Introduction
The Amistad Research Center (ARC) is committed to collecting, preserving, and providing open access to original materials that reference the social and cultural importance of America's ethnic and racial history, the African Diaspora, human relations, and civil rights. ARC is named after *La Amistad*, the Spanish schooner upon which a revolt by enslaved men and children occurred in 1839. The revolt and the ensuing U.S. Supreme Court case that established the African captives as freed people became a source of inspiration and a symbol for the abolitionist movement in the United States.

ARC was established in 1966 on the campus of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, by the United Church Boards of Homeland Ministries to house the historical records of the American Missionary Association. The Association itself was established in 1846 by abolitionists who had been involved in the *Amistad* case before the US. Supreme Court. The Association was a group dedicated to abolishing slavery, promoting racial equality, and fostering Christian values. The Association helped educate the American populace at large, circulating its *American Missionary* publication to over 20,000 readers and establishing hundreds of anti-slavery churches. The Association also worked closely with the Underground Railroad, helping to free, shelter, and protect hundreds of escaped slaves. Following the Civil War, the Association founded many schools and colleges for the freedmen of the South during and after the Civil War, spending more money for that purpose than the Freedmen's Bureau of the federal government.
ARC initially served as a repository for the Association’s historical records, a function we are honored to continue to this day. At the time, the directors at ARC also realized the immense importance of the then-contemporary civil rights movement. ARC’s mission broadened to include collecting and safeguarding the history of race relations, ethnic culture, and social justice in the United States. ARC currently houses more than 800 collections, including: 15 million original manuscripts and rare documents ranging from the 1780s to present; 2,000+ periodicals dating from the early 19th century; 250,000 photographs dating from 1859; 8000 moving image and sound recordings, including hundreds of oral histories by musicians, civil rights activists, writers, military figures and community members; 1100 works of African and African American art, including works by several internationally renowned 19th and 20th century African American masters; 25,000+ monographs, books, articles and dissertations on the history of African-American and ethnic groups. ARC is home to many important collections that tell the story of America’s cultural and ethnic past.

ARC became an independent nonprofit organization in 1969 and relocated from Fisk University to Dillard University in New Orleans the following year. After a brief interval of occupying the Old U.S. Mint at the edge of New Orleans’ French Quarter from 1980-1986, ARC again moved and found its current home at Tulane University. ACR maintains its status as an independent community-based archive housed on Tulane University’s campus. While the university provides support to Amistad in the form of facilities management and technology support, ARC is financially separate and independent from the University.

The building that currently houses ARC is Tilton Memorial Hall (Tilton Hall), which was originally built in 1902 as the first library on Tulane’s St. Charles Avenue campus. ARC occupies 10,660 square feet within Tilton Hall, which includes one reading room (1,290 sq ft), three floors for collection storage (6,430 sq ft), administrative and processing space (2,900 sq ft), and a small support space (40 sq ft). ARC lacks its own dedicated classroom or public engagement spaces, and the remaining space within the building is occupied by two academic units and classrooms for Tulane University.
ARC sought and was awarded funding through an National Endowment for the Humanities Sustaining Cultural Heritage grant in 2020 to hire consultants to undertake a survey of ARC’s preservation and collections care policies and the environment and infrastructural systems associated with collections care in Tilton Hall. This white paper addresses the history of ARC’s efforts to document and improve collections care, its current conditions and preservation challenges, the work plan and goals for this project, and the consultants’ findings.

**History of Project**

The first assessment conducted by ARC following its relocation to the Tulane campus was in 1995 through the Heritage Preservation’s Conservation Assessment Program (CAP). In the consultant’s final report, he states that “Most of the issues [facing ARC] are sufficiently large and pervasive that they are beyond the full control and management of the ARC as they are subject to planning and funding by the University to address comprehensively.” The most significant topic highlighted in 1995 was the broad subject of environmental conditions and the building’s HVAC system’s limitations. However, the major result of the CAP assessment was the construction of a secured area for the 200+ works of African American fine art that were donated to ARC not long after its arrival at Tulane.

Brenda Banks performed a storage and material handling assessment at ARC in 2001. In 2005, Laura Thomson, then manager of ARC’s Processing and Acquisitions, provided follow-up to the 2001 assessment through her participation in the Preservation Management Institute at Rutgers University. Thomson conducted a full preservation assessment of the Center, which resulted in the creation of ARC’s first disaster preparedness and response plan. In 2010, ARC was awarded a re-CAP, which allowed William Murphy to assess the condition of audiovisual materials, while Richard Bierce surveyed Tilton Hall and environmental conditions within. Bierce’s 2010 Re-CAP report stated that “the Center has been the beneficiary of remarkable efforts by its own growing and proficient staff to address and overcome many of the deleterious aspects but challenging environment of Tilton Hall.” His report “documents these many achievements in this long march to vastly improved circumstances,” but that “this report also reiterates the need to continue to resolve those items of collection care, storage and protection that it can, with the
renewed spirit of cooperation and assistance from the Tulane administration and physical plant
staff that has developed in recent years.

Through the Re-CAP reports by Bierce and Murphy, ARC was able to secure a Preservation
Assistance Grant for Smaller Institutions from NEH to fund the purchase of updated
environmental monitoring equipment in the form of 14 HOBO U12 Temperature/Relative
Humidity/Light/External Data Loggers. Since that time, ARC has collected and monitored the
environmental conditions in the stacks area of Tilton Memorial Hall on a monthly basis. In
addition, based on Murphy’s report, ARC sought funding to hire its first audiovisual archivist
and began plans to relocate its audiovisual holdings to Tulane University’s offsite library facility.

In addition to assessments and surveys conducted by ARC, the Center has also been included in
two additional assessments undertaken on the Tulane University campus in 2007 and 2018.

**Current Conditions and Preservation Challenges**

At present, the future of ARC is poised on the brink of important and ambitious challenges,
evolving from its beginnings as a research archive and steward of significant artifacts and
records of American race relations and ethnic culture. It is an educational leader and catalyst
nationally and globally. As a longtime tenant in an important historic building on Tulane
University’s campus, which has not been modified to house and protect collections, ARC has
struggled to balance its curatorial responsibilities with inherent structural and environmental
limitations. The age and design of Tilton Hall present a number of preservation, access, and
storage issues for a twenty-first century archival and library organization.

The current conditions of Tilton have been well-documented in several building assessments
conducted by Tulane University and ARC noted above. The building’s conservation needs and
lack of structural updates are the primary challenge to having a suitable onsite storage space for
ARC’s collections. While ARC established an environmental monitoring program in 2010 and
updated the security in 2018, the HVAC systems fails to support the preservation environment in
the building. Over the years Tulane University’s Facility Services has taken preventive measures
to remedy the ongoing problems with the HVAC system, but such efforts have not addressed
systemic issues related to the overall capacity and age of the HVAC system. ARC’s archivists have previously documented mold on archival boxes, library books and fine art collections as a result of the problems with the HVAC system. ARC’s staff conducted mold remediation in 2012 and 2015 in various parts of the archival and library collections. Another contributing factor to ARC’s preservation challenges in Tilton Hall is the condition of the wooden framed, single-pane windows and sky-lights in the storage area. The windows allow the outside humidity to infiltrate the second and third floors where the fine art and manuscripts, historic records, and rare books are held.

Lighting in Tilton Hall continues to be a challenge to preserving ARC’s collections. Windows in Tilton Hall are abundant throughout the storage and office areas. Fluorescent light sources are also abundant and running five and a half days per week for approximately ten to twelve hours per day. In the past, windows in the storage areas were filmed to remove ultraviolet radiation; however spot measurements indicate little or no ultraviolet filtration. The fluorescent lighting throughout ARC’s storage areas causes concern. Lights are energy efficient; however, their UV output is usually high.

Light readings have been taken and included measurement of daylight and fluorescent light sources. Readings were taken in the storage areas at windows and aisles, all offices, reading room and exhibition spaces. Fluorescent readings in the stack areas varied widely, with a range of 600 lux to 955 lux. Daylight readings had a range of 935 lux to 1570 lux. The reading room with document exhibitions had a fluorescent reading of 345 lux. The majority of levels measured at the Center indicate higher levels than are recommended and optimal for preservation. Goals should be for storage space 20-150 lux; reading and work areas 150 lux, and exhibit and display lighting should be a mix of direct and diffused light.

Lastly, the fine art collection is housed on the second floor of the storage space without the requisite space and storage systems for fine art. The fine art collection is stored in a cage with two flat files and two vertical cabinets designed to hold small and medium-sized paintings. Sculptures and small mixed-media works are stored on top of the flat files and cabinets. More than 50 framed art works are improperly stored on the original book shelves that were installed
in the building in 1906. Because the space is small, it cannot accommodate mobile or static art screens or rack systems.

**Grant Work Plan and Major Goals**

For this planning grant, an interdisciplinary team was assembled. This team included members of ARC’s administration and management team who oversee collections care, preservation, and facilities’ needs; a lead consultant with extensive experience in preservation planning and policy formation; a local book and paper conservator with experience working with ARC’s collections; an ARC board member who is an architect with over 30 years of experience and specialties in design development, revitalization, and planning; and the Director of Feasibility, Planning, and Programming at Tulane University, ARC’s host institution. A second lead consultant was added to the project team and brought considerable experience with environmental control systems in cultural heritage institutions. This project was informed by standards for collection care and preservation established by the American Library Association, the Society of American Archivists, and the American Alliance of Museums, as well as preservation and conservation guides such as the Northeast Document Conservation Center’s *Preservation Planning: Guidelines for Writing a Long-Range Plan*, the Preservation Planning Program Resource Guides available through the Association of Research Libraries, the preservation planning guidelines available through the Connecting to Collections program of the Foundation for the Advancement in Conservation, and book-length resources such as Pacifico and Wilsted’s *Archival and Special Collections Facilities: A Guide for Archivists, Librarians, and Architects and Engineers*. Building, planning, and architectural guidelines such as the *Handbook of the American Society of Heating Refrigeration and Air-conditioning Engineers* (Chapter 21: Museums Libraries and Archives) were also be consulted.

Early stages of this planning grant included the consolidation of such standards for review by the project team. In addition, ARC’s collections care, disaster preparedness and response policy, and overall policy and procedures manual were also shared with the project team.

Environmental monitoring data gathered since 2012 in Tilton Hall was made available to provide a long-term historic look at temperature, humidity, and light levels in the stacks area of Tilton
Hall. In consultation with the lead consultant, ARC’s administration and staff initially devised an effective plan to conduct a series of surveys to assess space, collections, and operations as they relate to the storage and care of ARC’s collections in Tilton Hall based on the lead consultant’s recommendations. While the focus of this grant project was Tilton Hall, the consultant was to be introduced to ARC’s collections held within the Tulane University library offsite facility.

As a collaborative project that supports conservation and preservation, Planning for an Improved and Sustainable Collections Environment at the Amistad Research Center also carried the benefits outlined by Yetunde Zaid and Abiola Abioye in “Museums, Libraries and Archives: Collaborating for the Preservation of Heritage Materials in Nigeria,” including 1) finding new ways to encourage cultural heritage and preservation, 2) fostering best practices among institutions, 3) sharing physical resources such as space and materials, 4) sharing policies for preservation and conservation of collections, 5) better coordinated training programs and sharing of training cost, 6) experiencing collaborative working, 7) avoiding competitive bidding for same funding, 8) sharing expertise, 9) enriching and broadening professional traditions and expertise, and 10) attracting more funding opportunities.

The original goals of this project called for the collaboration of ARC staff, conservation experts, and Tulane representatives to document and prioritize conservation and preservation needs in Tilton Hall; to create a strategic plan outlining next steps for a comprehensive implementation plan based on best practices; and the development of a projected budget and identification of funding sources to address actions steps within the strategic plan. These goals were guided by ARC’s collection development and care policies, as well as the technical expertise of the consultants who worked on this project.

Like many cultural heritage institutions, ARC experienced significant disruption to operations and services due to the COVID-19 pandemic. ARC closed its Tilton Hall facility and staff moved to remote work in mid-March 2020. Reopening in July 2020, ARC was required to shift

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timelines, project plans, and deliverables for a number of grant-funded projects. This NEH Sustaining Cultural Heritage grant was significantly altered due to the pandemic. Set to begin in October 2020 and include travel to New Orleans and ARC by the project’s lead consultant during 2021, these plans were delayed due to the uncertainty of the pandemic and then modified so that consultancy work was conducted remotely. Tulane University’s participation in the grant timeline was also modified due to the university’s need to pivot to remote instruction and later due to the effects of Hurricane Ida in August 2021. These changes are outlined in section 4 below.

Given disruptions to the project timeline, ARC did receive a detailed report from the project’s consultants and a survey of a sampling of its collections from a local conservator. The report includes an executive summary, observations and findings, and recommendations for action, both short-term and long-term. This report will be shared with Tulane University in order to continue discussions on a strategic plan and budget to address issues within Tilton Hall. ARC has begun to identify funding sources for future work, including an implementation phase Sustaining Cultural Heritage grant or an Infrastructure and Capacity Building Challenge grant from NEH as well as grants from local and national foundations.

Findings

A. Executive Summary

The wellbeing and survival of the collections of the Amistad Research Center (ARC) are critical to the Center’s continued ability to support researchers, students and others seeking to learn from its significant collection of artifacts and records of American race relations and ethnic culture. This report outlines an assessment of current environmental and storage conditions within Tilton Memorial Hall, an important historic building on Tulane University’s campus and the primary location of ARC.

Both ARC and Tulane staff are to be commended for their strong and long-standing collaborative relationship over the years to improve conditions in the building. Yet major challenges remain. Tilton is a multi-purpose structure used for academic and library/archival purposes and has not been modified to adequately house and protect the ARC collections.
Consequently, ARC has struggled to carry out its curatorial and stewardship responsibilities within the building’s structural and environmental limitations.

The threats to this very important collection’s preservation are severe. ARC collections’ continued existence will depend on the willingness of Tulane University, and sufficient financial support from various sources, to carry out the necessary upgrades to this building, including: environmental control systems (HVAC); control of daylight and electric light; and appropriate pest management. Because of the current physical limitations posed by the building, working conditions as well as access to the collections are severely compromised.

Amistad policies, collection processing practices and collection care procedures are excellent. Staff are knowledgeable about collection preservation and stewardship. They have been proactive and creative in dealing with the existing limitations. However, these issues, relating to the built environment, including lack of enough and quality storage space, along with sustained environmental challenges, is accelerating the rate of collection decay and is contributing to the collection’s shortened useable lifespan. The ARC is now at a point where immediate attention must be given to the environmental concerns noted in this report (as well as in a number of previous reports), or the collections will continue to be at extremely high risk of loss.

Recommendations for short- and long-term improvements are noted [below] and include the short-term goals of a) seeking funding support from the NEH Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections implementation grant to carry out recommended upgrades necessary to making the Tilton Memorial Hall HVAC system capable of maintaining a regulated and consistent temperature and relative humidity throughout all ARC occupied spaces and b) controlling light by working to place coverings on windows, designed by professionals experienced with historic preservation. The consequential goals would include reducing visible light, UV light, the heat load and damaging high relative humidity in support of environmental control and collection preservation.
B. Recommendations for Action

The following recommended actions are made in support of ARC’s project goals to:
prioritize conservation and preservation needs; create a strategic plan outlining next steps for
a comprehensive implementation plan based on best practices; develop a projected budget
and identify funding sources to address action steps within the strategic plan.

To provide an appropriate environment and physical space for the collection, the issues noted
below must be addressed in the short term. To carry this out, and to assure no further
deterioration of the building structure as a consequence, ARC is advised to bring together a
team that can design and implement these recommendations. This team will need to include a
preservation architect, an experienced HVAC engineer, and an expert in museum and library
lighting and environmental parameters. Everyone on the team should have experience
working with historic structures and will work in concert with the ARC team, who are
knowledgeable about the needs of the collections.

1. **Short Term:**
   - There is an immediate need to make upgrades to the HVAC system to provide a more
     suitable environment for the collections. According to Mr. Lance Bonadona, the HVAC
     engineer who physically inspected the Tilton space, it *may* be possible to add relative
     humidity control to the existing HVAC system.
   - Engage an experienced HVAC engineer to design upgrades to the existing HVAC
     system.
   - With the support of Tulane University, a logical next step to this planning grant is the
     submission of an NEH Sustaining Cultural Heritage Collections implementation grant to
     carry out the recommended upgrades necessary to making the Tilton Memorial Hall
     HVAC system capable of maintaining a regulated and consistent temperature and relative
     humidity throughout all ARC occupied spaces.
   - Control lighting. Work to place coverings on windows, designed by professionals
     experienced with historic preservation. The consequential goals would include reducing
     visible light, UV light, and the heat load.
2. **Long-term:**
   - Beyond the necessary improvements to the HVAC system noted above, ARC is advised to consider what its long-term needs are to adequately process the collection, store it to preservation best practice (in context of current collection formats, size and projected growth), produce exhibits and access/serve the collection to users.
   - If ARC intends to keep the collection in Tilton Memorial Hall, other more major upgrades will be needed. If that is not possible, ARC collections and users may best be served by finding another space on the Tulane campus that can serve its needs. If that is not possible, consider finding an appropriate new space elsewhere.
   - In planning for future space, consider space needs for a conservation facility to address the needs of the deteriorated and fragile collections.

**Conclusion**

Optimizing collections care and proper environmental storage conditions are important for any cultural heritage institution. The Amistad Research Center faces challenges like many of its peer institutions in these areas, but these challenges are heightened due to the design of and lack of updates to Tilton Memorial Hall. Addressing these challenges is vital to ARC’s ability to carry forth its mission and steward its collections.

The consultants’ report created as part of ARC’s NEH Sustaining Cultural Heritage grant project stressed two points: 1) the professionalism of ARC’s staff, their deep interest in caring for the Center’s collections, and the excellence of existing policies and procedures governing collections care, disaster preparedness, and archival/library functions; and 2) the importance of continued collaboration between ARC and its host institution, Tulane University, to ensure preservation and future access to collections that benefit not only the Tulane community, but those unaffiliated with the university and around the globe.

Reducing light levels in ARC’s storage area and upgrades to the current HVAC system servicing those areas are prioritized in order to move forward ARC’s curatorial and stewardship responsibilities. With this latest consultants’ report in hand, both ARC and Tulane University have increased documentation to seek funding to address these issues in order to preserve both
ARC’s collections and Tulane’s physical building. ARC’s administration would like to thank everyone on the project team, especially lead consultants, Evelyn Frangakis and Paul Himmelstein, as well as conservator Erin Albritton, for their time and dedication to this project.