



# Friends of Island History

## Collection Assessment Report

Great Cranberry Island Historical Society

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## Introduction

Like many other organizations on and around Mount Desert Island, the Great Cranberry Island Historical Society (GCIHS) has amassed a significant collection of valuable archival holdings that collectively constitute primary source evidence, or the raw materials, with which to tell stories from the area's past. As a member of the Friends of Island History (FOIH) consortium, the organization's leadership has been considering how the physical items in the archive can be better stored and protected, as well as the ways in which having these materials available digitally would provide a dynamic ongoing resource. A comprehensive digital collection would allow the society to use its history to support more productive and compelling research opportunities, public engagement (particularly youth), and public awareness of the heritage of Great Cranberry Island and the surrounding region. Providing a way for people across the globe to interact with the rich array of stories that emerge from the GCIHS's historical collections holds the key to building and maintaining stronger relationships with people, whether or not they ever step foot in the society's location at the Cranberry House. In collaboration with other FOIH organizations, the GCIHS has the potential to establish a cutting-edge digital history presentation and thus set a new standard for how local historical organizations can utilize their shared heritage content online.

The Friends of Island History retained HistoryIT to perform assessments of the existing collections, inventories, catalog systems and methods, and digital initiatives of fifteen local organizations. The information gained is intended to improve storage of and access to the physical collections and to form a plan to create and draw value from a comprehensive digital collection. HistoryIT conducted its assessment of the GCIHS collection in May of 2017, following a preliminary examination of inventories, catalogs, and procedures. The HistoryIT project team reviewed all of the collections currently housed at the Cranberry House on Great Cranberry Island, and met with Archivist Anne Grulich. This report summarizes HistoryIT's findings after fully reviewing the GCIHS's historical collections, storage spaces, catalog, and current digital initiatives, and offers recommendations to make the critical history it protects optimally available to the public.

A shared collections report will later be provided to all participants, and will identify overlapping materials and intersecting subject matter among organizations, articulate the levels of standardization necessary to participate in a successful shared digital initiative, and deliver a step-by-step plan for processing, cataloging, and digitizing materials, moving forward. This forward-thinking plan will require considerable effort on the part of all participating organizations, but to truly preserve and make our histories meaningful for future generations, this work is necessary. Addressing the recommendations presented in this report will empower the GCIHS to build upon their accomplishments in ways that cultivate increased interest and scholarship in this region at the local and national level, and provide opportunities to celebrate the unique and diverse facets of Great Cranberry Island's rich heritage.

## The GCIHS Collection Assessment

The HistoryIT team knew going into the project that the GCIHS collection would be substantial in size, and unique in its ability to showcase the history and heritage of the Cranberry Islands and surrounding region. We were impressed by both the depth and range of the content. Being able to interact with the items in the GCIHS collection is an informative and exciting experience, but one that is currently limited almost entirely to viewing materials on site, within the center's exhibit space or basement storage. There is agreement within the organization that greater access to these historical treasures can benefit the organization and the public. The stories locked within them constitute a unique, valuable resource that cannot be told from the collections of other organizations. These stories are exponentially more comprehensive and captivating when the many varied archival items around any given topic can quickly and easily come together in a digital environment.

During the assessment stage, HistoryIT reviewed the physical collections and existing catalog systems, records and methodologies, as well as the number and training of staff and volunteers at each organization in order to gather information in four areas:

1. Condition. What is the size, condition, and organizational state of the physical collections? What environmental considerations must be urgently addressed? What developments must be made in order to create a comprehensive digital collection?
2. Content. What are the subjects, themes and stories that emerge from existing knowledge about the collections? How much is *not* known about the subject matter and how unique is the content when compared with other participating organizations?
3. Catalog. Are appropriate systems and standards in place to gain intellectual control over the collections and to share them with the public? What percentage of the materials have item-level catalog records necessary for searching? Does the information in the catalogs enable meaningful searches by the general public, or only by librarians and researchers?
4. Capacity. Is the organization adequately structured and committed to undertake all of the steps necessary to populate a robust digital space? Are existing staff and volunteers sufficient to handle the scope of work required, and how would it add to or deter from their existing responsibilities?

These four areas inform the answers to the most fundamental questions for building a collective digital collections plan and addressing the Friends of Island History's collection storage needs: Is it feasible to build a digital collections space and, if so, how much work is needed? How much physical space is required to safely store the island's historical and cultural

resources, and what are the possible solutions to increasing, or better utilizing existing space? This report provides the GCIHS with a score between 0 and 10 for each of the assessment areas above, and then offers specific recommendations for improvement.

While many organizations struggle with the effort to build a meaningful digital collection, the GCIHS is bolstered by the fact that they are part of a collaborative initiative to make their materials accessible to the public. The organization has taken a critical first step by participating in a shared collections assessment. The age, condition, and type of materials present some minor challenges for digital imaging. However, the most substantial work lies in the detailed subject, era, event, location, and name tagging of all the materials so that they are fully discoverable in the digital world. These are not insurmountable challenges, but ones that must be addressed swiftly and comprehensively in order for the organization to draw full value from its unique holdings. The review of the physical collections and existing inventory information, described below, reveals that there is much to be done, but also much to be gained.

# 1. CONDITION

## Key Findings for the GCIHS Archival Collection

- There are overcrowded areas, but most items can be accessed easily, and are not blocked by other boxes or shelves.
- The majority of materials are stored in such a way as to prevent safety hazards to collections and people from falling boxes, unstable file cabinets, and exposure to toxic materials.
- The storage room has sufficient space to store current holdings, but will soon be beyond capacity at current collecting rates, and as items are processed and rehoused.
- The collections storage is not isolated from food storage, increasing risk of mold and insect exposure.
- The collections are not secure from environmental threats. Mold and fluctuations in temperature and humidity are of particular concern.
- Current fire safety precautions (sprinklers located directly over collection materials) risk damage to the collections.
- The building is locked after use and there is an alarm system, but the storage room is not explicitly monitored during the day.
- At least 20% of items are stored in appropriate archival housing for their type, with the use of acid-free folders, tissue, and archival boxes.
- Some extremely fragile items have been physically but not digitally preserved. Textiles, oversized items such as navigational charts, and loose documents require conservation.
- Mold has been identified on some items. Silica packets are in use but the items have not been separated from the other collections.

The GCIHS collection occupies rooms on the main floor of the Cranberry House, where items are on exhibit, and in the storage room in the building's basement. Prior to comprehensive

cataloging and digitization the count of items will remain a general estimate. As of May 2017, the archive contains approximately:

- 150 historical and ethnographic items including furniture, tools, and textiles
- 50 individual ceramic and glass objects
- 40 art objects
- 400 photographs, all processes
- 50 scrapbooks, albums, and pamphlets
- 100 audio and video items, mostly oral histories
- 60 linear feet of unbound archival records
- 20 maps and other oversized items
- 25 linear feet of unprocessed materials
- 12 linear feet of bound volumes, including town records
- 2,000 un-cataloged digital photos

Great efforts have been made to protect the GCIHS collections as best as possible, but the basement storage environment is poor. Although the majority of non-artifact materials are kept in archival housing, the environment is markedly humid, and temperature varies widely. The collections are subject to the building's heating and cooling system, but according to staff, temperature and humidity control is unreliable. Additionally, the temperature and humidity varies widely between the different areas within the basement storage itself. The back room of the storage area is not at all connected to the HVAC system and only gets the temperature controlled air that sneaks in from the front room. Manuscript and photographic materials are kept in the front of the storage area, where there is greatest possibility for stable temperature and humidity. Artifacts, especially the heartier objects such as boating equipment and tools, and other objects that have already faced significant wear and tear before becoming part of the GCIHS collection are stored further back in the space where staff have even less control over temperature and humidity fluctuations. There is no buffer between collection storage and the outdoors, which creates a higher potential for pest infestation. Water sprinklers are installed directly above document storage, and a café freezer sits close to the storage area, which creates the potential for foodstuffs to be placed on or near adjacent collection materials.

Mold is a major threat to the holdings and has already affected items within the collections. While some of these affected items have silica packets included, the materials are still kept in close proximity to the rest of the collections. The environment as a whole is not appropriate for storing paper and fabric materials. While there are currently no obvious signs of flooding, water damage is always a potential hazard in a basement space, especially in this case where the collection area is directly connected to the outside. In regards to security, the entrances to the building are locked after hours and there is a working alarm system.

The collection space appears large enough to accommodate the collections, but will no longer accommodate all the materials once they are processed and adequately stored. There is no more room for the collection to grow. Removing non-collections items (e.g. boxes of materials

marked for eBay) from the space would provide some additional space. New shelving units were recently added to the middle of the room and they are already almost at capacity.

The overall condition of the GCIHS historical collections is hindered greatly by their storage environment. While staff and volunteers strive to protect the materials and are conscientious stewards of the collection, the limitations of the space cannot easily be overcome. The majority of the materials are in desperate need of rehousing. The collection contains a sizable number of historically significant fragile items that should be a priority for digital preservation. Of most urgent concern are oversized items such as navigational charts, loose documents, and textiles. Digitization efforts must address these urgent preservation issues, as well as include a stage for rehousing and organizing the holdings.

HistoryIT scored the GCIHS archive condition with 5 out of 10. Specific recommendations to improve this rating are found at the end of the report.





## 2. CONTENT

### Key Findings for the GCIHS Archival Collection

- At least 75% of collection materials are unique to GCIHS.
- The majority of items in the collections are within the scope of the organization's mission and collecting policy.
- The majority of holdings relate to subject matter that is mainly only available from GCIHS, such as photographs and records of daily life and local businesses, navigational charts, and oral histories.
- There are finding aids available for staff and public use.
- The organization has a formal de-accession policy, but it is not actively implemented.
- Staff and volunteers have sufficient knowledge about processed materials to engage visitors, but a substantial backlog prevents full intellectual control over the collection.

Assessing how the GCIHS might build and benefit from a robust digital presence requires examination of the scope and content of the collections, the current level of accessibility to and knowledge of that content, and consideration of how the subject matter in the archive connects with that of the collections from other FOIH participating organizations.

While a finding aid with 2,200 cataloged items is available for public view on the GCIHS website, the aid is not searchable and approximately 1/3 of the records do not have associated images.

Existing knowledge of the collections reveals prominent and exciting themes that can engage audiences within the academic community, the local island community and surrounding area, and the general public beyond the region. The Archives Committee takes care to accession and de-accession appropriate items, and the collections have generally been kept in line with the society's mission to "collect, preserve and study the history and genealogy of Great Cranberry and its neighboring islands." While it may be complemented or supported by other local organizations, the mission of the GCIHS is unique, and its collections contain stories and information that cannot be duplicated by other FOIH members or local organizations.

The archive is composed of a wonderful variety of items. Holdings contain primary and secondary resource materials, including nautical charts and ship logs; genealogical records; town reports; photographs; documents and correspondence relating to local industries and daily life; organizational materials; ephemera and broadsides of local businesses, programs, and events of the past; clothing and other textiles; oral histories; ceramics and glass; furniture; and artwork. These materials all contain stories, but when connected to items in other collection categories, these stories become more dynamic, interesting, and comprehensive. Numerous subject themes emerge as one explores the collections. What is also clear, though, is that many more themes and stories will be unearthed.

The need to process a backlog of over 2,000 digital items and over 1,200 physical artifacts, rehouse materials, and de-accession other parts of the collection are hurdles to overcome. However, these tasks provide the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the content of the organization’s holdings. Once the collections are assembled together in a digital framework, we can search and sort across them in a variety of ways.

As the GCIHS works to grow their digital collection, they will vastly extend their ability to educate people about the region and engage new audiences in the history of the organization.

The GCIHS’s level of significantly unique content combined with their moderate level of intellectual control were impactful contributors to their score. HistoryIT scored the GCIHS archive content with 9 out of 10. Specific recommendations to improve this rating are found at the end of the report.



## 3. CATALOG

### Key Findings for the GCIHS Archival Collection

- Non-restricted digital assets for approximately 2/3 of catalog records are available to the public.
- GCIHS uses a digital collection management system for their historical collections (FileMaker Pro), but it does not have integrated digital asset management.
- There is a manual available to guide metadata creation. However, metadata for cataloged items is often inconsistent, with the majority of information contained in the description field.
- While 100% of cataloged records are available online, the vast majority of the collections are only viewable at the Cranberry House, meaning staff and volunteers must be available to assist researchers.
- Most items in the collections do not have records that include subject tags, references to people, or basic metadata including title, date range, and description.
- GCIHS has not consistently scanned or photographed all types of collections, or employed consistent digital imaging standards across the collections.

The GCIHS uses FileMaker Pro as their collection management system, and has approximately 2,200 records cataloged. The Archives Committee follows a specific set of procedures for acquiring and processing new items, but the digital side of the process could be enhanced to save both time and energy. 100% of catalog records are publically viewable via the GCIHS online finding aid. This finding aid is not searchable and several entries include only minimal metadata. As a result, the finding aid is not an effective tool for research. Although staff noted that records are imaged as they are cataloged, only approximately 2/3 of online records include image links, and many are "dead links" with no associated images. Effort has been made to populate the description field in a consistent format for each record, detailing object type, number of pages, item description, historical notes, and date. However, because known details vary widely from item to item, distributing this information across several fields and including additional subject tags would provide a more useful tool for researchers, as well as a more efficient means of creating new records in the future.

Since the implementation of specific digitization procedures, items have been scanned at 300 dpi. The recommended standard for digital preservation and quality reproduction, however, is 800 dpi for photographs and 600 dpi for documents, both significantly higher than the standard used by the GCIHS. While items are currently being scanned at 300 dpi, there have not always been consistent policies and procedures surrounding digitization, meaning that there is significant variability in the quality of scans and many that do not meet the GCIHS's 300 dpi standard. Thus, the small amounts of items that have been digitized do not maintain consistency, nor do they meet the basic requirements for digital archival preservation. The best standards for both digital archival preservation imaging and derivatives for sharing on the web are presented in the table below.

### **Digital Imaging Standards for Digital Preservation and Public Sharing**

#### **Standards for Photographs, Ephemera and Similar:**

- 800 dpi color TIFF for preservation/reproduction quality images
- 10 inches (6000 pixels) at least on longest edge
- 100% scale if original item's dimensions are larger than 10 inches on longest edge (so pixels are at least 6000 on that side)
- Over 100% scale if original item's dimensions are smaller than 10 inches on longest edge (so pixels are at least 6000 on that side)
- Originals should be scanned on the front and back
- When cropping, original's edges should be visible on all sides

#### **Standards for Negatives, Slides and Similar:**

- 1200 dpi color TIFF for preservation/reproduction quality images

#### **Standards for Documents:**

- 600 dpi color TIFF for preservation/reproduction quality images

#### **Web Derivatives for all item types:**

- 200 dpi JPEGs for research/preview/presentation quality images

The low imaging standards for digitization and the inconsistencies in catalog records significantly impacted the GCIHS score in this area. HistoryIT scored the GCIHS catalog with 3.5 out of 10. Specific recommendations to improve this rating are found at the end of the report.



## 4. CAPACITY

### Key Findings for the GCIHS Archival Collection

- There is at least one employee dedicated to the care of the collection.
- Staff members generally have the expertise required to address necessary conservation issues, and the required skills to update electronic catalog records.
- GCIHS has a formal collections committee and policies to support collections care.
- Limitations of the current space and remoteness of the location present obstacles in addressing imaging and storage needs.
- Additional expertise and equipment is required to image many collection items, especially oversized materials.
- It is not currently possible for GCIHS to eliminate the backlog of processing, imaging, and item-level cataloging within the next three years without external assistance. The backlog of 2,000+ digital and 1,000+ physical items will take significant time and resources to process.
- Increasing accessibility to collections is an organizational priority.
- GCIHS has effectively worked with outside partners in the past and is willing to continue to do so.

In addition to the Archives Committee, the GCIHS has an archivist who is specifically responsible for the care of the collection. Staff and volunteers are knowledgeable and passionate about the content of the collections, and are motivated to increase accessibility to materials. Although a relatively remote location creates some obstacles, the society benefits from being comfortable working with external partners. The GCIHS has established that they can accomplish significant work in a relatively short span of time. In the past four years the number of cataloged records available online has tripled, from approximately 750 to 2,200. At the same time, current staff members and volunteers do not have the capacity to undertake all of the steps necessary to conserve and rehouse holdings, and populate a robust digital space without significantly altering their existing responsibilities. Nor does the historical society

currently have the equipment necessary to comprehensively digitize its collections. While standard sized manuscript and photographic materials could be digitized with the equipment available on site, oversized and three-dimensional materials cannot be. Additionally, the continued IT issues and limited internet access, not just at the GCIHS but on Great Cranberry Island as a whole, will significantly increase the time it would take for GCIHS staff and volunteers to fully digitize the collections and make them accessible online on their own. A considerable amount of work is needed to physically preserve those archival items that are in danger, digitize, and create detailed descriptions and tags for documents, maps, and photographs. Simply put, managing and implementing a more comprehensive digitization initiative in a timely fashion is not currently feasible for the GCIHS without external partners to expand their capacity.

HistoryIT scored the GCIHS capacity with 8 out of 10. Specific recommendations to improve this rating are found at the end of the report.



## Summary

The Great Cranberry Island Historical Society collections offer the organization the opportunity to use historical records to educate and engage its members, researchers, donors, and the general public. The GCIHS received an overall rating of 6.4 out of 10, with a lower score for the current catalog, but high ratings in the areas of capacity and content. GCIHS's overall rating is among the highest of the FOIH participants, placing the society among organizations with funding and staffing resources that far exceed their own. The GCIHS is working diligently to protect its historical collections and engage audiences in the digital realm, but the collections are in critical danger due to the limitations of the current storage space.

HistoryIT recommends the GCIHS continue working with the Friends of Island History's current community initiative. Participating in the shared digital initiative will increase public awareness of the GCIHS collections and simplify and enhance the search process for researchers. Time can be used more effectively when the search process is enhanced, and when the majority of holdings are available electronically to access offsite. The visible intersections of subjects between local organizations can also increase the presence of GCIHS content in the curricula of local school systems. The initiative will prevent the organization's future digital collections from remaining isolated in an information silo, and increase the likelihood of researchers discovering GCIHS items spontaneously or inadvertently while exploring the database. Relocating a portion of the collections to a shared space can alleviate overcrowding concerns at the Cranberry House, as well as ensure the protection of the society's most fragile items, such as photographs, journals, and navigational charts that require higher environmental control.

GCIHS can benefit from inclusion in a shared archives storage space and digital catalog, but also contribute enormously to the content of a shared digital collection. By continuing to work with the Friends of Island History on this shared initiative, the GCIHS will be participating in a community-wide effort to preserve and make accessible its unique collections. Much of the content of the GCIHS collections is not duplicated in the collections of other local organizations, and stories of island life, industries, events, and so many other themes can be enhanced by their participation.



It is very possible for the GCIHS to rate a 10 in all four collections assessment categories. Images illustrating the current state of the GCIHS archival collection and a summary of HistoryIT's recommendations to improve in all four assessment areas are provided in the following pages.



# ASSESSMENT ILLUSTRATIONS



Pipes and sprinklers directly over shelves pose a risk of water damage to the items stored below.



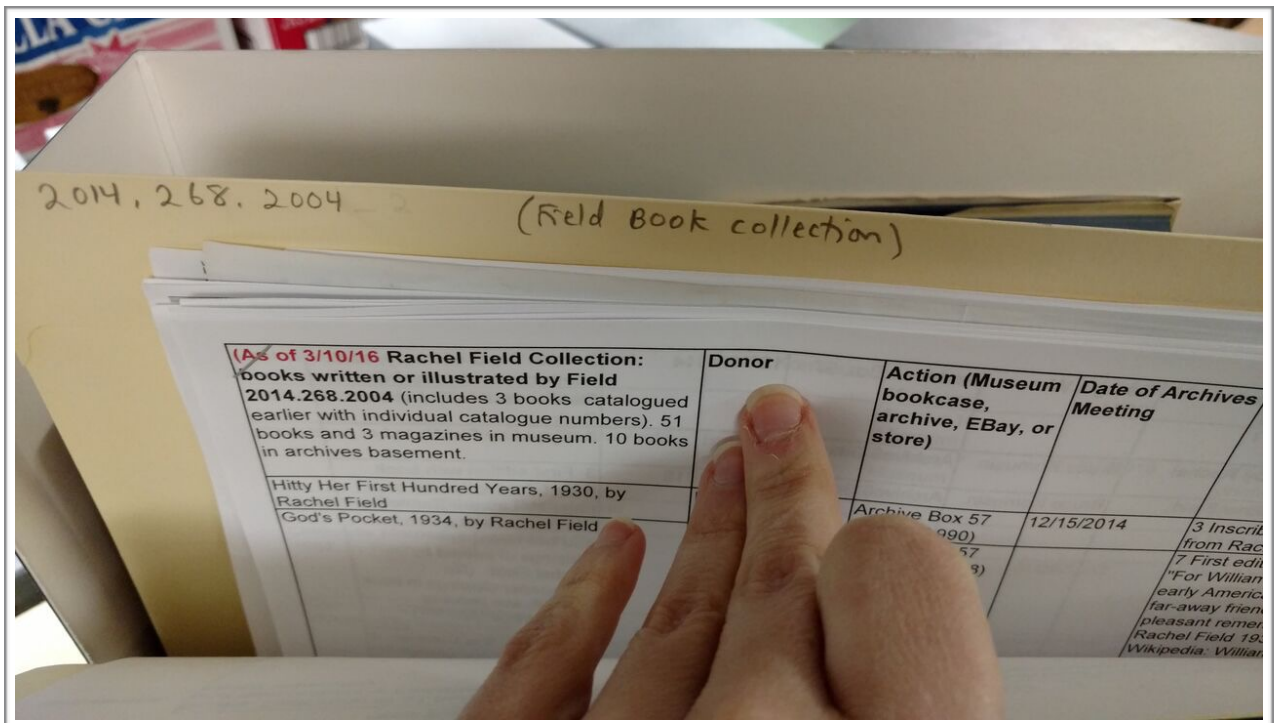
Food is stored in close proximity to the collections, increasing risks of insect and mold exposure.



Boxes and folders are sometimes overstuffed. As a result, paper items may be folded or torn, and it is difficult to locate and access items.



Processed items are often stored in appropriate archival housing and clearly labeled.



Paper inventories detailing contents have been included in many boxes.



Efforts have been made to store items appropriately for their type with the use of archival tissue (above) and individual sleeves for photographs (below).





Efforts have been made to store fragile maps and nautical charts appropriately (above) in proper archival housing.



These oversized items require conservation due to tearing, crumpled edges, and mold exposure.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## *Necessary Steps for GCIHS to Reach a 10/10 Score*

### CONDITION

- Immediately address the need to conserve and digitize at-risk items, especially textiles and fragile oversized items such as navigational charts.
- Obtain additional archival boxes for collections to give overcrowded materials more space and rehouse materials that are not currently stored in proper containers.
- Use alternative storage possibilities for food and food prep areas to decrease potential exposure to mold and insects.
- Obtain insect glue traps to gain better awareness of what pests may be entering the storage spaces.
- Isolate items that have been identified as affected by mold, to decrease risk to other items.
- Relocate a portion of collections to a future shared space to alleviate overcrowding, and to enable better environmental control and monitoring of holdings

### CONTENT

- Design and implement a strategic plan to process current backlog of archival materials and increase intellectual control over these holdings.
- Create item-level records for materials in all collections.
- De-accession duplicative or out-of-scope items from the collections area to alleviate overcrowding in the space and keep collections within scope.

<p>CATALOG</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Migrate current records to a collection management system with digital asset management.</li> <li>▪ Implement a formal plan for organizing, scanning, and cataloging the collections.</li> <li>▪ Adhere to digitization standards to create preservation quality digital images for safekeeping and sharing.</li> <li>▪ Photograph and scan holdings of all item types (navigational charts, genealogical records, photographs, etc.) to enhance research capabilities and public engagement.</li> <li>▪ Make all current non-restricted collection images available to the public online.</li> <li>▪ Update metadata for current catalog records that should be distributed across several fields (date range, dimensions, process, etc.) rather than in one description field.</li> </ul>
<p>CAPACITY</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Increase staff and/or volunteers to manage archival holdings, including cataloging digitization initiatives.</li> <li>▪ Attend collections care and digitization workshops to increase staff skill and comfort level with imaging technology and cataloging processes.</li> <li>▪ Continue working with the Friends of Island History to preserve and digitize the entirety of the GCIHS archival holdings.</li> </ul>