

STONINGTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.
COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT POLICY¹

Purpose

The mission of the Stonington Historical Society, Inc. is:

“To advance public knowledge of and interest in the history of the Town of Stonington, and of the diverse people who have made the town their home. To that end, the Corporation collects, preserves and displays objects and records relating to that history, maintains facilities providing access to historical materials and instruction, and participates in community activities relating to Stonington's history.” [Amended and Restated Certificate of Incorporation, Art. IV., adopted 2006.]

I. Defined Terms

Accessioning: The formal process used to accept and record an object in the Museum Collections by means of a Deed of Gift, an acknowledgment letter, and/or documented purchase in accordance with professional standards. Accessions are items that have been accepted and recorded into Museum or Library Collections database. Deaccessions are previously accessioned items that have been removed from the collection.

Acquisition: Items gained through gift, purchase, or abandonment that are the legal property of the SHS. Gifts of many kinds may be accepted by SHS, without the items necessarily being considered for accession into Museum or the Library Collections. Acquisitions may include office equipment and furniture, kitchen utensils and tableware for use, items given for resale, plants² and gardening supplies. See Temporary Custody Receipt form for example of gifts that may or may not later be accessioned into the collection. Items that have been acquired but not accessioned may be disposed of without going through the formal deaccession process.

Cataloguing: The ongoing recording of information relating to an accessioned object, including its physical description, ownership history, photograph, and its cultural, social, and historical significance to Stonington.

¹ Adopted June 1997; Revised and Accepted by Board of Directors 28 Feb. 2011.

² Historic plant material is often treated in the same way as are artifacts and as such might be considered as part of Museum Collections.

Collections Acquisition Plan³ is a document that helps guide museums in searching for items that would augment or deepen their collections in terms of better fulfilling mission and goals. Such a document typically includes a discussion of “gaps” in the collection as well as areas where a better quality or condition of representative artifact is desired. The document might also include a Furnishings Plan for the Palmer House: a room by room description of decor and collection items, with historical documentation to support each recommendation. This plan should cover both Museum and Library Collection areas.

Collections Management: The body of Stonington Historical Society (SHS) practices and procedure that allows for the prudent acquisition, documentation, care, preservation, security, loan, disposal, and accountability of objects in the Museum Collections.

Collections Management Policy: A document outlining the usual mode of operations involving collections, with guidelines for use by staff and volunteers. When it seems advantageous to vary from the guidelines, approval from the Collections Committee and Board of Directors must be sought.

Museum Collections: Artifacts accessioned by SHS for display and/or educational use. These are usually three-dimensional objects and do not generally include archival items that are part of the Woolworth Library Collection. Items accepted for USE, such as equipment, supplies, and items for resale (such as at book and tag sales) are NOT part of either of SHS’s Museum or Library Collections.

STAFF & VOLUNTEERS

Board of Directors is the governing body of the organization and has the final authority and fiduciary responsibility to ensure that the SHS collections are managed and cared for in accordance with professional and ethical standards, applicable laws and statutes, resolutions, and contractual terms and conditions. The Board reserves the right to approve, amend, reject, or reverse any advice or recommendation or action by SHS staff or the Collections Committee.

Collections Committee: The committee is formed and the members appointed at the discretion of the President. The Collections Committee advises the Board and staff on policies, procedures and actions relating to SHS Museum and Library Collections and shall perform the following functions: Monitor

³ This document does not currently exist.

administration of this policy to ensure that SHS conforms to legal, professional, and ethical standards in the acquisition, management, and care of its collections; periodically review and recommend revisions to the Collections Management Policy; upon the advice of committee members and staff, recommend to the Board any exceptions to the Collections Management Policy; oversee the creation and updating of a Collections Acquisitions Plan; act upon recommendations for acquisition and disposition of collections in accord with the Collections Management Policy; provide technical expertise and consultation on activities and issues involving the collections; annually review and present to the membership a report on collections activities and conditions.

Collections Manager: The staff person in charge of Museum Collections, whether the items are acquired by loan, purchase, or gift, whether in storage or on exhibit at one of SHS's sites or elsewhere, excluding manuscripts, books, photographs, and other archival items in the collection of the Woolworth Library. The Collections Manager, with help of staff, implements the Collections Management Policy, with the guidance of the Collections Committee and under the supervision of the Executive Director. The Collections Manager makes decisions and recommendations in accordance with the Collections Management Policy, provides control over and access to Museum Collections at all sites, oversees disaster plans and monitors condition of Museum Collections, maintains electronic and hard files, registration and inventory of such artifacts.

Collections Staff includes anyone working with Museum and Library Collections, including volunteers. Collections staff members work under the direction of the Collections Manager, with oversight of the Executive Director.

Executive Director: The SHS Executive Director acts on behalf of the Board of Directors, with the advice of the Collections Committee, to ensure that the Collections Management Policy is carried out by staff in accordance with the highest professional standards, applicable laws, statutes, resolutions, and contractual terms and conditions.

II. Accessions

General Criteria

Items accessioned by the SHS into Museum Collections or to the Woolworth Library, whether by gift, bequest, purchase, transfer, exchange, abandonment or any other transaction by which title to the material passes to SHS, are intended to be retained for the long-term and are reviewed according to the following general criteria:

1) Materials must be consistent with the purposes and activities of SHS, conforming with the Collections Acquisition Plan (assuming one exists).

2) Items must be unique in a collection area, fulfill a specific need within the collection, or open a new and relevant collecting area within the overall mission of SHS.

3) Groups of items that do not entirely fit within SHS's usual parameters will be accepted only if the collection as a whole has merit or the value of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

4) SHS must be able to provide appropriate storage, protection, and preservation under conditions that ensure the material's usefulness for display or study in the long-term, according to professional museum standards.

5) The physical condition of the items must not threaten or endanger any other collection items, persons working with them, or property.

6) Public records may be transferred to SHS only by the governing body with authority over such records or with that body's express permission; no private individual or entity can presume ownership of any public record, even if as the apparent result of abandonment, discard, or attempted destruction. SHS may assume temporary custody of such items for the purpose of reinstating them to the public domain.

7) Accepted items or collections of items should have a clear chain of provenance, whenever possible.

8) Potential donors should possess clear title and have ability to transfer ownership and clear title to SHS.

9) Materials may not be encumbered by restrictions or limitations to public access.

10) Items will not be accepted if they were collected or recovered under circumstances that might encourage irresponsible damage to collecting sites, cultural monuments, or human burial places.

11) Acceptance of an item shall not impose unbudgeted expense, unless funding can be provided or identified at time of acceptance.

Items offered as Gifts, Loans or Bequests

Items may be placed in the custody of SHS for the purpose of acquisition, loan or resale for the benefit of SHS. Non-accessioned items given to SHS may be disposed of for the benefit of collections.

1) Information will be solicited from the donor at the time the gift is offered, including its provenance and conservation history.

2) In considering a gift, the Collections Committee has the following options:

a. Accept the item(s) and accession it (them) into the Museum Collections.

b. Accept the item(s) for use or resale purposes without accessioning.

c. Table consideration pending further research, expert opinion, or deliberation, for no more than six months.

d. Return the item(s) to the donor or seller.

3) No donation may be appraised by a member of the Board, the Collections Committee, or SHS staff; nor may SHS pay for such an appraisal.

4) It is the responsibility of the donor to obtain an appraisal for the gift in accordance with current IRS regulations. If an appraisal is obtained, the SHS requests a copy of the appraisal for its files.

Purchases

1) Purchases must be recommended by the Collections Manager upon the approval of the Collections Committee.

2) Funds specifically allocated for the care or purchase of items for the Museum or Library Collections shall be maintained as restricted funds.

3) Acquisition funds must be in hand, designated, or promised in writing before an item may be recommended for purchase by Collections Manager. Unbudgeted or unfunded purchases must be approved by the Executive Committee and/or the Board of Directors, upon recommendation of the Collections Manager and Collections Committee.

4) The Collections Manager shall prepare an information sheet on any proposed purchase valued at more than \$100, with all pertinent data including the item's provenance and relevance to the collection described.

5) Where named funds are used for a purchase, this will be noted in the motion to accept and recorded as a credit line.

6) Purchases from staff, Board or committee members or their immediate family members shall comply with the Director Code of Ethics and be made public in Society's Annual Report.

Registration of Approved Accessions

1) Original purchase and other documents will be kept by the Collections Manager in the appropriate files established for every object in the collections. The Collections Manager provides accession (control) numbers following authorization by the Collections Committee.

2) The acceptance of all gifts and bequests shall be without restriction. No commitment shall be made as to exhibition, attribution, or placement of potential gifts. While it is the SHS's usual intention to accession for long-term use and preservation, no guarantee shall be made that the gift or bequest will be retained by the SHS in perpetuity. There shall be no exceptions to this policy unless any such restrictions or special provisions are considered advisable by the Collections Committee and are approved by the Board of Directors. In such cases, a signed statement of the approval should be filed with the accessions record.

3) The SHS's Deed of Gift is mandatory and shall be signed by the legal owner(s) or his/her authorized agent before the object can be accessioned. For bequests, a copy of the will, all codicils, and the letters of testamentary should be obtained and kept in the records of the permanent collections. All releases or receipts must be signed by the Collections Manager. The SHS is not obliged to accept bequeathed items that are not deemed appropriate to the collections.

III. Deaccessions

SHS may deem it necessary or advisable to deaccession objects to refine and improve the collections.

Process

1) Accessioned items or categories of accessioned items may only be deaccessioned upon the advice of the Collections Manager with approval of the Collections Committee.

2) Any item, whether deaccessioned or never accessioned, that is valued at \$5,000 or more must be approved by the Board of Directors before it can be offered for sale.

3) In no case will any item be deaccessioned without documentation and specific approval of the Collections Committee, except that the Library Director has the authority to withdraw excess copies of publications, images and other library items that no longer meet the criteria for acquisition or whenever copies are replaced with copies in better condition.

Criteria for Deaccessioning and Withdrawal

1) Relevance: The item or collection does not fall within the scope of the mission of SHS or the criteria for acquisition.

2) Redundancy: duplicates one or more items in the collection that are of higher quality and/or does not serve an alternative use or research purpose.

3) Physical integrity: Item is in a condition such that its conservation is not practical or restoration would render it essentially false, or if its condition endangers the preservation of other items in the collection or buildings or the health and safety of people.

4) Authenticity of the item has been refuted beyond reasonable doubt.

5) Legality: the item was acquired by questionable means or subject to cultural repatriation or any rule or agreement which makes its ownership questionable.

6) Restrictions: Donor restrictions are contrary to the exhibition and study of the object.

7) Except in cases of human health or collections safety, accessioned items will normally be retained for a minimum of two years before being deaccessioned.

Compliance with Legal Requirements

Objects must be deaccessioned in accordance with the following requirements.

- 1) SHS must determine that it holds clear legal title to any object considered for deaccession. When appropriate, donors or their heirs will be notified and the reasons for deaccessioning explained to them.
- 2) Any mandatory restrictions on the disposition of items already in the collections will be determined and strictly observed.
- 3) When appropriate, funds raised from a given sale will be identified with the name of the original donor of the item.
- 4) The final authority to deaccession and dispose of Museum Collections rests with the Board of Directors, but no object will be considered for deaccessioning without the advice of the Collections Manager and the Collections Committee having been duly considered.
- 5) The Collections Manager in consultation with the Collections Committee shall recommend the time and method of disposal, and the subsequent disposition shall be noted in the minutes of the Board of Directors.
- 6) No staff member, Board member, or member of the Collections Committee, or their immediate family, shall be permitted to acquire directly or indirectly, any work deaccessioned by the SHS, or otherwise to benefit from its sale or trade.
- 7) Expert consultants who are asked to evaluate or appraise works on collections will be advised that this work shall disqualify them from handling the sale of the objects.

Methods of Disposal

- 1) In order to keep the objects in the public domain where possible, the Collections Committee will consider whether gift or exchange with another non-profit institution would be preferable to sale.
- 2) If sale is selected, the primary objective shall be to obtain the best possible price at public auction, preferably outside the community. For any object valued at more than \$10,000, two disinterested outside written appraisals from qualified dealers or appraisers will be obtained prior to recommendation to the Board of Directors.

Proceeds from Disposition

- 1) Non-capitalization of Collections: In compliance with professional museum standards, it is the policy of SHS not to capitalize its collections or to treat them as financial assets.
- 2) SHS shall not use revenues from the disposal of its collections in order to provide financial support for institutional operations, facilities, salaries, maintenance, capital improvements or any other purposes other than the acquisition or direct conservation of collections.

3) It is the policy of SHS not to treat or represent its collections as capital assets, including but not limited to financial reports and records, loan applications, and security against acquired or bonded debt.

4) Net proceeds derived from the sale of a deaccessioned object (i.e., the proceeds of the disposition less all related expenses) shall be placed in funds restricted to the replenishment or conservation of the collections, consistent with the Collections Acquisition Plan and acquisition procedures of the SHS.

Records

1) The conditions and circumstances of the deaccession will be entered and retained permanently as part of the SHS collections records. A file on the object will be retained, consisting of photographs, conservation reports, and other useful information about the item.

IV. Loans

General criteria

1) SHS may participate in loan programs in order to provide broader public accessibility to objects owned by the SHS, as long as the loans are consistent with the long-term conservation of the objects and the needs of the SHS's exhibition and research programs.

2) All loans will be for specified periods of time and will be documented according to the established procedures of the Collections Committee. All loans must be contracted for by written loan agreements between the SHS and borrowers and lenders prior to receipt or shipment.

3) Loans [incoming and outgoing] require approval of the Executive Director acting on the recommendations of the Collections Manager and with the approval of the Collections Committee

4) The Collections Manager maintains complete records of all loans and tracks loan activity. Records concerning loans will be maintained in perpetuity as part of the organization's history.

Procedures

1) Loan requests are considered on a case-by-case basis and are dependent on the nature and condition of the object, proposed use, and the borrower's ability to meet professional standards of care and exhibition.

2) Requests for loans shall be made in writing to SHS and must include all contact information from the borrowing institution, items requested, purpose, description of exhibit, and requested duration of the loan.

3) Items may not be loaned to individuals.

4) Loaned items will be credited to the Stonington Historical Society as provided for in SHS Outgoing Loan Agreement.

5) Risk Management: A Standard Facilities Report from the borrowing institution detailing the environment in which the item would be displayed will

help guide the Collections Manager and Committee in making a determination of whether to make a loan or not.

6) The duration of the loan, the level of security, and the borrowing institution's mission in relation to SHS's mission will also be considered.

7) Loans to institutions without Standard Facilities Reports will be considered provided conditions are satisfactory for the requested item.

8) A condition report must be filed with the collection records before the item is packed or transported. A copy of the condition report must be included with other papers for the borrowing institution, which will monitor item's condition throughout loan period and record a final condition report before the item is returned to SHS.

9) Items will not be loaned if deemed too fragile for transport or if proposed use might endanger the artifact's long-term preservation.

10) Items on loan may not be treated or otherwise altered in any way without express written permission from the Executive Director of SHS, on advice from Collections Manager and Committee.

11) The borrowing institution may not photograph or otherwise reproduce images of the items except for purposes of publicizing the loan and/or the exhibit for which the loan was made. The item's correct identification and ownership must be listed on all labels and publicity which features the item.

12) Images thus made may not be used for other or later purposes without express permission of SHS.

13) Items on loan from SHS may not be photographed by the public.

14) Loans may not be transferred by the borrower to any other institution or individual.

15) SHS retains the right to rescind a loan if risk to the item becomes apparent during the loan period or the use reflects negatively on SHS.

Insurance

1) Loaned items will be assigned an insurance value prior to their release from SHS. The borrower will provide wall-to-wall insurance and indemnification and a certificate of insurance prior to shipping.

2) SHS does not charge loan fees. However, borrower shall cover all expenses relating to the loan, including professional appraisal if needed, packing and shipping, framing or other exhibit related issues.

3) All loans shall be for a stated term, agreed to and signed by both parties on an Outgoing Loan Agreement form.

4) Maximum term of a loan shall be one year, subject to renewal upon approval of the Executive Director on recommendation of Collections Manager and Committee.

Temporary Custody for Professional Services

1) Authorized contractors, such as conservators and framers, may receive items on a temporary basis for purposes of conservation, identification, research, or appraisal. Such custody is documented on a Receipt/Release form and does not constitute a formal loan.

2) Records of materials in temporary custody shall be maintained by the Collections Manager.

V. Care and Control of the Collections

Records

1) Collections records provide legal documentation of the Museum and Library Collections, establish and document provenance, and provide a permanent record of the care, use, location, and disposition of all items.

2) All collections documents are considered permanent records to be retained in perpetuity, whether or not the item is retained in the collections.

3) Documents to be retained included all correspondence, documents and forms related to the acquisition or transfer, records and images related to internal collections management. Additionally, documents related to temporary incoming loans shall be maintained separately.

4) The maintenance of accurate, up-to-date records on the identification, location, and well-being of collection items is a major responsibility of the SHS.

5) The Collections Manager and Library Director shall maintain and make available to qualified staff and researchers original records regarding accessioned or loaned items in the custody of the SHS, when available. Any staff member in possession of such original documents establishing right and title to objects shall forward them to the Collections Manager or Library Director (whichever is appropriate) for proper filing.

6) The primary purpose of these records is the control and documentation of the collections. Therefore, these records should provide at least the following information, which will be recorded according to accepted standards.

A. Identifying description of the object, a photograph of the object, and the appropriate accession number.

B. Legal status of the object, how its title was acquired, i.e. by gift, bequest, purchase, transfer, or exchange, and from whom.

C. Such provenance data as needed to contribute to the establishment of the legal status of the object.

D. Ongoing activity concerning the object, e.g., loans, exhibitions, conservation, movement inside/outside the SHS.

E. Current location of each object.

7) All primary records will be safeguarded from hazards, such as fire, water, smoke damage, and loss. Duplicate electronic accession records will be maintained.

Standard Forms

1) Temporary Custody Receipt: This form shows the name and contact information of owner of items left in the custody of SHS, specifying whether the items are

- A. An unconditional donation
- B. To be considered for acquisition into SHS collections
- C. For identification or study
- D. Other.

This form also asks potential donor to acknowledge disposition in case the item is not accepted for accession:

- A. Source will pick up item upon request
- B. SHS will dispose or destroy for the donor
- C. SHS may sell to benefit SHS

2) Deed of Gift form: This form transfers title to SHS.

3) Incoming Loan form

4) Outgoing Loan form

5) Donor Records: Correspondence, legal papers, appraisals, publications, etc.

6) Accession Log: List of items accessioned into the Museum and Library Collections.

7) Collections Database: PastPerfect Museum Software

8) Condition Report: This report documents the condition of SHS items prior to release for loan, return of loan, and should also be made on a periodic basis to monitor preservation problems.

9) Conservation Report: documents conservation treatment proposed or performed.

10) Environmental Report: Records and analyzes climatic conditions and light in exhibition and storage areas at various SHS facilities and museums.

11) Annual Report: Documents activity concerning the Museum Collections, including acquisitions, removals, loans, exhibitions, and publications.

Care

Every reasonable effort shall be made to monitor and protect items in the collections from careless handling, vandalism, theft, fire, water, infestation, exposure to environmental hazards, and natural disasters. SHS's Museum and Library Collections shall be stored and exhibited under appropriate conditions to ensure items on-going preservation. Collections will be protected against light, temperature and humidity fluctuations, dust, theft, vermin, and any other hazards as far as is practical. Where possible, collections will be stored in secure, climate control area which is segregated from other, non-collection items.

1) Condition reports will be added to the database on an ongoing basis, as specified by Collections Manager.

2) A review of environmental conditions and ways to improve conditions will be made by the Collections Manager on an annual basis.

3) The Collections Manager will recommend specific treatment for items in the Museum Collections and/or recommend the advice of outside conservators. The Library Director will do likewise for items in the Library Collection.

VI. Access to the Collections

As a public institution, the SHS will strive to provide the public and the press maximum accessibility to the collections consistent with reasonable request, staff availability, and the security, safety, and conservation of the objects. Requests for access to the collections not on public display will be coordinated with the Collections Manager and/or Library Director.

VII. Insurance and Risk Management

Insurance of SHS collections is maintained to cover cost of replacement, repair, or restoration of lost, stolen, or damaged artifacts whenever possible. It is understood that many items in the collections are irreplaceable. Funds secured through or by an insurance claim involving collections items shall be reserved exclusively for the purpose of direct care or purchase of collections.

1) Proof of insurance coverage is required for all incoming loans under the following options and within the parameters of SHS coverage: SHS will insure incoming loans under its own insurance policy, providing that the lender submits values for each item loaned with the signed Loan Agreement, and that the value amount given is the sole recovery available in the event of loss or damage.

2) Lenders may elect to maintain their own insurance policy provided that SHS is listed as an additional insured on that policy or is provided with a certificate confirming waiver of subrogation. SHS does not additionally insure incoming loans when Lenders maintain their own insurance.

3) The Collections Manager or Library Director (as the case may be) will administer insurance coverage and assure that loan agreements and receipts are in hand to effect coverage.

4) In the interest of good risk management, all damage or loss must be reported to the Collections Manager or Library Director as soon as possible.

5) SHS does not accept permanent or long-term loans. Long-term loans accepted before 2010 will be reviewed and renewed if advised by the Collections Manager and the Collections Committee. Every effort will be made to convert such items to permanent gifts.

6) Unclaimed Loans: It is the responsibility of the owner of property to notify SHS promptly in writing of changes in address or ownership status. SHS will maintain notices of intent to maintain ownership not less than 25 years. Should a lender cease communication regarding intent of interest in loaned property within that period, the item will be deemed abandoned.

7) SHS will not perform or allow any repairs, alterations, or conservation treatment of any loaned item without the lender's prior written and specific written permission.

VIII. Inventories

The SHS will undertake a periodic inventory of its collections. The goal of the inventory is to verify the location of Museum and Library Collection items, assess improper or wasted storage space; identify major conservation problems; and identify non-accessioned objects.

IX. Exceptions

If exceptional circumstances arise which run contrary to the above policies and procedures, the Collections Committee may present its recommendation to the Board of Directors for a determination.

Mary Beth Baker

2/28/2011

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