Guidelines for the security of rare book, manuscript, and other special collections

The final version, approved July 1999

Prepared by the ACRL Rare Books and Manuscripts Section's Security Committee

Abstract

In a climate where theft of special collections materials is an everyday possibility, security must be a major concern of the entire library and special collections communities, with special collections administrators addressing it to the best of their abilities within their institutional context.

The ACRL/RBMS Security Committee's "Guidelines for the Security of Rare Book, Manuscript, and Other Special Collections," published here, is the principal ACRL document dealing with the security of library materials. These guidelines identify important topics that collection administrators should address in developing adequate collection security.

While directed primarily toward rare books, special collections, and manuscripts, the topics are also applicable to general collections. The RBMS Security Committee strongly urges implementation of these guidelines, including the unique identification marking of materials and the appointment of a Library Security Officer (LSO).

I. Introduction

These guidelines identify important topics that collection administrators should address in developing adequate collection security. While directed toward special collections, the topics are also applicable to general collections.

Administrators of rare book, manuscript, and special collection materials must ensure that their collections remain intact and secure from theft and damage. The security of collections is now especially important since administrators' efforts to increase the use and knowledge of collections in their care can result in a greater public awareness of their value, and may increase the risk of theft. Security arrangements vary from one institution to another and are dependent on staffing, physical setting, and use.

Rare book and manuscript dealers also must concern themselves with collection security, since thieves may offer stolen materials to them for sale. Librarians should make every effort to familiarize such dealers with the ways institutions attempt to secure and identify their materials and help them use this knowledge to lessen anyone's chances of profiting from theft.

The appointment of an LSO and the development of a security policy can help ensure that staff is aware of their legal and procedural responsibilities in applying security measures.

II. The library security officer

Each institution concerned with the security of rare books, manuscripts, or other special collections materials should appoint an LSO. The LSO should be appointed by the library

director, should have primary authority and responsibility to carry out the security program, and should have a thorough knowledge of all repository security needs, particularly those of special collections. The LSO should not necessarily be conceived of as the library's general security officer, although he or she may also hold that role. The identity of the LSO should be widely known, especially among other administrative officers of the repository.

The LSO's principal responsibility should be to plan and administer a security program, which should include a survey of the collections, reviews of the physical layout of the institution, and training of the institution's staff. He or she should develop active working relationships with colleagues and seek the advice and the assistance of appropriate personnel, such as institutional administrators, corporate counsel, life safety officers, the LSO mail lists, and/or outside consultants from law enforcement agencies and insurance companies.

Suggestions for implementation:

1. In some repositories, the LSO and the special collections librarian may be the same person.

2. Special collections administrators, in institutions without another official for whom the role of LSO would be appropriate, are encouraged to take on this role and advocate that the institution recognize the importance of this responsibility within the institutional structure.

III. The security policy

The LSO should develop written policy on the security of the collections. In developing the policy, the LSO should consult administrators and staff, legal authorities, and other knowledgeable persons.

The policy should include a standard operating procedure on dealing with a theft or other security problems. The ACRL/RBMS Security Committee's document "Guidelines Regarding Thefts in Libraries" provides steps to pursue in establishing adequate policies for dealing with thefts.

The security policy should be kept up-to-date with current names and telephone numbers of institutional and law enforcement con-

Putting it all together

In a letter dated August 10, 1995, Carolyn Dusenbury, then immediate past chair of the ACRL Standards and Accreditation Committee (SAC), asked Elizabeth Johnson, then RBMS chair, if the section needed to revise its "Guidelines for the Security of Rare Book, Manuscript, and Other Special Collections" as part of the five-year review cycle. That letter was referred to the RBMS Security Committee for its consideration, and the committee informed the RBMS Executive Committee that it felt the guidelines would need revisions extensive enough to warrant further deliberation by the Security Committee.

At the ALA Midwinter meeting 1995–96, the Security Committee, after some discussion, appointed a subcommittee to prepare a draft of proposed revisions and submit the draft to the full RBMS Security Committee.

The subcommittee completed its work in 1997, whereupon the entire RBMS Security Committee took on the work of completing the proposed revisions.

At the RBMS Preconference at Washington, D.C., in 1998, the proposed revisions were the subject of a well-attended seminar, where the RBMS Security Committee sought input from the membership. In the meantime, SAC had also sent the document to an outside reviewer, whose comments were passed on to the RBMS Security Committee for consideration. All comments received up to that time were discussed and incorporated, as appropriate, at the RBMS Security Committee meeting at the 1999 ALA Midwinter meeting.

At the ALA Midwinter conference in 1999, the document was subject to a public hearing and then presented, with further revisions, to the RBMS Executive Committee, who approved it as then written and gave its permission for the document to proceed in the ACRL/ALA approval process. That approved version was subsequently published in *C&RL News* in April 1999 (pp. 304–311), with a request for comments.

Further comments were also sought by announcements on the RBMS discussion list, by posting the document on the RBMS

(continued on next page)

tacts. The institution should also review the policy periodically to insure that institutional needs continue to be adequately addressed. The LSO should cooperate with and be involved with development and implementation of general library security measures, as these may affect the security of special collections materials. The LSO should also be involved with any library emergency and disaster planning.

Suggestions for implementation:

1. In larger institutions it may be necessary to assemble a Security Planning Group to assist the LSO in identifying problem areas and to recommend solutions.

2. Institutions that lack appropriate staff resources may wish to bring in a security consultant to assist in developing a policy and in determining any major threats to the collection. When engaging a security consultant, the institution or LSO should use caution in evaluating the consultant's competence or ability to perform the work. The institution should investigate the security consultant's background and references thoroughly.

IV. The special collections building or area

The special collections building or area should have as few access points as possible, with a single entry and exit point for both researchers and staff. Fire and emergency exits, which should be strictly controlled and provided with alarm coverage, should not be used for regular access.

Within the facility itself, the public should have access only to public areas, not to work areas or stack space. Researchers should be received in a separate reception area where a coat room and lockers should be provided for researchers' personal belongings and outer wear. A secure reading room where researchers can be continuously monitored by staff trained in surveillance should be identified as the only area in which material may be used. A security guard should check researchers' research materials prior to their entering the secure area as well as when they depart.

Keys and their equivalents, such as keycards, are especially vulnerable items; therefore, a controlled check-out system for all keys should be maintained. Keys to secure areas

homepage, and by soliciting comments specifically from security experts in other organizations.

At the ALA Annual Conference in 1999, the committee finished its revisions on the document and held yet another hearing on the proposed revisions. The outcome of those final deliberations was presented to SAC at its meeting on Sunday, June 27, 1999, and approved. Subsequently, the document was approved by the ACRL Board and ALA at their Midwinter meetings.

Numerous people have contributed to this document. I wish to thank especially all the past and present members of the RBMS Security Committee for their unflagging dedication and enthusiastic work. Along the way, various people have taken time to offer comments and suggestions on various drafts of the document, and I believe the profession has a better set of guidelines because of their willingness to participate in the process.

I also wish to express my thanks to the ACRL Standards and Accreditation Committee for their support and guidance. Barton Lessin, chair of that committee, and Donna McCool, liaison to the RBMS Security Committee, were especially helpful and offered excellent counsel at various stages in the approval process.

Mary Ellen Davis of ACRL and Stephen Ferguson, the RBMS Web master, have made it possible for the document to be widely circulated both in print and electronic forms.

Finally, I wish to express my gratitude to the past and present members of the RBMS Executive Committee; their unfailing support of the Security Committee and these guidelines has been crucial to their completion. Members of the committee who saw this through to the final approval were Susan M. Allen (ex officio); Thomas L. Amos; Daren Callahan; Melissa Conway; Rachel Doggett; Connell B. Gallagher; Isaac Gewirtz; Rachel J. Howarth (intern); Anne Marie Lane; Katherine Keyes Leab; Ronald Liberman; Heather Lloyd; Michael North; Nancy Romero; Daniel J. Slive; and Diana M. Smith (intern).—*Everett C. Wilkie Jr., chair, ACRL/RBMS Security Committee, ewilkie@ix.netcom.com*

should be issued to staff only on an as-needed basis, and master keys should be secured against unauthorized access. Combinations to vaults also should have limited distribution and should be changed each time there is a staff change involving a position with access to the vault. Strong consideration should be given to installing proprietary keyways in locks in the special collections area. (See Ronald L. Libengood and Bryan J. Perun, "The Key to Good Security: Proprietary Keyways and Electronic Locks," *Focus on Security*, 2 [1995]: 6–16.)

Suggestions for implementation:

1. In institutions where it is not possible to hire an extra security guard, a staff member could perform this function. Consideration should also be given to installing a video surveillance system.

2. As a precautionary policy, keys and locks to secure areas should be changed on a regular basis.

3. When an institution plans to remodel or renovate space or build a new facility in which special collections materials are to be housed, the LSO and the special collections administrator should ensure that all security needs are addressed in the design and planning.

V. The staff

An atmosphere of trust and concern for the collections is probably the best guarantee against theft by staff. Nevertheless, close and equitable supervision is essential. The staff, including students and volunteers, should be chosen carefully, using any and all avenues available in making the decision for hiring. Careful personnel management is an ongoing necessity.

A weak point in maintaining a security system is disgruntled staff who may seek retribution through theft, destruction, or willful mishandling of collections. Consideration should be given to bonding employees who work in special collections.

Training the staff in security measures should be a high priority of the LSO. Such training should ensure that staff be aware of their legal and procedural responsibilities in relation to security as well as their own and the researchers' legal rights when handling possible problems. (See also the ACRL/RBMS "Standards for Ethical Conduct of Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Libraries and Librarians, with Guidelines for Institutional Practice in Support of the Standards.")

Suggestions for implementation:

1. The LSO and special collections administrator should ensure that all staff are familiar with these guidelines and the security policies in their institutions and how they may apply specifically to their institution.

2. When appropriate or consistent with institutional policies, background checks and bonding of staff members should be considered.

3. The LSO or special collections administrator should be familiar with the institution's personnel policies, and advocate security concerns with the institution's human resources staff.

VI. The researchers

The special collections administrator must carefully balance the responsibility of making materials available to researchers against the responsibility for ensuring the security of the materials. Staff must be able to identify who has used which materials by keeping adequate, signed check-out records, which should be retained indefinitely.

Registration for each researcher who uses special collections materials should be required, recording the name, address, signature, institutional affiliation (if any), and photo identification or some other form of positive identification to establish physical identity. These registration records should be retained permanently.

Researchers should be required to present a reasonable explanation of their need to use the materials. Each researcher should be given an orientation to the collections requested and to the rules governing the use of the collections. Researchers should not be permitted to take extraneous personal materials into the reading areas. This includes such items as notebooks, briefcases, outer wear, books, and voluminous papers. Personal computers should be removed from the case before use in the reading room is permitted. Lockers or some kind of secure space should be provided for any items not permitted in the reading room.

Staff should observe researchers at all times and not allow them to work unobserved behind bookcases, book trucks, stacks of books, or any other obstacles that restrict staff view. Researchers should be limited at any one time

to having access only to those books, manuscripts, or other items that are needed to perform the research at hand.

Staff should check the condition, content, and completeness of each item prior to giving it to the researcher and also when it is returned after use. This checking of materials that are returned is especially important for the use of archival and manuscript collections, which often consist of many loose, unique pieces.

Researchers should be required to return all library materials prior to leaving the reading room, even if they plan to return at a later time to continue their research. Researchers should not be allowed to exchange materials or to have access to materials brought into the room for use by another researcher.

Suggestions for implementation:

1. The LSO or special collections administrator should seek the advice of the institution's legal counsel or other appropriate legal authority when developing researcher policies, to ensure adequate legal recourse if researchers violate the use agreement.

2. The institution should require that all researchers read and sign an agreement to abide by institutional policies. This agreement should be renewed annually.

VII. The collections

Administrators of special collections must be able to identify positively the materials in their collections to establish loss and to substantiate claims to recovered stolen property.

This includes keeping adequate accession records; maintaining detailed cataloguing records and lists in finding aids; recording copy-specific information; and keeping condition reports and records.

Lists developed to fulfill the requirements of insurance policies should also be kept current. In addition, the materials themselves should be made identifiable. This can be accomplished by marking them following the RBMS "Guidelines for Marking" (see Appendix I), by applying other unique marks, and by keeping photographic or microform copies of valuable items.

Suggestions for implementation:

1. More valuable items should be segregated from the collections into higher security areas, with more restricted conditions for staff access and researcher use.

2. If appropriate security controls are applied, unprocessed materials may be made available to researchers for short-term use.

VIII. Transfers from the general collection

Many institutions house materials in open stack areas accessible to all users. These open stack areas may contain rare materials, which remain unidentified and unprotected. Materials in open stack areas are most vulnerable to breaches in security.

Many thieves search open stacks areas for materials considered rare, rather than attempt to infiltrate special collections areas or outwit the security measures implemented in monitored reading areas. Institutions should establish procedures for the routine areas using the ACRL/RBMS "Guidelines on the Selection of General Collection Materials for Transfer to Special Collections" to assist in identifying rare materials on the open shelves in need of protection.

IX. Legal and procedural responsibilities

The administrators of special collections and the LSO must know the laws for dealing with library theft that are applicable in their state and must convey this information to staff. Staff members must be aware of their legal rights in stopping thefts and not infringing on the rights of the individual suspected of theft.

The administrator of special collections and the LSO must report thefts of rare materials to appropriate law enforcement agencies and must take responsibility for requesting action from legal authorities. The theft of materials, whenever the theft is discovered, must be reported in a timely manner to help prevent the unknowing transfer of the items and to facilitate their return. Appropriate agencies to report to include local, institutional, and state law enforcement agencies and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Consult Appendix II for reporting details. For legal and procedural responsibilities, see "Guidelines Regarding Thefts in Libraries" (listed in Appendix III).

Suggestions for implementation:

1. LSOs and/or special collections administrators should take an active role in raising the

awareness of other institutional officials, e.g., institutional legal officers, public safety officers, the library director, etc., regarding the serious nature of materials theft, and urge the institution to actively seek the resolution of security threats and breaches and to seek the strictest punishment possible for those convicted of theft or other security violations.

X. Conclusion

The guidelines presented here are necessarily brief since further information is available through professional literature, professional organizations, and consultants within the rare book, manuscript, and special collections community, and in the law enforcement and insurance professions. The effort of the entire staff, with final responsibility vested in one senior staff member, working in cooperation with law enforcement, will result in more secure collections wherein materials are preserved and made available for all who wish to use them.

Appendix I

Guidelines for marking books, manuscripts, and other special collections materials

I. Introduction

There has been much thoughtful discussion regarding the appropriateness of permanently marking books, manuscripts, and other special collections materials.

Failure to mark compromises security. Cases of theft show that clear identification of stolen material is vital if material, once recovered, is to be returned to its rightful owner. The following guidelines are intended to aid libraries and other institutions in marking their materials and to provide as consistent and uniform a practice as possible.

Even the most conservative marking program results in permanent alteration of materials. Choices concerning marking are likely to depend heavily on one's aesthetic judgment balanced against the need to secure materials from theft and to assist in their identification and recovery.

Each repository will have to balance those competing needs. The ACRL/RBMS Security Committee recommends that libraries and other institutions use marking as part of their overall security procedures and that they attempt to strike a balance between the implications for deterrence (visibility, permanence) and the integrity of the documents (both physical and aesthetic).

II. General recommendations

General recommendations are:

A) that markings be of two types:
   1) readily visible to the casual observer, and
   2) hidden and difficult to detect.

B) that readily visible marks be made in an approved form of permanent ink.

C) that marks which are hidden or difficult to detect never be the only or primary types of marking.

D) that visible marks be placed so that they will cause significant damage to the aesthetic and commercial value of the item if they are removed.

E) that marks be placed directly on the material itself and not on an associated part from which the material may be separated.

F) that all marks unequivocally and clearly identify the repository.

III. Discussion

A) Readily visible marks are intended to deter potential thieves; hidden marks are intended to assist in the recovery of stolen materials. If only one type of mark is to be used, it should be of the readily visible type. The size should be kept to a minimum (ca. 5 point type size for lettering).

B) Visible marks should be all but impossible to remove and should never consist of just a bookplate. Although not the only form of a visible mark, ink is perhaps the best medium for this purpose, so long as the ink meets current standards for permanence and conservation. There is still controversy surrounding which inks are best suited for this purpose, so a recommendation cannot go beyond urging those in charge of marking programs to be current on the latest developments in this field.

C) Hidden marks should never be used as the only form of marking, because they are worthless in alerting others, such as booksellers, that material has been stolen. Hidden marks are intended only as supplements to visible marks.

D) Much controversy has surrounded the placement of visible marks. Given the varying nature of special collections materials and the varying nature of beliefs and sentiments concerning what is proper placement for a visible mark, it is probably futile to overly prescribe placement of marks. It is recommended, however, that no position for a mark be rejected outright. Some repositories might, for example, be comfortable stamping the verso of a title page or the image area of a map; others might reject those options. But no matter where the visible mark is placed, it should not be in a position that it can be removed without leaving quite obvious evidence of its former presence.

Some items do present unusual decisions on placement of visible marks. The following are specific recommendations for the formats listed.

1. Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts, Incunabula, and Early Printed Books: On the verso of the first leaf of principal text, on the lower inner margin, approximate to the last line of text. Additional markings may be needed when the item is a composite manuscript or otherwise has a substantial text that may be broken away without noticeable injury to the volume. The location of each subsequent marking would be the same, i.e., lower inner margin approximate to the last line of text.

When the item is too tightly bound to mark in the inner margin, alternate locations may be made in any blank area of the verso, as close to the lower portion of text as possible. The mark should be so placed that it may not be excised without extreme cropping. (In items of double columns, the mark might be located in the blank area between the columns.)

2. Leaf Books, Single Leaves from Manuscripts: On either verso or recto, at the lower portion of the text or image of each leaf. The choice may be determined by the document itself if one of the sides has more importance (owing to an illustration, manuscript notation, etc.). The ownership mark should then be placed on the reverse side.

E) Marks of whatever type must be placed directly on the material itself. Marks placed only on a front pastedown in a book, on a portfolio that holds prints, or on some type of backing material are rendered useless if that element is separated from the item. Especially in the case of flat items, such as maps and broadsides, it is important that the marks be applied before any backing procedure is done.

F) Marks should not be generic (e.g., "Rare Book Room," "Special Collections," "University Library," etc.), but should rather make plain the repository to which they refer. It is recommended that visible marking consist of the repository's Library of Congress symbol. If a repository lacks such a symbol, the Library of Congress will supply one upon request. If the Library of Congress symbol is not used, then the name of the repository should be used, being careful that no confusion arises among repositories with similar or identical names.

IV. Other considerations

A) Hidden marks do not have to be marks at all. They merely have to provide some positive ownership indication that is extremely difficult if not impossible to detect. Microembossers, for example, provide an extremely cheap and difficult to detect type of nearly invisible mark. Modern technology also provides non-invasive marking techniques such as micro-photography that does not leave any mark on the item itself yet serves as positive identification. Other technologies, such as micro-taggants, may also be appropriate for this purpose. It is vital if such marks are used, however, that the repository keep extremely accurate records of such marks so that they can be readily found for identification purposes if the need arises to do so. Generic secret marking systems, such as underlining a word on p. 13 of every book, should be avoided as the sole means of such marks.

B) Repositories should never attempt to cancel marks, even in the event that the material is deaccessioned. No system has yet been devised for canceling marks that cannot be imitated with relative ease by thieves, and there seems to be no alternative but to assume permanent responsibility for one's mark on a book, manuscript, or other document. Permanent records should be kept of deaccessioned materials, whether marked or unmarked, and the material itself when released should be accompanied by a document conveying ownership. It is advisable to place stamps or notes in items indicating that they have been deaccessioned, but no attempt should be made to cancel or remove previous ownership marks.

C) Marks should be applied to all items when they come into the repository. It is dangerous to send unmarked items into storage or a cataloguing backlog, where they may remain for years with no indication that the repository owns them.

Despite the fact that some items may present extremely difficult and complicated decisions about marking, the process should never be deferred. It is strongly recommended that programs also be instituted to mark retrospectively materials already in the collections.

D) Care must be taken to ensure that all discrete or removable parts are marked. It is recommended that each separate plate, map, chart, or other such item in a printed volume be marked individually. Volumes of bound manuscripts and collections of individual manuscripts present a similar problem and each discrete item in such collections should also be marked.

E) Because marking should be part of an overall security program, the role of cataloguing in identifying materials should not be overlooked. Accurate and detailed physical descriptions that note anomalies, defects, provenance, and unusual physical characteristics are essential adjuncts to ownership markings.

Appendix II
Addresses for reporting thefts

(Kept current and interactive at http://www.princeton.edu/~ferguson/secguide.html)

- *AB Bookman's Weekly*, Missing Books Section, P.O. Box AB, Clifton, NJ 07015; (201) 772-0020; fax: (201) 772-9281.
- Antiquarian Booksellers Association of America, 20 West 44th St., 4th floor, New York, NY 10035-6604; (212) 944-8291; fax: (212) 944-8293; e-mail: ABAA@PANIX.COM; homepage for theft reporting: http://www.abaa-booknet.com/stolen.htm
- ACRL/RBMS Security Committee, c/o American Library Association, 50 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL 60611; (800) 545-2433, ext. 2510; fax: (312) 280-2520; e-mail: ACRL@ALA.ORG; homepage: http://www.ala.org; RBMS homepage: http://www.princeton.edu/~ferguson/rbms.html
- Society of American Archivists, 527 S. Wells, Chicago, IL 60607; (312) 922-0140; fax: (312) 347-1452; e-mail: sfox@archivists.org; homepage: http://www.archivists.org. Security List (moderated and open to SAA members only): SAASECURITYRT-L@CORNELL.EDU
- Professional Autograph Dealers Association, c/o Catherine Barnes, P.O. Box 30117, Philadelphia, PA 19103; (215) 854-0175; toll free: (888) 338-4338 (U.S. only); fax: (215) 854-0831; e-mail: CBARNES2@IX.NETCOM.COM; homepage: http://www.padaweb.org
- Library Security Officer Electronic List: Susan M. Allen, chief librarian, Research Library, The Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1200 Getty Center Drive, Suite 1100, Los Angeles, CA 90049-1688; (310) 440-7611; fax: (310) 440-7781; send reports to: SALLEN@GETTY.EDU
- ExLibris Electronic Discussion List: EXLIBRIS@LIBRARY.BERKELEY.EDU (unmoderated but must be a member to post).
- Interloc: http://www.interloc.com/lost/index.htm. Reporting address: INTERLOC@INTERLOC.COM
- Museum Security Network: http://museum-security.org. Reporting address: SECURMA@POP.XS4ALL.NL
- Archives & Archivists Electronic Discussion List: ARCHIVES@LISTSERV.MUOHIO.EDU
- DeRicci Project: DERICCI@AOL.COM (for pre-1600 manuscripts only).

Appendix III
Related guidelines

(ACRL documents available at: http://www.ala.org/acrl/guides/index.html.)

- Association of College & Research Libraries. "Guidelines Regarding Thefts in Libraries" (1994).
- Association of College & Research Libraries. "Selection of General Collection Materials for Transfer to Special Collections" (2nd ed. 1994).
- Association of College & Research Libraries. "Standards for Ethical Conduct of Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Libraries and Librarians, with Guidelines for Institutional Practice in Support of the Standards" (2nd ed. 1992).
- Society of American Archivists. "Libraries and Archives: An Overview of Risk and Loss Prevention" (1994).
- Society of American Archivists. "Protecting Your Collections: A Manual of Archival Security" (1995). ■