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LIBRARYSCOPE: May 2011

## **BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY:**

### **A Study in Managing a Multi-Phase, High-Volume Relocation**

Imagine.... an old building filled with hundreds of thousands of books, newspapers, and literary treasures. Each year more is added to the inventory, yet, because no accurate records remain from decades ago, no one is quite sure what, or how much, was in the building to start with. And unfortunately this old building is not equipped to protect this precious and historical collection from factors in the environment which cause long-term damage; moisture, extreme temperatures, mold. The time has come ... you need to get your arms around the volumes upon volumes of archival materials that live here, clean them and transport them to a new, modern home in an environment that ensures they can be enjoyed by generations to come. And wouldn't it be great in so doing, if you could organize this inventory so it could be accessed through your catalog, and then easily and quickly retrieved?

This is the challenge recently undertaken by the Boston Public Library with the relocation of materials from their Charlestown Service Building to their new, climate-controlled depository space in West Roxbury, Massachusetts. Through careful planning and breaking the project into manageable phases, the Boston Public Library has successfully refurbished and efficiently moved a huge volume of once largely unknown materials into an environmentally controlled facility. They have also succeeded in making the contents of this historical trove easily accessible to their patrons.

#### **Climate-Controlled Storage: To Own or Not To Own**

Many libraries today are facing the same question...whether to own or sub-contract the appropriate climate-controlled space required to store books, periodicals, and other materials. The decision to build, or to outsource to a specialized provider of depository space, is based on inventory size, operational requirements, and of course financial considerations. Given the sheer volume of materials and their multiple locations, the decision for the Boston Public Library to build their own depository space was an easy one. After many years of planning, they converted a facility in Boston's West Roxbury neighborhood to a state of the art, temperature and humidity controlled, high density book depository, providing the best possible storage scenario.



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## Defining Project Scope

With the end destination a known factor, the Boston Public Library faced the prospect of identifying service providers who had the expertise and technical knowledge necessary to assist in this complex endeavor.

“There were three main components we had to take into consideration: mold remediation, the physical move of the materials, and the technology component of not only providing a locator system, but one which was compatible with and able to upload to our existing catalog,” indicates Catherine Willis, Technical Services Manager for the Boston Public Library. “We didn’t really expect to find all three capabilities with one service provider, although the hope is always to identify a turn-key solution.”

After an extensive specification and selection process, the MEYER Library Relocation Services division of William B. Meyer, Inc. was chosen to provide a complete solution to all three components of the project. A natural fit for moving materials out of the Charlestown Service Building given their many years of specializing in library relocations, William B. Meyer, Inc. also managed the mold remediation process. In addition, the company is providing the technology that allows Boston Public Library to upload details of the Charlestown materials into their main catalog system.

## Phase I: Moving and Mold/Mildew Remediation

Books and documents housed for long periods of time in areas with little or no environmental controls are susceptible to mold, mildew, and pest infestation. The materials in the Charlestown building had experienced such exposure, and it was necessary for them to undergo some form of cleaning process prior to being integrated with other collections in the new depository.

Following careful packing and palletizing and prior to their relocation, William B. Meyer, Inc. coordinated the efforts to have the books treated to eliminate any mold or mildew. All materials were run through a procedure involving exposure to ethylene oxide (EO), a gas which quickly penetrates the densest of books and kills any microorganisms living within. This process is highly efficient, safe, and cost-effective, and concludes with neutralization of any residual EO gas through an appropriate aeration process.

## Phase II: Efficient Storage through the use of Technology

With the Charlestown Service Building inventory now clean and on pallets in one wing of the depository, the Boston Public Library and William B. Meyer, Inc. embarked on Phase II of the project.



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“Phase II of our project involved a few key initiatives,” Willis says. “The first being that the depository space would be arranged based on Meyer’s high-density storage model utilizing their warehouse locator system.”

Using a high-density storage model, institutions such as the Boston Public Library can typically achieve an increase in shelving capacity of up to 40%. The model makes use of size-based shelf elevations where volumes are scanned to specific locations, enabling materials to be shelved randomly by size, without sacrificing quick and efficient retrieval. Coupled with an effective inventory locator system, this model also eliminates the shifting and interfiling challenges typically associated with shelving in call order.

Willis adds “In addition, because much of the early inventory at Charlestown had never been cataloged or may have been cataloged but not bar-coded, we asked that Meyer customize their program. Upon their entering item information, an automatic search of our existing catalog is performed, with any matching records bar-coded and linked to the existing record. Items not matched, essentially unknown inventory to us, are then recorded, automatically uploaded to the catalog and hence searchable.”

With a significant percentage of the original books, serials (periodicals, directories, newspapers, etc.), government documents, and many folios from the Charlestown location already having been processed into their depository space, Phase II of the project is right on target. Based on careful planning on the part of the Boston Public Library, and their successful partnership with a flexible and technically advanced vendor such as William B. Meyer, Inc., all of these are now easily found and available to the public to enjoy for years to come.

For more information on the Boston Public Library, visit <http://bpl.org>.

For more information on William B. Meyer, Inc. and their library relocation services, visit <http://williambmeyer.com>.



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Figure 1: Pallets of materials following Phase I of the Boston Public Library relocation project, waiting to be processed into inventory.



Figure 2: Utilizing William B. Meyer's high-density storage model and inventory locator technology, the Boston Public Library realizes maximum efficiency in use of their depository space.



Figures 3 and 4: Through effective project planning, the Boston Public Library proactively had Meyer customize their technology so that new inventory items are uploaded automatically into their main catalog system.