links to an external site.](#)
- Sharon MacDonald, "[Collecting Practices](#) [Links to an external site.](#)"
- [Collections committee documents](#) [Links to an external site.](#)

Discussion Questions: How do curators collect? How do they decide what to collect? Compare the AAM plan and (significance), the Australian plan. Critique the NBWM plan

Visitor to class: Naomi Slipp, New Bedford Whaling Museum

Writing assignment (due Feb 13): Research and propose something from [eBay](#), [Invaluable.com](#), or other auction, collections, or similar sites for the the Little Compton Historical Society, the New Bedford Whaling Museum, or another museum that you can find a collecting plan for. Use the format of one of these collections committee proposals: the [NMAH Walker collections request](#) [Links to an external site.](#), the [CMC Acquisitions Cover Sheet for Detention Doors](#) [Links to an external site.](#), the [CMC Acquisitions Cover Sheet for the Daguhoy Trunks](#) [Links to an external site.](#), or the [CC Marty Greco Memo](#) [Links to an external site.](#) 2 - 3 pages. **Be prepared to present in class.**

LCHS project: continue reading Little Compton history. Come to class with at least one good transportation story from your reading, and one or a small group of real, imagined, or potential objects that would tell an LC story. **Add to the #exhibit-project Slack channel before class.**

February 20 -No Class (long weekend)

Week 4: February 27 Crisis/contemporary collecting

- **Read for class:**

- *James Gardner and Sarah Henry, "September 11 and the Mourning After: Reflections on Collecting and Interpreting the History of Tragedy," *The Public Historian* (2002) 24 (3): 37–52.↪ Links to an external site.
- *Active Collections Manifesto↪ Links to an external site. and Framingham Historical Society plan↪ Links to an external site.
- Kristen Iemma, Maddie Mott, Julia Renaud, & Nicole Sintetos (2019) "Stakeholder Interviews and University Collections: An Exploratory Methodology," *Journal of Archival Organization*, 16:1, 45-51
- Barbara Cohen-Stratyner (2017) What democracy looks like: crowd-collecting protest materials, *Museums & Social Issues*, 12:2,83-91, DOI: 10.1080/15596893.2017.1364571↪ Links to an external site.
- *Eira Tansey, No one owes their trauma to archivists, or, the commodification of contemporaneous collecting↪ Links to an external site.

Discussion Questions: How to collect contemporary issues? How to work with the public to shape collecting? For the LCHS project: how do contemporary issues shape historical collecting.

LCHS project: Read Chapter 6 of Carol Kammen, *On Doing Local History* and Carl Becker, "Everyman His Own Historian"↪ Links to an external site." and Chapter 5 of Nearby History (Available through Brown's course reserves system—this seems to not work in Safari on a Mac.)

Choose a Little Compton archival collection to explore. Find an interesting transportation story. **Add to the #exhibit-project Slack channel and be prepared to talk about it in class.**

We will also spend some time talking about the overall plan for the exhibit and the process to get there.

Part 2: Preserving

Week 5: March 5 Accessions and Collections Management

- **Read for class:**
**Inside the Lost Museum*, Section 2
- [Museum Registration Methods](#) (chapter on accessioning)
- *AAM [Developing a Collections Management Policy](#) ↗ [Links to an external site.](#)
- [NBWM Collections Management Policy](#) ↗ [Links to an external site.](#)

Discussion Questions: How and why do museums keep track of objects?

Visitors:

1:00 Shárdíín Brown, RISD Museum, curator of Diné Textiles, on collecting contemporary works for exhibition. NOTE: Be sure to visit Shárdíín's exhibit, Diné Textiles / Nizhónígo Hadadít'eh before class.

3:00 Nicole Woolean, Brown University curator

Collections databases

- [LCHS collections](#) ↗ [Links to an external site.](#)
- [Brown University collections](#)

LCHS Project: Explore the LCHS (or another) collection, either online or by setting up a visit. Find an interesting transportation object useful to the exhibit. **Write** an improved description for the database. Add the object to the #exhibit-project Slack channel and be prepared to talk about it in class. Think about the information that's included in the database. How could it be more useful?

Week 6: March 12 Preservation and Ethics of Collections

Read for class:

- *Lorén Spears and Amanda Thompson, "[As We Have Always Done](#)": [Decolonizing the Tomaguag Museum's Collections Management Policy](#)" ↗ [Links to an external site.](#)
- Barbara Appelbaum, [Conservation Treatment Methodology](#) ↗ [Links to an external site.](#), introduction
- AAM, [Understanding the State of Voluntary Repatriation, Restitution, and Reparations Today](#) ↗ [Links to an external site.](#)

Discussion Questions: NAGPRA, legal and ethical concerns with collections. Practical issues of caring for, storing, and handling collections. Ethical and practical questions of access to collections.

Workshop: Ron Potvin, object handling

LCHS Project: Explore Little Compton transportation history in local newspapers. Most useful will be the *Providence Journal*, but there are many others as well, especially Newport, New Bedford, and Fall River: [here is](#) the Library's guide to newspapers (note the "Tips" section). Find an interesting transportation story—ideally, a story that is covered in more than one story. **Add to the #exhibit-project Slack channel and be prepared to talk about it in class.**

Part 3: Displaying

Week 7: March 19 Introduction to exhibits and exhibit planning

Meet with RISD class at RISD CIT Building, 169 Weybosset Street

Read for class:

- **Inside the Lost Museum*, Section 3
- Smithsonian Institution, *Guide to Exhibit Development* [↗](#) Links to an external site.
- **Polly McKenna-Cress and Janet Kamien, Creating Exhibitions, Chapters 1-3*

LCHS Project: Be prepared to present an exhibit section idea to the RISD students, a 3-5 minute presentation with images of objects. At this meeting, we will set up exhibit teams.

Writing Assignment: Write a description of one story of transportation (chronological or thematic or object-based) that might be in the LCHS exhibit. This should include images, potential objects, and an explanation of why it's important or interesting. Prepare 4-5 powerpoint slides for presenting to the class. Note -- this can be more of a compilation of sources than original work. **Due March 19**

Thursday, MARCH 21:

Special Meeting (optional): Personal Taxonomies workshop, at the RISD Nature Lab, 13 Waterman Street, with the RISD students. 1:00-2:30

March 26: No class, spring break

Week 7: April 2. Conceptualizing Exhibitions

Read for class:

- Nina Simon, *Relevance* [↗](#) Links to an external site.
- **Beverly Serell, Big Idea* [↗](#) Links to an external site.
- **Polly McKenna-Cress and Janet Kamien, Creating Exhibitions, Chapters 4-6 and chapter 8 to p. 232*
- *AAM and Wilening Consulting, "Museums and Trust"* [↓](#) Download Museums and Trust"

- NMAH Center for Restorative History, "[Restorative History Explained](#) → [Links to an external site.](#)"

LCHS Project: Come to class with a proposal for a “big idea” for the Little Compton exhibit. Be prepared to discuss this in class. By the end of the class, we will have two or three big idea proposals and some possible outlines of the exhibition.

Joining us by Zoom at 2:30: Marjory O'Toole, Executive Director, LCHS.

Writing assignment: Write a review of a history exhibit. For models, see the reviews in the [Journal of American History](#) → [Links to an external site.](#) and [The Public Historian](#) → [Links to an external site.](#) **Due April 2**

Week 8: April 9. Meet with RISD students to work on exhibits

NOTE: The Field trip to Little Compton has been canceled—most of you have been there, and we can spend our time more usefully working on the exhibit.

Read for class:

- Tiya Miles, [All That She Carried: The Journey of Ashley's Sack, a Black Family Keepsake](#)
- Jules Prown in "[Mind in Matter](#) → [Links to an external site.](#)"

WE MEET AT THE RISD CIT BUILDING. Francesca and I will work with each of the groups to give advice and direction on your plans.

(We won't talk about the readings, but they're worth reading—we can catch up on them the following week.)

Week 9: April 16. Exhibition scripts

Read for class:

- *Katherine C. Grier, [Tips for Better Exhibition Scripts](#) → [Links to an external site.](#)
- *Beverly Serrell, [Exhibit Labels](#)
- [V and A exhibit label writing guide](#) → [Links to an external site.](#)
- [Metropolitan Museum of Art label guide](#) → [Links to an external site.](#)
- Larry Borowsky, [Telling a Story in 100 Words](#) → [Links to an external site.](#)

LCHS Project: Write the main label, section labels, and an object label for the exhibit. For any sections that you don't complete labels for, write a sentence or two for the presentation. Work with an AI tool to use different guidelines and to write for a range of audiences. (For example, give claude.ai the Met guidelines and ask it to write with that in mind.) **Due before class.**

Presentation/Poster Assignment : In teams of four (2 RISD, 2 Brown), produce a proposal for the entire exhibition. This should take the form of a large poster with your big idea, a plan of the overall exhibit, and appropriate details. It should include a proposed logo for your exhibit. **Due April 16, but this is based on working together as a team for several weeks.**

Also, prepare for **April 17, 7:00PM** Zoom talk for LCHS. Here's the description of the program from the December newsletter: "Curator Steven Lubar and his students at Brown and RISD are busy researching and designing this summer's transportation exhibit. Join them for an informal discussion of their work. Hear their most interesting stories and see the images that are teaching us about Little Compton's connections to the outside world. Little Compton's history is always full of surprises, and its transportation history is no exception."

April 17, 7:00 Zoom presentation to the Little Compton community.

Week 10: April 23.

Meet at RISD CIT Building. Next steps in LCHS exhibit

Week 11: April 30

Read for class:

**Inside the Lost Museum, Section 4*

LCHS Project: Exhibition design preliminary presentations. Come prepared to present progress on your section of the exhibit. We'll work on the exhibit sections together.

Read for class:

- *Download and explore [Bloomberg Connects](#) → [Links to an external site.](#), and [about the program](#) → [Links to an external site.](#). Read and view materials for how to prepare material for them. <https://brand.bloomberg.com/d/3npCeTG4fPcm/cms-help-center#/cms-help-center/overview> → [Links to an external site.](#)
- Werner Schweibenz, "[The virtual museum: an overview of its origins, concepts, and terminology.](#)" → [Links to an external site.](#) *The Museum Review*, Volume 4, Number 1 (2019)
- Nicole Meehan, "[Digital Museum Objects and Memory: Postdigital Materiality, Aura and Value](#)" → [Links to an external site.](#)" *Curator*, 65: 417-434 (2022)

1:00 Diana McMahon from Bloomberg Connects will call in.

LCHS Project: LCHS will use the Bloomberg Connects platform for digital outreach and presentation. We'll explore museum digital media and think through how the LCHS can best use this platform in this exhibit.

Writing Assignment: Following the Bloomberg Connects rules, write a story for the LCHS exhibit. Final product is a script, 4-5 images, and 2-3 minute recording. (Note: this will be based on and might be the same as material in your exhibit script.) **Due May 5**

Week 12: May 7.

Optional: Join me at RISD to work on design details and see what the designers have devised so far.

Week 13: May 14

Final presentations at RISD: We will meet at RISD for a final crit, a presentation to an audience of outside critics and interested parties.

Writing Assignment: Based on the agreed-upon overall exhibit plan (including colors, sizes, etc.) produce a detailed plan for one section of the exhibit (which section will be determined by the group). This should include material that is ready to display in the exhibit space, including full object and image labels, section labels, and images, as well as a description of the objects that will be nearby as part of the section. Include as a separate document footnotes for your sources of information.

Done as a team with a RISD designer.

These will be edited and used in the final exhibit. **Due May 14**