



FROM THE OFFICE OF COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT

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**Mysterious Disappearance: Where's my stuff?**  
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**Background**

On September 22, 2006, The Mariners' Museum received a phone call from an individual in Switzerland alerting the Museum to the possibility of thefts being perpetrated by the Museum's archivist Lester F. Weber. The man indicated that he had purchased a number of items through the international auction site eBay and had become suspicious after questioning the seller, Lori Childs, about the source of such high quality materials. Lori Childs was the wife of Lester Weber. An investigation immediately commenced.

On September 26<sup>th</sup> Weber was fired and on October 3<sup>rd</sup> the investigation was turned over to the authorities. For the balance of 2006, throughout 2007 and into early 2008, members of the Museum's staff worked closely with the Newport News police department, the United States Secret Service, the Criminal Investigation Division of the Internal Revenue Service, the Office of the Inspector General of the United States Postal Service and the U.S. Attorney's office in Newport News to build a case against Mr. Weber and his wife.

In February 2008, Mr. Weber and Ms. Childs were indicted in U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia on more than two dozen counts including wire fraud; mail fraud; conspiracy to commit mail and wire fraud; making and filing false tax returns; and theft from an organization receiving federal funds. Both pled guilty and in December of 2008 Mr. Weber was sentenced to 48 months in prison and 3 years of probation. In addition, Mr. Weber was required to file amended tax returns; required to fully cooperate with The Mariners' Museum to value and recover the stolen items (this has not happened); to pay the Museum more than \$172,000.00 in restitution; and prohibited from "engaging in any employment where the defendant has access to archived material or to the cataloging of any archived material."

Research to this point indicates that more than 6,456 items were removed from the archival collection between December 2000 and September 22, 2006.

*Commentary specific to our experience has been italicized.*

## **How the Thefts Were Facilitated**

Today, it is painfully obvious that Mr. Weber arrived at the Museum intending to steal (he was hired December 4, 2000 and opened the eBay account on January 1, 2001). Although he did attempt to follow standard archival practices, many of his decisions and actions seem to have been “clouded” by these intentions and consequently facilitated the thefts. The changes he made also compounded the archives existing organizational problems.

Many of the problems that exist today began in the 1930s when untrained staff attempted to organize the growing collection by categorizing and numbering archival materials by type—a non-standard practice that caused the individual materials in donated collections to be segregated from one another. This system made searching the collection particularly cumbersome. The Museum hoped to solve at least some of the organizational problems by hiring a trained archivist.

The thefts were facilitated by a number of organizational changes Mr. Weber instituted shortly after his arrival:

### ***Mr. Weber physically rearranged the storage area and the collections themselves***

Shortly after being hired Mr. Weber began the physical reorganization of the archives. At the same time he began reorganizing the collections themselves by rearranging larger collections; merging or breaking apart collections into one or more new collections; creating new artificial collections; and reconstituting some of the collections that had been broken apart. Most of these changes were not questioned by the staff because it did appear as though changes were being made that would bring the archives in line with standard professional practices. None of the changes, probably intentionally, was documented.

The confusion created by the physical reordering combined with a complete lack of tracking or cross-referencing meant that only one person knew where anything was—the thief.

### ***Mr. Weber instituted a new numbering system***

As the physical reordering progressed Mr. Weber began applying new accession numbers using the standard MS system.

The renumbering process, however, was not a one-to-one change because of the complicated nature of the physical rearrangements. It was also completed sequentially, by shelf, which rendered the archives system of tracking locations, known as the “red cards”, obsolete and no attempt was made to update the system.

Large collections received a single MS number. Smaller collections and individual items, especially those materials that had been stored in filing cabinets, were grouped together and stored at the end of the numbered collections. Reputedly, “banks” of new accession numbers were set aside for future application to these smaller collections. According to the archives staff accession numbers would be applied from these “banks” as the collections were reviewed or reprocessed. Unfortunately it doesn’t appear as though this process was actually followed.

The process was further complicated when Mr. Weber intentionally left certain collections unnumbered. He stated several reasons for doing this; first, he intended to

combine or break apart the unnumbered collections into single, large artificial collections or smaller collections at some point in the near future; second, he intended to “deaccession” some collections because of their lack of relevance to the Museum’s mission or their lack of research value; and finally, his stated desire to transfer particular types of materials to the Museum’s object collection.

Further tangling the situation were several instances in which newly numbered collections were assimilated into one of the new artificial collections leaving gaps in the catalog. *One example is MS9, the menu collection, which was folded into MS15 (an artificial collection of steamship ephemera). At least 76 menus disappeared during this process including every US Navy menu in the collection.*

The chaos and confusion created by the physical rearrangement and numerical changes essentially erased all institutional memory of the collection and the removal of so many items from the direct oversight of other staff members allowed the perpetrator to remove thousands of individual items and, in some cases, entire collections from the building (one example is CK23, the money collection).

As I mentioned earlier, these changes also intensified the archive’s organizational problems. Today, the staff has to contend with a collection that is organized in multiple ways—both the old way AND the new way, making searching for collection items even more complex.

***Mr. Weber dismantled a system of checks and balances aimed at preventing theft.***

When Mr. Weber was hired one of his primary tasks was to “formulate, review and revise the policies and procedures for the archives” and create a new manual. He was given full authority over all matters concerning the archives and within months had instituted policies, nearly all verbal, that removed a system of checks and balances that would have uncovered his activities.

- Prior to Mr. Weber’s employment, collections were only “closed” on rare occasions, afterwards an excessive number of collections were declared “closed”, so many in fact that it became nearly impossible for staff to access the collection without Mr. Weber’s presence. In addition, access to the archives was restricted to archive staff (three people), not even library staff were allowed to access the space.
- Prior to Mr. Weber’s employment, collection processing was handled by teams of people working together to complete the work. Afterwards, processing tended to be conducted by a single staff member.
- A thorough, but cumbersome, system of cross-referencing existed before Lester’s employment; after the physical rearrangement and renumbering it became nearly impossible to search the collection. To try and help ease the situation a database was created but it only allowed searching from one direction—from new number to old. Unnumbered collections didn’t appear in the database at all.
- Before Mr. Weber’s tenure, donor and acquisition information and extensive records documenting how a collection had been processed and whether materials had been removed and stored elsewhere were retained in the donor files. Afterwards no information regarding the processing and location of the donated materials was kept.

- Prior to Mr. Weber's hiring staff worked with original materials in public spaces where other staff members could observe what was going on; afterwards most of the work occurred in individual office spaces or in unmonitored storage areas.
- Collection materials were stored in the archivist's office or on his desk which previous archivists did not do.
- Procedures previously established for tracking items accepted for temporary loan (for possible donation, purchase, loan/exhibition, identification or for research purposes) were no longer followed.

### **How the Thefts Were Perpetrated**

Although we believe materials began leaving the building within several months of Mr. Weber's arrival it is obvious that once the total chaos of the physical rearrangement, renumbering and new policies and procedures kicked in, Mr. Weber's rate of thievery intensified (we can document 269 items in 2001; 477 in 2002; 923 in 2003; 1298 in 2004; 1634 in 2005; and 1098 for 8 months in 2006). The thefts were perpetrated in several ways:

#### ***As collections were reprocessed***

Once the reorganizing and renumbering was underway, Mr. Weber began processing collections. As he worked he removed duplicates; items that were highly collectible; items documenting ships whose materials are highly sought after (like *Titanic* or *Olympic*); and pieces from rare shipping companies.

In early 2002, a processing plan for the Museum's massive steamship ephemera collection (MS15) was formalized. The document stated that duplicates and non-shipping items would be removed from the collection and turned over to the archivist and that extremely rare or valuable items would be removed from the collection and "copied" (we are not sure if this actually happened or if it was just a way of identifying materials for future theft). By 2003, it must have become apparent to Mr. Weber that MS15 was a rich source of material because the staff member overseeing the project was removed and Mr. Weber took over.

One of the ways Mr. Weber covered his tracks was by processing collections at the item level to make it appear as though nothing was missing. Several collections were processed in this manner even though it is an atypical and inappropriate practice for an artificial collection (because it prevents the incorporation of new material).

The Museum's collection of postcards was processed in the same manner. Starting in early 2001, postcards were being removed from several unidentified collections but there isn't any indication of where the cards went (*but we can document the sales of more than 536 cards and another 496 were recovered when the defendant's house was searched so I guess that answers that question!*).

#### ***Unprocessed and uncounted collections and recent donations were raided***

In addition to removing items from collections as they were being processed Mr. Weber skimmed materials from unprocessed collections, poorly documented collections and newly donated materials. The huge backlog of undocumented and unprocessed (or poorly processed) collections was one of the situations the Museum hoped to remedy by hiring a trained archivist. Instead of resolving the problem, the situation provided a rich source of material for Weber and Childs's eBay business.

There were also numerous instances in which Mr. Weber's greed got the best of him and he stole materials from collections that were actually very well documented. To try and cover his thievery he destroyed inventories, finding aids and other forms of documentation and in several instances it appears as though he did not know any form of documentation existed. Mr. Weber also cut items from bound scrapbooks and removed issued and unissued stocks from complete books of stock certificates. To this day we are still finding collections that have been affected by his activities.

*One of the biggest mistakes Mr. Weber made was his constant underestimation of the skills, intelligence and professionalism of his co-workers—he always assumed, and projected the attitude, that his co-workers were not as smart as he was and it was this mistake that provided the evidence that led to his prosecution. The greatest example of this underestimation can be found in the Aks Collection. The collection was compiled by Frank and Leah Aks, a mother and son who survived the sinking of the RMS Titanic. The collection was loaned to the Museum in 1986 and in the late 1990s the Museum agreed to purchase the materials. Although the collection was predominantly archival, because it came to the Museum as a loan it was overseen by the Office of Collections Management not the archives. As a loan, the collection was documented to the item level and everything was photographed or photocopied. Following the completion of the purchase in 2001 the collection was transferred to the archives. The collection was not formally processed after the transfer which led Mr. Weber to assume he could remove items from the collection without any fear of being caught. His second huge mistake was in selling most of the Aks materials to one of the Museum's lenders.*

### **Practical advice about deterring theft**

The sad reality is that **no** institution is immune to internal theft. Staff members familiar with institutional policies and procedures can always find ways to circumvent them. All any organization can do to deter internal theft is institute a strong system of checks and balances and establish a set of well-known consequences for breaking policies and not following procedures. *It also can't hurt if your staff recognizes that you will hunt them to the ends of the earth if they are caught stealing from the collection!*

### **Guard Your Trust**

One of the hardest lessons we learned was one of trust. We trusted our archivist explicitly and assumed that he, like us, had the best interests of the collection, the Museum and our current and future patrons at heart. I am not suggesting that you don't trust your employees or co-workers but you should always remain "on guard." The unfortunate reality of the situation is that the very people you need to place the most trust in are the same people you shouldn't place **all** of your trust in.

Here are a few things to consider:

- Never place full oversight of the collection in the hands of a single individual
- Never restrict physical access of any portion of your collection to a single individual
- Consider conducting expanded background checks on all staff, volunteers and interns; especially on those individuals who will be working directly with collections materials.
  - Perform a simple Google search and see what turns up!

- Consider completing background checks on consulting curators and researchers working with important collections. If you can't afford to complete formal background checks, ask for professional references.
  - Consider performing credit checks. *This seems a little excessive, but after our thefts occurred we learned that our thief had declared bankruptcy shortly before being hired.*
  - Consider subscribing to PACER (<http://pacer.psc.uscourts.gov/>). PACER (Public Access to Court Electronic Records) is an electronic public access service that provides access to case and docket information from Federal Appellate, District and Bankruptcy courts, and the U.S. Party/Case Index via the Internet. The cost of this service is only 8¢ per **printed** page but you aren't charged if you don't exceed \$10 in any one month. This is relatively inexpensive and could be used to quickly check for problems related to researchers.
- Watch for red flags:
    - Do you have a particular staff member who isn't following procedures or abiding by Museum or Library policies? *Besides ignoring his own policies, our thief regularly broke or ignored established Museum policies.*
    - Have you seen a staff member perusing the storage area for no ascertainable reason?
    - If someone comes to you and raises a red flag by complaining that procedures aren't being followed or that policies are being broken, be proactive and investigate and then formally reprimand and **enforce** the violated policy or procedure. Do not ignore the situation. *During our investigation we learned that a library employee had voiced a concern about seeing our thief regularly perusing the storage area and certain collections but management rebuffed the concerns. Interestingly, he was the one library staff member who chose to ignore Mr. Weber's restriction that only archive staff could enter the storage area.*

### **Establish a broad based system of checks and balances**

Establish policies and procedures that apply to everyone from the top of the organization to the bottom and, most importantly, enforce them.

*Our thief was given total control of the archives and implemented policies and procedures (without any input from other library or archive staff) that did not meet professional standards and were never formally approved.*

### **Policy**

- When writing or updating policies and procedures, make sure they are crafted by a team of qualified staff and not a single individual.
- Make sure that your policies reflect the current professional standards established for your type of organization.
- Require staff to sign forms acknowledging that they have read, understand and will abide by the established policies.
- Make sure your institutional code of ethics and employee handbook contains strong, clearly written policies regarding conflicts of interest related to personal collecting and dealing by all museum, library and archive staff members. *If our handbook had not*

*included a section titled “Conflict of Interest in Maritime Collecting” firing our thief, even though we had a strong suspicion he was stealing, would have been challenging.*

- Make sure your Collections Management Policy establishes strong policies and procedures with regards to collections security.
- Establish and enforce policies that govern how staff and researchers work with collections materials.
- Establish policies and procedures regarding the acceptance of items on temporary loan (for donation, research or other purposes).
  - Create detailed inventories of temporary loans and, if possible, photograph the materials.
  - Ensure that the loaned material can be tracked at all times.
  - Require the quick processing or resolution of temporary loans and new accessions.

### **Procedures**

- Require staff and researchers to work in monitored spaces where they can be overseen by other staff or security cameras.
- Prohibit the storage, even temporarily, of collections materials on desks or in office spaces and require the return of all collection materials to secured storage at the end of each day.
- Prohibit the placement of staff offices within storage areas.
- Keep un-cataloged or poorly cataloged/processed collections under tight security and require that multiple staff members be present when these materials are being accessed (this is especially important with large archival collections).
- Prohibit staff from working with collections materials unless another staff person is in the area, especially before and after normal working hours. *Our thief regularly worked outside of normal working hours giving him plenty of opportunities to remove materials from the building.*
- Involve multiple staff members in the cataloging/processing of new collections and the re-processing of older collections.

### **Other Checks and Balances**

- Conduct frequent inventories and make sure multiple people are involved.
- Never allow the wholesale renumbering or reorganization of your collection unless multiple people are involved and very thorough records are maintained.
  - Lists or databases that document changes in numbering should be created as the changes are made and checked frequently to ensure that **every** collection/item remains accounted for.
  - Original records documenting old numbering systems should be kept permanently
- Create detailed accession records, inventories and finding aids.
  - When accessioning objects or creating finding aids for archival collections (even artificial collections) make the records or finding aids as thorough as possible.
  - Document large archival collections to the item level whenever possible. If it's not possible, provide a thorough description of the contents of each folder and count the number of items in each folder and include all of this information in the finding aid.

- When updating finding aids or adding additional materials to a collection document the changes that are made and when.
- Keep printed copies of the finding aids and inventories in multiple locations—including personal staff files and locations unknown to all staff members. *Our thief was covering his tracks by destroying or modifying finding aids, catalogs, inventories and computer records. Having old finding aids and inventories stored in locations he was unaware of provided some of the evidence the authorities needed to prosecute the case.*
- Consider making “sneaky” copies of archival items. While it is common practice to photograph or digitally document high dollar items, consider making “sneaky copies” of random pieces in a specific collection.
  - Have two or three people randomly choose items and copy them. Place the copies in sealed envelopes with the finding aid and store them in a secure location or in object files. Maintain as much secrecy as possible about exactly what was copied so that if someone decides to remove something from the collection they won’t ever be sure that a copy of what they are taking doesn’t exist.
  - Put images of archival objects in collections area object files. *We were able to prove some of the thefts because documentation of several of the stolen photographs were found in our object and artist files.*
- Mark your objects well and in several different ways. Unfortunately, the presence of an identification mark or stamp will not prevent an object from being stolen. It might, however, deter a thief and help prove ownership if a stolen object is recovered. There are a number of different methods available for marking objects.
  - Consider using a microstamp like the *Trace Mark* (available through [microstampusa.com](http://microstampusa.com)) to apply hidden marks to your collections materials. A microstamp is relatively inexpensive and easy to implement, but you must figure out some way of keeping track of where the marks are applied. Obviously, microstamping every object in a large collection is a possible, but massive, undertaking most institutions aren’t willing to consider, but it can be done randomly and on high dollar or highly collectible items.

I would recommend the following resources to help you determine the most suitable object marking methods for your institution:

- “Marking Rare Book and Manuscript Materials”, by Everett C. Wilkie, Jr. This article appears in the publication “Guide to Security Considerations and Practices for Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collection Libraries” which was published by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ARCL). It provides an excellent discussion of the many different methods of object marking.
- “Ownership Marking of Paper-based Materials, Library of Congress ([www.loc.gov/preserv/markings.html](http://www.loc.gov/preserv/markings.html))

**Things to Consider if you Discover a Theft,**  
**Practical Advice About How to Investigate and Work With the Authorities,**  
**Plus a Few Sad Realities...**

What follows are some of the things we had to consider and some of the practical lessons we learned as we conducted our investigation. It is important to remember that the authorities will probably not give you any advice about how to investigate and, in fact, may not fully understand how to conduct an investigation in a cultural institution.

- Do NOT ignore the situation and hope it will go away. Taking action will prevent another organization from becoming a victim. *This was one of our main motivations in pursuing the prosecution of our thief. If one of the two previous organizations he had worked for (and stole from according to the Secret Service) had taken action we would not have become his next victim.*
- Act quickly and involve the authorities right away, they can help you undertake the investigation but, again, don't expect them to understand how to conduct an investigation in a museum, library or archive.
- Theft, especially on the magnitude we experienced, will place a great deal of emotional stress on your staff. You need to be prepared to deal with incredulity, enormous frustration, guilt (that they didn't see what was going on), a great deal of anger and a lot of tears (not just at the beginning, but throughout the entire process).
- When faced with having to investigate a theft it is important to remember that the person best suited for the task is not necessarily the person or people responsible for the day to day care of the affected collection.
  - You need to find your “bus driver”—someone who has a basic understanding of the organization of the collection and its supporting files but who is also systematic, organized and determined. Someone who will not give up until every last stone has been turned over.
    - The person leading the investigation must be able to create and manipulate massive databases. *[I became so familiar with the information contained in our databases that I could actually reconstruct our thief's movements as he processed collections.]*
  - Don't be afraid to ask for help across departments or from other institutions.
  - The people tasked with investigating the theft will need a great deal of support from their co-workers, managers and senior staff. Give them a lot of latitude to conduct their investigation: allow them to periodically hijack one of your staff members for assistance; allow them to review files they might not normally be allowed to see (personnel files can be a great source of information—like providing yearly goals and work plans that can pinpoint affected collections); and depending upon your level of trust in your lead investigator you might even need to be willing to bend policies.

- However much time you imagine it will take to investigate a theft and pursue legal action—triple it. *At Mariners' our normal work week is 35 hours. My timesheet for the period December 1 to 15<sup>th</sup>, 2008 contained 201 hours. Between February 2007 and March of 2009 I spent between 3,500 and 4,000 hours on the investigation and I have easily spent another 1,000 since that time. Our overall staff time is probably double or triple that figure.*
- Pursuing the prosecution of your thief will be expensive. By December of 2008 our legal fees exceeded \$65,000.00. Those fees continued to mount as we worked to settle the insurance claims—which took another three years to resolve.
- Be as open as possible about the situation with your staff and volunteers and don't limit their involvement in the investigation.
  - I think this is one of the mistakes our organization made early on. Most of our staff were kept in the dark about the matter and staff involvement in the internal investigation was limited to the library/archive staff. If the Museum leadership had been more forthcoming about the situation and involved the staff of other departments I believe we would have located the evidence that proved the thefts sooner which might have moved the case forward faster and saved some of our materials from destruction.
  - When our thief was fired many staff, volunteers, docents and even some of the Museum's members became very angry and very vocal that he seemed to have been fired without cause and it made the Museum look bad. When he began waging a campaign to malign and discredit the institution and senior level staff remained silent, people formed their own opinions/conclusions about the case and it took quite a while to change their minds. It also made things very difficult for the staff working on the investigation.
- Don't be afraid of publicity! Internal theft is something that cannot be prevented and people will not think poorly of the institution if it occurs. Interestingly, publicity about a theft can actually help your case. In our situation it uncovered evidence that proved that the thief was supporting his unemployment by continuing to sell off items from our collection—even after he pled guilty.
  - Maintain a record of all publicity. Try and identify both print and online articles/discussions. *We discovered that we were being used as a case study for a law class at the University of Illinois. The professor, a noted expert on archival theft, managed to uncover quite a bit of information about our thief and provided some very helpful advice.*
- Maintain a timeline of the events associated with the investigation/prosecution (when the authorities were contacted; when the thief was arrested; when you alerted the insurance company, etc.). You will need this sort of information throughout the investigation and trying to pinpoint the dates when particular events occurred, especially months later is more difficult than you think.

- Secure as much evidence/information as quickly as possible
  - Secure the thief's computer and office. If possible, try to identify the source of collections materials found in the office as it may help pinpoint affected collections. It will also provide evidence that can be used to prosecute the case.
  - Have the staff scour their files and old collection records for finding aids, inventories and other forms of collection documentation.
  - If the materials were being sold through eBay or any other online auction site:
    - Download every eBay sale you can find for the seller and keep them electronically (*we only printed ours and after a while the quality degraded making it difficult to see the images clearly*). The item descriptions will also come in handy for any insurance claims that need to be filed.
    - Use the eBay feedback profile of the seller, to identify objects, sale numbers and buyers. Use the numbers to access completed sales. While not every sale can be documented in this manner it will certainly help you find sales that aren't documented in other ways (i.e. info you get from eBay, Paypal, bank records or email). Finding the feedback profile will also help you contact the buyers of the stolen material that remain active.
  
- Working with the Federal authorities is not easy, in fact, it can be intensely frustrating!
  - Be proactive—don't wait for the Federal authorities to show you the way, do everything you can to move the investigation forward. Just be sure to stay in constant contact with the people working on your case.
  - No matter how quickly you work, the Federal justice system does not. Although the defendant has the right to a speedy trial, the victim does not have the right to a speedy resolution of the problem!
  - You will be asked to complete huge projects with little or no lead time and to cram six months of work into one, and more often into less. Most of the time all of this effort will not appear to have any impact on the case.
  - You will be asked to provide some very strange information and most of the time it will be difficult to understand how it could possibly be useful.  
*One of the strangest requests we received was to determine what kind of equipment the photocopies of the Aks documents had been made on. Amazingly enough, despite the passage of nearly 14 years, we were able to provide this information, but only after a great deal of digging!*
  - Working within the confines of a grand jury indictment is difficult and frustrating. Information that will really help you will be withheld. You won't be allowed to discuss the case. You won't be allowed to keep any of the information they give you. Our lawyer worked ceaselessly to ensure that we could get or keep copies of everything we turned over or documents we generated. If you can possibly manage it, maintain copies of everything you turn over to the Federal authorities.
  
- If asked to review evidence seized from a residence—especially if it's original materials—examine everything under bright, raking light. We did not do this initially and later discovered quite a bit of evidence in the form of erasures. *Of the 496 pieces seized from our thief's residence we initially found only three with identifying marks. After examining the*

*objects under bright, raking light the number of pieces with identifiable marks changed to 128.*

- Build a database of the marks you find on the recovered materials because they will inevitably give you clues about which segments of the collection have been affected.
  - Gather samples of handwriting of former and current staff members and of major collectors of the materials housed in your institution. These will help prove that the materials came from your collection.
- If asked to review images seized from the defendant's work and home computer have a single person (preferably your "bus driver") coordinate the work. Because of the way the data is retrieved there will be many images of varying sizes and quality (from grainy postage-stamp sized thumbnails to large high-quality images) and there will be many duplicates. If a single person completes the work they will become very familiar with each image and will be able to easily tie the duplicates and related images together.
- We were asked to review and identify 3360 images, but as the project progressed we realized that there were duplicates and detail-shots of the same object. In the end, only 979 distinct objects were involved.*
- Construct a database to document each object and vigorously study the related images for evidence of any sort of connection to the institution (erased marks made by collectors or staff; identifiable handwriting; gouged stamps; whether or not the object had been duplicated [i.e. photographed or photocopied] or documented [inventoried or catalogued]; cataloging marks, etc.). When a possible connection is found search for documentation.
  - Place the accumulated documentation in binders (we had two, one documenting items we could positively prove ownership of and one that contained items that were "similar" to materials found in the collection).
  - You can also use Photoshop to increase the contrast of an image which will help reveal, illuminate or refine hidden or erased marks.
- Be prepared to deal with more than just the theft investigation. We had to deal with unemployment hearings, dueling civil lawsuits, and multiple insurance companies requesting different kinds of information and documentation.
- Finally, be prepared for the sad reality that the buyers will not voluntarily return the stolen materials. To date, only two buyers have returned the items they purchased. Sadly, we have a number of buyers who are aware they are holding stolen material but so far they have declined to return the items.
- *We did purchase some materials back from several buyers in order to acquire the evidence we needed to prosecute the case. Two were wonderfully cooperative; one (a Reverend, no less) complained the entire time, fussed that he was being shortchanged, and stated that he was "losing out" because he didn't get to keep the item.*