Field Study at Montpelier Mansion

Building a Library in a Historic House Museum

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The Site
Montpelier Mansion is a National Historic Landmark located in Prince George’s County, Maryland. Called familiarly “Montpelier Mansion,” the site encompasses the late 18th Century home of the prominent Snowden family, approximately 70 acres of parkland, a Carriage House, a Summer House, and the Montpelier Arts Center. The site is managed under the auspices of the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission by the Department of Parks and Recreation for Prince George’s County and is operated as both a house museum and a rental facility.¹

The Library
The Montpelier Mansion Library consists of a collection of approximately 1,000 books. Prior to beginning my field study, the books were not located in one unified location; some were arranged on bookshelves in the Mansion office hallway, some were placed on shelves in the historic Library Wing, and others were on display as prop pieces in various Mansion Rooms. Although the main two groupings in the hallway and in the Library Wing were organized loosely by subject category, there was no complete inventory of the materials, no reliable way to determine the scope of the collection, and no cohesive procedures and policies in place to govern the collection. The library collection became further displaced when the renovations began, during which time the majority of books were placed into whiteboard boxes and transported to the Carriage House.

My Project
The goals of my field study were: to evaluate, inventory and catalog the Mansion Library collection using the LibraryThing database; to investigate how other information institutions utilize LibraryThing as as both an internal catalog and as an access point by which to reach their community; to number and label the Library materials according to museum registration standards; to develop documents and policies to build a maintainable and flexible Library infrastructure; and to establish a subject-based classification system for physically arranging the books into one unified location in the Historic Library Wing. Overall, the aim of my project was to improve accessibility of the library for staff and visitors while also providing realistic procedures for greater physical and intellectual governance of the Library collection.

Results
During my field study, I was able to catalog the entire Library collection into the LibraryThing database, produce research on the use of LibraryThing as an access point, and develop documents such as a Check Out List, Procedures for Entering Materials in LibraryThing, a List of Subject Headings, and a Pull Card in order to provide some basic policies and procedures that staff can maintain and build on in the future. Due to time constraints, I was only able to complete approximately 75% of both the registration process and the organization of those registered books into their subject categories. I hope to have created enough infrastructure that this work can be continued by staff so that the when the Historic Library Wing becomes accessible again, the transfer will be simple and result in a unified, governable, and accessible Library.

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