

Preserving History: The Construction of the David and Fela Shapell Collections and Conservation Center of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Travis Roxlau

Description: The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum began collecting more than a quarter century ago and since then has created the collection of record on the Holocaust. Soon after collecting began, the Museum leased a temporary facility to house the nascent collection. After twenty years of unforeseen growth and three expansions later at the leased facility, an appropriate permanent home for the collection was necessary. Beginning in 2010 with the commissioning of a feasibility study, the Museum began a multi-year process of designing, fundraising, and moving the Museum's collection from its current facility to the new Center. With construction nearing completion in December 2016 and the collection move looming in September 2016, this session will present the development of the collection, the case for a new facility and the numerous stages and challenges of designing, building, and moving the collection.

Travis Roxlau joined the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in 1993 as a staff member of the Benjamin and Vladka Meed Registry of Holocaust Survivors. In 1995 he became the Oral History Archivist in the Archives Branch. Beginning in 1999 he began to serve as the Collections Manager for Archival Collections and in 2000 became the Chief of Collections Management for the Collections Division. With the establishment of the Office of Collections in 2006, he was appointed the Director of Collections Services. He also served as the Acting Director of the Library from 2008-2010. Travis holds a BA in History and Secondary Education from John Carroll University and a MA in Museum Studies from the George Washington University.

Talking Points for AJL 2016 Meeting

1990

- The Museum was never intended to be a collecting organization
- Permanent Exhibition – just that, the objects would be collected for the PE and then it would be finished
- Three years before the Museum opened, approximately 1/3 of the building at Linthicum was acquired for purposes of exhibition staging
- Location was chosen as it was close to the Port of Baltimore because a number of large objects arrived via ocean freight such as the Polish railcar, the Danish rescue ship, and the barracks from Auschwitz-Birkenau
 - Objects were acquired either through gift or loan for inclusion in the PE
 - A large amount of space was required for photography of the objects
 - Even more space was needed for gallery layouts for the purposes of object selection and placement of exhibition elements
- However, even though the Museum originally never intended to be a collecting organization the collections began to grow
 - Survivors began to send their materials documenting their experiences during the Holocaust soon after it was announced that the Museum was going to be built in Washington
 - Exhibition planners acquired entire collections documenting individuals experiences when only one item was needed for purposes of the exhibition

- Governments and organizations generously offered and gave items to help document the Holocaust such as the Cobblestones from Chlodna Street of the Warsaw ghetto by the Warsaw City Authority, the Hollerith machine used in the 1939 German census by the Technical Museum in Dresden, and coins and scrip from the Lodz ghetto by the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.
- With the opening of the Museum in 1993, the original purpose of the Linthicum facility had dramatically changed. The exhibition planning had been completed but in the meantime the Museum had begun to build its collection.
- That same year, the Museum transitioned from exhibition creation to collection building in earnest.
- Focus on permanent and special exhibition planning also transitioned to include traveling exhibitions.
- The temporary Linthicum facility was not only becoming a permanent need, it needed to be expanded.

1995

- In 1995 the Museum nearly doubled the space at the Linthicum. To meet the needs of the newly established traveling exhibitions program and the need to maintain and develop our overwhelmingly popular permanent and special exhibitions we expanded and added design and production workshops to support our growing exhibitions program. This necessary expansion also witnessed the upgrading of our collections storage space to included museum industry standard artifact cabinets.
- You can see in this photo the installation of the first set of 10 artifact cabinets. Today we have more than 50 and will be nearly doubling that number once we move into the Shapell Center.
- By the late 1990s, the archival collections had also grown that we needed to increase the shelf space. We installed our first floor to ceiling archival stacks. These stacks are 20' tall with 18 shelves per section.
 - At the time of installation, the then Chief of Collections Management told me that I could put them up but that I was never going to fill all of those shelves.
 - 17 years later, we now have 24 of these units located in 3 different locations at Linthicum and all 24 are full.
- By the end of the 1990s, only seven years after opening the Museum, Linthicum had become a very active collections facility that was serving the needs of the ever expanding collection and exhibition program.

2000

- By 2000, as the Museum continued its success, we needed to expand one more time. We were able to expand into the last available space at the Linthicum building.
- This expansion included space for the then mature traveling exhibitions program and offered us space for operations storage.
- We also maximized the collections space by adding those additional 23 archival stacks as pictured here.
- The collection that had begun with those first donations from survivors had grown into a world class, collection of record on the Holocaust.

2010

- In 2010, the Museum was faced with the reality that were approaching the end of life for our Linthicum facility. It was projected that we had approximately 5 years of growth left at the facility.
- After intensive discussions with our Council, and key donors we received an approval to proceed with a feasibility study with the intention it would lead to the construction of a new collections center.

- After a solicitation for proposals to a number of companies that specialize in Museums and Cultural Institutions, a firm was selected to conduct the feasibility study.
- The scope of the study included sizing the existing collection by volume, defined the projected growth of the collection for the next 25 years, determined the geographic location within the Metropolitan Washington, DC area, and it established 4 scenarios.
 - In order to size the existing collection, we examined the types of collections, then estimated the volume and added a 30% decompression factor
 - Our projected growth was based on the trends realized during the first 20 years of collecting factored with the aging donor base of Holocaust survivors and liberators. The assumption was, and still is, that collecting will peak within the next ten years and then begin to decline as the eyewitness generation passes away. This resulted in an estimate of a doubling of size of the collection in the next 10-15 years.
- The location was to be within a driving distance of 30 minutes during non-rush hour traffic.
- The four scenarios were:
 - Scenario 1: Current Function with Growth
 - Scenario 2: Primary Conservation Facility
 - Scenario 3: All Collections Activities Offsite
 - Scenario 4: Institutional Flexible Space

2011-2014

- The feasibility study was completed in early 2011 and received Council approval with the caveat that we complete the project on an accelerated schedule due the urgency of protecting our collection.
- We selected a site by visiting nearly two dozen properties in both Suburban Maryland and Northern Virginia. After narrowing down these options, select members of our Council visited our top choices. In the end it was a unanimous decision by both the staff committee and the Council committee where the Center would be located.
- Through a bid proposal process an architect was chosen.
- A key component of the Museum's 20th Anniversary in 2013 was the launch of a five year campaign which included the fund raising for the Center. As a part of the campaign launch it was announced that the lead gift for the Center had been made by the David and Fela Shapell family and the new center would be known as the David and Fela Shapell Family Collections and Conservation Center.
- And then we fundraised, and fundraised, designed the building, and fundraised some more.

Collections Management Suite

Collection Vaults-First Floor

Conservation Suite

Collection Vaults-Second Floor

2015-2017

- April 2015 – Ceremonial Groundbreaking Ceremony
- July 2015 - Actual Groundbreaking
- Arial view of the site

Collections Move

- Move kick-off
- Pre-Move Activities
- Move Activities
- Post-Move Activities

Continuing Operations

- Move Operations
 - Acquisitions
 - Loans
 - Exhibition rotations
 - Cataloging
 - Reference

Construction Photos

The NEW Normal Operations

- May 1 and beyond
 - Building Dedication
 - Move Operations come to an end
 - Regular operations resume

Shapell Center Completion slide

Thank you and I am looking forward to welcoming you at the David and Fela Shapell Family Collections and Conservation Center in the very near future.