Museum

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT



American Printing House for the Blind

Museum Goes Vertical to Add Important Archive

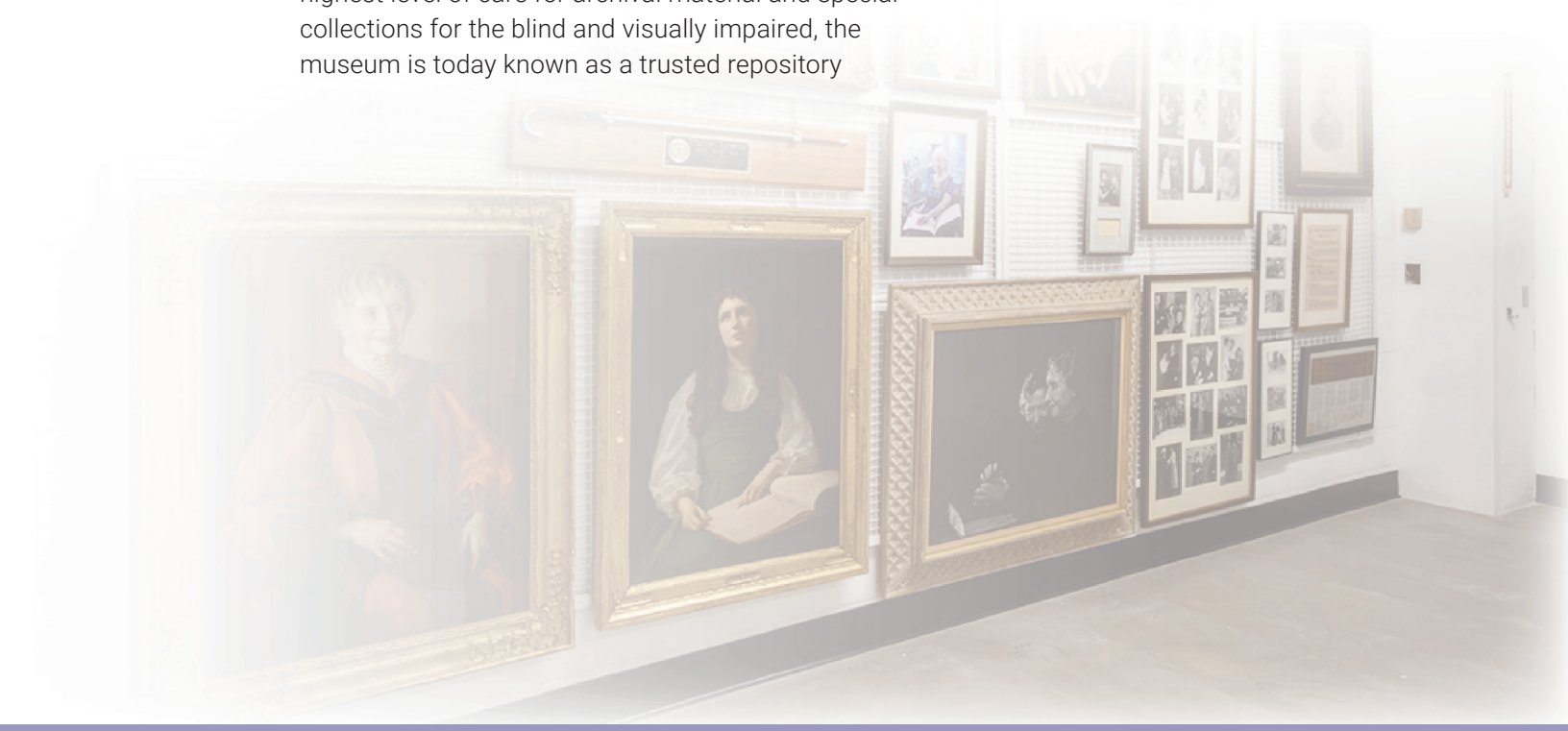
The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) produces educational material for the blind globally. Its Louisville, Kentucky, museum also houses exhibits engaging people with the history of literacy and learning for people who are blind or visually impaired. In 2020, the APH began a collaboration with the American Foundation for the Blind to display their comprehensive Helen Keller Archive. Yet it needed more space to accommodate the archive and continue to expand its collection.

THE PROBLEM

The American Printing House for the Blind (APH) has established itself as the world's largest producer of accessible material for people who are blind or have low vision. It has offered innovative products and technology to support educational, workplace and individual living experiences since the 1850s. Its extensive catalog of products and services includes Braille and large print documents, audio adaptations, accessible tests and indoor navigation software.

In 1994, the nonprofit also opened the first gallery of the APH Museum dedicated to the history of accessibility. Thanks to its drive to provide the highest level of care for archival material and special collections for the blind and visually impaired, the museum is today known as a trusted repository of archives for other blindness agencies. That reputation led to the 2020 acquisition of the Helen Keller archive from the American Foundation for the Blind.

The AFB Helen Keller Archive is the world's largest repository of letters, speeches, press clippings, photographs and artifacts relating to the famed feminist, social activist, and prolific writer. Acquiring this important collection easily tripled the museum's holdings. The APH needed more storage capability within the same footprint.



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Micheal Hudson
Director, American Printing House Museum

THE SOLUTION

The APH museum already enjoyed archival boxes, powder-coated archival quality steel shelving, and temperature, light, and humidity control. But its high-quality museum storage area wasn't large enough for the incoming archive. It needed to reimagine its space to accommodate the growth of its collection.

The AFB Helen Keller Archive gave the museum the political and financial capital to install new storage, said museum director Micheal Hudson.

Since its 1994 opening, the APH museum has already ordered additional shelving three times. This time, they intended to install a solution to accommodate future growth, Hudson said.

Working with Patterson Pope, the museum asked, *"What can we do to absolutely maximize the amount of space that we use here?"*

Patterson Pope's team looked up. The existing archive space consisted of 14-foot-high ceilings. Installing high-density mechanical assist mobile shelving and art racks gave the museum exponentially more space.

"There's literally no airspace wasted," said Hudson. *"Nothing makes me happier."*

Patterson Pope also worked with the museum to design shelving widths to maximize the number of record boxes stored. *"If you're wasting two inches on each shelf, then by the time you get to the top you've wasted an entire shelf,"* Hudson said. *"Multiply that by every shelf and it adds up."*

The team also incorporated heavy-duty shelving into the design to ensure safe storage of printing equipment and other heavier items.







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THE OUTCOME

By the time the AFB Helen Keller Archive arrived at the museum, the storage solution was ready and waiting to have different archival materials taken directly from their moving pallet to the specified shelving location.

Although Hudson had initially resisted compact, mobile shelving as some of his professors had previously had poor experiences with a similar product, he said he's a convert now. *"The shelving works like a dream,"* he said, adding, *"Getting everything in the right place makes a significant impact on the entire project. And, the storage solution is flexible enough to allow curators to reset and restructure the items as needed in the future."*

Now, the APH museum team is looking ahead to moving into a new home. Called The DOT Experience, the museum's expanded facility is scheduled to open in 2025. It's a big project to move the entire collection into a new space, but because of the effective project design, Hudson is confident they have a solution designed for their current needs as well as tomorrow's growth. He advised, "The more time you spend planning, the more you'll thank yourself in the future."

ABOUT THE CLIENT

The American Printing House for the Blind is the world's largest nonprofit organization creating accessible learning experiences for people who are blind and low vision. Since 1858, the Louisville, Kentucky-based nonprofit has provided educational, workplace, and independent living products and services.

The American Printing House Museum opened in 1994, and recently tripled in size with the incorporation of the renowned American Foundation for the Blind Helen Keller Archive. The APH plans to continue empowering people who are blind or low vision and changing minds about blindness, leading to a more open minded society in its The Dot Experience museum scheduled to open in 2025.



