


# MY MOST CHALLENGING PROJECT

with Brian Willcut



My Most Challenging Project is a series in which we ask members to share their most difficult projects and lend advice on how others can solve similar challenges. Brian Willcut, branch manager of Restoration Management Company (RMC) in Seattle, recounts the contents recovery and museum artifact restoration project at a local historical preservation site in Washington State.

## WHAT WAS THE PROJECT?



In the summer of 2018, the City of Aberdeen's Museum of History experienced a catastrophic fire that affected the entire museum structure. This historic building had been used to exhibit and archive many rare and irreplaceable historical artifacts unique to the area.

Approximately 41,000 square feet of valuable antiques were being stored or currently on exhibit at the museum. Two tenant spaces were also affected. The concrete and heavy timber structure was significantly compromised by the fire, and some areas remained at risk of imminent collapse.

Restoration Management Company (RMC) was selected by the city of Aberdeen to engage the project. Selective demolition and temporary shoring were needed before any debris removal or contents and artifact recovery efforts could be undertaken. This work was required on the front end in order to provide safe access to the facility by RMC's highly trained

restoration technicians performing the contents and artifact recovery efforts.

Priority services for the city included:

- Meet with key personnel associated with the project.
- Work closely with the structural engineer retained by the city to establish safe access and egress points.
- Remove overhead hazards and install shoring as needed to guarantee safe passage for all workers.
- Involve an independent third-party certified industrial hygienist (CIH) to evaluate potential







environmental concerns and establish the final artifact recovery protocol.

- Provide recovery and restoration solutions for the contents of the affected parties.
- Provide asbestos, lead and mold testing, securing safe access to the structure.
- Provide air sampling and clearance results as well as any other environmental reports requested by the affected parties.
- Inventory and catalogue all contents as well as provide recommendations for salvage versus non-salvageable museum artifacts for consideration by the museum curator and/or other interested parties.
- Perform hazardous material abatement, cleaning and remediation services as warranted by the nature of the loss.
- Provide ongoing safe and secure storage of museum artifacts and other contents in a climate-controlled and conditioned environment.

- Meet regularly and work closely with all parties associated with the loss, from city managers, insurance companies and the community.
- Publish daily written updates to those affected or other interested parties.
- Provide up-to-date and ongoing cost analysis and comprehensive reports for the consideration of the financially responsible parties, including detailed breakdowns of the individual costs associated with each entity.





### *WHAT WERE THE UNIQUE CHALLENGE(S) THAT HAD TO BE OVERCOME?*

With any restoration project, workplace safety is paramount. Any time a structure is damaged by fire, there are potential environmental concerns due to potential contaminants and/or pollutants that may be released during the fire. Another consequence of the fire, such as the one that the museum experienced, is that there was a

considerable risk of collapse remaining due to the massive damage to the structure.

The sheer volume of debris from the roof collapse presented a logistical challenge mandating a careful sifting and sorting project in order to recover potential valuable and salvageable artifacts. Additionally, a record of the non-salvageable items needed to be generated for the city of Aberdeen's insurance carrier.

### *HOW WERE THOSE CHALLENGES ADDRESSED TO SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETE THE PROJECT?*

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RMC's national construction team, working in tandem with its environmental and emergency response teams, partnered with an independent certified industrial hygienist and engaged the loss in a methodical, step-by-step approach. Our team assessed and secured specific areas one by one in order to isolate and eliminate potential environmental, health and life safety hazards.

- Structural shoring was added in key areas in accordance with a local engineer's design specifications.
- Cranes, reach forklifts and other heavy equipment were used to safely remove the remaining roof structure and overhead hazards.
- Debris was carefully removed and sorted in a forensic process.
- Temporary cleaning and drying facilities were constructed on-site to process, clean, restore and catalogue the smaller museum artifacts.
- A warehouse facility was secured nearby and was used to engage some of the larger artifacts.
- Some of the largest and/or most sensitive artifacts were returned to RMC's regional facility in Kent, Washington, for final cleaning, archiving and storage in a heated and conditioned facility until such time it will be returned to the city.

### *HOW DID THE PROJECT TURN OUT?*

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The city of Aberdeen went to great lengths to protect what historical artifacts survived the fire of 2018. In

partnering with RMC, the city achieved its initial goals of salvaging and restoring a great deal of regional history. The city, its tenants and the community benefited from RMC's vast experience and utilization of industry leading technology, means and methods specific to museum artifact restoration.

Restoration Management Company is honored to have been allowed to partner with the city of Aberdeen on these recovery efforts and looks forward to any opportunity to work with the city and its associates in the future.

### *WHAT LESSONS DID YOU LEARN THAT COULD BE APPLIED TO CHALLENGING PROJECTS FELLOW RIA MEMBERS MAY ENCOUNTER?*

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As with any remediation project, a prompt and expeditious response is crucial. Involving key players early on and developing a comprehensive and holistic recovery plan are equally significant. Most importantly, communicating plans, progress and potential encumbrances — as well as solutions — always streamlines a project and affords the client a level of comfort and assurance that their needs are being addressed in a timely and professional manner.

#### **SOURCES**

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<http://www.thedailyworld.com/news/museum-recovery-discovers-theft-of-guns-button-collection-and-more/>

<https://kbkw.com/recovery-at-aberdeen-armory-uncovers-theft-of-petty-cash-weapons-bank-information/>

