

The **Watch Us Move!** Exhibit: Coos History Museum's First Foray into the Meta-Museum Movement

Goal: Practical

Our basic need for work space—one of the many reasons we are moving to a new facility—was one of the initial prompts for this project. Additionally, while working on a full collections inventory, it would have been difficult to devote staff time to our usual summer special exhibit. By putting ourselves on exhibit while we used the space to work, we thought to resolve both issues while seizing a golden opportunity to communicate with our community in a new way.

Success?

In serving our practical needs, this exhibit was a total success. We completed the majority of our textile inventory, created direct access to our object storage and, in the process, deconstructed what was our most labor intensive exhibit to break down.



Current "workspace"



Exhibit Workspace

Goal: Interactive

Meta-Museum initiatives should be a source of energy and engagement for both the staff and the visitor. Museums strive for transparency and to educate while the public is possibly more information hungry than it's ever been. Meta initiatives marry these two drives and should make for something exciting.

Success?

The two primary staff people who worked in *Watch Us Move!* agreed it was a very positive experience for them. Each stated that it made them think about their work more self-consciously and renewed their own love for collections in their effort to share what they do with the public. While most interaction was initiated



by the staff, it still resulted in a wide variety of communication from basic questions like "What's that you're holding?" to in depth process-related questions like "How should I best care for my own textile collection?" The majority of visitors who opted to take our survey said they would very much like to see more exhibits like this at our museum or in the area.

Coos Historical & Maritime Museum's Summer 2014 Exhibit

Watch Us Move!



As we prepare the collections for the move to our new home, come watch what we do "behind the scenes" right out on the exhibit floor



July 18th - September 15th, 2014

FREE admission during July Jubilee
Friday and Saturday July 18th & 19th

Coos Historical & Maritime Museum 1220 Sherman Ave, North Bend
(541) 756-6320 www.cooshistory.org

Poster by: Michelle Nash

Assistant Collections Manager

Coos History Museum & Maritime Collections

Goal: Educational

As with all museum exhibits, we wanted this to be educational. The space allowed for only minimal interpretation so we decided to address what we felt were common misconceptions about museums in general and our museum in particular. We also encouraged asking questions of the staff working in the space.

Success?

Staff in the exhibit observed that most visitors read the labels and some even commented on them to their fellow visitors. However, those who self-selected to complete our visitor survey were more likely to agree with the statement that the exhibit was "interesting" than that it was "educational" (though the majority agreed with both).



Conclusion:

This initiative was mostly successful and very positive. The majority of visitors liked it and the staff loved doing it. It's less certain that all our educational goals were achieved. It is also likely people in the community did not think this was as "avant-garde" as we did but, broadly speaking, it was a success. We plan to continue Meta initiatives in our new building.

What is the "Meta-Museum Movement"?

I'm using the term "Meta-Museum" as an umbrella for all the initiatives that aim to discuss museology as part of an exhibit or public program. Examples include "behind-the-scenes" tours, "fishbowl" type exhibits and "hacker" spaces, sometimes called "community" or "maker" spaces.

This movement has been growing in popularity and creativity for the last couple of decades but has lacked a term to define it.

This Meta exhibit involved completing a portion of a full collections inventory in a primary exhibit space with interpretation and inviting visitor interaction.

A little bit about the Coos History Museum

We are a private 501c3, collecting and interpreting the history of Coos County, Oregon and the Southern Oregon Coast. We have been in operation for over sixty years and are now in the process of building and moving into a new facility.

We serve the county which has a population of about 60,000, as well as many visitors traveling along the coast. *Watch Us Move!* is our first Meta-Museum initiative and, to our knowledge, one of the first in the community at large.