

A Case for the Proclamation of the Constitution

Access and Preservation of Prestigious Documents

Balancing the needs of clients with the long-term preservation requirements of prestigious archival records is a delicate act that comes with several challenges. In many cases, providing access to important archival material through on-site consultations or loans to institutions requires careful consideration and negotiation to mitigate the risk of damage to the documents while at the same time ensuring access.

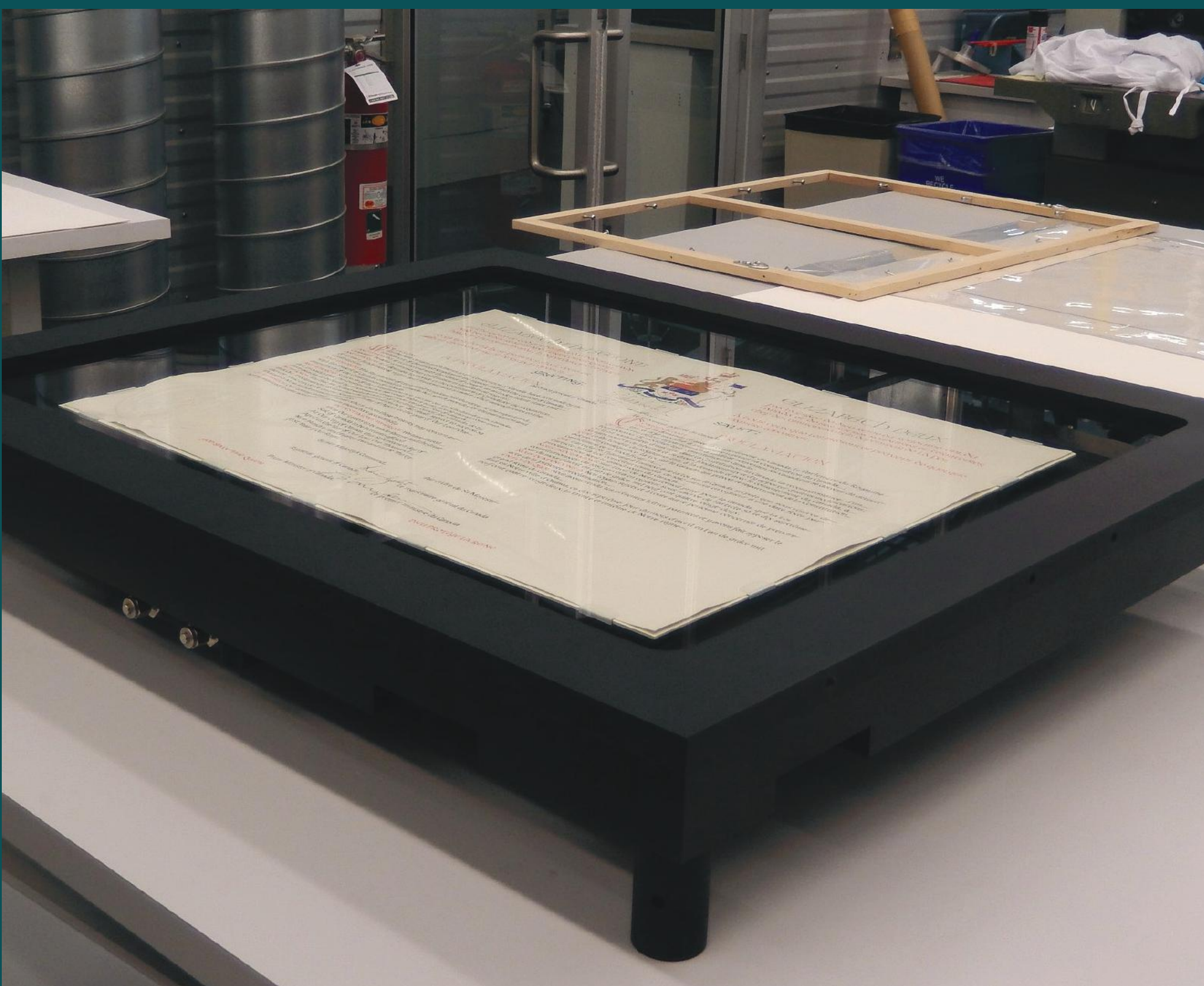


Access and Preservation

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) holds the two original copies of the Proclamation of the Constitution Act (1982) in its collection. One copy was signed during the outdoor public ceremony and was exposed to rain. The other was signed privately and later suffered intentional damage. Studies conducted in 2012 by the Canadian Conservation Institute (CCI) concluded that the signature inks used on both copies of the Proclamation of the Constitution are extremely light sensitive. This information, coupled with an increasing demand for the long-term loan and display of these documents, compelled LAC to work closely with CCI to create specifications for a preservation storage case with all the features necessary to protect these important documents while on display.

Long-Term Preservation

The case is designed to accommodate an anoxic or low-oxygen environment should LAC decide to pursue this at a later date. Creating a low-oxygen environment typically involves using valves to flush the oxygen out of a sealed case, replacing it with an inert gas (usually nitrogen). Because oxygen accelerates the deterioration of many organic materials, anoxic environments provide a good option for slowing deterioration and adding to the life of the material.



Challenges

One of the biggest challenges was designing a storage case that addressed both preservation and security concerns while not interfering with the visibility and display of the document.

Glazing: Glass must be anti-reflective and offer protection from harmful ultraviolet light exposure while still offering good visibility

Document clips: Clips must be hidden and not detract from display of the document while still ensuring that the document stays securely attached to the support plate

Environmental controls: All internal components such as desiccants are hidden in compartments beneath the document support tray



Finishes: All case parts are anodised black so that the case does not draw attention away from the document

Integration: The storage case fits seamlessly inside a larger custom-built display case that addresses security requirements

Conclusion

The preservation storage case and display case form a two-part system that provides the necessary preservation, display, and security requirements needed to protect both copies of one of Canada's most important documents. The success of this project has opened doors to the possibility of creating more custom preservation cases for other treasures and prestigious documents in LAC's collection.

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